



# The Path of the Singular, a Singular Path



## FLORENCIA F.C. SHANAHAN

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

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Florencia Shanahan highlights for us a short text by Lacan in order to be able to identify singularity in neurosis.

She reminds us that for Lacan, the pleasure principle functions to temper, buffer stimulation, and it works in the way of “doing bugger all”, “doing as little as possible”. This entails a certain cunning that consists in not laying the accent on the “tricky bit”, that is not called pleasure, but *Jouissance*.

This puts us already in the path of the Singular.

*Liliana Kruszel, Jared Elwart*

## **Florencia F.C. Shanahan**

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# The Path of the Singular, a Singular Path

by Florencia F.C. Shanahan

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“Poetic creation is an indecipherable mystery,  
like the mystery of the birth of man.  
You hear voices, you don't know where,  
and it's useless to worry where they come from”

*Federico Garcia Lorca*

“The story of my life doesn't exist. Does not Exist.  
There's never any centre to it.  
No path, not line. There are great spaces  
where you pretend there used to be someone,  
but it's not true, there was no one.”

*Marguerite Duras*

I would like to thank my colleagues and friends of the Lacanian Compass very much for this invitation to work with you towards the forthcoming Clinical Study Days. It is always a pleasure to share our questions, our investigations, even if it has to be in this remote way.

I am going to try today to focus on one of the many questions that were articulated in the very well-constructed argument that constitutes the presentation of the Study-Days.

There we can read the following proposal with regards to the orientation of psychoanalysis in our School, that is, in the path opened by Jacques-Alain Miller's elucidation of Lacan's teaching: “more emphasis is placed on thinking the clinic from the perspective of the symptom as the singular invention each one constructs around the non-existence of a program on how to relate to the other sex. These varied responses, as a defense against the real, will constitute their struc-

ture and, at the same time, they will be an exception to the structure. They will be outside anything else that looks like it; they will 'ex-sist' outside of what we identify as common in a structure. These singular responses can be located in the knotting of the three registers [...] The path that opens up for us this year is how transference and interpretation work as operators in the treatment of neurosis?”<sup>1</sup>.

In order to approach this question, I will take four elements. Let us say we always need four. This you can verify when you study Lacan's teaching from beginning to end. Whether it is the critical reading of some post-Freudians that conceived of the Oedipal complex as a triad (mother, father, child), or the schema L, the schema R for Schreber, the paternal metaphor, the graph of desire, the discourses or the knots at the very end, psychoanalysis as a praxis requires a quaternary structure.

We can think of it with the terms of the title: singularities - neurosis – transference – interpretation. There are four terms. A title is always already an operation of reading. Just like in order to pose a question one must have already formulated, somewhere, an answer, when we entitle something, that is already a way of orienting ourselves and, therefore, of choosing and of losing.

I gave as my title a sentence with four terms too. Except that, at least in appearance, it could seem that they are only two, the same, and that they repeat. “*The Path of the Singular, a Singular Path*”. What I wanted to show is precisely something of how things function when we are dealing with neuroses.

If the four fundamental concepts of psychoanaly-

<sup>1</sup> *Lacanian Compass Clinical Study Days 16, Argument. Available online: <https://lacaniancompass.com/about-csd/>*

sis could be circumscribed by Lacan as the *unconscious*, the *drive*, *transference* and *repetition*, we can also bring to light another two, which are inextricably linked to the knot they form, but are however not named: *symptom* and *interpretation*. It is perhaps not by chance that they are not named. The issue of what is naming and what is sayable concerns them both. From the perspective of the unconscious there is, at the heart of the symptom, an unsayable, an unnameable, and this is what interpretation - under transference - operates on.

I propose that this is a grid we need to conceive of the Lacanian compass, the compass that we follow in what we do not only in the clinic, in the encounters with our analysands, with our supervisees, but also in the encounters such as this, with our colleagues, in the community of work that our School constitutes, and moreover outside of it as well, in the institutions, the hospitals, the universities, the care centres where we may find ourselves enacting the Lacanian action. This compass<sup>2</sup> is the permanent, constant, uninterrupted interrogation and questioning of what is the end of an analysis and how can it be achieved? And this both in the sense of what is the aim, the goal of an analysis and by what means that is achieved, as well as how does an analysis finish, what makes it possible to bring analysis to its logical end, which is also the question on which Lacan founded his School.

