

THE EGO AS USEFUL FICTION: THE CASE OF MRS. J.

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**ABSTRACT:** Using a clinical case as a starting point, we pose the following hypothesis: in clinical practice, Lacan's decentering of the ego is neither its demolition nor its praise, but its conceptual delimitation. This idea will be argued through the analysis of a woman's case, in the light of certain points from Seminar 2 and other references that are implied in this text: Jeremy Bentham's theory of fictions and Freud's construction in analysis. This clinical-theoretical analysis will guide us to contemplate a possible conceptual delimitation of the ego: the ego as a useful fiction.

**Keywords:** Ego; construction; fiction; Freud; Lacan.

**Resumo: O Ego como ficção útil: o caso da Sra. J.** A partir de um caso clínico, propomos a seguinte hipótese: na prática clínica, a descentração do ego em Lacan não é nem demolir o ego, nem muito menos elogiá-lo, mas delimitá-lo conceitualmente. Tudo isso será discutido analisando o caso de uma mulher, à luz de alguns aspectos fundamentais do seminário II, juntamente com outras referências implícitas: a teoria das ficções de Jeremy Bentham e a construção na análise de Freud. Este análise teórico-clínica nos guiará a considerar que uma possível delimitação conceitual do ego é de considerá-lo como uma ficção útil.

**Palavras-chave:** Ego; construção; ficção; Freud; Lacan.

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## PRESENTATION

Lacan's efforts to differentiate his teaching from that of post-Freudian psychoanalysis – both, before and after his *excommunication* – are well known. His *return to Freud* at the beginning of his teaching is part of this endeavour: opposing his contemporary's reading of the later Freud, a reading which adopts the *strengthening of the ego* as the direction of the treatment's main aim.<sup>1</sup> Later, in the seventies, we see in Lacan's work a number of entries where he mentions the so-called American psychoanalysis (*ego psychology, annafreudism*), very often cited as a way to differentiate his teaching from theirs (FARRIOL, 2018), which Lacan associates with the *plague* (LACAN, 1972/1978).

Already in *Seminar II* – focused on Freud's conceptualisation of the ego – Lacan shows the desire to differentiate himself from his contemporaries, from the hypothetical substantialization of the ego proposed by the latter, the decentring of the ego that characterises, not only his teaching but Freud's '*Copernican revolution*' itself (LACAN, 1954/1983, p. 12).

By following a case study, we will see how the analyst's choice between substantialising or decentring the ego comes into play in clinical practice. This case is based on a woman who, having previously attended analysis for several years, seems to present a non-triggered paranoia or, what Lacan found to be the effect of cures focused on a strengthening of the ego: post-analytic paranoia. In fact, this subject presents a notorious interpretative and perjury tendency in relation to what has allegedly been discovered during her previous analysis, where, she reports, 'I have understood all about myself'.

This case will guide us to think about Lacan's effort to circumscribe Freud's notion of ego. We will see that in the case of Mrs. J.'s analysis it was not a question of decentring the ego or of fortifying it, but of making use of the ego as a *useful fiction*, an operation that would be impossible to theorise without the Lacanian conception of the ego as an imaginary mirage determined by the symbolic.

In order to do this, the case of Mrs. J. will be analysed in relation to some key points from *Seminar II* that corresponded with different instances of the brief number of sessions that this therapeutic work comprised. We will address the symbolic determination of the ego's imaginary mirage as opposed to its substantiation; Bentham's influence on Lacan when thinking about the ego as fiction. We will also invoke what Freud called the *construction in analysis*, used in the case as an imaginary support for this subject. This clinical analysis will be the compass to think of the conceptual delimitation of the ego as a useful fiction.

