

Where there is symptom and sinthome

Jean Allouch

This title is first of all an observation: the two terms are to be found in Lacan, the second as if it were brought to him by James Joyce the Dubliner. From this observation comes an elementary problem that indicates three convergent questions. Is it a question of a substitution in which “sinthome” had done away with “symptom”? Or is it a question, rather, of one and the same essence that could be approached in two different ways? Or might there be two different concepts that should be carefully distinguished? In which case one of the problems raised could be that of their cohabitation, even their articulation.

It seems to me that this third option must be retained, so I propose to submit to you the reasons for this choice. What led me to this is what I have recently been able to isolate in Lacan, that is, the subtle presence of two different “analytics of sex”, the first focused on the object *a*, the second on the inexistence of the sexual relation. So it is these two different analytics of sex which I must present to you in order to throw some light from this onto the distinction of the symptom and the sinthome. This seems to me to be suited to these two days of homage to Cormac Gallagher where we are examining the two different symptoms, one said to be of the “group”, the other singular. Could we envisage that the latter might be called “symptom” while the first would pertain to the “sinthome”?

It will only be possible to answer by presenting three points: 1) the two analytics of sex; 2) the sexuation of the Other; 3) the reason that constrains us to differentiate symptom and sinthome. We will approach these according to a common methodology, because what we are referred back to by the name of Jacques Lacan are not “courses” [*cours*] (Jacques-Alain Miller), nor are they statements, nor mathemes, but *trajectories* [*parcours*]; they are composed of statements and mathemes, but which vary and which can therefore only be read by considering their progressions, their variations, and their transformations. Varity [*Varité*], better than truth [*vérité*].

Two different analytics of sex

This differentiation seemed necessary to me first of all because of a statement that troubled, jolted, and shocked me, thus putting me to work. It can be placed in the list of remarks, made by Lacan, that stood out from the sequel that was expected of them. We speculated about an explanation, a development, an extension, and found ourselves confronted by a side step that, often, infringed silently upon the knowledge that had supposedly been acquired. This happened thousands of times. Here is one of these *misplaced* [*déplacé*] declarations (in the sense that a remark is “misplaced”, unwelcome) articulated 26 January 1975 in reply to a question from Marcel Ritter:

There is a relation with sex in so far as sex is everywhere it should not be; there is not, anywhere, the possibility of establishing, in any manner that can be formulated, the relation between sexes.

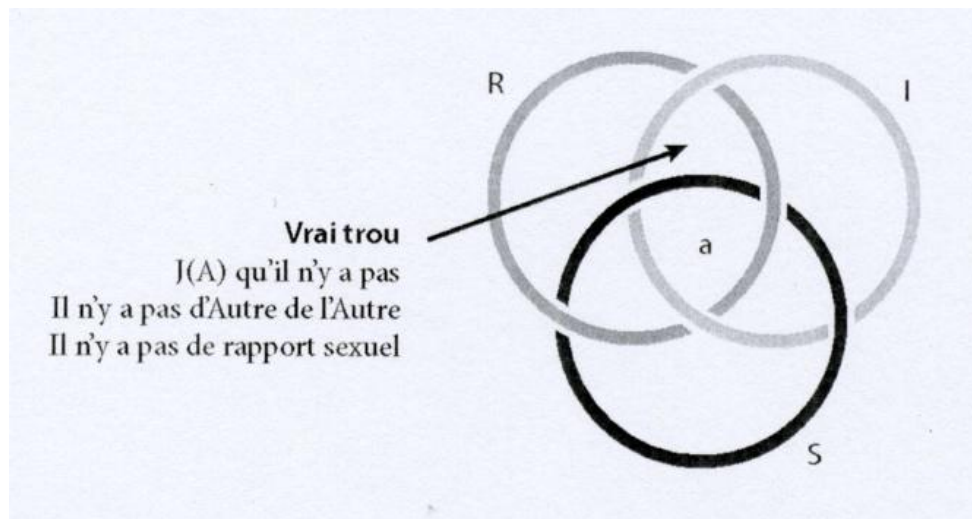
What is to be understood by “sex is everywhere it should not be”? To believe that, wherever it is, it is not in its place, not in position, or even that it *does not stay in place*—a little like one might say of a restless child. Sex is led astray, *delinquent*, borne off its course. And yet, by not being in its place, being lodged moreover “where it *should not be*”, sex is no longer itself, to the point that Lacan is able to declare one fine day, with no longer the slightest concern for Freud, that sexuality is a “defence” (25 January 1967). Sex would only be itself by remaining in place. Move the first violin far from its place on the left of the orchestra conductor, and place it “where it should not be”, for example right in the middle of the horns, and there follows a cacophony: the music is no longer played nor heard.

