

Title: *What do you want of me?*

Introduction

Hello... Thank you for being here as my audience for this talk and thank you to my referees who helped me fashion this paper to make it in the end more coherent. ... it is titled...*What do you want of me?*

I have approached it as an experiment, an attempt to formulate my response to a call to live ethically. I am bringing two strands of my experience together – painting and psychoanalysis – to speak to the *encounter* that occurs in the creative space or what I call the ‘scene of address’.

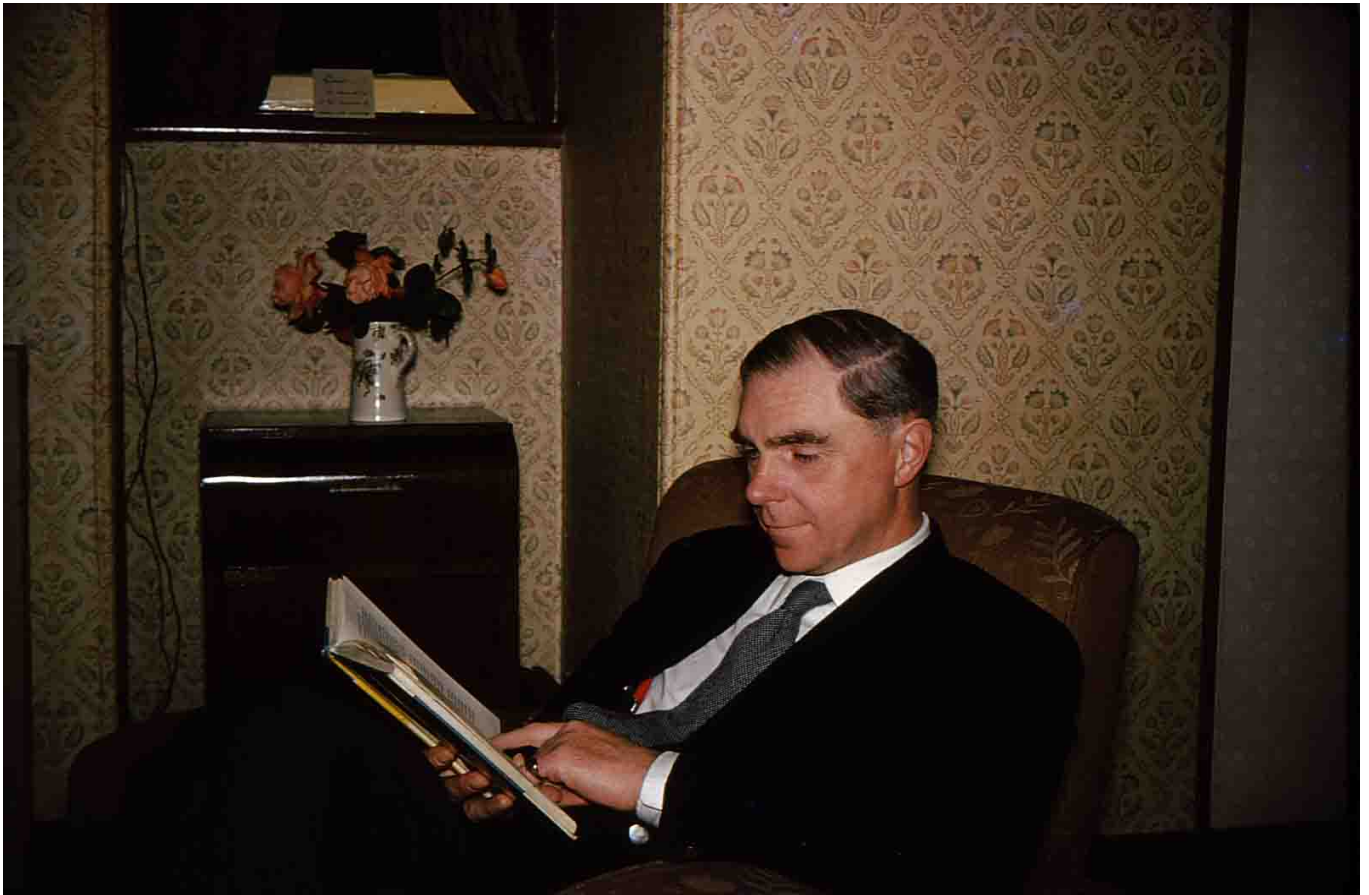
Recently I have made a move from the analysands couch to the analysts chair. That move across the room threw the radical operation of the detail starkly into view. The detail, or more specifically, the *detail-without-model* is my term to designate the smallest unrepeatable element, which supports the locus of an unsettling enigma.