### Mrs. J.

J. is 48 years old, she has a 16 year old daughter and an 18 year old son. Divorced, at the time of the consultation she lived with her new partner and their daughter. After a family fight, the latter leaves the house to settle with her father. Since then, J. insists on asking her daughter for an explanation in relation to the abrupt breakup, getting nothing but silence as a response. "She doesn't talk to me anymore", or "never answers" either calls, or voice or text messages. It is this silence that makes J. more and more desperate, a fact that makes her decide to request a judge to organise visits with her daughter every Saturday afternoon in a space mediated by psychologists. These visits do not alter the attitude of her daughter, who insists on not speaking to her, despite the efforts of both the mother and the mediators. It is in this context that several Saturdays having passed, J. asks one of the psychologists, why her daughter has decided not to speak to her anymore. The psychologist's response is to give her the address of the free consultation centre where I practice.

### 1st session

I receive J. at the free consultation centre. From the beginning J. presents a remarkable rigidity both physically as well as in the use J. gives to language, word and thing seeming one and the same for her. As an example, that first appointment, seeing that she is delayed, I go to check the building's entrance, and there she is, waiting. I ask her why she did not ring the bell, receiving as an answer that I had not indicated her to do so when I gave her my consulting room's address. She comes to the consultation with some reluctance, anticipating that "I come only to know why my daughter does not speak to me, because for everything else I have already done a psychoanalysis of several years, which made me understand why I am what I am". J. speaks briefly but in detail of her "discoveries" during the mentioned psychoanalysis, where everything seems to have coincided with everything and provided answers that explain all her old questions, in a speech without breaks. This absence of breaks made the session extremely long, with nothing dialectizable to underline as a cut.

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<sup>1</sup> See Schema of psychoanalysis in part II (FREUD, 1940/2003, p. 174-181), as well as Analysis terminable and interminable (FREUD, 1937b/2003, p. 223, 232, 234-238, 240, 249-251).

J. constant complaint circulates her urgency to know why her daughter doesn't talk to her anymore. What really intrigues her is not so much that she does not speak to her, but rather not knowing why she has made that decision. That "not knowing" is unbearable.

During the sessions, her daughter began to form part of the series of close relationships who "abandon me": her husband who leaves her, her parents who "exiled me from the family, not talking to me anymore" and who "sided with my ex-husband", and also his younger brother, who no longer speaks to her. She describes all of them as "closed people, who never speak and who keep everything to themselves without ever exploding". The only one who has not left her is her 18-year-old son, who, already graduated from university, has left the maternal home without ceasing to call from time to time to hear her news.

One of the unbearable elements of this break with her daughter, is that such an unexpected event has ruined her expectations of building the family that she wanted to build. Indeed, J. claims to have followed for years her parent's rigid ideal of academic and professional excellence, "where we had no choice", an imperative to which she was submissive "so they don't abandon me". J. also says that as a child she would have liked to have been born a boy, to please her parents who openly said that they would have preferred it that way. Now, and after her psychoanalysis of several years, she says she has decided to change that model, "to do the opposite 360 degrees", that is, to desire above all having a daughter, who is happy to be one, and which would be "the first generation that would not fall into that family's ideal that I had to suffer". Thus, J. experiences as a failure the fact that her daughter does not talk to her anymore, because "she ended the ideals of my parents": her daughter, in fact, in addition to "not talking", has shown a taste for dressing "like a boy", as well as following an ideal of academic excellence, adding to this that she has moved in with J.'s ex-husband, "Who is the embodiment of the ideals of my parents: a man and a doctor".

On her part, her efforts to abandon such a family ideal have been manifested with the choice of her new partner, a man "totally the opposite of my ex-husband, 360 degrees the opposite [...] who never shuts up but says everything, even too much [...] and that is precisely the cause of the fight with my daughter". J. says that it has cost her a high price to make this new life: her family has completely pushed her aside.

J. is a confused woman, despite the fact that she enunciates everything from a position of knowing very well what she says. This is how, after a long session, she finally asks a question: whether it is worth forcing her daughter to do what she wanted for her? It is with that question that I cut the session.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> session**

J. comes back and starts the session with a new question: whether to continue with the mediated visits with her daughter: "I'm getting tired of all those visits that don't lead to anything".