The statement of 1975, “sex is everywhere it should not be”, would have been inconceivable if Lacan had not previously declared (4 June 1969): “There is no sexual relation”. By considering sex as a *relation*, he highlighted, *ipso facto*, a completely new register of the sexual, at the same time both different and akin to the one that, following Freud, he had studied and reconfigured up to that point. Following this declaration of 4 June 1969, a *unitary* version of the erotic analytic was no longer tenable. Jacques Lacan was far from being the only one who had *distributed* the erotic in this way, although he did it in a manner without equal. I would like to present to you, in a table, some of these authors, and not the least of them, who have also divided the erotic between two registers¹:

¹ In *Pourquoi y a-t-il de l'excitation sexuelle plutôt que rien?* (Paris, Epel, 2017), I have presented all the elements which made possible their formalisation in this table.

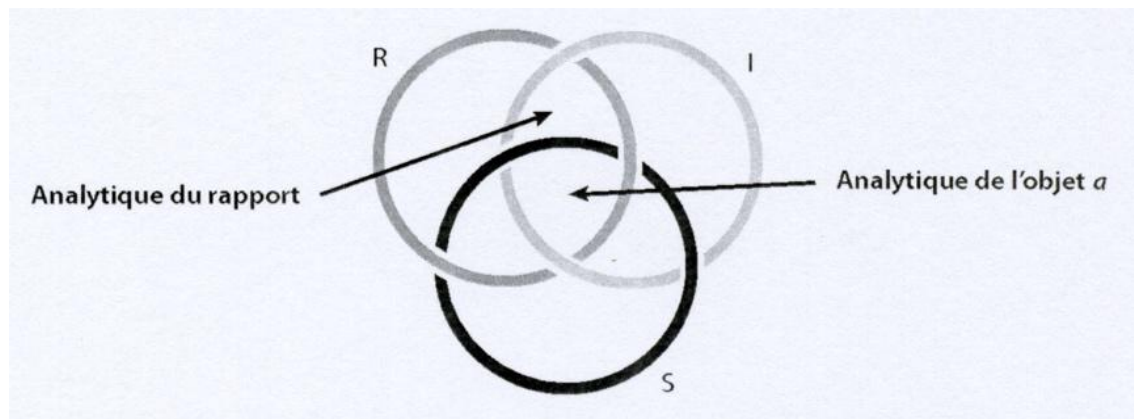
	<i>Register 1</i>	<i>Register 2</i>
Plato	Sexual desire	Metaphysical erotics
Lacan	Analytic of the object <i>a</i>	Analytic of the sexual relation
Foucault	Device [<i>dispositif</i>] of sexuality	Device of alliance
Rubin	Sex	Gender

The “specific domain” that constitutes the second analytic of sex is not indicated just by the statement “there is no sexual relation”. Two other “there is no” converge with the one that bears the sexual relation: “There is no Other of the Other” and “There is no jouissance of the Other”. These three statements are tied, because if there were an Other of the Other, one could always wonder, having accepted that the Other does not enjoy [*ne jouit pas*], whether the Other of the Other is not prone to enjoying [*de jouir*]. And no one doubts that the absence of this jouissance of the Other very closely concerns the sexual relation, which, despite being inexistent, does not cease to solicit this jouissance which proves to be missing at every rendez-vous we thought we had made with it. Thus these three inexistences are assigned to a second analytic of sex, that of the traumatising-because-inexistent sexual relation. Lacan, moreover, lodged them on the same beach as a Borromean knot laid flat, a beach that he claims is that of the “true hole”, which is thus not the one where he inscribed the little *a* (here the distinction between the two analytics is *written* [*écrite*]):