Another important question of the argument is the one about our contemporary clinic, the evidence that those we receive no longer arrive, like in Freud's time, under the aegis of division, of the unconscious as a message, of the symptom as the result of repression or conflict between the drive and the ideal. This changes our understanding of interpretation. Lacan's teaching accounted for this. Some years ago, J.-A. Miller put it in the following terms: "the substitution of the Lacanian *parlêtre* for the Freudian unconscious fixes down a scintillation. I propose that we take it as an index of what is changing in psychoanalysis in the twenty-first century, when it has to take into account another symbolic order and another real besides those upon which it was established."<sup>3</sup>

You have already worked on this specifically regarding transference and interpretation with J. L.

Monnier at the previous meeting. But I wanted to put the magnifier on the expression "fixes down a scintillation", which is the translation of the word '*étincelle*', both a flash and a spark. Its definition is very precise: "An incandescent particle that detaches itself from a flaming body or sparks when two bodies come into contact." I read it as homologous with interpretation in the Lacanian sense, that is, when it is not based on or aimed at meaning, when psychoanalysis is not reduced to a hermeneutics, even a Freudian one. I spoke about this way of understanding interpretation in my first testimony<sup>4</sup>, where I gave some illustrations of it.

I will focus on a very short text by Lacan<sup>5</sup>, published in *The Lacanian Review* "The art of singularities," and which I imagine many of you have already been working on. There are many things we could discuss about it, but I will try to emphasise those that put me to work for today.

"The pleasure principle is the principle of tempering **stimulation**, of buffering it [...] The pleasure principle, to say it clearly, is about doing bugger all, doing as little as possible. Of course, this entails a certain cunning, but ultimately a cunning that consists precisely in not laying the accent on the tricky bit [*piège*] The tricky bit is not what is called *pleasure*. The tricky bit is *jouissance*."

This puts us already in the path of the singular. Because the pleasure principle is precisely what is left on the side of "for all", call it the master's discourse, the ideals, common sense or shared reality. Everything that is of the order of "it works", of well-being if you like, is of this register. And moreover, it is organised by a logic of "getting it over with", "completing it", "getting it done", "getting there". Constructing a guarantee, an Other of the Other whose path one follows, be it God or Freud or Lacan or the mother, or the analyst, is a way of buffering stimulation, that is, what truly and really moves us, awakens us, makes us vibrate.

When a neurotic demands an analysis, it is because something is not working. Inhibition, symptom and anxiety are all names of that thing that prevents us from moving, from desiring, from loving, from working, from "walking one's and only one's own path". This is why the word Lacan uses *piège*, trap, snare, is important. *Jouissance* appears there as something that catches our foot, stops us in our way, captures us. And with the fundamental rule: say everything, don't chose, don't

2 Cf. Arenas, G., *En busca de lo singular*, Grama, 2008.

3 Miller, J.-A., "The Unconscious and the Speaking Body", 2014, available online: <https://uqbarwapol.com/jacques-alain-miller-unconscious-and/>

4 Shanahan, Florencia F.C., "Dejar Que Pase..." in *The Lacanian Review*, Issue 9, pp. 95-104.

5 Lacan, J., "On Pleasure and the Fundamental Rule", in *The Lacanian Review*, Issue 11, pp. 17-21.

sensor, don't leave anything out, we aim at producing precisely the unfolding of the coordinates of how this has been built. We hear the question often enough: what's the point? What is it that I am doing all this for? For whom? What of it do I want? What in all of this is worthwhile?

Well, Lacan gives a response:

"the only thing which is valid [*vaille* = worthwhile] is not the particular but the singular. The rule means: it's worth the trouble [*vaut la peine*] *It's worth the trouble* is a very fine way of putting what it means."<sup>6</sup>

As you can imagine when we read that Lacan says "what it means" we pay attention! If we read this to the letter, "*peine*" is trouble, effort, but also sorrow, upset and moreover, punishment, penalty (like in "death penalty"), sentence. This point is relevant for what will come next...