Long speech with some variations from the last session. She describes her parents as "pseudo-computer scientists", that is, "they were computer merchants but they didn't even know how to program". She evokes again her psychoanalysis, where she was able to put together a family novel that is more like a report than a novel. It takes up the ideal of the parents, where academic excellence, being a man and a doctor appears as the master signifier. Under these ideals, she graduated as a dentist, while her brother, man and all, ended up with a diploma far from the parents' medical ideal.

The question about the desire of the Other is unbearable for J. That is, not knowing what is going through the head of her ex-husband or her daughter. The news of the family comes to her with a long delay, which makes her say in a session that "they hide everything from me, they don't tell me anything, my family, my ex-husband, my daughter".

J. points out that it was the day that "I saw that my husband was the image of my father" that she decided to start her psychoanalysis. She says that in that cure "all my efforts were to leave that ideal of my family", which she managed to "doing the opposite of this, as the choice of my partner who is 360 degrees opposite of my parents". Her partner, by the way, is a computer merchant. With him "I can talk, because he talks, and a lot, even too much", and on weekends they do DIY in the house they built together. It is under this new ideal of 'family' built by her that she wants to make her daughter speak.

At the end of the session, she says she has decided to end the mediated visits. With great discretion, avoiding any semblance of an order, I tell her that if she feels like it, she can tell her daughter that she prefers not to force her to talk to her anymore, and that to do this she can stop the visits, but that she will always have the door open for her if one day she decides to talk to her again. J. says that is just what she intends to do in order to avoid any impression of abandonment to her daughter.

## **3<sup>rd</sup> session**

J. arrives at the session saying that she has already announced to her daughter her decision to stop the

mediated visits, since she will no longer force her to speak or explain anything to her, and that in any case she will always have the possibility to call or write to her when she decides to do so.

J. says that, after this decision, she does not know what will happen. Only that “not knowing” is extremely difficult to bear for J., who has a colossal need to have an explanation for everything that happens. Thus, she spends a good part of the session justifying what she has decided and wondering once more about her daughter’s silence. She returns to the expectations she had for her daughter and how, by not achieving it, she feels that she failed in her project of leaving her parents’ ideals. J. realizes that there is something in her daughter inevitably transmitted from her parents’ ideal, as her daughter cultivates a masculine dressing style, which makes J. think of her own yearning to be a boy during her childhood. This exasperates her, because “I really wanted to have a daughter, she really was a desired girl as such”.

This misunderstanding of the situation, the lack of coincidence between her expectations and its results, are extremely enigmatic to J., as if the non-coincidence between what was sought and what was found did not exist. She says that although “I understood everything after my psychoanalysis about my family and I”, what happens with her daughter escapes her, and this is what she cannot bear. This opacity provokes, during the course of a session, in the span of only a few minutes, the unfolding of a series of mixed theories about how the world should work so that we all understand each other: “in the end everything is a matter of beliefs, because theories are that, and all would be clearer if there were only one belief”. This speech agitates her more and more, ending up with her clutching her head with both hands and exclaiming “why, why! I don’t know, too many questions!”. Faced with such a paroxysm, to limit such overflow, I tell her that indeed, there are too many questions, we can not know everything because even the finance ministry cannot accomplish such a feat. This makes her laugh. I then add that anyway, at least she gave her daughter *the option to speak to her or not*, where her assumed model was to give no choice. She does not make the link with the “no choice” of the father’s ideal but her speech stabilizes. To this I add that she has managed to make a new family for herself, with the construction of her house, with her new partner with whom she does DIY.

At the exit I ask if she will come back next week. She says “no”, because “I’ve already made my decision”. Respecting that, I told her that my door is always open to her anyway if one day she decides to come and speak.

## ANALYSIS

### An ego that understands everything but silence

“I come just to find out why my daughter is not speaking to me.” What appears to be a demand can also be read as her *cover letter* of introduction upon arrival for the consultation. Well, in that demand a boundary is delimited: a coming “just” to know something, and nothing else. This becomes more evident when she articulates it with her second *cover letter*: “[...] I have already done a psychoanalysis of several years, which made me understand why I am what I am”. The first *cover letter* – her demand to know – can be read as a statement, the enunciation of which can be elucidated in her second *cover letter*: she already understood everything about her in her analysis, and that is better not to touch her again, because “I already understood everything and I should not understand anything else, apart from why she does not speak to me”.

