

## *Prefatory Note to 'Freud and Lacan'*

Let us admit, without prevarication: anyone today who merely wants to understand Freud's revolutionary discovery, who wants to know what it means as well as just recognizing its existence, has to make a great theoretical and critical effort in order to cross the vast space of ideological prejudice that divides us from Freud. For not only has Freud's discovery been reduced, as we shall see, to disciplines which are essentially foreign to it (biology, psychology, sociology, philosophy); not only have many psychoanalysts (notably in the American school) become accomplices to this revisionism; but, more important, this revisionism has itself objectively assisted the fantastic ideological exploitation whose object and victim psycho-analysis has been. Not without good reason did French Marxists once (in 1948) denounce this exploitation as a 'reactionary ideology' which furnished arguments for the ideological struggle against Marxism, and a practical instrument for the intimidation and mystification of consciousnesses.

But today it must also be said that, in their own way, these same Marxists were directly or indirectly the first victims of the ideology they denounced; for they confused this ideology and Freud's revolutionary discovery, thereby adopting in practice the enemy's position, accepting his conditions and recognizing the image he had imposed on them as the supposed reality of psychoanalysis. The whole history of the relations between Marxism and psychoanalysis depends essentially on this confusion, this imposture.

That this was particularly difficult to avoid we can understand from the function of this ideology: the 'dominant' ideas, in this case, were playing their 'dominating' rôle to perfection, ruling unrecognized over the very minds that were trying to fight them. But it is also explained by

the existence of the psychoanalytic revisionism that made this exploitation possible: the fall into ideology began in fact with the fall of psychoanalysis into biology, psychologism and sociologism.

We can also see that this revisionism could derive its authority from the ambiguity of some of Freud's concepts, for, like all inventors, Freud was forced to think his discovery in existing theoretical concepts, i.e., concepts designed for other purposes (was not Marx, too, forced to think his discovery in certain Hegelian concepts?). This will come as no surprise to anyone at all familiar with the history of new sciences—and at all careful to discern the irreducible element of a discovery and of its objects in the concepts in which it was expressed at its birth, but which, out-dated by the advance of knowledge, may later mask it.

So a return to Freud today demands:

1. Not only that we reject the ideological layers of the reactionary exploitation of Freud as a crude mystification;
2. but also that we avoid the more subtle ambiguities of psychoanalytic revisionism, sustained as they are by the prestige of certain more or less scientific disciplines;
3. and finally that we commit ourselves to a serious effort of historico-theoretical criticism in order to identify and define, in the concepts Freud had to use, the true *epistemological relation* between these concepts and their thought content.

Without this triple labour of ideological criticism (1,2) and epistemological elucidation (3), which, in France, has been initiated in practice by Lacan, Freud's discovery in its specificity will remain beyond our reach. And, more serious, we will take as Freud precisely what has been put within our reach, precisely what we aimed to reject (the reactionary ideological exploitation of Freud), or subscribed to more or less unconsciously (the different forms of bio-psycho-sociological revisionism). In either case, we would remain prisoners, at different levels, of the explicit or implicit categories of ideological exploitation and theoretical revisionism. Marxists, who know from their own experience the deformations Marx's enemies have imposed on his thought, can see why Freud could suffer the same fate, in his own way, and why an authentic 'return to Freud' is of such theoretical importance.

They will concede that if such a short article proposes to introduce a problem of this importance without betraying it, it must confine itself to the essential, it must situate the *object* of psycho-analysis so as to give a first definition of it, in concepts that allow its *localization*, the indispensable precondition for its elucidation. They will concede therefore that, as far as possible, these concepts should be introduced in a rigorous form, as in any scientific discipline; to vulgarize them in an over-approximate commentary would banalize them, while an analysis that really drew them out would require much more space.

An accurate assessment of these concepts can only come from the serious study of Freud and Lacan which each one of us can undertake; the same is true for the definition of the still unsolved problems of this theoretical discipline already rich in results and promises.

## *Freud and Lacan*

Friends have correctly criticized me for discussing Lacan in three lines.<sup>1</sup> This was too much for what I was saying about him, and too little for the conclusions that I drew about him. They have asked me for a few words to justify both the allusion and its object. Here they are—a few words, where a book is needed.

