



# TO EXIST, IT IS TO DEPEND ON THE OTHER

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LACANIAN COMPASS  
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The LC EXPRESS delivers the Lacanian Compass in a new format. Its aim is to deliver relevant texts in a dynamic timeframe for use in the clinic and in advance of study days and conference meetings. The LC EXPRESS publishes works of theory and clinical practice and emphasizes both longstanding concepts of the Lacanian tradition as well as new cutting edge formulations.



## PRÉCIS

Cristiane Alberti in her video conference for the Lacanian Compass in 2021, took us through this journey of Lacan's teachings to grasp its implications in our contemporary culture, in psychoanalysis and with regard to the *sinthome*. The first one of such implications, she reminded us, is that The woman, as a signifier, is lacking in the symbolic and its consequences apply to all speaking beings. It alludes to an absence that brings the possibility of something beyond the Phallic with its reference to the universal and ideals. Today, Alberti remarks, there is a push for sexual identity which masks as the multiple, but in fact reinforces allocations. What Lacan calls the feminine principle designates an authentic singularity. It is Lacan's response to universality which is in the domain of value and not of existence. On the path of analysis, Alberti underlines that *The woman does not exist* leads beyond the fictions to which the Other would have us assigned. Analysis brings to light the experience of what Lacan calls sex as such, *heteros*, based on the logic of the not-all. It is a logic where one really exists and in a unique way. It is the path of the *sinthome*.

*Liliana Kruszel*

To Exist, It Is To Depend On The Other, *was a video conference given by Cristiane Alberti for the Lacanian Compass USA, August 29, 2021.*

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## TO EXIST, IT IS TO DEPEND ON THE OTHER

I immediately indicate that I chose this title from the perspective of “The Feminine Other,” by playing on the equivocation of “the Other,” that is to say, the other in the sense of otherness, of the unfamiliar, of strangeness, but also to say an other conception of the feminine which is that of Lacan. The woman has always been the other sex. The female sex is fundamentally the Other. We’ve made “The” woman out of her, with a capital T, which assumes, as the poet says, that we remain separated from her forever. This way we can say that “The” woman embodies “The Thing” as a place of enjoyment, as shown in particular by courtly love. Outside of the signified, as foreigner, “The woman” is not, except as empty.<sup>1</sup> Lacan indicates that it is in this imagery that we experience our relationship with The woman even today. From this Other I will forever be separated. No word, no sexual relationship will arrive to overcome this separation. It is the woman that I have not encountered; it is the one that I have lost forever that I miss, and about which I dream. For Lacan, it is sheer madness to think that by calling her “my wife,” that by saying, “you are my wife,” one can hope to make her one’s own one day.

### A LACK OF SAYING

With this quote “*The woman does not exist*,” it is not a matter of wondering in which sex one lives, how one experiences it, feels it, how one identifies with it, how one faces it or refuses it. It is a question of grasping what must be understood by “*The woman*” when Lacan suggests that she does not exist. He does not speak of women, but of “*The woman*” as a signifier lacking in the symbolic. The resulting consequences apply to all speaking beings, for both women and men

alike, and in a trans-structural way. Missing does not mean less, does not mean negativity, but on the contrary it means an absence that brings the possibility of something beyond the phallus.

It is first of all through psychosis, in the questioning of the relation to the phallus, that Lacan is led to represent the lack of a signifier in the Other. In the seminar *The Psychoses*, without formulating as such the lack of the signifier “*The woman*,” Lacan finds an answer to this questioning: the character of absence is referred to the imaginary of the woman, where the phallic symbol is prevalent.<sup>2</sup> “*The feminine sex has a character of absence, emptiness, hole, which means that it happens to be less desirable than the masculine sex in what it provokes, and an essential asymmetry appears.*”<sup>3</sup> He points out that there is no symbolization of the female sex as such because the imaginary only provides an absence, where there is a prevalent symbol on the phallic side. In any case, the paths of symbolization are not the same. There is an asymmetry. Everything that can be designated as male or female in the imaginary is ambiguous, revocable, open to criticism in the symbolic. So, woman, daughter, sister, wife, mother, concubine, names or images of the eternal feminine, try in vain to capture the referent of “*The woman*”. The feminine Other is elusive, her being depends only on the symbol that supports her. As Lacan says, it is a being without being, like all speaking beings. But on the woman’s side, he points out, the lack is redoubled. Indeed, the repressed phallus is inadequate to represent her. And as a phallus, how should it represent her? “*What else than a denial? [...] Yet it is only from this angle that Woman appears in the Freudian logic [...]. The phallus [...]*

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1 Lacan J., The Seminar, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (1959-1960). Edited By Jacques-Alain Miller.