What would that “I understood why I am what I am” be? We have seen how J. describes one “who I am” to the beat of a family history woven during her psychoanalysis. A story that could hardly be called a family novel, since nothing of the metaphor proper to literary texts seems to be present in her story<sup>2</sup>. Rather, it was a rigorous and detailed report, where the correspondence between the cause (its history) and the effect (“what I am”) seems to make a whole without hiatus. In this speech without fracture, the silence of her daughter makes a hole in that knowing that she seems to have believed was total. This hole seems to have two effects on her subjectivity: on the one hand, a perplexity about the other’s place, her daughter in this case, and not an enigma on her own side, of the type “what could I do so that she doesn’t talk to me anymore?”. On the other hand, faced with this perplexity, the answer seems to be on the side of an evil Other, crystallized without even much consistency in “my family hides things from me”.

From J.’s speech we propose as a hypothesis that her first analysis gave her an ego that speaks its being. A *moi*, an ego made to measure what she did not want for herself, an ego made “360 degrees opposite to my parents”, with all the paradoxes and ironies that such an expression can have. J. clings to that ego, and not without reason, but her own consistency makes the encounter with what is not within the foreseeable of that unbearable system: the silence of her daughter. The question of how to deal with that hole is imposed, since

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<sup>2</sup> It is the way Lacan refers to Schreber’s book, saying about the latter “that he is without a doubt a writer but not a poet” (LACAN, 1955/1984, p. 114), that is, texts where the metaphor is absent.

she seems incapable of giving it a phallic meaning. Persecutory interpretations appear as an answer. If that hole in the knowledge of herself is filled with the knowledge of the therapist, the therapist will most likely soon take the place of the persecutor. Given this, how to position oneself?

### **Question of the diagnosis and positioning of the analyst**

This rigorous and detailed map of her family history, constructed in her analysis, suggests what Lacan calls “post-analytic paranoia”, the consequence of a cure oriented by a fortification of the ego. Lacan points out that in these orientations, the cure-type is described as “the necessity of maintaining the ego’s capacity for observation intact” (LACAN, 1954/1983, p. 362), which seems to resemble its rigorous report of the patient’s family history. However, the case shows us how this power of “observation of the ego” leads to “no other result than making the subject paranoid” (LACAN, 1954/1983, p. 363), as shown in the interpretive cascade provoked by her daughter’s silence. That is why after the first session with Mrs. J. a question imposed itself: is it either a non-triggered psychosis, or the result of a therapy directed by a fortification of the ego, whose aim is “to make it well-rounded, this ego, to give it the spherical shape in which it will have definitively integrated all its disjointed fragmentary states, its scattered limbs, its pregenital phases, its partial drives” (LACAN, 1954/1983, p. 362) but where “in wanting to guard the subject from his so-called menacing madnnesses, he would succeed in ending up not that far from there” (LACAN, 1954/1983, p. 364).

