

## SEXUATION AS A SOPHISM: CONTINGENCY IN THE CHOICE OF A SEXED POSITION

Vinícius Moreira Lima<sup>1,2</sup>, Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4253-8154>  
Heloísa Bedê<sup>1,3</sup>, Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7631-8224>  
Ângela Vorcaro<sup>1,4</sup>, Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6538-8646>

**ABSTRACT.** This work proposes a re-reading of the Freudian article of 1925 named ‘Some psychological consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes’, following the path opened by Lacan with his theory of sexualization. In Freud’s text, there seems to be an implicit temporal proposition about the assumption of the sexed position, which leads to an Oedipal schematism that does not always account for the singularity of sexualization beyond its normative arrangements. Thus, we raise the question: can the sophism of the three prisoners – by the differential introduction of the time for ‘seeing’, ‘understanding’, and ‘concluding’ – help us to deliver a non-normative reading of the body in the process of sexualization? Branching out this question, we will discuss the importance of maintaining, with Lacan, an acute and precise differentiation between the phallus and the penis and between sexual difference and the anatomical distinction between the sexes. Finally, we conclude by pointing to the limits of the Oedipal norm to predict or determine what will be made of the subject, since, by considering the Other as barred – and not a complete system of domination –, a space of contingency is opened, revealing for each one the unconscious choice of their sexed position.

**Keywords:** Sexualization; contingency; phallus.

## DA SEXUAÇÃO COMO SOFISMA: A CONTINGÊNCIA NA ESCOLHA DA POSIÇÃO SEXUADA

**RESUMO.** Este trabalho propõe uma releitura do artigo freudiano de 1925 sobre ‘Algumas consequências psíquicas da distinção anatômica entre os sexos’, seguindo a via aberta por Lacan com sua teoria da sexualização. No texto de Freud, parece haver uma proposição temporal de fundo acerca da assunção da posição sexuada, que acaba levando a um esquematismo edípiano que nem sempre dá conta da singularidade da sexualização para além dos seus arranjos normativos. Partindo daí, pode o sofisma dos três prisioneiros – pela introdução diferencial dos tempos de ‘ver’, ‘compreender’ e ‘concluir’ – auxiliar numa leitura não normativa do corpo no processo de sexualização? Desdobrando essa questão, discutiremos a importância de sustentar, com Lacan, uma diferenciação aguda e precisa entre o falo e o pênis, bem como entre a diferença sexual e a distinção anatômica entre os sexos. Concluímos apontando para os limites da norma edípiana para prever ou determinar o que será do sujeito, uma vez que, sendo o Outro barrado (e não um sistema completo de dominação), abre-se o espaço da contingência em que se revela, para cada

<sup>1</sup> Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Belo Horizonte-MG, Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> E-mail: [vmlima6@gmail.com](mailto:vmlima6@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Email: [heloisabede@gmail.com](mailto:heloisabede@gmail.com)

<sup>4</sup> Email: [angelavorcaro@uol.com.br](mailto:angelavorcaro@uol.com.br)



um, a escolha inconsciente de sua posição sexuada.

**Palavras-chave:** Sexualidade; contingência; falo.

## LA SEXUACIÓN COMO SOFISMA: LA CONTINGENCIA EN LA ELECCIÓN DE UNA POSICIÓN SEXUADA

**RESUMEN.** Este trabajo propone una relectura del artículo freudiano de 1925 sobre ‘Algunas consecuencias psíquicas de la distinción anatómica entre los sexos’ siguiendo la vía abierta por Lacan con su teoría de la sexuación. En el texto de Freud, parece haber una proposición temporal de fondo acerca de la asunción de la posición sexuada, que acaba llevando a un esquematismo edípico que ni siempre da cuenta de la singularidad de la sexuación más allá de sus arreglos normativos. A partir de ahí, ¿puede el sofisma de los tres prisioneros – por la introducción diferencial de los tiempos de ‘ver’, ‘comprender’ y ‘concluir’ – auxiliar en una lectura no normativa del cuerpo en el proceso de sexuación? Al desdoblar esta cuestión, discutiremos la importancia de sostener, con Lacan, una diferenciación aguda y precisa entre el falo y el pene, así como entre la diferencia sexual y la distinción anatómica entre los sexos. Concluimos apuntando a los límites de la norma edípica para prever o determinar lo que será del sujeto, en la medida en que, siendo el Otro barrado y no un sistema completo de dominación, se abre el espacio de la contingencia en que se revela, para cada uno, la elección inconsciente de su posición sexuada.

**Palabras clave:** Sexualidad; contingencia; falo.

### Introduction

In starting his text on ‘Some psychic consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes’, Freud (2018b) gives us a warning about the specific situation in which he found himself in his life. If, as a young man, the Viennese sought to keep his works for a few years to wait for their confirmation or rectification and then publish them, in 1925, almost a septuagenarian, he no longer had the same time horizon that would allow him to keep with himself, at least for the time he deemed necessary, the news he thought to discover. In this context, it is a work written under a particular hurry to conclude, depending on the author’s shortened life span. Thus, the argument of the text draws on what Freud was able to extract from his clinic, with the tools at his disposal at that moment and from the forms of subjectivation that reached his practice.