True hole

J(A) that there is not
 There is no Other of the Other
 There is no sexual relation



Analytic of the relation

Analytic of the object *a*

Sexuation of the Other

The conception according to which the Other might be able to sexually enjoy [*jouir*] hardly seems to be suitable if we understand it according to the first definition of the Other as “treasury of signifiers”. It becomes less strange if we note the transformation to which Lacan subjected his concept of the big Other—with, however, one constant feature: this Other was first of all considered as *Other than oneself*, not *Other of oneself*, the latter opening its arms widely to psychology while the former, in the model of the God of the Christians, dispenses with it.

A reminder: this Other was, for some time, conceived of as an Other subject. According to this perspective, accepted as “intersubjective”, the subject can only appear in place of this Other subject. Thus the unconscious was defined as “discourse of the Other”, desire seen as “desire of the Other”, the fantasm written with the object little *a* [*petit a*] lodged in the place of the Other, the auto-eroticism being brought to the account, not of a self, but of a lack of self.

Having from the start wanted his Other to be “treasury of signifiers” posed a problem: where, therefore, was this treasure to be located? Its place could not simply be a pure receptacle without any effect on what it contains. This is due to the fact that *the place* assigned to the signifier intervenes in the determination of the signification. Such is the case, for example, with our numbering of position, where 1 followed by 2 has a value other than 2 followed by 1. Or again: a greenhorn [*blanc-bec*] is not the same as a green horn [*bec blanc*]. Thus the Other was always thought of more as place—the so-called “place of the Other”. This is the first step that, already, puts intersubjectivity into trouble.

A new step is this metamorphosis of the Other, this place that a topology highlighted as surface, and this surface, thus, is made corporeal. The place of the Other, as was said in 1967 (*The Logic of the Fantasm*), is not “to be taken otherwise than in the body.” There followed, six years later, a new and final step in which this body is recognised as sexuated: “The Other, in my language, can only be the

Other sex” (1973 *Encore*). I believed I could write in a single word: “Othersex”, and explore the scope of this term throughout a recent work.²

Was this Other, first made treasury, then place, then body, then sex³, not especially well-suited to be taken as partner of a sexual relation? A sexuated body can enjoy. The place of the Othersex seems to be all located in a sexual relation, viewed as “a relation, definable as such, between the sign of the male and that of the female” (4 June 1969)—all the more easily since, in classical French, the expression “other sex” was more or less equivalent to “feminine”.⁴

Now, *this is exactly the step [le pas] that must not be taken*. The jouissance of the Other “remains in suspense”, or again, “adrift” (14 June 1967). And above all, *this is the key point, the cornerstone which makes it necessary that the erotic be distributed in two different analytics*. One alone would have “sufficed” if the Other enjoyed. Lacan closes this door held wide open by Catholicism with its “*fruitio Dei*” (jouissance of God).

By successive and discrete touches, Lacan will shore up the distinction of these two analytics. Thus, on 4 February 1972, he declared: “This object little *a*, ... it is not the Other, it is not the Other sex, it is the Other of desire.” The Othersex is distinguished here from an Other of desire. An analytic of little *a* (of the drive, of the fantasm, of anguish, of desire) is to be differentiated from that of the inexistent sexual relation. The desire caused by *a* is attached to an Other of desire now differentiated from the Othersex (thus an end is put to what I would call “the imperialism of the desire of the Other”); it is a matter of the sexual law, henceforth recognised as abnormal, even when it concerns each and every one.

The putting into question of desire that is seen, with Hegel, as “desire of the Other”, can be no more clearly perceived than in a declaration of 1967, posterior, therefore, to the discovery of little *a*: “If ‘the desire of man is the desire of the Other’, it happens that it would indeed be necessary that the desire of man be his very own.”⁵

The same year, it is nothing less than the Freudian conception of libido which is cut to the quick: “... what is articulated at great length in modern psychoanalytic theory, the confusion of this

² *L'Autresex*, Paris, Epel, 2015.