I have divided this talk into three components: *The Image*, in which I talk to an image of my father; *Twin Axis*, in which I extract the *detail-without-model* from two encounters, psychoanalytic and the Painter’s studio; and *Becoming Parlêtre*, perhaps the most difficult as it is more densely theoretical – but necessary – so please bare with me.

Component One

The Image

(Slide One)



You are looking here at a digital scan of a 35mm colour transparency taken I would say in the late 1950s. It is of my father, taken before I was born. My father died three years ago. I scrutinize the image in the hope of locating within it his manner of dying. Having a Painter's eye, I first discern that the image has the air of having been constructed; reminding me of the way Cézanne, for example, might formally 'build' a painting according to certain pictorial conventions ... the vertical rhythms dividing the frame from left to right: corners, alcove and edges where different wallpapers meet ... the cascade of horizontals ... falling to the book. Here I allow my eye to slide down the slant and settle ... momentarily ... on the hands

... a finger points backwards against the trajectory of my eye ... the tie leads up to the head ... which appears to be the focus of the image ... at its *centre*. I notice that my father turns his cheek. My gaze is deflected; I follow his, and am directed back toward the open book.

This image speaks of a distinct historical moment through a seamless unifying concatenation of details. Is it the particular combination of patterns: brown-beige flock upholstery; dominant beige-cream paper stencilled with the thistle-filled lozenge; and dotted paper indistinct in the shadows. Or is it something about the jug of orange roses, placed on the highly polished surface of what appears to be a wood veneer freestanding gramophone cabinet in the alcove corner. Or perhaps combed hair, pressed close to the head, crowning short back and sides.

In this *tableau* the culturally specific indicators situate the image historically and geographically, for example...the garden roses are so English... reminding me of Roland Barthes' concept of *studium*. The signifiers, embedded in the image are in his words 'ultimately always coded' enabling me to read the specific time and place of the symbolic world in which it was taken ... cultural knowledge steeps the image ... the overall warm light so peculiar to the technology of slide transparencies, the particular hairstyle that speaks not only of my father but more generally of all men of that era, their social standing grounded in a masculine authority. Added to which the open book ... intimating that here is an intellectual, a man of letters.

.....

And yet what draws me in to this image is an almost imperceptible restlessness. An 'intense immobility' across the surface that *exceeds* cultural legibility ... to use Barthes term, this is the *punctum*, which he tells us, is located in the detail (Barthes, 1993: 49).

The *punctum* is immanent to the image. It is a locus for what is mysteriously quite 'other', an enigmatic, non-specific, unsymbolised surplus ... what I term *detail-without-model*.

....

I settle into a *free hovering attention* as I look at the image. I register the turn of the cheek parallel to the transparent surface ... muscles pulling at the thinly settled lips in the singular way that is my father. This *detail-without-model* disturbs the image for me ... it rises to meet me ... punctures the *studium* ... expands to fill the entire space ... and snags. The muscular ripple makes a little hole in the unity of the image ... it is an interruption ... or what Eric Santner calls a 'stain on the horizon of cultural intelligibility'.

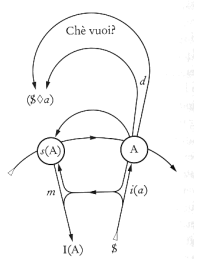
If the *studium* is, in Barthes words the 'very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: *I like it/I don't like it*' (Barthes, 1993: 27) – with the binary, oppositional logic absence/presence, either/or – recalling the *phallogentric* structure of language, the *punctum* is representative of another register altogether. It 'rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me' (Barthes, 1993: 26).