Lacan continues:

"It's what I said just now -- you have to work up a bit of sweat. It's worth the trouble of faffing through a whole series of particulars so that [...] something singular will not be left out. It's worth the trouble of deriving some *jouissance* from this unique position that can be defined in one way only [...] as what I called *encounter*."<sup>7</sup>

I propose (although I will not develop it here) that the position that Lacan is speaking about is not only referred to the mutation that an analysis brings about regarding the suffering of the subject, but precisely a way of speaking about the analyst's desire, which is the product of an analysis. The desire of the analyst has to do with obtaining the maximum possible distance between ideal and object, with producing the absolute difference (the radically incomparable) of each analysand, and this requires a disposition to be open to the encounter, defined in a way that we shall see.

Going back to the paragraph:

"The encounter that is never a true one, that only comes about haphazardly, from tugging on the knot that is nevertheless strictly specified for each of us."<sup>8</sup>

Here we are at the pinnacle of the paradox: for each of us there is something, a way of knotting the registers of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real, that is strictly specified, the determining coordinates of the position we came to occupy in the world, our relationships with others, with our own body, etc. Put more simply, a way of being alive in life, this is what we defend

ourselves from.

So, Lacan states that the analysis of a neurosis allows for the subject to derive some *jouissance* from the mis-encounter instead of deriving only suffering from it, instead of defending himself from it. J.L. Monnier presented it in terms of the one-blunder. The analysis does not free one from one's unconscious, or drives. But it brings us to the point where a mutation can occur with regards to singularity, understood as the unfathomable decision in how we responded to the facts of structure that are the consequence of us all being speaking-bodies.

The encounter is never a true one because the object is forever lost: that is what inscribed us in a bond with the Other in the first place. If we can mourn that loss, then it becomes operative: it's the emptying of the place of the cause of desire and this is why, eventually, one can come to occupy this function for other subjects.

Another way of reading this is that the *jouissance* contained in the symptom ceases to be experienced as a trap and can be thus used differently. Not as that which stops us in our path but that which propels us in our effort. In order to obtain this, the fantasy that supports the symptom has to be traversed. As J.-A. Miller put it long ago, "From symptom to fantasy, and back."<sup>9</sup>

I continue with the last part of the quote:

"If something is to be met that might define the singular, it's what even so I called by its name -- a destiny [*destinée*] That's what the singular is. It's worth the trouble of getting it out, and this comes about only by good luck. Yet good luck has its rules. There is a way of narrowing in on the singular, and this is by the path of the particular, the particular that I'm equating with the word *symptom*. Psychoanalysis is the search for this good luck, which is not always inevitably or necessarily what is called [*happiness*]. But it's quite clear that when we set out the fundamental rule, we make specific reference to particularity, and inasmuch as it disturbs the pleasure principle. The pleasure principle consists in not having anything particular. The pleasure principle is, all the same, what a fair few are still attached to -- politeness, normality."<sup>10</sup>

The word that Lacan uses is "*destinée*", and is different from "*destin*", not only because the former is

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Miller, J.-A., "Del sintoma al fantasma. Y retorno," (course of 1982-1983) Paidós ed.

10 Lacan, J., "On Pleasure and the Fundamental Rule", op. cit.

feminine and the latter masculine. At the risk of interpreting it inaccurately, I will say that the word Lacan uses is linked to chance and fortune, whereas “*destin*” is linked to fate in the sense of determination and fatality.

“Our destiny [*destin*] is not inscribed in the dispositions of the stars, but our destiny [*destinée*] depends on the use we make of time - the time that liberates or ceases. One word expresses destiny: it is a vocation, a free response to a personal call that never ceases to ring out.”<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately analysis brings us to a point where we can choose to consent, or not, to what was present from the beginning: not what we want to be, or what we would have liked to be, or what we imagine others wanted us to be, but what we are. Only that it is not that simple. Because the “I am that” of the end not only is not of the order of being but it necessitates an emptying of everything that was constructed as a response to the what am I? in terms of “being.”

“I am what I am”, “I am how I enjoy”, these ways of formulating what is produced by an analysis can be easily confused with the delusion of identity, and can readily be filled up with identifications, images, names or objects. The height of these would be that of “analyst.”

