

HOW CAN LOVE FOR AN OTHER EXIST?¹

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1. It is a paradox. Precisely because initially psychoanalysis gave sexuality and love an absolutely central role, it is actually extremely difficult for a psychoanalyst to talk about love. This because, for Freud, love – as distinct from Eros, from desire, drives – essentially does not exist. In any case, whether it exists or not, we often talk about it. Because, as Lacan points out, ‘to speak of love is in itself a *jouissance*’ (Lacan, S20: 77²). French film director François Truffaut said ‘If they told me that 99% of all films talk about love, I would still say we need more.’ We are insatiable devourers of love discourses. And the question will then be: what relation is there between *jouissance* and love? In other words, why do we enjoy when we talk about love? I would also add that in Western societies love discourses give pleasure to women more than they do to men. When I ask students of various levels ‘What topic relevant to psychoanalysis shall we talk about next time?’, in the vast majority of cases it is the women who suggest ‘Let’s talk about feminine sexuality... about sexuality... about love’. A sign that sexuality and love are something more problematic for a woman than for a man, in the sense that they give her more *jouissance*. One should ask why.

In the meantime, what extension do we give to the meaning of the word love? The ancient Greeks distinguished between *eros*, erotic desire, and *philia*, which translates as friendship, the non-sensual aspect of love. For Aristotle one should have feelings of *eros* towards one’s wife, but also of *philia*, the loving friendship beyond sexual desire and pleasure. So, for centuries the problem has been: what relationships are there between *eros* and *philia*?

In one of his writings, Freud dealt with cases, at the time only of men, where *eros* and *philia* were entirely separate³: men who cannot have sex with the woman they love and value, but only

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² Quotation from the French original, Lacan, J. (1975). *Le Séminaire, livre XX. Encore*. Paris: Seuil.

³ ‘On the most common degenerations of love life’, 1912, SE, 6; GW, 8.

with women they do not love, with women they actually find quite despicable, such as prostitutes. Tenderness and sensuality – *zärtliche* and *sinnliche* as Freud says – do not intersect. Each epoch weaves the relationships between *eros* and *philia* in its own way. For example, up to about twenty-thirty years ago in English and Italian to talk about coitus one would say ‘to make love’, ‘*fare all’amore*’. Today, to talk about sexual intercourse, we say ‘to have sex’, ‘*far sesso*’. I have heard that something similar has occurred in the Russian language too: from *zanimat’sja ljubov’u* (make love) to *zanimat’sja sexom* (have sex). As if wanting to make things clear: one thing is sexual intercourse, another is a love relationship. Today *eros* and *philia* would seem to connect in a much more problematic way than only 20 or 30 years ago. And what to say of the love that excludes sexuality? (But for Freud it does not exclude it at all). Of the love for one’s kin, for one’s friends, one’s pets? Which of these forms of love, and what other forms still, can become a model or paradigm of the others? For example, some have confessed to me that the life of certain animals is more important to them than the life of human beings. They love their dogs as if they were their own children, and these people usually do not have children. It seems clear to me that the love for the dog transfers onto the animal our parental love for a child (with the difference, as Freud noted, that love for dogs – in contrast to love for one’s children – is not ambivalent. In fact, dogs are almost perfect kids: they almost always obey us). While the love we bear for cats seems to inherit what Winnicott analysed as transitional phenomenon: the cat gives life to the cuddly toy or teddy bear that can be essential to the development of a child. A cat is an animated cuddly toy.

2. Here I shall deal with the kind of love somehow connected to Eros, to conjugal love. Freud did not think that conjugal love – *philia* – was in any way primary, he did not believe it was a datum that could not be further analyzed. For Freud, what is primary – what explains without requiring to be explained – are drives, libido, *die Lust*. Now, for Freud love is never entirely true, as every love is reducible to two different types of relationship: either to narcissistic love, or to ‘leaning attachment’. Love as leaning attachment (*Anlehnungstypus*) has been called anaclitic in English, using a Greek term unintelligible to most: I prefer leaning attachment.