Almost a hundred years later, this Freudian text still finds its echo in our ways of life. However, the profound social transformations that occurred during the second half of the twentieth century (which we will take here for their consequences in the gender and sexuality fields) have given visibility to different forms of subjective presentation that challenge the Oedipal norm of tradition, according to which the boy must identify himself with the father and the girl must become a mother. Challenging these standard solutions, we have witnessed the proliferation and progressive public appearance of transsexuals and transvestites, drag queens, as well as of figures such as the ‘feminized fag’, the ‘phallicized dyke’ (Butler, 1993), among so many others that were previously only intended for silence, death, and oblivion.

Such mutations call for psychoanalysis to open itself to the listening of the suffering linked to non-normative forms of life, refractory to the heterosexual solution proposed by the traditional Oedipus plot. This is, for example, the invitation that Judith Butler (2004) offers us throughout her work, in which the debate with psychoanalytic theory stems from a fundamental question that we could risk formulating in the following way: how can psychoanalysis contribute to thinking contemporary forms of subjective presentation beyond the heterosexual norm? Thus, at the dawn of the 21st century, the urgency of the suffering linked to non-normative forms of subjectivation requires us the precipitation of more decanted constructions of the process of sexuation.

However, if the moment asks us to hurry, it is necessary to insert the dimension of time for understanding in this debate so that, through a renewed appreciation of the times of sexuation, a theoretical-clinical proposition of this process is possible, focusing on the singularity of subjective constitution. Moreover, this displacement will require an acute and precise explanation of the difference between phallus and penis, a differentiation that Freud, even though he has indicated it, does not seem to have been able to sustain it until its last consequences, by letting himself rely on, at certain moments, by the norm of his own time, which he tried to eternalize by figuring it in the Oedipus complex.

Still, it is not a question of discarding Freud but of taking a step ahead where he held himself back. After all, the Viennese knew the Oedipal issues he described were just the typical solutions: "I do not want to say that this typicality is the only possible one. Variations in the temporal sequence and the chain of these processes will have to be especially important for the development of the individual" (Freud, 2018a, p. 254). How can Lacan's work help us to think about these 'variations' of the subjective constitution beyond the heterosexual norm?

### **Considerations about the phallus in Lacanian sexuation**

In the history of psychoanalysis, there may be no more significant controversy than that surrounding the theme of the phallus. More recently, J. Butler (2015) made a decisive criticism to the way that this theoretical operator in Lacan seems to function as a maintainer of a heterosexual order, by forcing men to re-enact the comic failure of the virile position of 'having the phallus', and women, the feminine position of 'being the phallus'. According to the philosopher, in line with the feminist reading tradition from which she starts, there would be no scope for a critical subversion of these positions in the Lacanian scheme, constituting a kind of religious idealization of the heterosexual norm. Starting from questions like this, we will try to branch out some ways of reading the phallic operator beyond its normative function.

In a writing dedicated to the signification of the phallus, Lacan (1998b) locates the aporia implicated in the phallic function as the nucleus of castration which, if taken at the biological level, is insoluble and mythical. Despite its transmutations, its importance is the position it marks in the subject's structure. For Lacan (1998b), the phallus is not a fantasy of logical copulation, nor a partial object that would apprehend something from the sexual real and even less the organ, whose image would transmit the generation. Insofar as the speaker enters the signifier game of displacement and condensation that language assigns him/her, the phallus is the signifier intended to designate the effects of meanings as a whole, but only by barring the subject from access to the unconscious meaning in which he/she settles down as a lack of being.

A privileged signifier of this mark, where part of the *logos* is linked to the event of desire, it is only veiled the phallus exercises its role as a sign of the latency by which all

the significance is reached. Lacan (1998b) uses the phallus as an algorithm that indicates the 'reason' experienced by the subject of the opaque desire of the Other which must be recognized. Having the effect of projecting entirely into the comedy the ideal manifestations of each sex, the relations between the sexes are concentrated around a 'being' and a 'having', linked to the phallic signifier, which, under the intervention of a 'seeming' that replaces a 'having', gives the subject an appearance of reality (having the phallus) and unrealizes the relationships to be signified, as it is 'impossible to be it'. However, with this privileged signifier, the subject - man or woman - protects himself/herself and masks his/her lack.

Even so, since that moment in Lacan's work, it is necessary to observe that such relation of the subject with the phallus is established "[...] without regard to the anatomical difference between the sexes" (Lacan, 1998b, p. 693). Such sentence calls us to investigate how anatomy becomes framed by the phallic signifier, as it is a trivial clinical finding the fact that there are men who do not align themselves with the phallic 'having' and women who are not guided by the ideal of 'being' the phallus<sup>3</sup>. In our reading, we can articulate this finding to the Lacanian writing of the  $S(\mathcal{A})$  and the differentiation between imaginary and symbolic phallus (the latter being later raised to the status of the phallic function). In our view, such articulation derives from a 'beyond Oedipus' that Lacan has developed in his theory since the late 1950s, but whose consequences still do not seem to have been sufficiently explored to think about non-normative forms of subjectivation.