This call comes from a place that, as the poet in the epigraph so beautifully puts it, can never be accessed. It is the hole of the *Unerkant*, the limit to any possible interpretation, “it is in the destiny of the primary repressed, namely, that something specified by not being able to be said on any account, whatever the approach, being [...] at the root of language, that we can give the best figure of what is at stake. [...] what I’m designating with the name *parlêtre*, which happens to be another designation of the unconscious... it is due to being born from a being who desired him or did not desire him, but who, through this very fact, situates him in a certain way in language, that a *parlêtre* finds himself excluded from his own origin.”<sup>12</sup>

The mark of this impossible to say, this One, is precisely what the “singular of a confine<sup>13</sup>” produces in the end of analysis.

Let’s us go to the last paragraph of the text, where Lacan gives a response to the question we were trying to approach today, while differentiating the analyst as the logical product of an analysis from the artist and also from the author:

11 Lacroix, J., [https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1948/12/30/destinee-et-destin\\_1903861\\_1819218.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1948/12/30/destinee-et-destin_1903861_1819218.html)

12 Lacan, “Jacques Lacan Responds to a Question from Marcel Ritter”, *The Lacanian Review*, Issue 14, pp.19-21.

“Analysis is something that indicates to us that there is only the knot of the symptom, for which evidently one has to sweat a great deal in order to lay a hand on it and isolate it. It takes so much sweat that one might even make oneself a name out of it, as they say, from this sweating. It’s what culminates in certain cases with the apogee of the best that anyone can do -- a work of art. This is not for us. Our intention is neither to lead someone to make a name for themselves nor to make a work of art. It’s rather something that consists in inciting them to pass through into the good hole of what is offered to them as singular.”

The universal hole, in psychoanalysis of the Lacanian Orientation, has a formula that is for all: there is no sexual relation. There is no program that tells us how to be in life, how to relate to ourselves and others. There will be a programme built on our bond with the Other, with the particularities of our history, around the singular hole, this One that is the trace on the body of the inaugural encounter with language. The symptom is what links up the two. It’s the most real thing we have, and it is incurable. “This incurable symptom, which is present in sexuality as such, cannot in truth be given a solution. It remains an enigma. You can only deal with it. Psychoanalysis is about identifying and isolating the way in which you have encountered the sexual enigma. It means clarifying the way in which your unconscious has interpreted this enigma and finding a better way of dealing with it.”<sup>14</sup> This is what Lacan indicates when he speaks of “tugging on the knot.”

I will conclude with two short vignettes from two analysts of the School whose transmission has not yet been made available in English and who are both incredibly precise in how they elaborate what remains of the symptom after they finished their analyses. But before, I will read once again the passage of Lacan’s *Seminar 11* that J. L. Monnier also put to work with you the last time.

“Whenever we speak of cause [...] there is always something indefinite. The phases of the moon are the cause of tide [...] miasmas are the cause of fever – that doesn’t mean anything either, there is a hole, and something that oscillates in the interval. In short, there is cause only in something that doesn’t work [...] the Freudian unconscious is situated at that point, where, between cause and that which it affects, there is always

13 Lacan, J., “L’etourdit”

14 Miller, J.-A., in *France Culture*, 16 June 2005. Available online: <https://www.lacan.com/millerlecture.htm>

something wrong. The important thing is not that the unconscious determines neurosis [...] For what the unconscious does is to show us the gap through which neurosis recreates a harmony with a real— a real that may well not be determined. In this gap, something happens. Once this gap has been filled is the neurosis cured? After all, the question remains open. But the neurosis becomes something else, sometimes a mere illness, a scar, as Freud said— the scar, not of the neurosis, but of the unconscious. [...] I think you will be able to feel guided by the terms that I have introduced when you come to read Freud's own works."<sup>15</sup>

The analysts of the School, those who testify to the end of their analysis and engage in the attempt to transmit psychoanalysis from this point of absolute difference that was achieved, namely, from the very singularity that the analytic discourse produced them as, have the difficult task and the responsibility to renew psychoanalysis departing from this exact navel, from what cannot be known. Even though of course fiction cannot be eliminated completely from this exercise, however, a demonstration is expected and also a plus: there is the logic of the case, the formalisation of the symbolic determinations of the subject of the unconscious, and there is also the opaqueness of the hole that allowed him or her, precisely, to find a way out, to exit.