Narcissistic love is love not for ourselves, but for our mirror image. It is love for the ideal image of ourselves. There is a leaning attachment when we fall in love with a substitute of our suckler, of she who fed and took care of us and thanks to whom we survived as infants. Freud – who wanted to grow up to be a scientist – was basically a reductionist, if by reductionism we mean to say something like ‘love is nothing other than...’ For example, for biological reductionists,

sexual love is nothing other than a particular interaction between neurotransmitters. When we fall in love, when we are, in other words, erotically attracted to someone else, in our brain dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin prevail; when the affection stabilises, when we marry and perhaps have kids, the action of oxytocin and vasopressin prevails. As clear as day, right? This is not merely neurological academia. I think the day is not too far away when, if for a woman it is no longer convenient to be in love with an inappropriate man, because he is a womaniser or because he is poor, for example, she will have the opportunity of having her oxytocin or serotonin levels drastically reduced and stop loving him. To say that a complex feeling like love is ‘nothing other than ...’ means excluding that there may be something other than the components such a feeling can be reduced to. Now, a part of psychoanalysis – and Lacan belongs to this part – attempts to say what this ‘nothing other than’ that love is really is. That is, it tries to say what love is as other from what it simply ‘is’. Indeed, Lacan gives a name to this other which is nothing: he calls it Other (with a capital O). First of all in the sense that the Other – Lacan says – does not exist. For example, the Audience I am talking to now does not exist. Of course, you exist as individuals who are listening to me right now, but the Audience you limit yourselves to incarnating does not exist. Completely different people could have been here instead, and it would still have been an Audience. An Audience can only exist in those allegories painted centuries ago: Truth, Modesty, Temperance, and so on. In other words, the Audience is the Other – capital O – from which I, the speaker, take my signifiers. And for Lacan I am a slashed S $\$$, a subject who wishes to speak to an audience. But were there not an Other – the Audience – I would say nothing, because ultimately it is always you, the Audience (the Other), who supplies me, slashed S $\$$, with what I must say. Significantly, the writers of the ancient world said they were inspired by the Muses: it is the Other who always dictates to us what we should say. Me too, I don’t think I’m inventing too much now: I am talking because I am listening to...

I am using Lacanian terms, because my friends from Saint Petersburg have asked me to talk about what Jacques Lacan says about this ‘nothing other than’ of love, in particular in *Seminar XX, Encore* (1972-3). An arduous, almost desperate, enterprise. In fact, I am one of those who believes that Lacan’s thought cannot be explained, therefore it cannot be summarised in the same way as one might explain a very intricate scientific theory. Because Lacan always produces more than anyone of us can explain or understand of his thought. He actually said himself that he published his *Ecrits* not to be understood, but to be read. Trying to explain everything Lacan said, or wanted to say, is an enterprise doomed to failure, like trying to explain everything that

Dante wrote in the *Divine Comedy*, or Nietzsche in his works, or Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*! Lacan overwhelms us like volcanic lava, even if it is a lava of signifiers. Somebody thinks that Lacan's thought is a system, but in fact it is a volcano. In other words, we are attracted to Lacan because he is animated by what Claude Lévi-Strauss called a plethora of signifiers. So, don't expect me to finally explain to you what Lacan said about love, because I could actually prove to you that Lacan thought nothing definitive or precise about love. Lacan raises a series of questions, some of which are acute indeed, but he does not supply a battery of answers. I shall therefore talk about questions he puts to himself, not his answers.

3. We said that Freud dealt with the object relation, not with love. In other words, he tended to reduce the beloved to the objects – narcissistic ones or the 'leaning attachments' – we become involved with. Lacan, on the other hand, distinguishes between love and what he calls *jouissance*, enjoyment, sexual enjoyment in particular, but not only. Now, his essential sentence is: 'love aims at Being' (S20: 40). Being is obviously the being of the person we love. Then he says that not only love, but hate too, somehow captures the other's being. And this because Lacan, as a psychoanalyst, believes that love is inseparable from hate. Even if I think I love someone without a shadow of hatred, with no ambivalence, for psychoanalysis I always have a reserve of hatred, in the same way as the outside of a glove must necessarily include an inside that cannot be seen. Love and hate are two sides of the same glove, which Lacan – with a pun – calls *Hainamoration* from *haine* (hatred) and *énamoration* (falling in love). We could translate it as 'hating in love' (rather than falling in love).