With a self-reflexive act my unconscious desire is called forth and a scene of address is co-constituted.

Component Two

Twin Axis

(Slide Two)



In the psychoanalytic clinic I ask ‘*What do you want of me?*’¹ and as I confront the ‘anxiety-provoking abyss’ of the analyst’s desire coming from the other side of the room ... I attempt to narrate my thoughts, dreams, memories, into the present ... I try to construct a coherent story about myself ... I wonder what it is he wants to hear ... I find I utter words to please him ... my desire is directed towards him... but his desire comes back to me opaque and enigmatic. This relationship is not equal.

Jean Laplanche, Jacques Lacan’s student, elaborates this scene as a re-play of the originary encounter that he describes as one of seduction, in which the infant is imposed upon by words, touches, glances, looks – or we may say *details*. These enigmatic signifiers leave a trace upon the body as an ‘echo’. Their meaning is unstable and undecided for they signify nothing *as such* yet in that *nothing as such* they carry something more; they are *without model*. Psychoanalysis is a re-play of this first seduction. In the present a space is ‘hollowed out’ (Laplanche, 1999: 214), a scene of address is established characterised by the analyst’s *refusal*... the refusal to collude with the analysands demand for interpretation for it is the analyst job to safeguard the enigma (Laplanche, 1999: 227).

This scene of address was first framed by Freud. He discovered that by lying the hysteric on the couch orientated in a position turned away from the him, he was relieved of the work’s continual hourly scrutiny and she was able to say anything that came to mind more freely. In this way speech was isolated and

Freud was able to listen with a *free hovering attention*ⁱⁱ. His ear was linked to her mouth, as it were, horizontally along the axis of the couch. By encouraging her to say anything that came to mind he aimed at the core of her sexuality. If psychoanalysis is staged within the invocatory register – with the ear as the erogenous zone and the voice as the object – we might say that Painting is staged in the opposite register what Lacan calls the scopic ... with the eyes as the erogenous zone and the gaze is the object

When painting from observation I stand upright behind my easel ... in silence ... I focus my look exclusively toward the object in front of me ... with a *hovering attention* I try to account for what is looking back at me ... I hold what I see, as an image in my mind and turn to the painting positioned on the easel ... I place pieces of paint on the surface striving at an faithful equivalence to the image in my mind ... *turning* again to scrutinise the object in the world my desire is called forth once more.

And so I propose two axis.

1. analysand, analyst and speech
2. painter, object and paint..... both are triangular apparatus

Psychoanalysis grounded in all-speaking and no-looking is in the invocatory register performed along the horizontal axis ... painting grounded in all-looking and no-speaking is in the scopic register performed on the vertical axis.

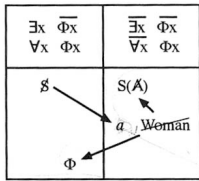
With speech and paint as products both aim to render – in the sense of ‘to give back’ – a representation.

Yet as we know, the image in the mind is already once removed from any initial experience, it is a representation of a representation and so what is produced in the world – story or image – is removed yet further from the original encounter, that encounter, we are told, having already always been missed is as it were *supernumerary*.

Component Three

Becoming Parlêtre

(Slide Three)



Passing through the primal, seductive, scene of address I loose my being. I give up my libidinally charged enjoyment, the limitless fusion with my mother ... and the world ... I am seduced by the Other. I am submitted to the imposition of enigmatic glances, strokes and words: the *detail-without-model*, the un-symbolised excess – the too much – that which overwhelms ... through desire I am brought into the mode of sexuality and language ... I become a ‘speaking being’ – or to borrow Lacan’s word, a *parlêtre*. I enter the process of becoming sexual, a process that Lacan designates sexuation – defined we could say as the particular psychic-sexual position I take up as a subject and with it the modes of enjoyment I gain. Thus sexuation is structural... it is irrespective of gender or biology.