Both A.S. introduced the symptom at the level of the relation to speech, to the very act of speaking, and also to writing. They both address the problem of how a speaking being consents to life and - I thought - it would be good to work on these testimonies, if they were translated into English, with those two texts by Lacan from TLR that I chose to explore today.

On how an analysis does not produce a "biography", A.S. Carlos Rossi writes: "The bio, i.e. the living, and the graphic, i.e. the written, meet only episodically and evanescently. We know that *jouissance* is the cause of the logical impossibility of being a comfortable contemporary of oneself. No one is a contemporary of oneself because one lives out of time 'in a present that does not belong to everyone.' It is the price one inevitably pays for the intrusion of libido in time. [...] The neurotic mutation leaves open the field for a know-how to come with the symptom as a scar of the unconscious. At the same time, it anticipates the idea that the destiny of the unconscious is the reduction to a mark. [...] From wild neurosis to transference neurosis, from

the scar to the letter, the analytic device allows the body to disinhabit the marks of the Other that was built to account for the profound disagreement of the languages that spoke it."<sup>16</sup>

"Talking about who would be my last analyst, I heard myself saying 'I read her a lot' [yo la leo mucho]. The mystery of the transference took shape. In its resonance, the syllables stuck together: "I babble a lot" [yo laleo mucho]. It is clear that, in my case, the interpretation anticipated the first session."<sup>17</sup>

For Paloma Blanco, in her case, the "singular of a confine" was sketched from two maternal sayings: "For every living child a dead one fell [cayó]" and "If you fall, you get up." She calls these "the wickerwork of the symptom." Her relationship to knowledge was marked from the start by the 'ssshhh' of the Other: to shut up and to know. Her whole analysis will bring her to the writing that carved up desire for this speaking-body. She became a mother, but her second child lived only a few hours. She writes: "in the hospital room I needed to go to the bathroom and while I was composing myself a bit in front of the mirror, I lost consciousness due to the pain of a strong contraction. I fell and I hit my head. I woke up with a huge haemorrhage. I thought: I could have died just like that, just like that, from a bad fall. I don't want to miss life, the life of my son, the child who is in Here the knot, the weaving of knowledge, truth, desire, *jouissance*. And this is how Paloma could testify to it: "An analysis is the process of emptying the mark of the trauma until it become a letter. What interests us at the level of the experience that is our practice, is that in language itself there is a void that can accommodate something that is not of language, but of the affect of the body that is embedded, in the symptom. In the 'materiality' of the symptom, the letter circumscribes what does not cease not to be written from the blanks..."<sup>18</sup>

What does not cease not to be written, the impossible of a real, that origin from which one is excluded, which no being can come to fill up, imagine or name, but which is the place of a call that we can call<sup>19</sup> our singular.

Edited by Jared Elwart, Liliana Kruszel.

15 Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Book 11), Ed. J.-A. Miller, Trans. A. Sheridan, W.W. Norton & Co., London, 1998, p. 22.

16 Rossi, C., "Escribir en el agua", intervention as A.S. at the 31st Study Days of the EOL "The Body I Inhabit", 2022.

17 Rossi, C., "Primer relato", in *Revista Lacaniana*, Issue 29, EOL, April 2021.

18 Blanco Díaz, P., "De lo indecible al indecible" (first testimony), in *Revista El Psicoanálisis*, Issue 38, 2021; "Causa", intervention as A.S. at the 22nd Study Days of the ELP, 2023.

19 Cf. the etymology of the word: "From Middle English *callen*, from Old English *ceallian* ("to call, shout") and Old Norse *kalla* ("to call; shout; refer to as; name"); both from Proto-Germanic \**kalzōnā* ("to call, shout"), from Proto-Indo-European \**gollH-so-* ("voice, cry"), from \**gelH-*. Cognate with Scots *call*, *caw*, *ca* ("to call, cry, shout"), Dutch *kallen* ("to chat, talk"), Norwegian *kalle* ("to call, name"), Welsh *galw* ("to call, demand"), Polish *głos* ("voice"), Lithuanian *galsas* ("echo"), Russian *голос* (*golos*, "voice"), Albanian *gjuhë* ("language, tongue"). In my testimony as A.S. I referred to this as "the voice of no-one" (F.C. Shanahan, F., "Dejar que pase..." in *The Lacanian Review*, Issue 9, 2020)

# LC EXPRESS

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