



PUBLIC SEMINAR

Luce deLire & Jamieson Webster

What Do We Even Want From One Another?

Anxiety, Permeation and Identity in the Age of a Slowly Imploding Liberalism

In a time identified by the breakdown of fantasy, xenophobic malaise, and the salve of identity politics, philosopher Luce deLire and psychoanalyst Jamieson Webster take us to the limits of 'the self.' They muse on anxiety's collectivizing forces, the political instrumentalization of unsolvably fractured identities, and their permeation. They suggest a large scale embrace of personality hacking and sexual angst.

Why are phenomena of personal dissolution oftentimes structured around political prohibition and the negotiation of sexualized proximity? What is 'freedom' beyond the negative freedom that restricts others from encroachment on one's personal rights and property - philosophically, psychoanalytically? What do we even want from one another?

We hope to introduce you to a surreal space beyond the impervious confines of anxiety and individuality. We will tell the tale of a woman who falls in love with a car, fathom the psychoanalytic fable of a shrimp that eats sand, and call for a (re)invention of anxiety and post-secular atheism. We hope you will join in on the journey and dissolve (together with) us and into one another.

This is a transcript from a talk given on July 5th, 2018 at Spektrum in Berlin, Germany.

Luce: Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, dear kings and queens and queers and children, I am more than happy to welcome you tonight to 'What do we even want from one another?'

Jamieson: Thank you Luce.

Luce: Okay, I thought we would talk a little bit about how this event came about and who we are for a few minutes, and then we just start. So this event came about because Jamieson and I have had long conversations about all kinds of things for maybe four years, and I tried to convince Jamieson that she should come to Berlin for four years. And Jamieson kept declining, and said, '**I won't come.**'

Jamieson: I don't want to come here.

L: You're not even here.

J: I'm not even here right now.

L: It was not even a possibility for you to go stealthily. But then, Jamieson announced, 'okay, I'm going to come to Berlin,' and I said, 'how about we have an event that would capture some of what we've been talking about so far.' And Jamieson said, 'so I'm working on this book on Conversion, and it includes some thoughts on anxiety and identity and hysteria.'

And then, we decided that we would take that as our starting point for a more or less loose conversation.

J: Definitely a loose conversation.

L: I'm not sure if that was lost on them.

J: This is Luce.



L: Hi, I'm Luce.

L: Right. So, that's what we're going to do. Jamieson is going to read out these thoughts drawing on her new book and I'm going to interject at times, and we're going to go into other topics of conversation that we've been talking about over the years and over the days since you've been here. It's going to be amazing. Jamieson Webster is a clinical psychoanalyst in private practice in New York City, and her book *Life and Death of Psychoanalysis* was just translated to German. I only have this one version, and it's mine. But Sascha is editing it.

J: He is an editor of the series.

L: The series that it appeared in: Neue Subjektile with Turia and Kant. So if you talk to Sascha after this event, you might get lucky and get one.

Sascha: You can find it in the bookstore also.

L: No...that's too easy. Don't make it so easy for yourself... And the new book is called *Conversion Disorder*. And it's going to be--

J: Columbia University Press, October 2018. Just to give an introduction to Luce. I think the relationship between Philosophy and Psychoanalysis is incredibly important, so, while this is a talk for everybody, and it's not necessarily just an academic, professionalized conversation, we try to present our ideas to everybody.

What's important to me about our relationship is that as clinical psychoanalysts who see patients all day long every single day, we're always in the moment of listening to them, and there are moments in which you have to step back, and you have to theorize what it is that you are doing, which is of course why we rely on people like Freud and Jacques Lacan, to give us some perspective.

And they of course relied on philosophy, which we forget about. Nowadays, to be an analyst is to be in some sort of horrible 'here's how to be a therapist' mill. 'Here's how to be intuitive,' 'here's how to be empathic with your patients.' And I find that people forget how to think as analysts, although that is very, very important.

So, one of the things that I hope you see tonight is this: I'm going to tell you psychoanalytic stories, I'm going to tell you clinical stories.

Luce is going to think for us. And one of the things that she does is that she reads my work, and then she translates it into classical texts like Spinoza and Hegel, and then she moves forward and she goes to Deleuze and Guattari, and Derrida and Butler and I find this incredibly rich.

So, a little bit of what we're up to today is to sort of perform this friendship for you. Which is perhaps an answer to this question of, 'What exactly do we want from one another at all?' So, with that, maybe, we start?

L: Yeah, shall we?

Jamieson: Let's face it. All of you have an anxiety disorder. And by virtue of that, you are the worst, most boring, psychoanalytic patients. It's like listening to a blender, or an emergency broadcast signal. I don't mean to offend you. I have anxiety too. It's unbelievably painful and boring. But what could be worse than painful and boring!?

And if we all admitted it, we are bored to death with our anxiety ridden selves, with that hamster wheel that turns around and around and around in our heads. Everybody in New York has Meditation apps. They help a bit, I think. Get yourself centered. Clear out your head for 4 hours, do it again, maybe it lasts a little bit longer, a day? Do it again tomorrow.

But I have to ask the question. What is this serving as a bulwark against? What is going on with the collective palliative measures for mutual vague indefinable symptoms? Blame the phones. Blame Trump. We have a Xanax crisis in the US for the better off, and Opioid crisis for the poor. I'd like to see if philosophy and psychoanalysis can help us get to the bottom of this, just a little.

Patients come to me, they complain of anxiety. They have read everything on the Internet about anxiety disorders and the meditation or mindfulness techniques for abating it. They've researched Benzodiazepines. They've probably tried their friend's prescriptions. They've gone through the rounds of herbalists, body workers, stress massage, breathing techniques, cleanses and journaling.



They've probably cut out gluten, as I have. But what they are seeking in all this is really something more. The desire to place terribly real and painful bodily feelings somewhere, grows more and more intense. Is this illness due to biology or circumstance, is it some sort of ancestry? Often my patients will settle for all three, being better equal opportunists than the mental health ideologues themselves. But what does the psychoanalyst respond to in all this?

The interesting question is that anxiety has always been a huge threat to the psychic system for Freud who refined his theory of anxiety till the very end. So really if you look at Freud from 1896 all the way to the 1930s, he's constantly working on the question of anxiety and it's one of the parts of his theory that he radically changed at different points.

Anxiety isn't merely a negative force; rather, it is a question of a mass, a quantity, to which we must form a relationship. And which demands some sort of palpable structural change. Anxiety concerns what he calls the liminal aspects of subjectivity, or consciousness, and it also includes something about sexuality that highlights the separateness of bodies and makes bearing this separateness impossible. I think you can see in this why it's a sexual question. Anxious patients, it's true, I think, love their anxiety. Which is part of the problem, it's this thing that you run around with that's so painful to you, but you actually love in some way.

They monitor it, stick close to it, greet it like a long-lost friend, especially the kind of friends we keep in order to complain about. We also happen to live in a time that is deeply invested, loving the vicissitudes of anxiety, of deep insecurity, of paranoia and too much communication, too many non choices.

Together, with the thousand palliative techniques, we are in a closed, almost claustrophobic loop. This loop mirrors the problem of being trapped by anxiety—an anxiety in fact that has no outside. This is why it tends towards either claustrophobia on the one hand, or agoraphobia on the other. Because you're not happy inside, and you're not happy outside, either.

None of these pressures do anything for you, and how are you going to cut any path through this. I take this cultural read very seriously. I do think that we live in a time of high anxiety, and many analysts fear that the reason for this is that we are facing the breakdown of collective fantasies.

I mean in the US this is probably the most palpable example of this, that we thought we were this great empire, and now we've got this man as our president. And it should be said that other analysts in fact celebrate this. Like why should fantasies not break down? Why should we not face this anxiety? Although they're very, very worried about the psychic consequences of it on everybody. So this is why I think it's actually an incredibly important question.

Freud said that most cures, like vague eastern philosophies for the masses, follow the lines of what he called a 'crooked cure.' He thought that they were kind of fantasies in the guise of religion or philosophies of life that are aimed to soothe your anxieties. He wanted something else.

He said that these bind anxiety in a collective illusion that covers over the fact of the unconscious. So if you believe that you are going to heaven - this is a very banal, rote example - you'll have less anxiety about dying. We have many many other versions of that today.

Collective anxieties to a certain extent, and all of the treatments for them, at least in my patients, function as their religion. I mean you see that every day, it's a question of tackling their anxiety and all of the things that they have to say about it. It gives way to all kinds [of] rituals, like those involving a daily or hourly dose of social media.

Psychoanalysis is different than this to a certain extent insofar as what it wants created are new solutions. It doesn't want to adapt the philosophies of life, it wants you to find a solution in yourself to the anxieties that you face and the fundamental anxieties of living. And Freud thought that this could be something other than one more of these 'crooked cures.'