At the time of Seminar 3, Lacan (1988) read the phallus and the question of sexual difference through the symbolic, taken at that moment as the alternation of the presence-absence binary. The attributive distinction of having or not the phallic appendix is the factor that produces a differential entry into the symbolic order, stemming from the interpretation of the Other on the subject's anatomy. Thus, the designations arising from the Oedipus complex invite the speaking being to position himself as a man, in the case of the penis presence, and as a woman, in its absence. At that moment, the phallus is considered an imaginary object that, in the Oedipal crossing, is taken on its symbolic, signifier value. Thus, if thought strictly by this Oedipal grid, the symbolic becomes the destiny, as suggested by Butler's (2015) criticism.

However, what will become more evident as Lacan advances his reading is that the destiny of anatomy depends on how the subject positions himself/herself with the imaginary of his body concerning the symbolic phallus. The sexed position depends on how the subject invests the bodily imaginary or how the subject imaginarizes the body he/she has, stemming from the incidence - not only from social norms but especially - of the desire of the Other in his/her constitution. It is this opaque and enigmatic desire arising from the Other, written by Lacan (2016a) in Seminar 6 with his  $S(\mathcal{A})$ , that uncompletes the determinations arising from social norms and normative structures of heterosexual kinship.

Henceforth, the Oedipus complex can no longer be taken as a consistent structure or a kind of symbolic destiny that would produce subjection [*assujétissement*] without leftovers. In contrast, it turns out that the Oedipal norm transmitted by the Other of tradition reveals itself unable to completely regulate the subject, who will respond to social injunctions based on how the unconscious desire of the Other affected his/her body. This

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<sup>3</sup> Butler (1993 p. 103, author emphasis) realizes the complexity of the subject's relations with the phallus, by listing a series of subjective possibilities of jouissance not sufficiently described in Lacan's works: " [...] men wishing to 'be' the phallus for other men, women wishing to 'have' the phallus for other women, women wishing to 'be' the phallus for other women, men wishing both to have and to be the phallus for other men [...], men wishing to 'be' the phallus for a woman who 'has' it, women wishing to 'have it' for a man who 'is' it".

conception opens the way for a differentiation between the symbolic phallus  $[\Phi]$  and the imaginary phallus  $[\varphi]$ , which Lacan points out in Seminar 8.

In this Seminar, the psychoanalyst considers that “[...] the minus *phi*  $[\varphi]$  designates the imaginary phallus as being concretely interested in the psychic economy [...]”, due to the child questioning about the presence or absence of the organ, “[...] where the neurotic experiences it in a way that represents his particular mode of operating and maneuvering with this radical difficulty [...]” that constitutes the ‘*Phi* symbol’, that is, the symbolic phallus  $[\Phi]$  (Lacan, 2010, p. 293). Thereby,  $\varphi$  seems to constitute a neurotic resource to deal with the difficulty of  $\Phi$ , the symbolic phallus that guides the enigma of the desire of the Other.

Thus, the subject’s unspeakable relationship with the ‘pure signifier of desire’  $[\Phi]$  comes to project itself “[...] on the localized, precise organ, situated somewhere in the body. Hence this properly imaginary conflict, which consists of seeing itself as private, or not private, of this appendix” (Lacan, 2010, p. 303-304). Faced with the enigma of *Che vuoi?*, the subject can resort to the bodily imaginary to locate in the presence or absence of the penis something that guides him/her in his/her sexed position. In this manner, the imaginary phallus will concern the body’s subjectivation in terms of plus *phi* or minus *phi*,  $(+ \varphi)$  or  $(- \varphi)$ <sup>4</sup>. In contrast, the symbolic phallus will articulate itself with the subjective position of a speaking being in relation to *jouissance*, something that Lacan discusses initially by the being or having the phallus and, later, by the theory of sexualization.

In the early 1970s, Lacan (2008) started to take the phallus not only as a signifier but as a *jouissance* function: it is not an attribute that one has or does not have (which would restrict us to the imaginary dimension of the body), but of a logic of *jouissance* in relation to which the subject must position himself/herself. From Morel (1999), we know that the phallic function is not about having or not having an attribute, but about how the sexual being uses his/her body for enjoyment, regardless of his/her anatomy. In this way, there are effectively two modes of positioning oneself concerning the phallic function: submitting entirely, albeit in a failed way, to the phallic universal, or being in it in a not-all way, sustaining something in *jouissance* that escapes from the phallic norm.

In Lacanian theory of sexualization, we must keep in mind that, if adults make symbolic invitations to children stemming from the imaginary of the body as the Oedipal norm frames it, there is, even so, an unfathomable decision of the subject to accept or not the invitations of the Other, insofar as something from the order of contingency inscribes itself in the unconscious. If it were not so, the Oedipus complex and the big Other would be rendered as too powerful, setting aside the choice of the subject, causing the Symbolic to appear as an  $S(A)$ , an unbarred Other, capable of legislating completely on sexed positions. Consequently, the subjection to the norm would be without leftovers.