In the history of Western Reason, every care, foresight, precaution and warning has been devoted to births. Pre-natal therapy is institutional. When a young science is born, the family circle is always ready for astonishment, jubilation and baptism. For a long time, every child, even the foundling, has been reputed the son of a father, and when it is a prodigy, the fathers would fight at the gate if it were not for the mother and the respect due to her. In our crowded world, a place is allocated for birth, a place is even allocated for the prediction of a birth: 'prospective'.

To my knowledge, the 19th century saw the birth of two or three children that were not expected: Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. 'Natural' children, in the sense

that nature offends customs, principles, morality and good breeding: nature is the rule violated, the unmarried mother, hence the absence of a legal father. Western Reason makes a fatherless child pay heavily. Marx, Nietzsche and Freud had to foot the often terrible bill of survival: a price compounded of exclusion, condemnation, insult, poverty, hunger and death, or madness. I speak only of them (other unfortunates might be mentioned who lived their death sentences in colour, sound and poetry). I speak only of them because they were the births of sciences or of criticism.

That Freud knew poverty, calumny and persecution, that his spirit was well enough anchored to withstand, and interpret, all the insults of the age—these things may have something to do with certain of the limits and dead-ends of his genius. An examination of this point is probably premature. Let us instead consider Freud's solitude in his own times. I do not mean human solitude (he had teachers and friends, though he went hungry), I mean *theoretical* solitude. For when he wanted to think i.e., to express in the form of a rigorous system of abstract concepts the extraordinary discovery that met him every day in his *practice*, search as he might for theoretical precedents, fathers in theory, he could find none. He had to cope with the following situation: to be himself his own father, to construct with his own craftsman's hands the theoretical space in which to situate his discovery, to weave with thread borrowed intuitively left and right the great net with which to catch in the depths of blind experience the teeming fish of the unconscious, which men call dumb because it speaks even while they sleep.

To express this in Kantian terms: Freud had to think his discovery and his practice in *imported* concepts, concepts borrowed from the thermodynamic physics then dominant, from the political economy and biology of his time. With no legal inheritance behind him—except for a parcel of philosophical concepts (consciousness, preconsciousness, unconsciousness, etc.) which were probably more of a hindrance than a help as they were marked by a problematic of consciousness present even in its reservations—without any ancestral endowment whatever, his only forerunners writers—Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière, Goethe—or proverbs, etc. Theoretically, Freud set up in business alone: producing his own 'home-made' concepts under the protection of imported concepts borrowed from the sciences as they existed, and, it should be said, from within the horizons of the ideological world in which these concepts swam.

That is how Freud comes to us. A long series of profound texts, sometimes clear, sometimes obscure, often enigmatic and contradictory, problematic, and armed with concepts many of which seem to us at first sight to be out of date, inadequate for their content, or surpassed.

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<sup>1</sup> *Revue de l'Enseignement philosophique*, June-July 1963, 'Philosophie et sciences humaines', p. 7 and p. 11, n.14: 'Marx based his theory on the rejection of the myth of the "*homo oeconomicus*", Freud based his theory on the rejection of the myth of the "*homo psychologicus*". Lacan has seen and understood Freud's liberating rupture. He has understood it in the fullest sense of the term, taking it rigorously at its word and forcing it to produce its own consequences, without concessions or quarter. It may be that, like everyone else, he errs in the detail or even the choice of his philosophical bearings; but we owe him the *essential*.'

For today we cannot doubt the existence of this content: analytic practice itself, its effect.

So let us summarize the object Freud is for us:

1. A practice (the analytic cure). 2. A technique (the method of the cure) that gives rise to an abstract exposition with the appearance of a theory. 3. A theory which has a relation with the practice and the technique. This organic practical (1), technical (2) and theoretical (3) whole recalls the structure of every scientific discipline. *Formally*, what Freud gives us does have the structure of a science. Formally; for the difficulties of Freud's conceptual terminology, the sometimes material disproportion between his concepts and their content, suggest the question: in this organic practico-technico-theoretical whole do we have a whole that is truly stabilized and founded at the scientific level? In other words, is the theory really theory in the scientific sense? Or is it not, on the contrary, a simple transposition into theory of the methodology of the practice (the cure)? Hence the very common modern view that beneath its theoretical exterior (which we owe to worthy but vain pretensions of Freud himself), psychoanalysis remains a mere practice that does sometimes give results, but not always; a mere practice extended into a technique (rules of analytic method), but *without a theory*, at least without a true theory: what it calls theory being merely the blind technical concepts in which it reflects the rules of its practice; a mere practice without theory . . . perhaps then, even simply a kind of magic? that succeeds, like all magic, because of its prestige—and its prestige, applied to the fulfillment of a social need or demand, therefore its only justification, its real justification. Lévi-Strauss would then have theorized this *magic*, this *social* practice, psychoanalysis, by pointing out the *shaman* as the ancestor of Freud.