So, when Freud compares what he called classical hysteria – for those of you who don't have the psychoanalytic nomenclature, Hysteria was his first name for these patients who had these incredible bodily symptoms. They would forget things, have something like multiple personality disorder, they would go into fugue states, and there was a lot of sexual and aggressive acting out. And interestingly, these were all women.

So, these were Freud's first patients, and he called them Hysterics. And he compared them with what he called Anxiety Hysterics.



Which would be anything that now falls under the rubric of anxiety disorders and panic disorders. So on the one hand you have these women patients that have these incredible, beautiful symptoms which he found meaningful, and then on the other side you have people who had anxiety who seemed unable to form any symptom itself, who seemed [to] live within a state of anxiety.

And what he says about this is that the Hysteric is the person with the true symptom, and Anxiety is the sort of failure to create the symptom that you need to act out against the world, even when it's at the cost of suffering. Anxiety he said makes us live in a kind of medial zone of incessant defense and substitution, projection, denial, and wishful thinking, what he called an unending series of half measures.

This is really Freud at the turn of the century. This is very, very early. The symptom for Freud is a structure, it's a creation of the mind, whereas anxiety for him is the erosion of the structure, and maybe even its devastation.

So in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, Anxiety* which is in 1926, he portrays two types. He says the Hysteric suffers from Repression. They have a Symptom. And often they use what he calls scotomization, which is that they don't want to see what they don't want to see. Which makes the world nice, right? If you don't see what you don't want to see, things look lovely. And by virtue of this, by virtue of repression, symptom and denial, you don't have anxiety.

So one of the amazing things that he saw was that a Hysteric could come in, and she's got a sort of an arm paralysis, and she's got sexual frigidity, but on the whole it doesn't really bother her. It doesn't make her that anxious. Right, and on the other hand we have patients who come, and it's Anxiety, Anxiety, Anxiety, Anxiety. And he said, they're not repressing, they're regressing. I think we made the joke that this neighborhood is the neighborhood of pure regression. I don't know why. I'm not from here but everyone is in a prolonged adolescence in Berlin. It's your joke!

So you have regression, you have character neurosis, which means it's your entire being, it's not this symptom within your being, your entire being is somehow caught in the symptom, and you have a phobic defense which makes you turn away from the world. This is the agoraphobia.

'I don't want to go out there, these people are so demanding, I don't want to deal with it.' And when all of this fails, which it does on a daily level, anxiety breaks out. So you can see how you're in this constant relationship of defense.

So Freud, at this late point, says that we have to understand better how defense turned against a piece of the external world—right so the Hysteric doesn't see a certain thing that she doesn't want to see, leaves the symptom and the personality intact, whereas the cost of the second structure dominated by "anxiety" is so much greater.

The cost of it on your being is so huge. A woman, he says, for example, will be tender to her children — whom she otherwise hates — but not necessarily tender to children in general or as a person.

Right...., whereas the person with anxiety has to be overly nice to every single child that they get near, which causes them great distress, and then they hate them more, and they don't want to go out of their house because there are children everywhere that they hate.

See what I'm saying? And basically, what he says at this point is that what you see is that instead of being creatures of reaction-formation, rather you have symptomatic reactions to the entirety of creaturely life. They don't distort a piece of reality, they distort the entire thing.

That's the outline of the conundrum of anxiety for Freud and the question [that we] want from one another will have to arise from this. But basically we either have our symptoms through which we figure out if we can interact with the other person.

Right...., we either use our symptoms to kind of live in the world and figure out what we want to know or we don't want to know and we see how we want to interact with another person, or we have anxiety through which everything in relation to it is mediated. So Anxiety structures your relationship to the other person in its entirety, and causes the other person great pain, as they try to soothe your anxiety which is never soothe-able. And I'm making a very stark characterization here. Of course, all of us probably have varying degrees of both. But this will become important in ways I'm going to show you.



Luce: I'm going to interject at this point, or comment, maybe. One of the things that is interesting at the starting point is that we are talking about the relationship between religion, psychoanalysis and philosophy.

So, one of the questions that you bring up is the question of anxiety becoming a religion, or functioning as a religion, or tying into existing religions on the one hand. And on the other hand, psychoanalysis as an insistence that something else would be possible.

Now of course, psychoanalysis is not immune to becoming a religion, to becoming the mere ritualistic repetition of practices directed to authority. You could think then, or you could ask, if we can group 'religions' under this blanket term. We could ask: "Where are the anti-anxiety remedies within religious practices?"

And another question between us, an ongoing question between us is: "How does the ongoing relationship between philosophy and psychoanalysis figure in this?" And I thought I'd share with you a few thoughts that may or may not be obvious in this regard.

First of all: Freud's own relationship to philosophy, if you remember, maybe the most well known instance is the very beginning of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where Freud says, "whatever we are doing here, we're not going to do philosophy. Because Philosophy is just speculation."

And so you think, right, "we don't want to do philosophy, because philosophy is just speculation, and we want to do science." There's another term coming in here: 'psychoanalysis as a science.' As empirical science, for that is the dominating, the hegemonic system of knowledge of the time. Just as 'philosophy' re-invents itself 'as a science.'

From Bacon through Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Popper up to Kripke, Lewis, Fine and Malabou, the question of the relationship between 'philosophy and science' and 'philosophy as a science' is and remains crucial. For 'psychoanalysis,' then, the general idea is that if we're lucky, we can map psychic stages to brain functions, and then we can just treat it all with meds, and do it back and forth, so that's going to be good. So then, we are moving along a sequence: 'science,' 'philosophy,' 'religion,' 'psychoanalysis.' And then interestingly Freud says, "we don't want to do philosophy because philosophy is mere speculation."

He doesn't specify what that means, he just says 'mere speculation.' But then, four chapters into the book, he starts speculating wildly.

The wildest speculations. Such as, "how about if the beginning of life was just a little cusp that was just defending some inside, like building an inside, and defending it against an outside." And you're like, "wait, wait what- where does that come from?" And he doesn't explain. He's just like, "well, I think this is well-grounded speculation, I can do it," and you're like – "okay." And then he goes on about it for three chapters and never comes back to it, and everyone's super confused. And you're like...., "what is that?"

J: It's super wild.

L: It's totally wild. And it's as you explained to me, it's the moment where psychoanalysis splits into those who sign up for this adventure of speculation and of installing a death drive into the heart of being that generates repetition compulsion and destruction, and those who are just like, "No. No. No!"

J: Which is the American version, which is, "it's not the death drive, it's just that we're all sort of Darwinian, aggressive, competitive people, and if we were rational enough we would just get in check and be the right amount of aggressive." Lacan's sort of scathing critique of this moment in psychoanalysis, American psychoanalysis in the 1950s is that basically what they seem to want is the aggressiveness of the American lawyer. Aggressive enough to get what you want. That this was going to be the sort of paragon of health.

L: So, some people were very interested in this relationship between psychoanalysis, science, religion and philosophy. And, partially with regard to this term 'Speculation.' What does it mean to speculate? Of course, 'speculation' seems to be a vital part in any four of these fields, so as to generate empirical scientific progress. In order to build hypotheses you need a certain amount of 'speculation.'

We have lots of philosophical 'speculation' all over the place, and when Derrida takes it up in *To Speculate on Freud*, I think what he is trying to carve out is the relationship of thinking to the subject of thinking. And he does it through Freud because Freud writes this book on (the) death drive, in the moment in which his favorite grandson dies.



And he writes it very quickly.

So you could think it's a work of mourning. There's an empirical individual psychological push inspiring this book, setting off the speculation. So much so, that he does exactly what he denies himself in the early stages of the book, and it doesn't make any sense really.

Yet again, it becomes one of the most pervasive discourses of psychoanalysis with and on itself, and one of the favorite texts to be taken up in 20th century continental philosophy. So, although the speculation is so wild, he seems to hit something.

And what Derrida is interested in in this moment is exactly the question, 'What is the relationship between, the person thinking, and the thought that is thought?' 'What is the relation between the individual process of mourning that Freud does for his grandson, and the thought that evolves from that.' He doesn't really come up with a conclusion. But I thought, that would be the first point. You can establish here a relationship between psychoanalysis and philosophy.

If the dream that philosophy has of itself is the dream of pure thought, in which we can communicate with each other on the basis of pure argumentation, then in this dream there is no individual. The individual just becomes – and it's in the practice of philosophy that the individual becomes a name.

'Kant,' 'Hegel,' 'Spinoza.' 'These people.'

And they become as it were, discursive proxies for certain formations of thought. As Heidegger famously says, "Aristotle was born, he thought and he died." And that's all you need to know, right? Like, that's the idea.