In contrast, we find a queer effect on Lacanian sexualization since it expropriates anatomy of the allegedly coherent *jouissance* positions that the heterosexual norm tries to engender. In Lacan’s reading, there is no proper or adequate sexed position to any anatomy: there is always a logical flaw in *jouissance* that makes gender identities, supposedly coherent with a body, always fail in its attempt to order bodily satisfaction. Therefore, within sexualization, what is at stake is the unconscious choice of a position of *jouissance*, which exceeds the determination of social norms.

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<sup>4</sup>This reading finds a late resonance in a speech by Lacan, in which he states: “The imaginary has no other support than this: the fact of having the body and, insofar this body gets rid of phallic *jouissance*, the imaginary takes on consistency. [...] This is the opposition not between zero and one, but between minus one and plus one. As castration operates, that there is minus phallus, the imaginary subsists” (Lacan, 2016c, p. 22).

### **The three prisoners' sophism in Lacan**

Using Lacan's contributions, perhaps we can move towards a non-normative reading of sexuation in order to think about the sexual destinies of the speaking being in the contemporary, seeking to complexify the narrative of these destinies. We take Freud's 1925 text as a starting point about the psychic consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes (Freud, 2018b). As we will try to demonstrate, there seems to be an underlying temporal proposition about the assumption of the sexed position that leads to an Oedipean schematism that does not always account for the singularity of sexuation beyond its normative arrangements.

Branching out this topic, can the three prisoners' sophism - by the differential introduction of the times: 'the instant of the gaze', 'the time for understanding', and 'the moment of conclusion' - help in a non-normative reading of the body in the process of sexuation? Or yet: can this sophism contribute to a temporal location of how anatomy is framed in each one's sexuation, preserving the singularity of this process in its logical relation to the phallus?

In addressing 'The logical time and the assertion of anticipated certainty', Lacan introduces 'the three prisoners' sophism', paradigmatic for us to think about the function of the times: 'the instant of the gaze', 'the time for understanding' and 'the moment of conclusion' in the analytical device. According to Lacan (1998a, p. 199), "[...] every sophism initially presents itself as a logical error [...]", which a direct deduction cannot solve in the same way as the classical logic of syllogism would do it. On the contrary, a sophism is an enigma that leads to an apparent aporia when it comes up against an impossible point that requires the subject to put something of his/her own to solve it.

In Lacan's sophism, we find three prisoners facing an enigma proposed by the prison director. He states that he has three white disks and two black ones, and the proposal is that, among the five disks, each prisoner would have a copy affixed to his back so that he could see the opponents', but not his own. Thus, the challenge is to deduce one's color, and the first prisoner to do so correctly and explain the logic of his discovery will be released from the prison gate.

'The instant of the gaze': With two black disks in front of him, the prisoner can be instantly sure of his disk. It is evident; he was left to be white. The subject can see the others at that moment, but he does not know anything about himself (Quinet, 2017).

'The time for understanding': Having a black and a white disk in front of him, it is up to the prisoner to reflect more about them. It is only by putting himself in the shoes of others that he can think: "[...] if there were two blacks at stake, someone would have already concluded that his disk is white". As this does not happen, there can only be two white and one black disk, so his disk is white. At that time, the subject "[...] believes he can say who he is, but he has no conviction; hesitates and looks at others again and his hesitation articulates itself with theirs" (Coelho, 2006, p. 4).

'The moment of conclusion': Having two white disks in front of himself, nobody concludes. After a while, the three run out of the cell together, saying: 'I am white!'. This is a certainty anticipated by the precipitation of the time for understanding, in which there was still an assumption of knowledge in the Other. If no one knows, the three must be white. They have to conclude quickly to win over their opponents, and this is the function of haste: it invokes the act. The only check to say I 'am white' is the certainty anticipated by haste. It is, however, a provisional certainty, after all, and according to Lacan,

[...] these movements result from the fact that the subject is finite, sexual, incomplete, that is, he is a being of lack and, therefore, as he does not have all sexes, also in the proposed sophism, they do not carry all colors, and they should take responsibility and take risks on their part, affirm their condition of freedom (Coelho, 2006, p. 4).

In conclusion, it is noted that there is no possible logical answer, leaving the subject with the possibility to wager: "I am black!" or "I am white!". However, Coelho (2006) warns us that, even so, it was not the subject who chose the color that was placed on his/her back. This did not initially depend on his choice; therefore, at a certain level, the subject is unable to give an account of himself/herself on his/her own - for that, he/she would need to count, in the same movement, on the Other. With that in mind, we will continue with the question: how could this Lacanian sophism help us to go beyond Freud when reading the problem of sexualization?

### **Freud and the 'Oedipal' consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes**

In his 1925 text, Freud is grappling with the differences in the boy's and the girl's Oedipus complexes. He affirms that after discovering the "[...] genital zone that provides pleasure - penis or clitoris [...]", the child does not make a connection between this childhood masturbation and the investment in Oedipal objects (Freud, 2018b, p. 263). Unlike this idea, which would eventually lead to a kind of object harmony, what happens is a "[...] discovery full of consequences, which is up to the little girl" (p. 264). Thus, there is a break with any development process that could culminate in a successful norm for satisfaction. Freud, here, assigns great importance to the *view* of the anatomical distinction between the sexes, which will produce trauma with no return for the subject.