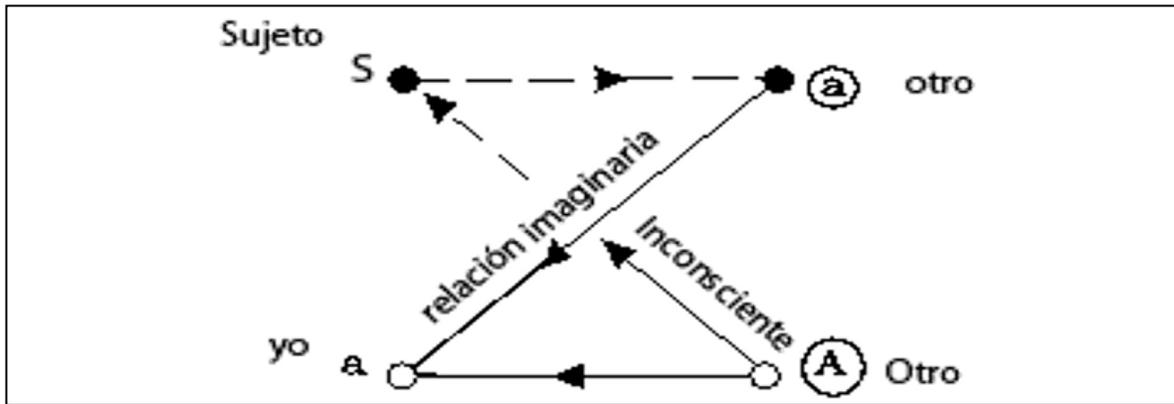
Prudence would lead us to the first hypothesis. Given this, the analyst’s silence is not considered as a possible tactic. It would echo her daughter’s silence, leading her back to a certain perplexity, and consequent paranoid interpretations. Thus, given all this, it is not her demand to know what will guide the work, but rather the enunciation of this demand: “not to touch” her ego. This “strong me” is neither to be analysed as resistance nor to disturb the defence. It is in fact quite possible that J. has no support other than such defence. That so-called “strong me” must be considered as something effectively not to be fiddled with, because it might serve her in some way. What can this construction do for her?

### **Theoretical foundations of this positioning**

Under the hypothesis that Lacan, in his *Seminar II*, makes a conceptual delimitation of the ego in Freud, we might ask: how could this delimitation serve as a clinical orientation for this case? Mainly, by warning us of the imaginary quality of the ego, that is not an essentialist ego. This, we will later see has to be considered in order not to fall into the trap of the imaginary axis.

Lacan begins his conceptualisation of the ego, distinguishing the one developed in Freud’s work from the one interpreted by the post-Freudian movement. Freud’s discovery is regarded as a Copernican revolution (LACAN, 1954/1983, p. 12), in as much as the de-centred ego proposed by him is unprecedented in the history of Western thought. Therefore, given such epistemological subversion, Lacan wonders what is the reason for the trend of Freud’s successors in celebrating “the return of the good old ego” (LACAN, 1954/1983, p. 93), placing it as an ideal of homogeneity to be reached by the direction of the cure. Lacan, in contrast, insists on making that ego inconsistent, considering it an “imaginary mirage” (LACAN, 1954/1983, p. 235) determined by the symbolic.

In order to support this argument, Lacan revisits the notion of the ego in Freud, particularly the moments of *impasse* in its conceptualisation. Throughout the seminar 1954-1955, Lacan presents us with this literal tour, which begins with a biology-based attempt departing from the reflex arc described in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (FREUD, 1895/2003), which later moves into the regression model in “the interpretation of dreams” (FREUD, 1900/2003). Following, is the ego as an image invested with libido that appears in the *Introduction to narcissism* (FREUD, 1914/2003), and finally, an ego that could not be reduced to consciousness, an ego that is not unrelated to the death drive. The articulation of the death drive to the conceptualisation of the ego is decisive in defining Freud’s notion. The post-Freudian conception of the ego included the states of the libido as a series of developmental stages where the subject would reach an ideal state: genitality. Lacan, openly self-defined as anti-progressive (MILLER; CLÉRO; LOTTE, 2003), does not adhere to this view. From the monologue *Oedipus in Cologne*, articulated with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (FREUD, 1920/2003), Lacan emphasises a drive that has no other tendency than death itself. If something on the side of life can be introduced, says Lacan at that moment of his teaching, it is neither from the side of instinct, nor from needs, nor from a supposed harmony between drives, but from the side of Freud’s libido concept: the field of desire. Such desire is embodied in the word, and therefore, it is not a matter of the other but of the big Other. This is what Lacan shows in his diagram: not the *a-a'* axis but the S-A. That is, not to position oneself on the side of the imaginary ego but rather on its symbolic determinations, the treasure of the signifier’s logical articulations.