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2 Lacan J., The Seminar, Book III, The Psychoses (1955-1956). Edited By Jacques-Alain Miller.

3 Ibid., p. 199 (French version).

*which may well be her representative, but which has nothing to do with her.*"<sup>4</sup> This is a remarkable quote where Lacan says that there is a double negation, a way of saying that there is neither representative nor referent of the woman in language.

One of the essential axes of this approach to the feminine Other is to argue that there is no polarity but what Lacan calls the passing on of a lack. The phallus is the signifier privileged to denote the sexual position in the Other. But it is only as a simple mark of difference, which leaves the subject the possibility of making multiple uses of it. As Lacan argues in Seminar XVI, everything that psychoanalysis introduces as the logic of sexualization can be reduced to a single term which is its original term, namely, "*The connotation of a lack, and which is called castration. This essential minus is logical, and without it nothing can work. For both men and women, all normativity is organized around the passing on of a lack.*"<sup>5</sup> The phallus is only a principle of substitution which serves to shift enjoyment onto something else. It serves to repress the sexual and the metaphor is its spring; it makes the lack pass through. There is not "*the men*", there is not "*the women*", but there is "*the passing on of a lack.*"

## OTHER TO HERSELF

If there is a lack of saying the sexed position in the Other, Lacan indicates a sure direction, always valid, in his *Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality*, in the approach of a more substantial existence of the feminine Other: "*feminine sexuality appears as the effort of a jouissance enveloped in its own contiguity [...] to realize itself at the expense of the desire that castration releases in the male by giving him its signifier, the phallus.*"<sup>6</sup> It is the jouissance of a woman, therefore, her own jouissance, and not that of the body of the Other that Lacan describes here as a continuous and contiguous jouissance, enveloped in its own contiguity. We can note the enveloping, inseparable character of this jouissance. This passage is essential because it indicates that there is no desire for the penis in women as we commonly hear – this is

a remark made by Jacques-Alain Miller in his course – but what Lacan calls an effort tended towards desire. As if jouissance was more natural to the woman. Jouissance occurs at the expense of desire. There is already in this passage the indication of another regimen of jouissance, beyond the Oedipus which concerns the woman in her desire and in her jouissance. The image that Lacan gives here of the feminine jouissance "*enveloped in its own contiguity*" places us on the path of a structure that has no outside, which relates to the infinite. The structure not of a series of contiguities, but of an uncountable continuum. In this way, Lacan anticipates what he will call "*the singular of confines*" in "*L'Etourdit.*" In this logic, in the phallogocentric dialectic, the woman represents the absolute Other. Lacan assigns to the woman as such in his *Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality*, being "*Other to herself,*"<sup>7</sup> hence an essential strangeness, one could say an essential availability. Thus, one of the chapters of the Seminar, Book XIX, "*... or worse*" was named by J.-A. Miller "*The Vanished Partner.*"

## THE VANISHED PARTNERS OR HETEROS

Didn't Freud conclude his work as the inventor of psychoanalysis on this stop, the enigma of femininity: "*What does a woman want?*" Her jouissance arises here as an enigma, a hole in meaning and at the same time outlines a place, a place in reserve. Freud, through this question, was only expressing how the relationship to the sexed Other, and to the Other in general is problematic. Considered from the perspective of the jouissance of the One, "*the Other as such remains [...] in Freudian theory a problem.*"<sup>8</sup> "*Woman does not exist*" is Lacan's response. Indeed, he adopts a radical position in the 1970s, with this shattering declaration: "*there is no second sex [...] [there is] heteros.*"<sup>9</sup> There is not The woman as a second sex, but only this "*that, wherever you take it, the Other is absent from the moment when the sexual rapport is at stake.*"<sup>10</sup> It is the relation to an Other that empties, vanishes. Lacan deconsists the Other under the species of "*The woman.*" "*The hetero [...] is in the position to*

4 Lacan, J. The Seminar, Book XVI: From an Other to the other (French version). Edited By Jacques-Alain Miller.

5 Ibid. p. 224

6 Lacan J., *Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality*, The Ecrits, W. W. Norton & Company; January 17, 2007. 1st edition. p.735

7 Ibid. p. 732.

8 Lacan, J., *Encore, The Seminar, Book XX, On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge (1972-1973)*. Edited By Jacques-Alain Miller. P.115 (French version)

9 Lacan, J., *The seminar, Book XIX, "...or Worse"*. Edited By Jacques-Alain Miller. P.95 (French version)

10. Ibid., p. 104.

11. Ibid., p. 95.

*empty itself as a being for the sexual rapport,*”<sup>11</sup> that is to say, in the position of the unconscious partner according to the beautiful formula proposed by J.- A. Miller. The woman gives the illustration of this figure of the Other between meaning and absence — meaning, because she participates in the phallic function via her partner in love, and absence, through which she does not participate in it. It is an absence which is nonetheless a “*joui-absence*,” hence the partner is often in a hurry to inhabit this place of presence, with his presence.