In the boy's case, when he sees the female genital region for the first time, he is "[...] irresolute and, at first, little interested" (Freud, 2018b, p. 264). He refuses his perception and, only later, "[...] when a threat of castration gains influence over him [...]", that initial view becomes meaningful to him. In an *a posteriori* movement, he will perceive the girl as castrated, and, from now on, he will face the threat of the loss of his organ. Thus, two late reactions are described by Freud: after this process, the boy will have "[...] horror of the mutilated creature or triumphant contempt for her [...]", reactions that can appear together, separated, or mixed with 'other factors' (p. 264).

In this way, the boy articulates the threat of loss of his organ with another loss that the girl would have already suffered (considered as castrated), confusing his penis with the phallus, and thus maintaining hope in a phallic reserve of *jouissance*, to be carefully conserved by narcissistic investment in the organ [(+ φ)]. The price of this psychic strategy would be the degradation of the female object, considered as castrated or absent, while it is only deprived of a penis. In this way, the phallic lack, which is inscribed for both sexes as (-φ), is transposed to the feminine side as if it were exclusive to it, in a masculinist version of sexual difference. This version ends up confusing sexual difference with an anatomical distinction between the sexes.

If, at the instant of the gaze, the boy encounters this anatomical distinction in the imaginary, it is in a second logical moment, the time for understanding, that he will try to make sense of this vision, seeking help in what he inherits from the Other for understanding what is at stake in this impasse. In general, what does the Other disseminate? Starting from the imaginary and normative arrangement of the genders by the 'characteristic type of man and woman', adults initially distinguish children based on

the presence or absence of a penis, which equivocates with the phallus. So, “[...] the little difference - hurrah! – was already there for the parents for some time, and that could affect how the little man and the little woman were treated” (Lacan, 2011, p. 16).

Therefore, the presence of a penis, taken by the Other as a  $(+\phi)$ , is the reason for a series of questions to the child, as Lacan reminds us: “That’s how they say: - ‘Oh, isn’t he a real little man? You can see already he is completely different from a little girl. He is uneasy, inquisitive, isn’t he? Already looking for notice’. In comparison, the little girl is far from resembling him” (Lacan, 2011, p. 16, author emphasis). Faced with the postponement of a response to the initially meaningless view of the anatomical distinction between the sexes, the boy may resort to a belief in the Other of tradition to overcome the limits of his understanding, precipitating himself in a misunderstanding and concluding with the common error of discourse, arising from the sexual theory of children, which effectively confuses penis and phallus. It is worth noting that the Other cannot provide an ultimate guarantee  $[S(A)]$  for this equalization between the organ and the signifier.

That way, the boy can conclude preserving the illusion of having the phallus - in which Lacan introduces a nuance by saying that ‘he is not without having it’ -, at the cost of degradation of the female object, which allows the little man to sustain the imaginary belief that his small organ corresponds to the phallus. However, this imaginary solution, through the deceitful path of  $(+\phi)$ , already comes too late: the phallic signifier  $[\Phi]$  transmitted structurally by language has already made its mark on the body, operating a negativity effect for both sexes and engendering, via castration, a lack of ‘jouissance’ for both the boy and the girl  $[(-\phi)]$ , displaced from the deception of its initial position as the maternal phallus.

Nevertheless, if this negativity effect is structural, in that case, it implies that the belief in  $(+\phi)$  as a sexed conclusion depends on how each one will subjectivate the transmission that comes from the desire of the Other to position himself/herself in the sexual partition. Consequently, the presence of the penis in the body does not need to be assumed as virile power; as Lacan (2008, p. 101) states, “[...] the apparent necessity of the phallic function turns out to be only contingency”. Then, it is necessary to read this choice as contingent, which may or may not take the organ as a legitimate representative of male potency. After all, we cannot neglect that, before that, there is also the dimension of the complete Oedipus linked to bisexuality, which left Freud visibly embarrassed:

The difficulty in understanding arises from the complication that the Oedipus complex, even for the boy, is doubly oriented, active and passive, according to the sexual constitution. The boy also wants to replace the mother as an object of love for the father, which we call the feminine position (Freud, 2018b, p. 261).

However, Freud does not seem to have sufficiently explored the destiny of this feminine position in men, which is often repressed - but always incompletely - in favor of the normative male position in his virile identification with the father. In turn, Lacan provides us elements to move in this direction when he says that the exception, on the male side of sexuation, has consequences ‘for all those who believe they have’ the phallus; that is, it is not just a question of having it, but of ‘believing’ to have it (Lacan, 2016b). There must be a belief in the phallic ‘semblant’ so that this bodily organ is raised to the dimension of exception that inscribes the subject’s body in the all-phallic scope of jouissance.

In this way, it is through a contingency based on a common error that the phallus can be written as an instrument of power for a speaking being, as a belief in a phallic presence that has the appearance of guaranteeing to the subject a portion of his



jouissance  $[(+\phi)]$ . Such contingency is taught to us by cases that escape from this normative rule, as “[...] one is not forced, when one is male, to put oneself [...]” on the male side (Lacan, 2008, p. 81). Some men are on the feminine side as much as women and who, “[...] at the same time, feel very well there. But, in spite, I do not say of his Phallus, despite what hinders them in this regard, they glimpse, they experience the idea that there must be a jouissance that is beyond [...]” the phallus (p. 82), as the example of “[...] gifted people like John of the Cross”.