While in the case of Ms. J. it would be rash to speak of desire, there is something about this concept that does come into play: an ethics. This was effectively put into evidence by positioning herself on the SA axis, that is, not looking for the meaning of what was said but working on the significant matter of her speech, in this case, her question “is it worth forcing my daughter to do what I wanted from her?”. The emergence of this phrase, as well as the cut made by the analyst, made it possible for the work with J. to go from her demand to understand why her daughter does not speak to her (an understanding that as such is eminently imaginary) to a question about her own decision.

This importance given to the symbolic in the direction of the cure (a typical move of the early Lacan) has not only ethical consequences for the patient, but it also constitutes the ethics of the analytic work itself: that the analyst respect J.'s other demand: *do not touch anything from her previous analysis*. This finds its theoretical foundations in what follows.

### FICTION AND UTILITY IN BENTHAM

Although in Lacan the determination of the symbolic over the imaginary comes from his reference to Lévi-Strauss, another reference must be considered: Jeremy Bentham. It is this author who will inspire Lacan's aphorism “the most profound truth in its structure as fiction” (LACAN, 1961). Not counting his very brief mention of Bentham at the meeting on 17 November 1954 (LACAN, 1954/1983), at the least, a couple passages of this seminar suggests Bentham's theory of fictions, particularly his essay about ontology. There is this passage where Lacan wonders what it would be if something exists or not. He is referring to certain post-Freudian reflections identified here by Lacan, where the dichotomies between as “psychic reality” and “true reality” are developed. Faced with these impasses between what is understood as real and as fictitious, Lacan proposes: “Whether a thing really exists or not doesn't much matter. It can perfectly easily exist in the full sense of the term, even if it doesn't really exist. By definition, there is something so improbable about all existence that one is in effect perpetually questioning oneself about its reality” (LACAN, 1954/1983, p. 343). This reflection, which may seem enigmatic, finds its echo in what has been said by Bentham in his *A fragment on Ontology* (BENTHAM, 1776/1838-1843), where he distinguishes between real and fictitious entities: “A real entity is an entity to which, on the occasion and for the purpose of discourse, existence is really meant to be ascribed” (BENTHAM, 1776/1838-1843, p. 196). And he continues: “A fictitious entity is an entity to which, though by the grammatical form of the discourse employed in speaking of its existence is ascribed, yet in truth and reality existence is not meant to be ascribed” (BENTHAM, 1776/1838-1843, p. 197). This leads to a fictitious condition of both what is considered real and what is considered fictitious, and all this is due to a need for discourse:

Then to language – to language alone – That it is fictitious entities owe Their existence – their impossible, yet essential existence.

[...]

What will be seen, Moreover That is the fiction [...] is a contrivance but for which language – or any language in any form rate superior to That of the language of the brute creation – Could not have existence. (BENTHAM, 1776/1838-1843, p. 198).

It is with the theory of fictions that Bentham builds a logic to think the utility, where utility is not such in itself but in its relationship with other fictions, which gives us reasons to justify why what is useful for one subject is not useful for another. There is no universality or transcendence of the utility. Nor is there ‘be useful’, for “be” and “useful” are respectively ontology and ethics (CLERO, 2006). Thus, it is not a question of being but an ethical question: how to make the act useful for a certain particular purpose?

This non-essentialist quality of the Benthamian fictions seems to produce its influence on Lacan, as can be appreciated in the previously cited paragraph, regarding existence. This question about the “fictitious” and the “real” (both for Bentham essential fictions for the existence of language) reappears when referring to the post-Freudian ideal of an ego “integrated” and “rounded” as a planet. For Lacan, thinking of the ego as something given and not as something determined by the symbolic would be like thinking that “the symbolic apparently springs out from the real, which naturally isn’t any more well-founded than thinking that the so called fixed stars really revolve around the Earth. Similarly, one shouldn’t think that symbols actually have come from the real (LACAN, 1954/1983, p. 358).

Thus, thinking of the ego as an imaginary product determined by the symbolic, and reading this from Bentham, one can conceptualise the ego not as an evolutionary apex of the synthesis of drives, or as a good mediator between the id and the superego, but as a *fiction*. If we add to this the ethical dimension of Bentham, where a fiction is articulated with other fictions according to the need at stake, we can thus think of the ego as a useful fiction.