³ These are so many qualifiers that are not mutually exclusive, whereas to simply make them coexist would be problematical.

⁴ *Le Trésor de la Langue Française* cites Ronan: “For the girl, he [the vicar] had these reserved manners that our Breton ecclesiastics have with ‘persons of the sex’, as they say” (*Souvenirs d’enfance et de jeunesse*, 1883, p. 32). It is said of Molière that he had “a penchant for the sex”, which anyone and everyone easily understood, what is designated in Spanish by a term that has no equivalent in French: “*mujeriego*” [womaniser]. In his *Caractères*, La Bruyère writes: “The honesty, the consideration and the politeness of persons of advanced age of one and the other sex give me a good opinion of what is called the olden days”. Neither is there any ambiguity in the title of a work of Margaret Mead: *L’un et l’autre sexe*.

⁵ In “Place et origine de mon enseignement”.

nutritive [*nourricier*] Other with this sexual Other” (18 January 1967). The formidable Freudian discovery of the *libido*, a concept which appeared in Augustine⁶ and gathering together all the excitations, of whatever order of the drive they may be, here comes to harm.

Symptom and Sinthome

Like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, how has the sinthome been able to be born and become emancipated from the symptom? Here, roughly sketched, is what made this trajectory in which a continuity gives rise to a separation.

With Sigmund Freud, analysis conceived the symptom otherwise than was done by the psychiatry of his time. Freud discovered that hysterical spasm referred to a “traumatic memory”⁷, and Lacan, that the madness of Marguerite Anzieu attested to a problematic that well and truly came to her from her history (that it was not, therefore, a matter of a “psychical process”⁸). In the one and the other, the historicisation of the symptom gets the upper hand over its medical localisation within a clinical entity that it would be supposed to constitute with others, its fellows [*semblables*].⁹ It has required some time, however, for certain analysts, myself among them, to abandon psychopathology.

Thus, historically situated, the symptom was able to be treated (*Durcharbeitung*) and, finally, to give way. It becomes devoid of object when, while speaking to someone, the erotic tensions belonging to a history that would not stop not finishing, are brought to light, thus losing their virulence. This schema was seductive, it has seduced: the disappearance of the symptom proved its validity.¹⁰

This did not, however, take account of what we were soon going to discover and name “transference”. To embark upon an analysis, from the very beginning, modifies the situation that one finds oneself in and that one wishes to change. A new character (“the person of the doctor”, according to this recurring Freudian expression to which Guy Le Gaufey has drawn attention) is introduced into the intimacy of the subject and the heart of his relational network. This takes place

⁶ “*Exceperum me consolationes lactis humani [...] post et ridered coepi*” Augustine had written, *Confessions*, I, 6 (7-8): “And my having received the consolations of human milk [...] Later, I started to laugh.”

⁷ A trauma conceived of very differently than by Charcot, dissociated from the innervated zones of the body and tied to what language operates in cutting up bodies.

⁸ One of the battles brought by Lacan in his thesis of 1932 consisted in separating the conception of psychosis as process in order to make place for reaction. I discuss this point in *Marguerite, ou l’Aimée de Lacan*, Postface by Didier Anzieu [1990], 2nd ed. revised and augmented, Paris, Epel, 1994.

⁹ The architecture of the work at the time was the following: symptom, syndrome, clinical entity, illness.

¹⁰ It was taken seriously and keenly contested by Adolf Grünbaum (*La Psychanalyse à l’épreuve*, transl. to Eng. (USA) by Joëlle Proust, Paris, Ed. de l’éclat, 1993; *Les Fondements de la psychanalyse, une critique philosophique*, transl. to Eng. by Jean-Claude Dumoncel and revised by Elisabeth Pacherie, Paris, PUF, 1996). I proposed a critical reading of this work in “Adolf Grünbaum reader of Freud: A sound critique gone astray” (*L’Unebévée*, no. 10, automne/hiver 1997, pp. 73-100).