We can see clearly this lapel of frenetic hatred when loving couples separate or divorce! We know how many lawyers make a living thanks to this *hainamoration*. In what sense does love then aim at being? It's something we all know, when we say to someone 'I love you', we don't simply mean the set of agreeable, lovable objects that go to make up this loved one. Even though a scientific analysis – analysis means to untie, to separate, to fragment – of the feeling of love would still lead to certain crucial lovable objects and to their specific combination in the loved one – and there would be nothing other than these lovable objects. Let's assume that thanks to a careful analysis I find that I love the woman I'm with essentially because she's dark-haired, because she has a sense of humour and because she's a Lacanian; or rather, I love that specific combination of those traits in her. But if this woman's hair, as she grows old, turns grey and if she turns sour, losing her sense of humour and interest in Lacan, my love could fade away. So, did I really love this woman? Did I love what she was, or what she had?

It happens, therefore, that we ask our lover ‘why do you love me?’ or ‘what do you love about me?’ And we all know that the only satisfying answer would be: ‘I love you because you exist!’ It is in this sense that Lacan says ‘love aims at being’. But the point is: does it reach (achieve) this?

It means that in love my loved one counts for me as something per se and in itself, simply because it’s precisely him or her, not just as my loved object. Love is a paradoxical relationship with another being as someone unrelated from the relationship with me.

Now, science does not deal with being. For science we love someone insofar as they are so-and-so. If you believe in science alone, then loving the other’s being is an illusion, because being is itself an illusion. Is what others love about us is just the set of enjoyable objects we contain? And Freud tended to share this opinion that love is an illusion. But does this thing that in love the other is really exist, and that it is in surplus in respect to all the other lovable objects that this other contains?

4. People once said that love is eternal. Indeed, Lacan, in the Seminar of 16 January 1973, raised the question of the relationship between love and eternity. And he seemed to conclude that love is something contingent, hence not eternal. In other words, we don’t love each other because there is a God who loves us eternally. We can instead say, with a well-known Italian comedian, ‘love is eternal as long as it lasts’. I think this is also the focal sense of most Woody Allen films. He describes the birth of eternal loves, but then from one eternal love we always move on to... yet another eternal love. Eternal shifting.

In our metaphysical and religious tradition it is said that we love not so much the other’s body but rather her soul. Lacan therefore asks himself: ‘What is the soul?’ Analysts talk about the soul using the Greek word *psyche* – which they identify with the Ego or the Self or the subject. What then do we really mean by ‘soul’ when we incautiously use this word? The conclusion Lacan comes to, paradoxical as always with him, is that we call soul precisely what we love in the other. To make it clearer, he coins a neologism, *âmer* (to soullove) a term combining *âme* (soul) and *aimer* (to love).

We could conjugate this verb: I soulove, you soulove, it souloves.... This is just one of the many puns Lacan indulges in. But what it means, in my opinion, is this: we cannot say that what we love in the loved one is her soul. On the contrary, it is love that gives a sense of some sort to our concept of soul; we call the soul this something we claim to love in the other. We have a soul because somebody loves us. And, indeed, if we are no longer loved we may contemplate suicide – having lost our soul, we wish to part with our body too. In fact, Lacan also tries to tell us what is essential in this soul that exists as long as one is loved. Swept away by the flood of signifiers Lacan overwhelms us with, now and again a pearl stands out. When he says:

... the soul could not be spoken except on the basis of what allows a speaking being—
.....—to bear what is intolerable in its world, which assumes that the soul is foreign to
[this world], in other words, phantasmatic. Which considers the soul to be here—in
other words, in this world—owing only to its patience and courage in confronting it.