But then you learn funny things about Aristotle. When he was reading, he kept an iron ball in his hand, and every time he would fall asleep the iron ball would fall and he would wake up. That sounds pretty compulsively neurotic and weird, right? Like, who's that person? Why would I believe what that person has to say? So that's one of the interesting questions, and I think it's one of the questions, or a sphere of questions, that is going to haunt us throughout this evening:

'What is the relationship between the person thinking and the thought that is thought.' 'What is the relation between the individual process of mourning that Freud does for his grandson, and the thought that evolves from that.'

And the other thing that I wanted to say is this: "How do we even communicate with each other," or "how do you communicate with yourself," or "how do I communicate with myself." Psychoanalysis has tried and often insists that it is an empirical science.

For example in the friction between Freud and Jung. Here, Freud keeps insisting, "No no, we cannot keep going to this spiritual, religious-like nonsense, we need to keep this scientific because otherwise people are going to keep running away from us."

Now you may think that one of the reasons is that Freud of course, as a Jew, doesn't have the access to narratives like "okay I'm just a white secular Christian, I'm just going to blend in and forgive me all experimental quirks besides the path of *science*, because my 'ethnic-religious' [read: racial] background goes unmarked." He is prey to the allegation to not be scientific *enough* (and always has been), to be a traitor and to be religious after all ('psychoanalysis as a *cult*, sect, pseudo-science' etc.) and these kinds of things.

The Dreyfus affair is present to these people at the turn of the century. But nevertheless, he comes up with meta-psychology. There are meta-psychological questions. And meta-psychological questions seem to be questions like, "what *kinds* of objects are there in the psyche?" From a little bit of a different angle you might think this to be kind of a classical ontological, philosophical question – 'what *kinds* of objects are there?' restricted to the realm of 'the psyche.'

You can have different kinds of ways of answering this question. That's one of my points here. On both sides of the spectrum ('psychoanalysis' and 'philosophy'), it seems as though the one would always collapse into the other to establish the problem. And then of course, both have a relationship to science.

I touched on this earlier already. One of the large mythical tales that philosophy has of itself, is that with enlightenment, or with 'the scientific revolution,' philosophy reinvents itself as a *science*. So 'we', namely Descartes, say goodbye to the Scholastics. "We don't want divine causation anymore. We want to explain everything through external causation, efficient causation. We want to reduce everything to mechanistic models.

We want to replace the divine as a determining figure in our philosophies." And Bacon is very clear about this. Kant is very clear about this.



We want to do philosophy as a science, but nobody knows what that means. The 'meaning' of science has [to] be *philosophically* investigated – and here we are back into the movement between 'psychoanalysis' and 'philosophy,' a mutual collapse.

“But what that definitely means is that we don't want religion.” And that's why I thought, as a counter-point, which I am going to touch on in our discussion later, I'd float a few thoughts about secularism, and atheism. So a question would be, "what can we even understand under the names 'Secularism' and 'Atheism'?" Is that even a thing that we can think? Or two? And, in order to prepare this, I'm going to read out for you a quote from the introduction to Judith Butler's *Parting Ways* (2013). I'm going to read this out to you now, and I'm going to read it out to you again in the end, but in an amended version. So here's the quote:

"A similar problem emerges when we say that this idea [...] is 'derived from' Jewish sources.

On the one hand, this is a true statement (which is to say neither that those are the only sources from which it is derived or that such ideas are derived from no other sources). As the debate between Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor made clear, it matters whether one claims (a) that certain values are derived from religious sources and then translated into a domain of rationality considered to belong finally to no religion (Habermas) or (b) that the religious reasons we give for why we act as we do belong to certain idioms and can never be fully extracted from those discursive fields (Taylor).

Whether one takes the first or the second position, it is still necessary to enter into a field of translation, since either the secular content has to be extracted through some means from the religious discourse or the religious discourse has to make itself communicable beyond the community of those who share the idiom. So even if a certain conception is 'derived from' Jewish resources, it has to enter into translation in order to be more broadly communicable and for its relevance to be established outside a communitarian frame (whether religious or national)." (Butler 2013, 7)

And then this launches two problems. And the one problem is an assimilation of religious meanings into established secular frames. Or, the attempt to establish a common language that transcends particular discourses and then exerts power over these discourses.

So we have here, a question between particularity and universality, if you will, although this is already philosophically induced terminology, so that's why I'm careful calling it by this name. However, we can maybe establish that there is a question of philosophical thought, and psychoanalytic thought, with their relation to their own religious sources and their own religious starting points.

On the other hand, then, I want to suggest for the moment that the question of Atheism can have two meanings. The one would be 'whatever we call successful secularization.' But in the history of secularization you can easily see that secularization in Europe at least mostly meant 'Christians who have done away with their Christian heritage but remain primarily Christians.' Which you can easily see regarding the history of the Jewish enlightenment, which was never really accepted to be an equal kind of enlightenment. So that could be a kind of Atheism: 'Atheism as Post-Christianity' or 'post-christian Atheism.' I would hold, however, that both Atheisms, 'ultra-secularization' and 'Post-Christianity,' are ways of thinking about Atheism that abstract from the *institutionalization* of religion. In that sense, they are deeply ideological.

So the question becomes, how do *institutions function*? To give an example: Classically, the Monarch is the proxy of God, then the president becomes like the proxy, or the replacement of the Monarch, and then the people become the justification for the president to act as they do. Etc, etc. etc. So you have a genealogy of the alleged auto-transformation of religious thoughts and structures, which move very slowly. Look, for example, at the legal code, the civil law in Germany, which mostly still relies on Roman law, and then of course was largely updated in the middle ages, it's highly religiously charged. Such institutions, 'the law,' 'the legitimation of power,' 'the prison' move very, very slowly, much slower than elections, revolutions, constitutional reform. And many of them are deeply, deeply infused and substantiated by and with religious structures, imaginaries etc.

So, the other way of thinking about Atheism, and I want to come back to that later, would be to say that we actually cannot be Atheists. There's no way that you can be an Atheist because we always already live within the setup of religiously infused culture, institutions, legal code, and these kinds of things. Which I think makes Freud's insistence all the more palpable, though totally insane, and all the more important, right? To say–



J: How do we cure ourselves?

L: What would any kind of process mean in this setup? Because of course, from that position, whatever is called 'religion' now cannot be maintained as religion because that would mean, to have oneself negatively determined by opposition to whatever is being called 'religion'. And that would just be stupid. So what I was trying to do was pump up the volume on this challenge and say, "how do we deal with religious responses (and responsibilities), given that we don't know what that could possibly be and could possibly mean." And the deep entanglement of this question with the very set up of what we do not yet know how to call 'religion,' 'science,' 'philosophy,' 'psychoanalysis.' Should we continue?

J: Yes, why don't I do one and two. So, I have **four** psychoanalytic fables, or stories, or little tales to tell you. One is about *coitus interruptus*. Does everyone know what that is? 'Pulling out,' 'stopping your orgasm.' The second is 'losing your arm on the subway.' **'Leaving your appendages on the subway.'** The third is **'the woman who fell in love with a car.'** And the fourth is **'the shrimp that eats sand.'** Most of these come from Lacan, but I'll explain them. So I'm going to do the first two and then I'll let Luce comment.

The point that Luce is making about the fact that Atheism is impossible given that it is built into structures that are secularized so we don't even understand the effects of religion at this point is incredibly important for psychoanalytic thinking at this point to the extent that a lot of what happens in the most conservative versions of analysis is they say, at one point we had symbolic structures like family, like God, that told you how to be a man and a woman and a mother and a father, and that this helped us function. And that now that these are eroding [and] we're going to have symptomatic outbreaks.

I think that this is incredibly problematic because it assumes on the one hand that there was a religious universe and now we're in a properly secular world, as opposed to that we never understood where we were situated in the first place.

Coitus Interruptus

So Freud actually originally thought that the reason we had anxiety was because too many people were practicing "Coitus Interruptus." And he included in this condom use and too much masturbation. And so this is the kind of thing that you ignore, and Freud says these ridiculous things, that like men might menstruate out of their nose. And you just sort of ignore that and think, okay maybe he was just on a lot of cocaine and we'll just forget about all of this.

But I sort of happened on this moment in Lacan's seminar on anxiety where he said that this was the most brilliant thing that Freud ever said. And I thought, "Oh my God." So why did Lacan think this? He thought that what Freud was pointing to at this moment was that anxiety is linked to some failure in sexuality, and in our capacity of relating with one another. And that in highlighting this, even in the ridiculous way that he did, Freud is showing us, even at the beginning that he has this idea that sexuality essentially fails. Orgasm, Freud tells us, is the ejection into the outside world of the scraps or grains of libido, it's the exteriorization of the drive essentially in coitus.

Anxiety is then for Freud at this early moment, these scraps trapped on the inside, they're unable to enter into the stream of thought, they're not able to return to the body, they're just sort of caught between here and nowhere. So if you think of the agoraphobia on the one hand and claustrophobia on the other, this is the same metaphor that he's using for anxiety that is somehow trapped between just having a drive and having a body, and on the other hand being able to have an orgasm.