in the present, in presence, and has ended up appearing more decisive than the history. It was discovered, surprisingly, that certain patients had been able to furnish the doctor with such-and-such a symptom simply because it was known that the doctor was interested in it. And also that only the “putting into play of the unconscious”, in other words the transference (Lacan), could put an end to the symptom¹¹, which was, moreover, verified by the opposite: an abrupt interruption of the transference could give rise to a recrudescence of the symptom(s). One of the most exemplary cases in this regard, although outside of analytic practice, was published by Pierre Janet. Pauline Lair Lamotte became delusional *the very day* of the death of this Father Conrad¹² who supported her transference by validating her extreme engagement, rich bourgeoisie that she was, in the evangelical charity among the poorest of the poor.

And then something happened to this person of the doctor, support of the transference, and party to its resolution. Lacan, in 1973, aspired to nothing less than “objectively situating” him. He is, Lacan declared, “that which in the past was called: being a saint”¹³. What is he saying by that? It is specified in the text: he becomes the refuse, he “de-charitises”; by not enjoying [*jouissant*] he is the reject of jouissance, thus for the subject opening up the possibility of taking him as the abject cause of his desire.

Can we conclude that such remarks concern the analytics of the object *a*? Luther comes to mind: “We are the turds fallen from God’s anus”.¹⁴ This Lacanian plunge into sainthood, nonetheless, is the bearer of something other than just the operation separating the object *a* and big A—with Luther it is a question of “charity”, with Lacan it is a question of “de-charitising” (a verb, an act). Thus we already suspect that the symptom might be a concern of the first analytics, and the sinthome of the second.

This would soon be confirmed. Less than two years after having turned the analyst into a saint, sainthood would come to strike its seal upon the symptom, with the exhumation of the first spelling of this word: *sinthome*. From one to the other, from the *saintanalyst* to the sinthome, Joyce was to be a bridge, perhaps even a decisive one.¹⁵ The lecture “Joyce the sinthome” is from 16 June

¹¹ Some of the first psychoanalysts in despair at being faced with what they viewed as a too-precocious disappearance of symptoms because, they said, it allowed the patient to avoid the analysis.

¹² Cf Jacques Maître, *Une inconnue célèbre. La Madeleine Lebouc de Janet*, Paris, Anthropos, 1993. My commentary is in “Du symptôme comme tenant hypothétiquement lieu de sainteté”, *Littoral*, no. 14, November 1994, pp. 53-64.

¹³ Jacques Lacan. *Télévision*. Paris: Seuil, 1973, p. 28.

¹⁴ On other occasions it is no longer a question of God, but of one of his creatures: the devil. One can see on the internet an engraving by Cranach the Elder illustrating the almost-opposite situation: Luther defaecating into the pope’s tiara. At: <http://jackaimejacknaimepas.blogspot.com/2017/05/la-defecation-de-luther.html>

¹⁵ The pages that I dedicated to this problem can be referred to in *La Scène lacanienne et son cercle magique. Des fous se soulèvent*. Paris: Epel, 2017, p. 164 ff.

1975¹⁶; its transcription carried six occurrences of the term “sinthome”, two of them being “Joyce the sinthome”, despite the title in which Lacan had chosen “symptom” and not “sinthome”.¹⁷ And notably the following: “Joyce the sinthome is homophonic with sainthood, regarding which some people here might recall that I televised it”.

The homophony thus noted refers back to no identity whatsoever. Joyce the sinthome is not declared to be a saint, in particular not a saintanalyst. And not a symptom either since, as far we know, a symptom does not have a proper name, and yet it is in that way that Lacan proceeded: by offering his proper name of “Joyce the sinthome” to a James Joyce who certainly would not have wanted it.

“Joyce the sinthome” is *someone*. The same applies when Lacan gives body to two figures respectively named “sinthome-he” and “sinthome-she” in order to gather together “all that remains of what can be called the sexual relation”, a relation henceforth recognised as “intersinthomatic”.¹⁸ All through the seminar *The Sinthome*, several figures from a shadow theatre would come to occupy this same place where the inexistence of the sexual relation is played out: Saint Thomas Aquinas first of all¹⁹, as well as the figure of the father (18 November 1975); next the other sex, here defined as “the one to whom I do not belong” (17 February 1976), ending up with the psychoanalyst (13 April 1976).