S20: 78

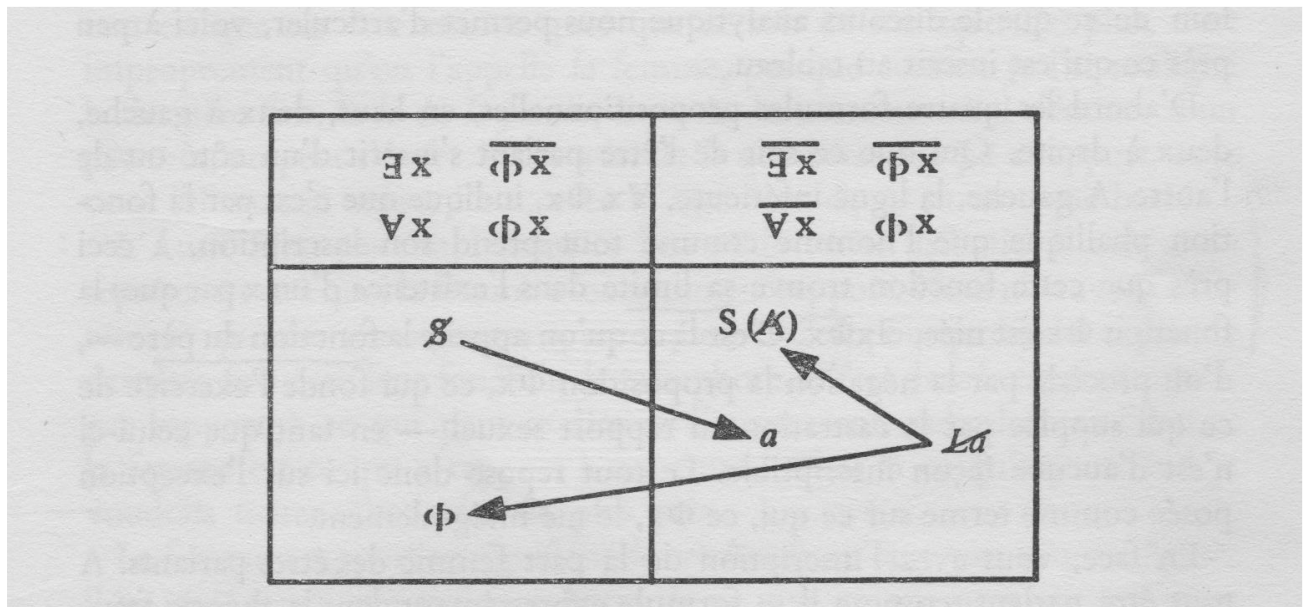
A cryptic sentence, but one from which we can, however, draw a lesson: that the soul is something outside this world – therefore something phantasmatic – which however consists in its ‘patience and courage’ before this world. Essentially, what we love of the other is always his or her patience and courage. I would add: we consider ourselves souls, not only bodies, insofar as we tolerate the intolerable and confront it. For example, for the terminally ill his body becomes intolerable and only morphine, which dulls our soul, makes it bearable; so all that’s left is the courage of the soul, which madly loves he or she who is still at his bedside. We could say, using terms that Lacan does not use, that every soul, which by definition is a loved soul, is this sort of surprising everyday heroism from which every love is fed and finds reassurance in.

5. Lacan tells the essential thing at the very beginning of his lucubration on love. Everything he says afterwards only tries to explain and extend what he says at the beginning: ‘Love is precisely what stands in sexual relationships’ (S20: 44). ‘There is no such thing as a sexual relationship’ is one of Lacan’s most problematic verdicts, as it solicits far more questions than those it answers. What does it mean? And why does he insist on it so much? His idea is that when we ‘have sex’ we do not become One. This even though things sometimes go so well in bed that we have the impression of being, if not One with, at least perfectly complementary to the other. Now, Lacan calls this apparent complementarity ‘phallic *jouissance*’. According to him, in

coitus both women and men find pleasure in the phallus, the former receiving it and the latter giving it. But this phallic *jouissance*, from Lacan's perspective, is a double loneliness. And, in fact, we cannot say 'love is nothing other than having good sex several times'. More is needed – which is not only 'nothing other', as we have seen - to form a loving couple. That 'other' which love is not.