So, coitus interruptus was an intriguing proposition because of the fact that it becomes a sort of incomplete act, a half measure, a need to sort of defend against something. Leaving something cut off midstream, without being able to articulate it or develop it, or think it or systematize it, and it seems to embody this sort of in-between. Right? - Like am I fucking or am I not fucking? - I don't know, I'm sort of half fucking.

This half-choice, Freud says, erodes one's somatic sexual constitution over time. This was his idea in the beginning. Which is also why all of the analysts were sort of really against masturbation.



And now we pretend that we're not, and we think that it's great, and everyone should enjoy themselves, but, actually we don't like masturbation. This leads Freud to a very, very strange symptomatic loop: he says that anxiety erupts because of interrupted pleasure and anxiety leads one to interrupt pleasure.

And you can see this all the time in patients. Masturbation becomes the hallmark of ruined libidinal potential. Which you wind up with someone like Wilhelm Reich, you know, who wants you to sit in the box and collect your energy, and then you can cure cancer and change the weather. Really, that's where it comes from. But the idea was that this ruined libidinal potential was weakening your constitution, was weakening your potency, and was eventually leading to a disposition to anxiety, pessimism, and low self-confidence. These patients, Freud says, bring "psychical sexual weakness" on themselves and they spoil all acts of coitus (ibid.).

A fun caveat for you ladies: Freud says one ought to be careful when considering a woman's complaints over anxiety, Freud cautions; more often than not they partnered with anxious men who are making them hysterical. And the more passionate a woman is, the more a woman desires passion, the more she will react to the decrease in a man's potency, to his *coitus interruptus*, and fall ill. These Freud reflections on anxiety, lead him to levy a surprising indictment against culture as a whole.

He says:

'In the absence of such a solution, and he calls it he 'innocuous methods of preventing conception and disease', and he also calls it the 'access of boys to good girls' in 1895. And he says, so in the absence of a solution, 'society appears doomed to fall a victim to incurable neuroses, which reduce the enjoyment of life to a minimum, destroy the marriage relation and bring hereditary ruin on the whole coming generation' (1985, 44).

Coitus interruptus is destroying the family, to say nothing of a whole generation to come, and he says that even the so called 'lower' strata—meaning the less civilized and so less neurotic will eventually succumb, leaving us in a world of hesitant half orgasming anxious men and more and more hysterical women. And then both of these figures will just tip into anxiety completely.

This is his pronouncement. And you know, honestly I have questions. If you read *Civilization and Its Discontents*, is it all that different from what he's saying in 1895? I mean the whole argument of *Civilization and Its Discontents* is the whole argument of pleasure, which at a certain point tips into the death drive. But it's not so different from what he's saying here, about a kind of hereditary ruin that gets built-in because of some failure to do something with one's drive.

Leave your appendages on the subway

J: Alright, leave your appendage on the subway. Story two. Freud changes his theory of anxiety later on. It's not coitus interruptus, but rather what he calls a reaction to loss and separation. Feeling of helplessness associated with loss and separation are basically what winds up overwhelming the system.

So we can basically breathe a sigh of relief here. You can masturbate, you can pull out, really, you can do whatever you want. You have to deal with the question of loss. Before, the question was, 'how to reduce this helplessness, especially in a world that is making us feel more and more helpless and anxious?'

This tale of anxiety reveals something about the stakes of an analytic cure. Which were obviously different since in the beginning question, the question was like, 'how do you get good girls, how do you get a method of preventing pregnancy and disease.' Right, so he drops this, because for Freud there's never going to be the solution that allows us to have great orgasms that we want to have.

There's a question here of what psychoanalysis needs to make possible in order to transform anxiety into some sort of potential. Pleasure, what do we want from one another, what are we going to do with our genitals? Freud's attempt to clarify the nature of anxiety leads him to consider what is distinct about human relationships to objects.

Let's take a humorous anecdote from Lacan. He asks us to consider the idea of one's arm, which, if it is a symbol of one's will, could become an object under threat. Someone could seize control of it, like when they call you someone's right-hand man. Or, we could leave it behind on the metro or in our analyst's waiting room, like an ordinary umbrella.



And we analysts know what it means when you leave things behind in our office. Lacan says “The experience of the hysteric is significant enough to know that this comparison, which affords a glimpse of the fact that an arm can be forgotten, neither more or less than a mechanical arm, is no forced metaphor.” (2014, 217) What Lacan wants to show is that anxiety is not only a question of dismemberment and bodily harm. It is also the recognition of the unconscious—the realization that we are not masters of our own bodies.

Right, so the blows the Freud levies to humankind is that you’re not master in your own house of thinking, and the other blow is that you’re not the master of your own body. And all this brings you to a peculiar fact of the question of what is it exactly within yourself that you are separated from? What are you constantly losing control of?

Lacan concludes that not controlling one’s arm could be reassuring, because if we don’t have them, then no one else does either. At which point, it is not a question of absolute control, self-mastery, nor being out-of-control and about to be dismembered—a discourse that every psycho-analyst will recognize immediately in the oscillation of patients’ anxiety. But, in fact, sort of what he’s saying is that all the platitudes concerning letting go, including the kind of Alcoholics Anonymous, give yourself over to a higher power, file in here.

They’re not wrong, but what’s important for Freud is that what this misses is what is radical about the unconscious and the sexual relationship to the object. So we always talk about letting go. I go to yoga classes all the time and they’re like, ‘let go of all your thoughts,’ and this is what they’re doing in the meditation apps. But for Freud, the idea [is not] that you simply let go of control, but that it’s about establishing a relationship to the unconscious that somehow makes it impossible to exist in this way.

And honestly I think this is what psychoanalysis does differently than all of the supposed philosophies of life of which we have a question of what these are - the religions. To the extent that it’s about forming a relationship to your own unconscious that allows you to then interact with the world differently.

Right, so you’re not taking something and you’re putting a philosophy on top of it, as if it’s going to help you enter into the world.

Anxiety arises in liminal spaces, in the sensation of oneself as a body with a foreign edge. Action, when based in anxiety, is reduced to controlling the appearance of the unconscious, either in oneself or in the other person.

I mean, basically what you do when you have anxiety and you talk too much, you know, when you meet someone, you’re basically stopping them from saying anything that’s going to shock you. Right? You sort of smother it with your words and then you run out of the room. And Freud is saying here, what you’re doing at all points in time is you’re defending against the appearance of the unconscious.

Here we get a glimpse of why anxiety must be tied to sexuality. So for Lacan, the meaning of separation is not ‘this is my arm and that is yours, my arm does what I want it too,’ but instead, something more like, ‘who knows whose arms any of these are, all the same, I’m doing just fine, it’s not going to come off if my attention lapses. Let’s go ahead and see what happens.’

Separation, he says, happens despite the lack of any firm outlines, not because of them. People like to talk about setting boundaries, like, let’s set proper boundaries, let’s figure out the rules of consent, but with Lacan we have to exist more in these murky zones and figure out within ourselves why our unconscious gets triggered in these spaces between people. Psychoanalysis does not indulge in a definition of an individual sense of boundaries or achieved autonomy – Americans love the idea of autonomy – but rather what it means to have a relationship with one’s unconscious.

Lacan pushes this point even further when he states that separation is the lack of any common satisfaction whatsoever. Right so for Lacan there is no sexual relationship, right, there is no woman, there is no God. All of these statements that he made. There is no Other of the Other. His final point is that there is no common satisfaction whatsoever and this is what is made the most apparent by the idea of coitus interruptus, not as the failure to orgasm, but rather as the failure to achieve common satisfaction that was expected and that then marks our separation.

So this is how he twists this thing of Freud’s from the very beginning.



He says that, basically, you went into the sex thinking that you were going to achieve this amazing unity, this amazing common satisfaction and because of the fact of the condom or the interrupted pleasure the separation that you experience from the other person that's when there is the eruption, and that is why anxiety is caused.

And in fact this is an idiom for all moments of anxiety in which the fact of separation comes to bear on you and it's unbelievably sort of earth shaking. Like this isn't what I thought I was going to get out of this, this wasn't what I thought it was going to be. Something's either too close or it's too far away with respect to your expectations and this has to do with an unconscious fantasy.

In an interrupted enjoyment of the body, the body feels the other's pulling out or pulling away, before any 'conclusion' is reached—and anxiety erupts. What appears in coitus interruptus is the embodiment of separation. This is why it is named as the source of anxiety by Freud.

Lacan concurs with psychoanalysis at its worst, uniting, in his unique and paradoxical way, the early and late theory of Freud: He says, "Thanks to Freud, we have this cleaving point in our grasp. This in itself is miraculous" (2014, 168).