There remains, it seems to me, no longer any doubt: the sinthome is to be inscribed in the analytics of the sexual relation. Both recognised as sinthomes, Joyce and the analyst play their parts differently. As Lacan describes it, Joyce is a master, not a saint. His work, made of a spherical language, in other words not holed [*non troué*], promotes its proper name.²⁰ It is a different question in regard to the analyst who—because he is also a character who incarnates the sinthome, and because his activity is not made to promote his name—can, from that, allow his intersinthomatic relation with the analysand (what was called “transference”) to be looped upon the inexistence of this Othersex and that of the sexual relation, in other words upon the holed nature of language, holed by this very inexistence (the impossibility of writing the sexual relation).

¹⁶ Six months later the first session of the following seminar took place, provisionally announced with the title *The Sinthome*.

¹⁷ In this terminological wavering we can see the indication of an unresolved problem. “Sinthome” disappears in the written version of the lecture, which appeared in 1979.

¹⁸ An extremely rare occurrence, this thing was said twice identically, firstly on 9 July 1978 in concluding a conference of the Freudian School, then on 22 October of the same year, in a paper entitled “For Vincennes”.

¹⁹ Here once again, is a homophony: *sinthom... adaquin* [*Saint Thomas d'Aquin*].

²⁰ I lament the terse character of these last remarks and here I can only refer the reader to *La scène lacanienne et son cercle magique*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 163-179, in which the position of Joyce the sinthome is presented and discussed.

Regarding the psychoanalytic group

Would it not be in the play of the intersinthomatics that the aforementioned symptom of the group should be situated? Without having exhausted its mainspring, I believe I have taken more than one step in the direction of an affirmative answer to this question. It follows that we should instead write “group sinthome”. Nonetheless, could the problems encountered by psychoanalytic groups pertain to the sinthome alone? It does not seem possible to rule out the possibility that some unlooped transferences manage to be extended into the life of groups. The register of such transferences is also of an intersinthomatic order and the group can play the role of a point of appeal for those “suspended” transferences (all the more so since psychoanalysts do not hesitate to use such means by assigning a role within their group to analysands chosen by them—Lacan also believed this to be possible and practised it²¹).

To envisage certain problems encountered in analytic groupings from the perspective of the analytics of the relation could permit the orientation of the inevitable decisions of any group, whether they concern its composition or its functioning. We will ask ourselves then: how can this functioning be configured in such a way that it does not become an obstacle to each one’s access to the inexistence of the sexual relation? There is nothing abstract about such a question, it concerns just as much: 1) the very status of the group (association, circle, school, etc.); 2) the modality according to which decisions are made within it; 3) the admission into the group; 4) the device [*dispositif*] of the passe; 4) cartels.

Lacan considered the latter question, that of cartels, to be the decisive one. In April 1975, on the occasion of a “Colloquium of cartels²²”, there was a lengthy discussion of what had previously been proposed as “plus one”, or even “plus one person”, different in this to the three other members of the cartel (the minimum number for a cartel to be formed, the maximum being six). Some held this “plus one person” to be someone; others also wanted this, but made the “plus one” a rotating function among the members of the cartel. This choice indicated a fear, that is, that this “plus one person” would exercise a leadership in the name of a supposed greater experience and a more certain knowledge, these two traits being accepted by the members of the cartel.

In 1975, taking the example of mathematicians among whom, he asserted, mathematics itself is a person, Lacan ruled out all leadership by proposing that psychoanalysis be this “plus one person”. By leaving the door wide open to what was called a “lateral transference”, the choice of leadership holds the members of the cartel at a good distance from the inexistence of the sexual relation; that

²¹ As an analysand, I did not leave him any possibility of acting with me in this manner.

²² *Lettres de l'École Freudienne*, No. 18, April 1976.

of the plus one person incarnated by analysis does not constitute an obstacle to this. Only analysis itself can decide if a statement is admissible or if it must be ruled out.