In actual fact, as well as phallic *jouissance*, Lacan sees a more enigmatic *jouissance* which he calls *jouissance* 'of the Other' – objective and subjective genitive. 'Of the Other' means either me enjoying from the Other or the Other taking enjoyment for me. But we shall examine this more closely later. By saying that 'There is no such thing as a sexual relationship,' Lacan obviously does not exclude the fact that we can 'have sex', even in very pleasurable ways. But for him these are sexual acts. What difference is there between sexual relationships (which he thinks are impossible) and sexual acts? I shall not draw on the complex logical and philosophical apparatus Lacan draws heavily on to stuff this difference with meaning. I shall try to tell you what I understood through this apparatus.

6.



In fact, Lacan thinks there can be no sexual relationship because God comes in between man and woman... A god breaks the relationship. We shall see in what sense. Lacan offers us this diagram which you can see on the screen. Let's ignore the logical formulae on the top part of the graph. I would need a lot more time to explain, not so much what they mean, but why Lacan

needs them. The left side inscribes the male position, the right side the female. (Which doesn't, however, mean that all beings with a penis can be situated on the left side and all those with a vagina and ovaries on the right. Some situate themselves in, let's say, anatomically incoherent positions. And not only transgenders. For example, for Lacan the great mystics – the male ones too – can be situated on the female side).

The arrows, which connect the male side to the female and vice versa, as we can see, never intersect. They become juxtaposed, but they do not intersect. Like in bed: men and women juxtapose each other. For Lacan men and women aren't even human subjects of the same type.

The male subject, is slashed S , $\$$ (on the left). The other, the female subject, is slashed La , \cancel{La} , on the right; La is the French feminine definite article, we could also write it as

~~The Woman~~

$\$$ is the subject insofar as it is never reduced to all the signifiers – the tags, some would say – that represent him. For example, my name is Sergio Benvenuto, I'm a scientific researcher for an Institute, I practice as a psychoanalyst, I am talking in Saint Petersburg, and so on and so on. But all these signifiers that represent me say nothing about my being. The real subjective being for Lacan is desiring. As desiring subject I am beyond all the qualifications, images, masks that represent me.

For Lacan those who prefer to be women are subjects only insofar as they exclude themselves from a universality: they are not like all other women. For Lacan feminine subjectivity is a shirking away from Woman as universal category. There is no feminine identity, i.e. no essence of the feminine. And every woman is a subject insofar as she shirks away from this feminine essence. We could say that for Lacan the male subject is he who shirks away from all the masks he wears, the female subject is she who shirks away from the feminine Mask she is supposed to 'be'.

7. Now, the fact is that man, $\$$, when he takes an interest in women, by no means tends to the female subject, but to something Lacan calls object a . For man, woman is an object. It is something many women, and not just feminists, lament, with complaints such as 'for men we

are nothing but pieces of flesh'. This is exactly the way it is. In short, Lacan hints at the fact that men are 'dirty pigs'. Unless they fall in love for a woman. This because, for Lacan, there is a basic amorality in sexuality, despite the fact that societies and religions have sanctified the sexual act, even if essentially because of its reproductive function. For the Catholic Church there is a sacrament called matrimony because the spouses consummate coitus, otherwise no sacrament. Yet, despite all this sanctification, when we have sexual intercourse we wish to hide, we are ashamed, as if it were something to be guilty of. Decency, modesty, is the sign that the sexual act is essentially polymorphously perverse. (Unless we are watching porn, which consists in perversely exploiting the sexual act portraying it as perverse.) For Lacan the male subject is perverse because it aims at what he calls object *a*, from 'autre' (other) with a "small *a*". (In English we would note it as 'object *o*'.) It's 'something other' that attracts men to women. This would seem to invert Freud's theory of love: according to the latter men tend to idealise – even excessively – their beloved woman. Freud was still influenced by the romantic vision of women as angels (for men)? But can we be so sure that object *a* makes the sexual relationship so perverse as it could seem for men? Because this object – the fine piece of flesh woman is – is in turn the mask of an even more fundamental object, something Lacan called