This clarifies that the not-all does not result from an absence of limit but from a relation to infinity. There, where there is an exception that founds the universal of castration, there is a void, nothing that could deny the function. Lacan translates this non-existence by the fact of being absent (*s’absenter*). The woman makes herself the signifier of this big Other that is not there. The Other is not her. She inscribes herself with the signifier of the barred Other, S(A).

### **NO POLARITY BUT THE PASSING ON OF A LACK**

The phallus is the privileged signifier to express the sexual position in the Other. But it is only as a simple mark of difference, just that, nothing but that. This is what leaves the subject with the possibility of making multiple uses of it. As Lacan argues in Seminar XVI, everything that psychoanalysis introduces as the logic of sex can be reduced to a single term which is its original term, namely, “*the connotation of a lack, and which is called castration. This essential minus is logical, and without it nothing would work. For both men and women, all normativity is organized around the passing on of a lack.*”

### **THE BANNER OF WOMEN, NOT ALL, NOT ONE**

It is thus feminine sexuality that will lead Lacan to go beyond what is a matter of semblance, the semblance of gender, we might say today. The whole Oedipal architecture made of signifier and image is revealed to be nothing but semblance. Men and women are first and foremost signifiers. Lacan anticipated the era of gender fluidity, which has pulverized the male/female binary. Men, women, genders of all kinds are first of all beings of language. Fatherhood, and soon mother-

hood, and marriage will be only fictions. There is no reason to believe in them all the way. Lacan will be led to seek a more substantial existence in feminine jouissance. It is on the path of supplemental jouissance that he will go beyond the phallus. He introduces the term *sexuation*. This is a very important point for these Grand Assises, a term that indicates from the outset the subjective element of a choice that depends on what he called “the formulas of sexuation.”

How to understand these formulas? They are formulas that give reference points as to the possible way of situating oneself in sex beyond the stereotypes of the designation man/woman. Thus, in his Seminar *Encore*, he states this choice in the terms of, “the side said to be man,” “the side said to be woman.” With regard to “the side said to be woman,” he insists that there is no woman with a definite article designating the universal of all women. However, he does not exclude talking about the woman in the common sense, and even considers it indispensable. “This is a signifier, this *la*. It is by this that I symbolize the signifier whose place it is essential to mark, which cannot be left empty. This *la* is a signifier whose characteristic is that it is the only one that cannot signify anything, and even to establish the status of the woman in this, that she is not-all.” I note this passage, which takes on its full weight in a context where a whole ideology would encourage us to speak outside of gender, outside of sex, outside of metaphor, which is impossible.

The “side said to be man” allows a subject to find accommodation under the regime of castration, in the sense of the limit established by the function of language. The regime of lack is located here on the male side. The experience of the body that corresponds to it is that of a jouissance limited to the phallic organ, localised, experienced as outside the body. This part delimits the world of sexuality where one loves and desires the other with the help of the fantasy – the body of the other one can only enjoy mentally. The “side said to be woman” does not respond to any universal and has only a contingent relation to the phallus. “She only participates in it by wanting to take it [the phallic function] away from man, or else [...] to impose its service on him.” But this does not have the effect of universalizing it, because at the root of the not-all, Lacan postulates a properly feminine jouissance, a jouissance of the unspeakable body, without form or response. If we say it is improperly feminine,

as Lacan points out, it is in the sense that it is feminine sexuality that gives the best insight into it. In imaginary terms, we could speak of the Freudian *dark continent* or the *oceanic feeling*, in logical terms, of the infinite or the *not-all*.

It is indeed the image of a *jouissance* enveloped in its own contiguity that, from the *Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality* oriented Lacan in the direction of this relationship to the infinite. These effects of limitlessness are found in particular in mysticism, in forms of self-abandonment that escape the framework given by the fantasy. Lacan defines this supplemental *jouissance*: “a *jouissance* of her own, of this *she* that does not exist and does not signify anything.”