Thus, due to a contingency, the male organ may not be raised to the place of exception so that its body set does not get closure from the phallic extraction, placing the subject on the side of the not-all and its opening to infinity. So, men could also attend the feminine aspect of jouissance. But ‘what is it that interferes in their way about that?’ Lacan does not provide a clear answer; he restricts himself to pointing out that he does not refer precisely to the phallus. Was he referring, then, to the normative arrangements for sexuation and their invitations to occupy positions of jouissance apparently consistent with a gender? After all, it is the male’s normative assumption (that the penis would be confused with the phallus) that seems to leave men hindered by the phallic commitment of their sex.

Following through, we could even conceive that traditional gender norms convene subjects endowed with penises to align themselves with the masculine side of the boards of sexuation. In contrast, those lacking this anatomical support are invited to place themselves on the feminine side of sexuation. Gender norms thus seem to try to legislate about modes of jouissance, summoning men to an alignment on the male side and constraining women to enjoy through the female side, but trying to refer them totally to the phallus, without wanting to know anything about the  $S(\mathcal{A})$ .

This reading helps us to clarify the normative procedure of sexuation. In the boy's case, from the instant of the gaze at the anatomical distinction between the sexes, a subjective question opens up about his sexed position. In his time for understanding, the young man can resort to the appeal of the Other, which from the beginning marked his care, by considering the girl as castrated, in order to solve the enigma of sexual difference in a normative way, positioning himself as all-phallic. In this arrangement, the equation occurs in the condition of an equivalence between phallus and penis: “I have the penis, the girl does not have it; therefore, she is castrated - and I am phallic”.

This would happen at the price of degradation in the love life, in which the female object is depreciated as inferior, castrated or at fault. Moreover, this strategy, which only works by assuming that the penis is the phallus, would support the virile deceit that the organ would preserve a specific phallic potency  $[(+\phi)]$ . In contrast, the lack would be reserved imaginarily only for the female side  $[(-\phi)]$ . In the meantime, from the standpoint of the symbolic inscription of the phallus, this negativity has already operated for both sexes in the unconscious.

And in the girl’s case? Freud is even more categorical: in comparison with the boy, in the little girl, things work in a different way. “In an instant, she is prepared for her judgment and decision. She saw it, she knows she doesn’t have it and wants to have it” (Freud, 2018b, p. 264). At this point, the Viennese seems to make a leap that goes, without mediation, from the instant of the gaze to the moment of conclusion. A conclusion that, in its univocity, seems to put away the complexity of feminine solutions as it depends on an even stronger belief than that of the boy in a coincidence between phallus and penis. “She perceives the penis, which is noticeably visible and of great proportions from a

brother or a colleague, immediately identifies it as the superior correspondent of her own small and hidden organ and, from there on, falls victim to the envy of the penis" (p. 264).

Thus, without considering the time of understanding, the Freudian reading of the girl assumes conclusions with a phallic scent whose instantaneity (without the time of understanding that precedes the hurry to conclude) could not help but to raise suspicion. After all, this 'noticeably visible and of great proportions penis' could only be articulated to a childish belief in the potency of the male's imaginary phallus [(+φ)]. Such a belief, if further investigated, depends on the contingency of a phallic solution that does not wear out the question of the feminine.

In the 1925 text, Freud even listed a series of consequences of penis envy, which would result from the girl's unequal comparison between her tiny clitoris and a boy's big penis. First, he mentions the masculinity complex (by the girl's refusal of castration, reinforcing the conviction that she has a penis and conducting herself as if she were a man). He also speaks about the recognition of her narcissistic wound, followed by a feeling of inferiority (after overcoming the attempt to explain the lack of penis as a personal punishment and understanding the generality of this sexual characteristic, a woman can begin to adopt the same contempt as men concerning the feminine). Among other consequences, we will underline the solution that Freud considers properly feminine: motherhood. If, at the beginning of sexual life, the girl is active like the boy, exercising her masculinity, why would she renounce her phallic onanism, a representative of her masculinity? Freud answers us: due to the "[...] assumption that the pleasure of this pleasant activity will be seriously damaged by some competing factor [...]", which is not necessary to look for far away. He continues:

[...] the narcissistic offense linked to penis envy could be the warning that she cannot compete with the boy at that point and that it would be better to abandon the competition with him. In this way, knowledge of the anatomical difference between the sexes forces the little girl to move away from masculinity and male onanism in new ways, which lead to the development of femininity (Freud, 2018b, p. 268).

It seems that, in this Freudian reading, anatomy is very closely articulated to destiny, since the anatomical distinction would entail for the little girl the almost necessary conclusion that her clitoris would be in deficit regarding the phallic greatness of the boy's penis. Would this not be a child's fiction that allows assuming that the penis is a privileged (+φ), whereas only the girl would be left with the lack engendered by (-φ)? Apparently, the childish belief that equates the penis to the symbolic phallus operates as a backdrop for specific moments of Freudian reasoning, which, however, sometimes fails to sustain the difference between the phallus as a signifier [Φ] and what Lacan came to name as the male's deceitful power, the erect penis as a potency tool [(+φ)].