the Thing. Instead, the female subject, ~~la~~, aims at the Phallus. But, as we can see in the graph, this Phallus has no connection to the male subject. It is underneath the subject, it dangles underneath, but does not define it. One could say: but men are often proud of their penises; and above all they are proud of the fact that their penises give enjoyment to women. But here we are talking about penises, not the Phallus. Every man can believe, if he wishes, that all women are after penises, but in actual fact, in her unconscious – Lacan says – a woman seeks the Phallus, which is a signifier which man lacks. (I would say that, instead, male homosexuals are magnetised by other men's penises, which are their object *a*. Male homosexuals shirk away from the Phallus). The point is that women's sexual enjoyment is far more complicated than men's. Women have a relationship not only with the Phallus, but also

with something that is on the side of the feminine. Lacan calls this: **S (A)**. Technically we say: *signifier of lack in the Other*. But what does this mean? Lacan means something

enormous: that in love every woman has a relationship with God. She dribbles the poor **\$** and aims directly at God.

In fact, the great Other, with a capital A or O – and Lacan clearly says so – is another way of saying God. Earlier I spoke about the Other as Audience: obviously, for the speaker the Audience is God.

So, for Lacan the female position in love is a mystical one: in other words, in that poor wretch her man is, a guy lacking in courage and patience, a woman believes she found God. (Of course we are talking about a woman's unconscious). In love, being women, according to Lacan, means enjoying the Other, and this Other may even be divine. Of course, a sexual relationship is quite difficult when you've got a perverted pig on one side and a poor wretched woman who is trying to become God's lover on the other!

Lacan gives us the example of a character in the Plautus comedy *Amphitryon*: Alcmena, the wife of the general Amphitryon. She has sex with Jupiter thinking she is having it with her husband, as Jupiter has taken on the guise of the cuckold general. The fact is that every woman actually sees a Jupiter behind her man. This enjoyment is not only related to love, but it is sexual too. Lacan would seem to subscribe to the maxim 'a man loves a woman because he desires her, a woman desires a man because she loves him'. In women, love is primary to sexual desire, because sexuality is a consequence of having found her god. To somehow simplify the Lacanian plethora or lava, we could say that in the sexual act man seeks in woman the object which is the cause of his desire; the thing that makes him horny, to put it vulgarly. As for woman, on the one hand she seeks in man what he is ultimately lacking, i.e. the phallus, and on the other she seeks a divine relationship with a man. There's a language confusion between men and women. But despite this confusion, all this is enough to procreate. Lacan goes as far as saying that if we have an idea of a god of some sort, it is thanks to the fact that women take *jouissance* from such a god. Before he had said the soul is only what is loved by the other, it is not pre-existent to love. In the same way we could say that for Lacan God is only that which a woman takes enjoyment from, and is not pre-existent to this enjoyment. Obviously from this we can gather that Lacan is a complete atheist, or, quite the opposite, that he believes in God so much to the extent that he has made him the *deus ex machina* of the sexual act.

8. Now, for Lacan the relationship between man and woman has to do with something he calls 'knowledge'. He is not referring to conscious knowledge, to what we learn at school, but to unconscious knowledge. For Lacan our unconscious knows. In fact, when something very important emerges in analysis, the subject often adds, 'ultimately it's something I've always

known'. Our unconscious knows more than we do. But, concerning women, for Lacan we are faced with things she does not herself know, and that we shall never know. One of these things is the enjoyment of the Other, which we have already mentioned. The other thing is love.

Lacan is struck by the fact that women, even when great writers, cannot really describe their orgasms, what he calls 'feminine *jouissance*'. They experience an enjoyment they know nothing about, to the point of saying: 'it's *nothing other than* clitoral pleasure...' Today there is a general agreement that orgasm is *nothing other than* clitoral, i.e. an orgasm similar to the phallic (as the clitoris is a miniature penis). Yet women often describe far more complex sensations. Françoise Dolto, who was a friend of Lacan's and also was a woman, distinguished between no less than four types of orgasm:

- The clitoral
- The clitoral vulval orgasm
- The vaginal
- The utero adnexal, an orgasm women never speak about, but yet exists. It is the type of orgasm women experience, but know nothing about. In other words, of feminine orgasm we cannot say 'it is nothing other than... clitoral'. Because there is always an... other enjoyment. Which is nothing, *no thing*? In fact, the debate among women themselves on the various types of feminine orgasm marks an important point for Lacan: that woman cannot 'speak about' her enjoyment, which remains ineffable to herself.