And part of the reason that this is important to me is, I don't know about here in Berlin, but in New York there's no shortage of patients. Everyone's psychoanalytic practices are doing well, and as I suppose with the turn of the century, patients come and what they have to talk about is sex. And they can be having tons of sex, but they are incredibly anxious about it. They don't know if they're supposed to be experiencing pleasure, or if they have too much pleasure or not enough. And something about this space and the way that it's mitigated in response to one's own consciousness which is why I think it's important to bring up at this point.

Luce: And why is it happening at the turn of the century?

J: I don't know why it's happening at the turn of the century. One could say that psychoanalysis was developed at that point because it's a transition into modernity, that it comes to replace religion, around the question of confession.

That psychoanalysts become the new priests, but it's a priest who doesn't reach a certain philosophy but rather listens to what the patient has to say and returns back to them their words.

Right, and one of the things that happens is that a lot of my patients come and they engage in girlfriend talk, which I do all the time: 'Oh my god, this happened and this happened and he did this and he did that, and then he sent me this email and what does this mean, and here's this email can you read it, and what did he mean by this?' And then they come and they want to do this with me and then I don't respond, so then you start to begin to hear the murmurs of it in the background. And it's a quasi-addiction, but none of this is helping, like all of this discourse that you're trying to plaster on the question of the anxiety that you're having about your sexual relationships— and then of course what always happens is it becomes incredibly moralistic.

Like, 'he did what? No way! Stay away. He's an idiot...'" and so on. None of this is going to help you.

Luce: So my attempt in this commentary is to – we talked earlier, and I tried to say, 'I think that the anxious person, who is going on in their infinite discourse and girlfriend talk, actually understands reality better than the person that doesn't do that.' So at this point I'm going to try and show you why the 'rational person' is really not rational enough, and the anxious-hysteric is really the one who gets the world. Like, she expresses an adequate understanding of a deeply broken metaphysical condition. Okay? That's going to be my hypothesis.

So in this text of yours something totally startled me, and I read it over a few times and I still can't get over it. It is the following sentence:

“Separation happens despite the lack of any firm outlines, not because of them.”- I'm going to repeat this. - “Separation happens despite the lack of any firm outlines, not because of them.”

And I kept thinking that I have no fucking idea what this means. You know, like, the whole passage around it made perfect sense to me. And I think the problem of my understanding of this passage was the problem that you oftentimes have when you read philosophical or also psychoanalytic or other literature.



You expect the terms used to carry semantic content that you already know, and at this point the problem is the term 'separation.'

So, obviously, in the sentence "Separation happens despite the lack of any firm outlines not because of them." If I understand 'separation' as the division of two pre-established things from one another, I miss the content of the whole sentence. Interestingly this 'separation' seems to destabilize what we normally understand as 'separation,' if 'separation' is understood to re-establish a division already given, our theory of anxiety goes lost in separation.

"Oh my god, do they love me, do they not love me, can I like ... , Is this ghosting already? She hasn't texted me in two hours. I don't know, when will we see each other again? I still love you. I haven't seen you in five years, but you're still close to my heart. What does that mean, you have a relationship with yourself? Like the ghost of somebody else in your own narcissistic whatever."

Okay, so we're trying to understand anxiety through the question of 'separation'. And we're trying to understand what separation is. And I think something interesting happens between these two parts, between 'coitus interruptus' and 'the arm that you lose.' Namely, a change in the – and here comes the philosophical translation – you're not going to pat my head? Thank you – in a change in the modality of the theoretical object.

If you read many theories you can see this: Oftentimes in the early state of the theory, the theorist goes for the actual state of the thing and, as it were, confuses it with a condition. So in the early state of the theory we are talking only about actual things. Only about present things. You know, "the intercourse is happening, there's a condom between the two bodies. That's what interrupts the really real reality of the total intercourse happening, and that sets off anxiety and that's why culture will go haywire and Armageddon is about to happen." But there's a series of things that really do happen.

Now, what this presupposes is that we already do have different bodies that are already established. "You are you, I am me, we can have intercourse, then we will separate again, and you will be you and I will be me." And then the problem is, what's actually happening in intercourse? Are we still different people? Or are we one person, or, am I having sex with my fantasy of you in my mind, or what?

You know this is becoming problematic, and the problem as it were manifests in the object that signifies the separation. For example, coitus interruptus. Clearly, this gives rise to, or is entangled with, a certain heterosexual fantasy, namely 'only when the man ejaculates, the act is going to be finished,' and inversely, 'whenever the man doesn't ejaculate, then the act is not finished, and when the act is not finished then, catastrophe.' Okay.

J: None of you know anything about that.

L: I don't know anything about that. I also don't know anything about talking too much in order to make the other not talk. I've never done this in my life.

Ever. Okay.

So we have the first figure of separation, if you will: 'pre-established figures do something with each other, and then something fails. But in general, the order of causes is such that intercourse is going to happen, ejaculation is going to happen, everything is fine, and the problem is external.'

Now in the 2nd moment, in the moment with the arm, really what Lacan is talking about, in my translation, if you will, in the light of the earlier Butler quote – really what we are talking about is not separation but is *separability*. It is the '*possibility*' of being separated, but a '*possibility*' of being separated *before* any separable units are established in the first place.

We are hence not talking about a '*possibility*' 'proper,' one that may or may not occur. In the earlier version, the version of '*coitus interruptus*,' separation is a *possibility* that befalls intercourse accidentally, externally – *or not*. But in no way are 'intercourse' and '*coitus interruptus*' internally connected in any way. 'Intercourse' in the hetero-patriarchal model, concluding with male ejaculation, occurs as the natural course of affairs.

Not so in the 2nd moment. For here, the idea would be that the condom or *coitus interruptus* manifest the primordial indeterminateness of our relationship, of our bodies to one another. When Freud talks about the formation of the child and the body of the child in the three essays on infantile sexuality – how is that translated?

J: *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.*

L: Thank you. There he says, "look basically the child is unorganized in a proper sense. The child does not have two arms and a head and is like having their sexual pleasure in their erogenous zone, being their left shoulder. This is something that happens in the process of growing up and *being organized*." This is what Deleuze/Guattari would have called it. *Becoming organized.*

So, my hand is my organ, but my hand as my organ must become organized, I must learn how to use my hand. And I must learn what parts of my body give me pleasure and which do not. And then the whole question of politics comes in. "Are you supposed to feel pleasure when I touch your left ear?" "No." So if you feel pleasure in that case, you repress. So this is a process of the organization of the body. And in that state, it is unclear and maybe meaningless whose body it is and whether my feelings belong to me or to you – there is a miniscule capacity here for a complete reorganization of 'corporeality' and/of 'society' towards 'de-individuation.'

But factually, some people can draw better because they learned how to use their hand more successfully, and some people have different kinds of pleasures on different parts of bodies, and they learn to play their bodies like an instrument, like an organization of the body. This process of organization of the body comes with the insecurity of an actual separation. Which makes sense, because we are beings that at a certain point in time are being separated, meaning that we 'learn separation' from ourselves and from other bodies, whatever gender they may have.

Like, in a womb, we are not quite separated from another body, so you must learn this separation. And one of my translations would be, that the sentence, "separation happens *despite* the lack of any firm outlines, not *because* of them," transposes the idea of anxiety and separation from the moment of the external influence which interrupts the otherwise well going machine of contact, intercourse, separation, etc. etc. – transposes this figure to a layer where it is not determined to begin with.

Who you are and who I am. This 'separation' or '*separability*,' then, does *not* occur in the modality of a mere 'possibility,' but rather as an *inevitability*, as a capacity that keeps showing up.

It may 'occur' in a sequence of actual occurrences (the condom, coitus interruptus, time constraints, sudden distraction ect. ect.) of virtual determinations (insecurities, prohibition of enjoyment, the internalized gaze of your mother etc. etc.) or in their mere undecidability between the two ("Am I insecure or is it the condom?") or as such ("do I really want this?", "am I doing this right?", "why are you not doing this better?" etc.). The exploitation of these insecurities is political ("You have to want this," "You do want this," "I should comply"); its institutionalization is the perpetuation of violence ('silence is consent,' 'burden of proof,' "she was drunk"). But the catastrophe is that these are political distortions and exploitations of a real condition, of a real 'separability' and the problematic of its 'individuation.'

I think that makes perfect sense to me because I would think that ordinarily if we become people, we become specific people. We have teenage idols, or mothers, or we have fears of people that we may become. And we relate virtually, as it were, to these people. "I want to become like Billy Idol, so I dye my hair blonde." And then I become a person who is not Billy Idol, that I have to be, and I am destined to be this person, but still I have moved like two steps in that direction.