In becoming a *parlêtre* ... I am invaded by language ... I am subjected to it ... I become entangled within the symbolic world enjoying all the rewards from itⁱⁱⁱ

However such investiture is necessarily alien. It intrudes upon my being introducing a *cut (joint)* between what I immediately am and any function that I exercise (Žižek, 2004: 87). Yet though I suffer ... I have an insatiable enjoyment when using words, gaining knowledge and making sense. This insatiable enjoyment, mixed with both the pain *and* pleasure is what Lacan calls *jouissance* and so in becoming *parlêtre* we all enjoy a *jouis-sens* of the *phallic* order which is under the banner of the male sexuation.

If we consider for a moment that language is a closed circuit with nothing beyond, we see there is no transcendent ... no other of the Other. And yet ... we know something does exceed ... something *is* hidden within the gaps where words fail us in the fissures of non-sense ... another space *ex-sist* ... yielding Lacan tells us an *Other jouissance* of feminine sexuation. (Fink, 2002: 37)

To elaborate sexuation Lacan mobilised both kinds of *jouissance* – *phallic jouissance* and *Other jouissance* – (using set theory) ... he looks to Freud's myth of the 'primal horde' in *Totem and Taboo*. In this the dead primal father is the exception that grounds the symbolic Law. He is the man outside upon which the 'set' of all men are predicated on. As *parlêtre* we are all subject to the Law, for we are all 'caught' in the phallic function, but under the banner of the masculine a subject ironically does not fully identify with the Law. He maintains a kind of distance through a belief of the fantasy of an exception as the limit. (Barnard, 2002: 177). While the exception outside the set stands as guarantor, producing the fantasy of 'oneness' grounding male sexuation.... ... feminine sexuation is profoundly different. It has no beyond to haunt it. There is no external Woman outside to delimit the set. Under the feminine banner, there is no figure acting as a limit for the subject, thus they are 'not-all'. There is no repeatability, they come one by one: each woman/subject is *without-model*.

Conclusion

Historically, I would argue, if viewed through the sexuation matrix, the creative scene adopts the male structure. Not that it might or might not be dominated by men – male painters, male writers; this is not my point here ...it is rather the way male sexuation structures the creative space by prioritising the imperative of the *reader-interpreter* with a tendency toward aiming for sense, fixed meaning, explanation and knowledge, passing over the *detail-without-model*, being blind to its singular capability and enigmatic surplus. In terms of the Painter's studio, we could think of the heroic painter (male or female) producing unified, sovereign works. The autonomy of this creative scene, one structured by the phallic, is underwritten by the fantasy of a 'genius' beyond, as the word 'author' within the literary field, undeniably bears witness – (*autor* etymologically coming from 'father,' ... originator, creator, instigator). While this evokes the myth of the primal father I wonder in what way the 'not-all' could offer an alternative structuring of the creative scene. Freud tells us the analytic labour is achieved by a working through, by attending to the lapsus rather than the 'whole' narrative, aiming to disperse or depose the deposits of 'echoes' in the body. Following this model perhaps we have a *choice*, an ethical choice, as Santner seem to imply if we opt for 'an open and infinite field of encounter in which there is no "place," no detail, no aspect of the work to which we are not called upon to respond, though [we] are not thereby held responsible for a final and definitive meaning of the work as a whole' (Santner, 2006: 206).

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ⁱ This is the ultimate question asked by Lacan's *Graph of Desire*, translated from the Italian, *Chè vuoi?* Lacan, J. (2006) *Écrits*, New York, W.W.Norton & Company.p.690

ⁱⁱ Freud found that if he listened with *free hovering attention* he was able to hear the analysand's speech to catch each word as a signifier, or perhaps we could say detail, not necessarily attached to the narrative meaning.

ⁱⁱⁱ To think and speak in the mother tongue is the medium that Lacan calls the 'field of the Other' Lacan, J. (1994) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, London, Penguin Books.p.199. And this Other, while it might seem to be internal to me as part of my thoughts and my speech, is at the same time external to me, revealing the continuation between the inside and the outside, what Lacan termed 'extimacy'. Lacan, J. (1999) *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The seminar of Jacques Lacan book VII*, London, Routledge. p.139