How to conceive the *jouissance* of a being that does not exist and does not signify anything? It is not that, on the feminine side, a subject denies castration or refuses it. Her *jouissance* is elsewhere, it exceeds that. In itself, it does not give any identity to the subject. One does not recognize oneself in it to the point that Lacan could say that it induces rather the feeling of being *Other* to oneself for oneself. It does not give more meaning to life, to reach to that point where precisely the Other lies and reveals its fictional character. Lacan writes it as  $S(A)$ .

We therefore grasp that the requirement for words of love is perhaps the only possible supplemental way of making up for it, moving us away from the cynical solution.

Paradoxically, this *jouissance* is related in itself to the absence of the Other. This “side said to be woman” is incommensurate with ideals because it does not inscribe itself in the order of values but is a matter of uniqueness, of the One-all-alone, of what exists and makes us unique. That is why we cannot form the set of all women.

Curiously, a woman exists precisely at that point where the Other lacks. It is paradoxical, an existence that arises from what the Other lacks. Existence in fact does not hold up by itself. There is no autonomous definition of existence. It depends on the Other. We understand why Lacan was able to say “to exist, it is not to be, it is to depend on the Other.”

Feminine *jouissance* puts us on the road to existence. Isn't this what, at the end of an analysis, becomes apparent as what gives a more solid foundation to existence? A *jouissance* that confronts the limit of what can be symbolized, an existence that strangely consists in depending on what does not exist. The decisive step taken here by Lacan is to posit that if women are without real mediation against this supplemental *jouissance*, they do not have a monopoly on it; it also applies to men. What Lacan calls the feminine principle in “Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual” can thus be generalized to men. Later in his teaching, he clarifies it as the principle of a *jouissance* that is supported beyond the phallic sense and that gives its most profound status to *jouissance*, as J.-A. Miller was able to develop in his course *Being and the One*.

We cannot form the universal of all women, such that the structure of the not-all will lead Lacan to subvert the conception of the social bond based on the universal of all men, in favor of a social bond conceived from the logical power of the not-all, insofar as it takes precedence over the paternal norm.

Is it not the mark that the feminine, insofar as it is not-all, gives to society that Lacan aims at in what he calls the *social instance of woman*, insofar as it transcends the order of the contract and touches the whole of society? Lacan is aiming here, not at the limits of the sublimatory capacity of women, but at what of the feminine is contrary to social entropy. In short, that which, starting from the saying, travels into the depths of love (*goût*) and is likely to introduce lasting modifications in the social. In the sense, for example, that the *Precieuses* movement has left its mark on language. Everything that tends to go beyond the conformist without aiming for consensus responds to the structure of the not-all, and, one could say, is imbued with the Lacanian feminine. At a time of collapsing discourses, “The woman does not exist” is Lacan's response that is valid for all, in the sense of the social bond possible on the basis of a singular mode of *jouissance* in tune with the times, the diversity of modes of *jouissance*, the expansion of the domain of maternity, the plurality of erotomanias. Today there is a *push to sexual identity* which masks as the multiple but in fact reinforces the assignment. What Lacan calls the feminine principle designates an authentic

singularity. It is Lacan's response to universality, which is in the domain of value and not of existence. J.-A. Miller remarks on several occasions that it is this feminine principle, that it is feminine sexuality that inspired Lacan to make the turn in his last teaching. It was by formulating that “The woman does not exist” that he was able to expand this fall of ideals, this desublimation to other categories. The most famous of these is that of the father, passing from the *Name-of-the-Father* to the *father-version* (*pere-version*), or from the universal to the singular father worthy by his symptom. Even more surprisingly, the imaginary, pushed aside by the first Lacan, becomes predominant for the second. Lacan has opened a path other than that of discourse, radically subversive of tradition, which found its source in the speech of analysands. He took into account the effect of this speech on the structuration of desire.

The definition of femininity, of the feminine, does not leave us alone. The being that speech gives us is inconsistent, elusive, which leads us to a passion for the right word that would finally say the authentic feminine being. Isn't this what can push a woman to seek in analysis a ground that is less elusive? Now, as Lacan says, “of women [...] [everything can] be said even if it comes from a place without reason”. On this path, analysis leads beyond the fictions to which the Other would have us assigned. It allows us to see ourselves that the signifiers that govern our lives only depend on the contingency of the signifier. Beyond the phantasmatic cover that compensated for our ontological lack, analysis brings to light the experience of what Lacan calls sex as such, *heteros*, based on the logic of the *not-all*. It is a logic that fits into a network more fundamental than that of fantasy, more stable than gender values, stronger than anything else, where one really exists and in a unique way. It is the path of the *sinthome* that in this sense feminizes us.



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