So I have *organized* myself by taking something from another person into myself. Consequentially, the idea would be that separation anxiety as it is presented in the first version, as '*coitus interruptus*' is taking it from the wrong end, so to speak, it's only looking at the effect. Whereas the second figure says: "The problem is not whether the orgasm is going to be interrupted or not. The question is really, *how do we format ourselves as individuals or not as individuals.*

What are the other kinds of people, our lovers, our parents, our friends, that we cannot separate from and from them in particular?" Which is why this is becoming so important in the first place. "Why did he say this, why did she say this, what does this mean," etc. etc. It's a lack of separation, but it's not something that's coming in from the outside. It's an instability in the individual identity to begin with, it's *inevitable separability*.

And that is pretty interesting I think.



It means that the person who indulges in infinite reasoning about their anxieties, "what did they mean, did it mean anything, did it not mean anything, are they ghosting me, are they not ghosting me, what does 'ghosting' mean anyway, are we still married, what is a marriage, what do I want, do I really want this, do I not really want this," is actually a *deeper insight* into the way reality works than the person who's like, "we're just dating and we see each other twice a week and then we have sex and depart, and then I go play golf with the boys, and I come back." This is really deeply sick. This is really sick. And the sickness of this consists in a denial of reality as inevitable separability.

The anxious person understands that they have no control over their own process of formation. On an intuitive level, as it were. The anxious person understands that the body is malleable in a metaphysical sense. That you could always become this other person. You can always be deeply infused by Angela Merkel.

And like do her gestures, and get her haircut. And then of course you're never going to be Angela Merkel. I'm always bound to be myself, but I'm going to be myself two steps toward Angela Merkel. You know, I could start voting for the Christian Democratic Union, I could start hanging out with conservatives and my political views would change, etc. etc.

Jamieson: That's a good entry point for the car. Should we do the woman with the car?

L: Yeah, go for the car.

Minimal Supports: A Woman Who Fell in Love with a Car

J: There's this really beautiful case. So Lacan never talked about his cases. Very rarely. In the seminar on anxiety, it's actually very long discussion of a case in a kind of play by play in the treatment itself and I really haven't found anything either in French or in English that takes it up, so I'm going to tell you about it in very layman's terms.

He says, "One day a woman tells me that her husband, whose insistences are, if I may, part and parcel of the foundation of the marriage, leaves her alone a little too long. So her husband is annoying, and he dotes on her.

So he leaves her alone a little too long for her not to notice. . . . And this is when she comes out with the following sentence. . . . She exposes herself as follows—*small matter whether he desires me, provided he doesn't desire others*" (187–88). Lacan says that he won't say that this is commonplace—something about a woman's jealousy or possessiveness or whatever—but that we can only really understand it from the constellation of what follows in the session, especially as regards the statement as a message from within the transference and the treatments of Lacan.

Lacan says she suddenly begins to speak with a peculiar precision about her state, one that shows that tumescence isn't simply the privilege of the man:

This woman, whose sexuality is quite normal, bears witness to what occurs for her if, when she is driving, for example, an alert flashes up for a moving entity that makes her say to herself something along the lines of God, a car! Well, inexplicably, she notices the existence of a vaginal swelling. This is what strikes her that day and she notes that, during some periods, the phenomenon will occur when just any old object comes into her visual field, to all appearances utterly foreign to anything of a sexual nature (188).

This woman's desirous gaze is returned to her through the withdrawal of her husband's.

Any old object can become the trigger for an experience of *jouissance* that arises like a flash, a signal, as the other or reverse face of anxiety. The state, she goes on to say, stops of its own accord—it has a rhythm all its own; it begins and ends by surprise, a kind of bodily symphony in relation to the world.

This is the limit of the analogy with the man, because for her tumescence does not follow the same path from tumescence to detumescence. Rather, it transfers onto a whole field of objects and then stops as abruptly as it started. So, you know, the whole process with the man where you become erect, you ejaculate and then you become un-erect, was very different, Lacan was saying, for this woman who would suddenly have this swelling and this experience of incredible enjoyment and then it would stop and it would start again and it would stop.



And he's interested in the fact that what happens within this is this cutoff point, this cut in her enjoyment that allows it to restart again is relatively tolerated by her. And she says that, in fact, what is most tolerable to her about it is that she can bring these observations back to Lacan in her analysis. This leads the patient to speak to the peculiarities of the nature of their analytic relationship. She says to him,

Each of her initiatives are dedicated to me, her analyst. *I can't say devoted, she adds, that would mean it was done with a certain aim, but no, any old object forces me to evoke you as a witness, not even to have your approval of what I see, no, simply your gaze, and in saying that, I'm going slightly too far, let's say that this gaze helps me to make each thing assume meaning (188).*

So this idea that she becomes incredibly precise about her state and what it has to do with Lacan, you see here because she is saying, 'I'm not getting turned on by the car because I think you want me to get turned on by cars. I'm getting turned on by cars because somehow the world has become meaningful and I can bring these things to you. I can bring these objects to you in the analysis and I can tell you about this. And this allows her to sort of tolerate both the incredible eruption of enjoyment and its stopping, which has nothing to do with her whatsoever.

What we see is that this object that enters into her sight and evokes a feeling of vaginal excitement is linked in some way to the function of the gaze in the transference. This is not the demanding clumsy gaze of her husband nor even her desirous looking (especially not looking for Lacan's approval) but something about the analyst as witness, the one who can be evoked as watching this emergence of desire in a field that surrounds her. This is the circuit that the other is used to support. All of this is prefaced by a separation, a fact—her husband's leaving her alone a little too long—which sets off the session and this series of confessions.

This gesture, she says is not exactly one done for the gaze of the other, but rather to support her own: "After all, what she wanted was not so much for me to look at her as for my gaze to replace hers.

She says, "*I appeal to the assistance of your person. The gaze, my gaze, is insufficient when it comes to capturing everything that stands to be absorbed from the outside. It's not about watching me do something, it's about doing it for me*" (189).

I find this moment absolutely beautiful, this idea of an appeal for assistance in order to capture the everything that can be taken in from the outside world. The insufficiency of one person when it comes to the desire for this absorption and its excitement. She is not taking the other in, duping them, nor is she taken in by her own ideal; rather, she allows her gaze to drop by replacing it with the idea that her analyst's eyes are there to watch something happen. And it is through this falling away of the husband or the fact of separation that suddenly the world flares up—God, a car!

This desirousness seems to need, at bottom, the encounter with another that can want in kind, that can hold their place—without attaching themselves to anything in particular. Alright, so think here about what was happening in coitus interruptus where people have certain fantasies about what the expectation needs to be and what it is that needs to happen, whereas here the attachment to the other person is not connected to anything in particular but simply their existence as such, as something that can be there to take in what it is you have to bring them.

Whatever shred of "common satisfaction" there might be, it is dependent upon some realized separation, which raises the question of what is common. To which she then must speak to her experience. What can we even want here really from the other, except this minimal support?

This is why the position of the analyst is very strange. It's why we don't entirely engage in girlfriend talk, although sometimes you do it a little bit, but you act sort of as a support for this discourse to turn from girlfriend talk into something else. Like falling in love with a car.

Lacan is at pains to argue on behalf of his patient that what she is speaking about isn't about any reciprocity or reciprocal relationship, like the symbiotic nature of a two-party political system. It is something else. The transference is not the establishment of reciprocity but the possibility that arises from the achievement of separation.

The relationship establishes an asymmetry that lends itself to the support of the patient, which they can find through the analyst. This allows the object to act as a supplement, and not as a negative, anxiety-inducing cipher.



So, you know, Lacan talks about the surplus enjoyment and surplus object in the end of his life. It's really strange for me to have found it this early in his seminars. And he's saying that what's important here and the reason it can function this way is because it's adding something to you. It's not the question of a negative that you're trying to sort of fill. One might ask, is this the same embodied negativity in the anxiety of *coitus interruptus*? Or is the object transformed when it is not the anxious signal of separation but the voluptuous consequences of it?

I'll finish the last story and then I'll let Luce explain all of this to you.

There is a Shrimp that Eats Sand

In Lacan's Seminar on Anxiety, Lacan again he says we have to go to the edge of this anxiety in order for this transformation to fundamentally take place. Right, otherwise we're trapped in the narrow confines and nagging whiny demands of anxiety. We can he says find a point of equilibrium if we experience separation in contact with what is absolutely Other. What Freud named forming a relationship to your unconscious. At the moment he uses the surreal naturalistic fable of a shrimp that needs to imbibe a grain of sand to establish equilibrium.

So these creatures have to take in a grain of sand otherwise they can't find equilibrium in the sea and they spend a period of time trying to find this, at which point they can then go on and live their life. And scientists became fascinated by this, and they started feeding them all kinds of strange things and using magnets to sort of drag them around and ruin all of their equilibrium. Scientists like to do things like that.