It is, possibly, by not finding a way out of the enigma of the symbolic phallus, that goes beyond the imaginary penis, that the sequence of Freud's argument seems to leave to the girl the Oedipal solution as the primary way of solution for her sexed position. In the 1925 text, the Viennese describes that, starting from the loosening of the tender relationship with the mother as an object (after having blamed the mother for giving birth to her without a penis), the girl, entering the Oedipus complex as a secondary formation, turns to the father to obtain a son from him, by the symbolic equation penis = child. In a Lacanian reinterpretation, this suggests that the phallic aspect of the girl's solution is nothing more than a male, Oedipal veil, covering the lack of response for her femininity.

Therefore, in this Freudian narrative, it is normative femininity that maintains the differential belief in (+φ) and (-φ) as determinants of masculine and feminine, respectively.

Seen in this way, femininity is nothing but masculinity, since ‘having’ a man’s child enters a woman’s circuit most of the time as a phallic solution, which does not wear out the question about the feminine. Thus, from the instant of the gaze that the boy has a penis and that the girl does not have it, Freud seems to assume in the girl an implicit way of understanding the anatomical distinction between the sexes, an understanding whose fundamental belief is that the penis is the legitimate representative of the phallus, so that, to answer the enigma of the feminine, the supposedly appropriate conclusion is that one could only slide within this symbolic equation by going from the absence of penis to the desire of a son.

Thus, in her time of understanding, the girl re-signifies the structural experience of lack by attributing it to the anatomical distinction between the sexes; after the instant of the gaze, the girl *a posteriori* locates the phallus in the penis of which she is deprived (“[...] that was what I lacked!”), taking herself now as castrated. Faced with this interpretation of the feminine reduced to  $(-\phi)$ , one of the ways the girl can cope with this is by placing herself on the left side of sexualization; she stays there as much as man, that is, with ‘imagination’ (Lacan, 2009). It is worth noting that hysteria, understood as ‘playing the role of the whole-man’, constitutes a form of unconscious denunciation of the imposture of the norm over bodies, by standing in a virile position when she is constrained to occupy a feminized position of an object of exchange by normative systems of kinship.

In this case, once guided by the Oedipus complex, the Freudian scheme of sexualization in the 1925 text seems to give centrality to the normative solutions to the impasse of sexual difference, intricately linking it to the anatomical distinction between the sexes (although the author emphasizes that it is about its psychic consequences, not just anatomy). However, at certain times, Freud’s solutions seem insufficient because of the complexity of the non-normative solutions that have increased in the contemporary. Therefore, it is a matter of adding to the Freudian narrative the time of understanding, situated between gazing and concluding. We expect that this gesture might bring out a space for contingency between anatomy and its destinations in the sexed position.

Therefore, the contingency implied in the differential consideration of the three logical times – ‘the instant of the gaze’, ‘the time for understanding’, and ‘the moment of conclusion’ - can help us therefore in a non-normative reading of sexualization. From our perspective, this proposition allows a step ahead concerning the Freudian reading of sexual difference, with the virtue of not reducing it to the anatomical distinction between the sexes.

### **Final considerations: sexualization as sophism**

In Pommier (1991, p. 17), we found a way to rethink these impasses from Freudian theory. He states: “If the castration complex were allowed to rest only on the visual perception of the anatomical difference between the sexes, numerous clinical particularities would not find their place in theory”. Thus, it turns out that the imaginary version of sexualization is limited, in regard of the process of subjective constitution, since it is guided by the normative arrangement of genders and by sexual difference reduced to the anatomical distinction between the sexes taken as positive/negative, plus/minus, presence/absence, privileging the phallus as  $(+\phi)$  and its absence as  $(-\phi)$ .

However, from a psychoanalytical perspective, we know that “[...] both men and women are exposed to an insufficiency, either of the penis or that of the clitoris, which is always unequal to the phallic symbol” (Pommier, 1991, p. 18). This means that phallic

negativity works for both sexes. Still, the modalities in which this insufficiency is discovered find different forms according to the child's sex, not only due to visual-anatomical trauma but especially "[...] according to the position that is attributed to each one by the discourse of the Other. That is why certain men will line up on the side of woman, and certain women on the side of man, without taking more into account the realities of the organism" (p. 18).

Thus, facing the enigma of sexual difference, which concerns the enigma of jouissance for the speaking being, the anatomical distinction between the sexes will be nothing but a secondary accident. This contingent response uses the imaginary of morphological difference between the bodies to address the way in which each one stands logically concerning the phallic function and the symbolic phallus. The latter, far from corresponding to the penis, signals what would complete the desire of the Other, demarcating the limit to the mother's demands, as it is always beyond what the signifier can provide.