Useful for what? It would not be to contradict either Lacan or Bentham to say that this utility depends on case by case. In the case of Ms. J., thinking of her ego as a useful fiction had consequences above all in the ethics adopted by the analyst: not touching that ego, that fiction constructed in her analysis of “a life 360 degrees opposite to my parents”. This then, even though the irony of such a formula is materialised in doing more or less the same thing that she *had to do* in life (a desire to impose a model on her daughter; a boyfriend who is also a computer merchant, a daughter desired as long as she is a woman who, in her eyes, seems to prefer to adopt the masculine countenance), that fiction seems to have given her a certain imaginary stabilisation. A precarious stability, since she does not seem to tolerate too many tensions, as can be seen by her perplexity at the silence of her daughter. This silence, as well as the fact of proposing to stop forcing her daughter to see her, is extremely problematic for her.

It is for this reason that this fiction constructed in her analysis, no matter how much she has decided not to touch it, seems to need in J. other fictions that serve her not as strengthening, but as support.

## **CONSTRUCTION AS ANOTHER USEFUL FICTION**

As useful as her fiction may be, we see how it presents its limits in J. when confronted to the hole of her daughter’s silence, the first discreet signs of a delusion of perjury then appear, crystallised in her husband and her family who ‘abandoned’ her. It is here where once again the delimitation of the ego as a fiction allowed another type of work, already anticipated by Freud: construction. In the place where his imaginary building collapses due to its own rigidity (since nothing is more fragile than a strong ego), delirium appears as another compensatory fiction of that impossible to symbolise, emptiness: the persecutory figure of the family; a series of theories so that the world can be understood; the permanent possibility of being abandoned. However, this delusion, although less terrible than the hole itself, raises an anxiety that confirms its condition as a failed solution. Can the construction in this case be considered a more useful fiction than the delusion? Starting from Freud, we can very well say that with construction we would be trying to change one delusion for another: “The delusions of patients appear to me to be the equivalents of the constructions which we build up in the course of an analytic treatment – attempts at explanation and cure” (FREUD, 1937a/2003, p. 269).

As Freud indicates, the construction proposed to J. is made from her sayings. They are the signifiers “to have-not have a choice” or “to abandon-to abandon me” that are used to construct a fiction where something at least bearable can be put into play. Thus, when J. decides to end the visits with her daughter, the analyst anticipates a construction: that J. decides to stop forcing her to speak, leaving her nevertheless the option to do so if one day she changes her mind. Using signifiers related to her history with her parents, with whom she “had no choice”, this construction allows J. to leave that series, and leave the option to her daughter.

This is where the construction needs a second support, given the subjective coordinates of J. Indeed, repeating in its history the signifier of abandonment, the construction proposes an element that can neutralize it: J. will always have the doors open if her daughter decides to call her again. This construction allows a logic of alternation, which J. herself does not easily achieve. There where for her it is either to be abandoned or to be persecuted, the construction allows an opening-closing, a presence-absence, where not forcing the daughter to continue seeing her does not imply any abandonment, since she, J., leaves the doors open to a reunion if her daughter so wishes. This same logic is put into play at the end of the last session, where even though she decided not to come again, the analyst also leaves her the doors open for a return, if she wishes. Thus, the analyst does not force it, but nor does it abandon her.

## CONCLUSIONS: RESULTS OF THE INTERVENTIONS

The delimitation of the ego, to which Lacan invites us, showed us in this case how, without putting into practice a psychoanalysis in the strict sense of the word, it was possible to do a work guided by it, in what can be called an “applied psychoanalysis” (ATTIÉ, 2002). J.’s diagnostic uncertainty ruled out the possibility of questioning the consistency of that ego of hers constructed in her previous analysis. At the same time, in the strength of this ego lay its own fragility: it was in effect a strength based on “having understood everything”, that is to say, an imaginary axis whose consequences began to make themselves felt there where understanding was finding its limits. Therefore, compensating that ego with even more meaning, with more understanding, was also to be excluded. If we have proposed the hypothesis that it is neither a matter of substantializing nor of destroying (in J.’s case, neither reinforcing nor questioning, respectively), but rather of delimiting the ego, we can delimit it, realising that it was in fact a fiction of great utility for J. Thus, the strategy of the clinical work with J. was based on two theoretical axes: not working on the imaginary of her ego, but on its symbolic foundations; making use of the fiction of a construction as a support for the ego.