Lacan marvels that evolution could make room for something like this. Some psychoanalysts tried to explain anxiety by the shock of birth. This is notably Otto Rank's theory of the separation from the mother's body, but Freud didn't buy this because everybody would just be cripplingly anxious, just by virtue of the fact of being born and Freud is no existentialist.

Lacan says, let us think of the shrimp and a foreign exterior, not so unlike oxygen, breath, that must invade us from the outside. It's not the separation from the mother's body but the fact that we have to start breathing that might be emblematic here of the trauma of birth and the relationship to anxiety.

And in fact, you said that you were in the mother's womb and then you have to deal with the fact of separation and one of the things that Lacan points out is that a baby isn't actually inside the mother, the baby is a parasite and essentially falls out. It's not like the baby is ever really on the inside.

Luce: It's true, it's even worse.

Jamieson: It's even worse.

L: I tried to sell it off more easy than it actually is.

J: So, Separation, then, you see, is an achievement, even when it is a fact. It is up to psychoanalysis, he says, to do an incredibly exhaustive investigation of this frontier.

Which is what we wanted to do tonight. You know, what is it that we want from each other is essentially about this frontier that we have to do this investigation of and this is what Lacan says that psychoanalysts need to do.

Alright, my final remarks for the ladies.

Women, Lacan claims, are much better at bearing this movement through anxiety. Men—are in much worse shape. Freud marveled at the fact of how well a woman can live with frigidity or sexual failure; whereas for a man, impotence often destroys them.

Lacan seems to concur with Freud's conclusion that men are more prone to anxiety, which often leads to more hysterical women. But, Lacan carries on, for the women, how can we not see that when it comes to life, they are lacking nothing—when he says this, he is thinking about the paradigm of gendered anxiety established by Freud. Men have castration anxiety and women have penis envy. But here Lacan twists the concept of penis envy ever so slightly.

Women, he says, are lacking nothing. Right, they have what they have, they think they need something else, they need some additional thing, they need this surplus object, but at the very least it's about what there is. And it's about what the world has to offer you, what you can take from the world. If you can figure out how to take something from it. He says their anxiety is letting what is there be seen because it might not seem enough. But, nevertheless, it's about what there is to be seen.



Whereas for men it's an anxiety about what there is to be seen, but also what can be taken away. It's always about the possibility of having a lack. For the woman it's about what is there not being enough, but she can then get from the outside world. If the man takes something from the outside world he says what he has in not enough. He's wanting of something.

Lacan says, "The fact is that on this point she has nothing wanting" especially when she wants everything from the position that she holds (ibid., 181). Right, and this is very Lacanian to the extent that from this position, what you have available to you is essentially desire. Right, and desire only comes through the transformation of anxiety.

So in wanting something from the Other, let's say the sexual organ of the other for the sake of simplicity, perhaps, he muses, what she wants is for the other to be able to tolerate their anxiety about losing it, not on the subway, but to her. This is Lacan's affirmative reading of female desire. Much earlier than many people think it exists. So I'll stop there.

[People trying to leave but are overwhelmed by the door].

J: Are you going to let these people separate from us?

Luce: I don't have much separation anxiety, with these people. But I'm not sure even why. Maybe because the door is so complicated. And I think it's a real challenge to open the door. And I think if they master this challenge, they're worth it.

Everything in this second two cases, to me, falls into two, interestingly, into a separation between two, which are not two. And the question that was left over from my last little commentary, is "how do these two levels of separability and the actual separation relate to each other?"

The level on which the body is not yet organized, and I might be you, and you might be me, and we might be one, and the moment of catastrophe in *the coitus interruptus* – do they just happen to fall into one at some point? Why is it that when it happens in certain moments that this becomes a problem and in other moments it doesn't?" And this is a question.

It's an interesting question of modality. "How does a certain kind of potential manifest in something actual?"

Many things are potential. I could transform into a Phoenix and fly out. I could have a giant elephant on my head, but only some of these potentials seem to actually be the case.

I don't have elephants on my head. That's one of the questions that is posed here. And I think it happens, interestingly, between the woman that falls in love with a car and Lacan, because they have very different positions on this. Because in Lacan's model, he comes up and says, "I am replacing her desire." So, you remember the case carries a classical patriarchal setup. A marriage between heterosexual, white, cisgender people, where he dominates her with his desire, and she tries to comply.

You remember *Vertigo*. "Can you dress up like my ex-wife?" "Yes I can dress up like you ex-wife. Even if I am your ex-wife I will still dress up like you ex-wife. Even if you don't realize it, I'm going to try and be what I already am. I'm going to give up on my own identity which is already being your ex-wife and then I'm going to become your ex-wife once again and then you kill me." That's always what happens. The patriarchal male gaze suffocates the person in the gaze because she's giving up everything in order to become something that she can never achieve because she cannot merge.

I cannot become what you want me to be. I cannot simultaneously be in your head and outside of it. Okay, so, that's the starting point, I would think. The starting point is this slogan. "I want to be what you want me to be and I am suffering from it." Now the gaze disappears and what happens is that another gaze shows up, and that is the gaze of the analyst. The gaze of the analyst seems to work very differently. It's not the gaze that tells you what to do and then you comply with what you ought to do and you fail, and then everybody is miserable.

That's the patriarchal position. This gaze is more a gaze that sets up a sphere of the (alleged) fullness of meaning. "Whatever I will bring to you, you will interpret, and we will talk about it for an hour." That's the promise. And of course, this is backed up by liberal capitalism, because she pays him, and that's why he talks back to her.

Maybe. Maybe he's interested, maybe not. I don't know. Lalalala. But in any case, I can be sure that whatever I bring to you, you will interpret. And that causes in me, a reorganization of my desire. I stop complying with a wild projection of what you want me to be, and I start playing, I would think.



I start playing with different kinds of signifiers and different kinds of possible organizations of the body, in this case. "How about I get off on a car. I got off on a car yesterday. What are you going to say to that?" And then we play. But the joke is not to satisfy you.

The joke is that we have a connection, which is – using a Spinozistic term – 'in itself infinite.' Like, in this connection between the two of us, we can generate an infinite amount of statements and possible objects of desire, and interpretations, and etc. etc. which will launch an infinite amount of possible pleasure. And we can take pleasure in this business of interpretation.

I would float, maybe, that this is the transition from 'girlfriend talk' to 'falling in love with a car.' Because in 'girlfriend talk,' the question is about *judgment*. "I bring this to you, and I expect you to judge it in a certain way," or, "I hope that you will judge me in the way that I think you will judge me so that I can be the person that you turn me into." Which is a power relation. Which is a replay of a top-down power relation. So from this, we transition into 'falling in love with a car,' which is completely random.

And the joke here about falling in love with a car is that it is completely random and that it doesn't have a pre-established meaning. "We will do it together. We'll become something that we haven't been before." And what's happening here philosophically, I would think – and again, just to say this, she's smarter than he is.

Jamieson: Mmhmm.

Luce: Right? The anxious person gets this. Lacan doesn't. Lacan says, "I am replacing her desire. I become the husband. She brings this to me. I become the instance of interpretation." But the anxious person gets it in her amassing of signification. She says, "it is more about assistance, dedication, assumption, witnessing." There's a *sequence* of words here. It's not just replacement. It is a whole flower bouquet of possibilities. And this is where we get to permeation and personality hacking that was promised.

One of the things that's happening here is a change from what some call 'negative freedom' to what we may call 'positive freedom.' Which is why it's interesting that Lacan starts off saying, 'my god, a car!'

So there's an interesting relation here between the divine and the completely mundane car. And it might not be absolutely obvious, but it describes an interesting process that European culture has undergone in its becoming more, and more commodified throughout the last 600 years. And that goes as follows.

With the scientification, the becoming science of philosophy, as I tried to say earlier, one of the questions was, "how do we replace God as the guarantee for meaning? How do we establish a society that is not relying on the promise of a paradise?" And many of these articulations that have become important in political philosophy and also in writing constitutions and etc., etc., have been accounts of *freedom*. Now, it's not without interest that the divine, crucially, is the thing that is most free.

To Spinoza, for example, 'the divine' is just 'absolute infinity,' and 'freedom' is the absence of external interference. So, 'absolute infinity' is the only 'free cause,' is the only free thing, because it cannot be interfered with from anywhere, as it has no outside. Now in the history of philosophy, you can string them up, the theories. And put Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, etc. etc. in a line and then the question always is, "what is the largest entity that is not going to be interfered with," meaning "what is the sphere of freedom," or "what must we submit to so as to be free." And then you will have 'the divine' and 'Spinoza,' 'consciousness' and 'Kant,' 'the state' and 'Hegel' as self-determining units. And Kant calls this, interestingly, 'freedom' as 'auto-nomy,' 'giving yourself a law.'