In this way, the subject is displaced from the place of the mother's imaginary phallus, since, with his body, with what the child can offer, it is not possible to complete the desire of the Other, once guided by the phallic symbol. At this point, the anatomical distinction appears as a contingent bodily response to a symbolic question that was already before it. Therefore, according to Lacan, as the phallus is dissimilar from the penis, sexual difference is different from the anatomical distinction between the sexes. Although there is a normative articulation between these registers that is inherited from the Other of tradition (which seeks to identify phallus and penis, sexual difference and the anatomical distinction between the sexes), psychoanalysis reveals, differently, that there is no coincidence, nor any relation of necessity between these terms - something that must be emphasized so that we can begin to extract its clinical consequences.

It is this dimension of contingency that opens up to each speaking being the margin of freedom to make their sexed choice, even if it is a forced choice, since it stems from the unconscious. In Seminar 21, Lacan (2016b, p. 183) goes so far as to affirm that the sexual being "[...] has the choice, I mean, this thing to which we limit ourselves, finally, to classify as masculine or feminine in the civil registry [...] anyway, this [...] this does not prevent the existence of a choice [...]", as the sexual being is only authorized by himself/herself and by some others. After all, from the Other, no guarantee can be expected: the choice of a sexed position depends on the assertion of an anticipated certainty that is not protected by any divine Providence, in the absence of a supreme Guarantor who can make a final judgment of this choice [S(A)].

It is precisely this dimension that the prison director incarnates in Lacanian sophism, as he constitutes himself as an observer who stands, before the departure of the three subjects, with an 'indeterminacy' to affirm, of one of these, "[...] if he concluded correctly as to the attribute of which he is a carrier" (Lacan, 1998a, p. 208). Thus, as the Other is not a complete instrument of domination, since the Other of the Other does not exist, then the subject can assume a sexed position that challenges the injunction of social norms and civil registration. That tradition exists and that it affects the subject, that is certain. Still, the subject can go beyond the determination of the norm insofar as the phallic ordering finds no guarantee anywhere outside its own enunciation.

Thus, for every speaking being, the assumption of a sex occurs through the assertion of an anticipated certainty of its position of jouissance without any guarantee from the Other. This choice exceeds the limits of understanding because it can only rely on failures, on the logic impasses, and is, therefore, articulated with the contingency of haste that marks the moment of conclusion. Thus, going beyond any comprehension guided by a

perfect and guaranteed logical deduction regarding sex, what we find in the speaking being is an unfathomable decision of being beyond all determination arising from the Other and/or from social norms. After all, the designation given by the Other based on gender cannot be said to correspond to the logic of sexuation, as the boy and the girl “[...] only recognize themselves as speaking beings by rejecting this distinction through all sorts of sexual identifications [...]” that go beyond the narrow limits of gender (Lacan, 2011, p. 16).

In this way, if the anticipated certainty comes from the idea that there is no guarantee from the Other concerning the assumption of a sexed position, this means that the precipitation of a decision indeed stems from the transmission of the Other, but without its guarantee, without an Other of the Other. Thus, in Seminar 21, Lacan was able to enunciate that there is no security for sexual identification, neither of the person we love nor our own (cf. Lacan, 2016b). In the place of this security, which would refer to the hope in a guarantee, what is at stake in the impasse of sexual difference is a choice between two modes of enjoyment: one that tries to become all-phallic and another that consents to be not-all.

So, speaking beings have the freedom to choose their sex, but, as Soler (2005, p. 226) points, it is not freedom by indifference, because the signifier is linked to an interpretation of anatomy: “It is an organ of the body that gives its representation to the phallic signifier, and that is why it is said that an individual is a boy or a girl, before any position of the subject. Therefore, if there is a choice, it is at least a strongly advised choice”. In this way, even if there are invitations to occupy sexed positions in a way that is consistent with the gender that is assigned by the Other, the subject may, at the limit, reject alienation from these assignments in his/her sexuality. In this sense, due to the contingency of sexual choice, the Oedipal norm becomes unable to predict or determine what the subject will become.

Hence, we can privilege the dimension of a subjective singularity beyond the Ideal by preserving the enigma and the queerness of each subject’s sexuality. After all, if there is an ideal type of sex, there is, in turn, no ideal type of sexuation. Faced with the impasse of sexual difference, which calls upon the subject to assume a position concerning his/her mode of jouissance, a reinterpretation of sexuation through the sophism of the three prisoners and their logical times finally seems to contribute to the preservation of the contingency by which each one, putting something of his/her own in it, must respond to sexual difference, which does not coincide with the anatomical distinction between the sexes.

Before the question-enigma, ‘what is my sex?’, which, like the disk on the back of each prisoner, is something opaque that cannot be directly accessed, the subject responds by precipitating a hasty conclusion, stemming from the gaze of the Other, but without any guarantee for this answer. Along these lines, the reinterpretation of the process of sexuation through the three logical times allows the possibility of sustaining the contingency of the body in such process, undoing specific visions that produce too hasty conclusion on the masculine and feminine sides with the anatomies supposedly respective to them. The reading we propose here may perhaps constitute a way of emphasizing the radicality of Lacan’s conception of the plasticity of sexuation, which allows us to approach the body of the speaking being and his/her inventions with jouissance in a non-normative way. After all, wouldn’t sexuation be one of the great sophisms that present themselves to the speaking being?

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*Received: Apr. 23, 2019*  
*Approved: Mar. 27, 2021*