### The S-A axis

It is by means of speaking that a certain flexibility was made possible in Mrs. J. making possible the move from a demand to know to the articulation of an ethical question. J. arrives with a demand for meaning, which as such concerns the imaginary. Respecting this, and the analyst being warned of the complications that this would entail, he opts for the symbolic axis. This is how he collects from the signifiers of J. not the question about meaning *but the question about decision*: if it is worth continuing to force her daughter to do what she wanted for her. The cut comes into play at that single moment in the entire session where there is a choice to be made, there where in Mrs J’s history “there was no choice”. Without that cut the question might have passed into oblivion, without effect.

This tactic shows us how the passage from the imaginary to the symbolic has the consequence of moving from J.’s ontological question (of why her daughter did not turn out to be what she had tried so hard to be, so as not to be like her parents) to a deontological question. A movement that makes us think of Bentham and his conception of utility not as a being but as an ethic. Indeed, at that moment for J. *the decision is more useful than the meaning*. However, this is not without problems: faced with an unwarranted new ethical question, something from the hole reappears where ‘abandonment’ takes the value of a meaning that cannot be dialectically articulated. Faced with such a hole, there came the need for a construction that would support it.

### The support of the ego

The analyst holds J. making an “imaginary crutch” (LACAN, 1955/1984, p. 292), using a construction which, as the ego and as delirium, is nothing but a fiction: perhaps leaving her daughter the choice of calling her back (or not). The ethical question goes from the mother to the daughter this time, where if her daughter may be the one who decides whether to abandon her or not (from her interpretation), it is in any case she, the mother, who decides not to abandon, and in particular, the one that decides to let her choose. As in the case of J., it is neither about pursuing nor about abandoning (two elements that are repeated in her life), but about alternating opening and closing. A kind of staging of a *fort-da* that perhaps was not inscribed. The enigma was not blocked, but the perplexity was outlined with a fiction that allows alternation. This alternation makes possible a certain flexibility, extremely difficult for this subjectivity, where it can be sheltered from the real that torments her: to be abandoned, to abandon.

## LAST CONCLUSIONS

These two interventions did not eliminate or de-centred J.’s strong ego, but they did find a possible articulation within her rigidity, without touching that fiction to which she clings so much, what she calls “my path” which is “360 degrees the ideal my parents”. This path of hers is still in place at the time when I point out that she has made a world as she wanted it, in which with her partner they do DIY every weekend. This DIY names something of a permanent manufacture, which allows that strong ego not to be finished in a definitive way, but to remain in a certain state of becoming<sup>3</sup>. The possibility of a discrete flexibility within her strong ego (largely similar to that of the post-analytic paranoia indicated by Lacan) was in this encounter possible through the S-A axis, in the logical relationships between the signifiers of her discourse, which made possible not to add more interpretive knowledge than she already had invested (and which was beginning to torment her) but a decision,

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<sup>3</sup> Being French-speaker, J. uses the word bricolage, here translated as DIY. Bricolage has many resonances in Lacan’s work, and in Jacques-Alain Miller’s lectures about Lacan and the sinthome. See MILLER, pièces détachées, lesson of the 11/17/2004.

and a construction that allows a pseudo dialectical movement.

This case shows how the theory of Freud and Lacan has the conceptual tools for a flexible and versatile clinical practice. Although both hold a practice of de-centring the ego, this rather translates into an analyst aware of the fictitious condition of it. In other words, the theoretical-clinical orientation in the case of J. shows how the analyst can bypass the ego, on the condition that one make use of it.

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