Now ironically of course, to give just one example, to Kant, 'giving yourself a law' is submission to a universal law. I find this hilarious. But – you don't find this hilarious? 'Freedom is submission to the universal law?' Right. But that is because there is no external interference in 'reason as universalizing capacity' isolated from external interferences doing just that: universalizing. Hence, 'submission to universality itself' is *freedom – the categorical imperative*.

But, what capitalism does in the 20th century, interestingly, is to transform the process of *auto-nomy*, the autonomous, the 'giving yourself a law,' into *auto-mobility*. The promise of automobility. That is the promise of autonomy, translated into the promise of the car.



So I would say that one of the paradigmatic images of freedom in the 20th century is the car. "If you get into your own car you can go wherever you want, you can be alone, you can pick up people, you can have adventures, all of these things." So for autonomy, if it becomes commodified, it becomes automobility. God becomes a car. "My god, a car!"

And it's all captured here! Right? The relationship between the everything that we were talking about earlier, the separability, or the separateness that is not quite yet separated, that is not yet quite organized, and as the *organization* of freedom into the smallest possible units, impersonated by a car – or many. Now the problem of course is that once everybody has a car, nothing moves.

Grenzöffnung Rudolphstein Hirschberg, 9. und 10. November 1989 Stau auf der A 9 am Brückenrasthaus Frankenwald wir waren so frei punkt de 9 42

This is an image of November 9th, 10th, on the A9 right after the Berlin wall came down, right after the border was opened. This is a traffic jam of *Trabbies*, the *Trabby* [short for 'Trabant,' 'satellite'] was like the car of the GDR. It was the kind of car that everybody had, so in the moment that everybody gets into their car, and everybody exerts their negative freedom, everybody exerts their automobility – traffic jam. Nothing is happening. Okay.

Now, what I think is interesting in the figure of the anxiety-ridden person here is that the anxiety-ridden person insists that this is not the solution. The anxiety-ridden person insists that the setup of signification, that the kind of freedom that we exert cannot be limited in this way, cannot be stabilized in this way.

Total organization is not the answer. And in the infinity of the girlfriend talk, "this and this and this and this and this and this and this and this and this and this and this" and the sequentiality of it, this shows up. There's always more. Of course we can try and stabilize it, and you can try and judge, and you can say, yeah, what did she do, and why did she do that?" etc. You can try to organize.

But that doesn't really end the sequence. Responding in this way is giving in to the process, which is why it is necessary to not respond to that or not like that.

It would exactly be a mode of talking, an attempt to free the analysis like 'automobility.' "You will have the right to determine everything as you want it to be." So the other kind of gaze, the gaze which is productive, in which we produce meaning together, is a gaze which aims towards another kind of freedom.

So we distinguish negative and positive freedom.

Negative freedom is the absence of external interference. 'Automobility,' I say, is the paradigmatic image of negative freedom in the 20th century. "Everybody stay off my car. This is my car, and I block everything else out, and I drive down the Autobahn which doesn't work because if we all exclude everybody else then nothing is working."

Total organization.

You can imagine this in like a state as well. If nobody takes care of each other, no health insurance, everybody dies. And then there's this other freedom.

'Positive freedom.' 'Positive freedom' is the productive interference with each other. It's the interference that you want. It's a friendship relationship that comes with social obligations. It's a love relationship that turns you into a person that you haven't been before. And in which you confront each other, and become people that you couldn't be by yourself. But I would think that this kind of anxiety, that this kind of falling in love with a car, insists on the possibility of yet another kind of freedom, and also, this is interestingly where it becomes political, it insists in the non-universality of commodification.

It insists that if neoliberal capitalism succeeds, if we just have the right kinds of goods and properties for everybody, then everybody's going to be marketed to as they need it, is getting *organized*, then this is not going to respond to the separability, the primordial reorganization of the psyche and the body, because it presupposed that you already know what you want. But the political potential, and also the psychological potential of anxiety is that this is not possible.

Now of course, that makes the suffering of the anxious person on the one hand, a political problem. The world is not made for people. Or, the world is not made for humans.

The world is made for marketing and the production of capital. Except, of course, in neoliberal capitalism, because neoliberal capitalism tells you, "if you suffer, there is always a remedy and the remedy will always be a commodity. So the more you suffer, the more we accumulate capital".

The last thing that I'm going to say is that I think the question and the solution to this philosophical and psychological and political problem is very aptly put by your way of putting the question. The question is: **"Is this the same deciduous object that is embodied negatively in the anxiety of *coitus interruptus*, or is the object transformed when it is not the anxious signal of separation, but the voluptuous consequence of it?"** So the question is, "in falling in love with a car, am I just regenerating my anxiety or is something else happening?"

And I think it's important that Jamieson doesn't respond to this question, because it can only be posed as a *question*. Because as soon as you engage in responding to this question, and making the cut and separating, making a proper distinction between the two, between the transformed object and the object of anxiety, you re-engage in the logic of anxiety. You try to *stabilize*, and thereby will probably produce another kind of category in which everything goes haywire, like the theory will collapse into another part.

The challenge for psychoanalysis, then, is to find ways to perform this *other freedom, the freedom of in/separability*, where we neither dwell in the mere inevitability of anxiety, nor try to reduce or institutionalize or *organize* it into this or that institution – a patriarchal relationship, a religion, a car. 'In/separability' in this sense is the continuous working and re-working of 'separability,' it's *practical* instantiation and dis-instantiation, based on transference. And here is Butler again, a little amended this time:

"[It] matters whether one claims (a) that certain values are derived from [certain] sources and then translated into a domain of rationality considered to belong finally to no [particular speaker] (Habermas) or (b) that the [...] reasons we give for why we act as we do belong to certain idioms and can never be fully extracted from those discursive fields (Taylor).

Whether one takes the first or the second position, it is still necessary to enter into a field of [transference], since either the [...] content has to be extracted through some means from the [...] discourse or the [...] discourse has to make itself communicable beyond the community of those who share the idiom.

So even if a certain conception is 'derived from' [certain] resources, it has to enter into [transference] in order to be more broadly communicable and for its relevance to be established outside a communitarian frame [...]." (Butler 2013, 7; amended)

"The turn to [transference] risks two different kinds of problems. On the one hand, one might assume that [transference] is an assimilation [...] into established [...] frames. On the other hand, one might assume that [transference] is an effort to find a common language that transcends particular discourses." (Butler 2013, 8; amended)

Dwelling in the in/separability of 'sources,' be it between 'philosophy' and 'psychoanalysis,' between 'you' and 'me,' between 'analysant' and 'analyst,' is the challenge of freedom as in/separability. The project is bound to fail, to continuously re-build and re-collapse. Impossible challenges, however, are all the more challenging.

Likewise, the challenge of Atheism would be the challenge to build a society for anxious people. A society in which we can acknowledge anxiety as the creative power that it is. "She did this and this and this and this and this," there's a lot of energy here, there's a lot of power here. There's a lot of power of imagination here. An engine, that never stops, that is in itself infinite, as I try to say earlier. This is a waste of productivity, that ends in your ear.

Jamieson: Yes. Yes.

Luce: And you're stressed by it, and your patients are stressed by it and it doesn't do anything. And why is that? Because society is not built for and to these people, so the Atheistic society–

Jamieson: Before–

Luce: Yeah.

J: Freud imagined this. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, there's one moment where he says, "are we going to destroy ourselves, is the death drive going to take over are we going to drive ourselves to extinction?"

He says, "I don't know. Maybe, maybe not."

But he does have hope that we can write rules as a society that make room for everyone's libidinal differences.



L: But I think that I would try and turn up the volume on this and say, it's not like making room for differences, it's like basing society on anxiety.

J: Yes.

L: It's like, because anxiety of course is a twisted name for creative potential, and it is the creative potential that is grounded in reality of this separability which is not yet decided. We can always rearrange and fail differently.

I can always become the Angela Merkel version of myself. You can become a little bit of an Angela Merkel Jamieson.

But, you see the difference between "We're going to stay compulsive neurotics in order to hold on to our neurosis, [and] we're going to make room for these other people who we really think are super sick; they always destroy everything, they always go on and on; they never stop talking, you can't follow them; they're always too complex and weird and everything is terrible." That, I take it, is the liberal reading of Freud's idea.

But you may also say, "no, no, the name 'anxiety' is a compulsive reduction already. The name 'anxiety' itself is violence to the phenomenon." Because the phenomenon is this ongoing engine and a reorganization of in/separability. 'Anxiety' in this second sense is the rational insight, the intuitive, rational insight into the inescapably of in/separability as permeation, and permeability. We always blend into each other.

J: Well, we will end our sermon for the evening. You can decide whether Luce was the shrimp and I was the grain of sand or whether I was the grain of sand and you were the shrimp.

L: I think we're both just grains of sand, no?

J: We're grains of sand. Thank you very much for listening.