To illustrate non-phallic feminine pleasure, Lacan cites a famous sculpture by Bernini, the Ecstasy of Saint Teresa (in the church Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome). According to positivist mentality, what Bernini shows us here metaphorically is a 'having sex'. The angel instead of a young handsome lover, and the arrow instead of the penis. As for Saint Teresa, she really does seem to be having an orgasm. Is it not so? But this is not Lacan's point of view. According to the latter, the sculptor, by using phallic metaphors, wants to allude to a mystical pleasure, which for Lacan is not a prerogative of mystics alone. Except that, it being a mystic enjoyment, we can know nothing about it. It's like what's inside a black hole: it exists, of course, but we can know nothing about it. Of love too we can know nothing. We've said that real love – if it existed – would be a love for the being of the other, due to the fact that the other 'is', not for the fine objects he or she 'has' or is. It's true that we could give up our life for a

loved one, because it's her or his being that has to be safeguarded. But is loving really to love this being?

Lacan does not give a clear answer, because on the one hand he says that love is a *semblant*, a semblance. It is true that loving is to love the other's existence, but the being of the loved other does not really exist, because (on the one hand) she or he is the *Other*, an (on the other) she or he is the object *a*. The loved one always oscillates between being a God and being a piece of flesh, so, is she or he nothing other than... this? This question remains suspended. In short, we can feel love, but we can know nothing about it. Probably love invests what Lacan, in an earlier seminar (*The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*), called the Thing, *la chose* (*das Ding* in German). The Thing is not just any object of desire, it is something that magnetises our existence. It is that 'nothing other than' that remains once we have set aside all the objects that allow a phallic pleasure. It is something It has to do with the uniqueness of the loved one. The subject loves, as well as object *a*, the Thing, which is always unique. The loved one, as we know, is (seems?) irreplaceable.

Because the uniqueness of the individual is something that language cannot tell about, never. Language always generalises, it cannot speak about the individual. We can of course give a name to an individual, I was given the name Sergio Benvenuto, someone else was given the name Anton Chekov, but Sergio Benvenuto or Anton Chekov are identification tags that say nothing about those uniquenesses that Sergio Benvenuto or Anton Chekov are. Of these two individuals we can only tell generalisable facts; for example that Chekov was a writer, but there are plenty of other writers too. Language cannot tell about the unique, which is precisely what seems to catalyse our love.

9. I would like to conclude with a love story from a 1948 Italian film by two famous filmmakers, Rossellini and Fellini, appropriately called *L'amore* (Love), more precisely the episode "The Miracle" of this movie. Something between Love and Miracle. The heroine is one of the most popular actresses of the time, Anna Magnani: she plays the village fool, a sea village on the Amalfi Coast, one of the most dazzling places in the world. Magnani meets a bearded vagabond and believes he is Saint Joseph. The latter gets her drunk and takes advantage of her sleeping to impregnate her. Her fellow villagers taunt her for this pregnancy: not only is she a fool, she is also promiscuous, a slut. As for her, she believes she has been miraculously made

pregnant by a new Christ. Abandoned by everyone, she lives in caves and gives birth alone, while attempting to climb towards the village church, which is empty.

It is a story of madness, but I wonder whether for Lacan this madwoman would not allegorise a sentiment common to all women. An unconscious conviction of having been enjoyed by God, and that their offspring are ultimately something of a miracle. Here we find a total breakaway between the heroine and her social environment. But, according to Freud's theory, the model of every kind of couple love is Romeo and Juliet: in short, a couple always implies a breakaway from social relations (in the case of Romeo and Juliet: of conflictual social relations). The state protects the family, but the love that generates the latter is always a transgression, a death threat for society. Sex love is a crisis of the Polis. In this film Anna Magnani hyperbolises the dis-social, even mystical, character of every love. That is why she is mad. But one wonders whether this alienness to the City that madness implies doesn't actually make a sort of solitary dimension of feminine sexuality emerge, a solitude always suspended between the miracle of maternity and the fraud of sex.