A practice pregnant with a half-silent theory? A practice proud or ashamed to be merely the social magic of modern times? What then is psychoanalysis?

## I

Lacan's first word is to say: in principle, Freud founded a *science*. A new science which was the science of a new object: the unconscious.

A rigorous statement. If psychoanalysis is a science because it is the science of a distinct object, it is also a science with the structure of all sciences: it has a *theory* and a *technique* (method) that make possible the knowledge and transformation of its object in a specific *practice*. As in every authentically constituted science, the practice is not the absolute of the science but a theoretically subordinate moment; the moment in which theory, having become method (technique), comes into theoretical contact (knowledge) or practical contact (cure) with its specific object (the unconscious).

If this thesis is correct, analytical practice (the cure), which absorbs all the attention of those interpreters and philosophers eager for the intimacy of the confidential couple in which avowed sickness and professional medical secrecy exchange the sacred promises of intersubjectivity, does not contain the secrets of psychoanalysis; it only con-

tains one part of the reality of psychoanalysis, the part which exists in practice. It does not contain its theoretical secrets. If this thesis is correct, neither do technique and method contain the secrets of psychoanalysis, except as every method does, by delegation, not from practice but from theory. Only theory contains them, as in every scientific discipline.

In a hundred places in his work, Freud calls himself a theoretician; he compares psychoanalysis, as far as its scientificity is concerned, with the physical sciences that stem from Galileo, he repeats that practice (cure) and analytical technique (analytical method) are only authentic because they are based on a scientific *theory*. Freud says time and again that a practice and a technique, even if they give results, do not deserve the name of science unless a theory gives them the right to it, not by mere declaration, but by rigorous proof.

Lacan's first word is to take these words literally. And to draw the conclusion: a return to Freud to seek out, distinguish and pin-point in him the theory from which all the rest, both practical and technical, stems by right.

A return to Freud. Why this new return to the source? Lacan does not return to Freud as Husserl does to Galileo or Thales, to capture a birth at its birth—i.e., to achieve that religious philosophical preconception purity, which like all water bubbling up out of the ground, is only pure at the very instant, the pure instant of its birth, in the pure passage from non-science to science. For Lacan, this passage is not pure, it is still impure: purity comes after the still 'muddy' passage (the invisible mud of its past suspended in the new-born water which pretends transparency, i.e., innocence). A return to Freud means: a return to the theory established, fixed and founded firmly in Freud himself, to the mature, reflected, supported and verified theory, to the advanced theory that has settled down in life (including practical life) to build its home, produce its method and give birth to its practice. The return to Freud is not a return to Freud's birth: but a return to his *maturity*. Freud's youth, the moving passage from not-yet-science to science (the period of the relations with Charcot, Bernheim, Breuer, up to the *Studies in Hysteria*—1895) may indeed be of interest to us, but on a quite different level: as an example of the archaeology of a science—or as a negative index of immaturity, thereby precisely dating maturity and its arrival. The youth of a science is its prime of life; before this age it is old, its age the age of the preconceptions by which it lives, as a child does the preconceptions and hence the age of its parents.

### Freudian Revisionism

That a young, and hence mature theory can relapse into childhood, i.e., into the preconceptions of its elders and their descendents, is proved by the whole history of psychoanalysis. This is the deeper meaning of the return to Freud proclaimed by Lacan. We must return to Freud to return to the maturity of Freudian theory, not to its childhood, but to its prime, which is its true youth—we must return to Freud beyond the theoretical childishness, the relapse into childhood in which all or a

part of contemporary psychoanalysis, particularly in America, savours the advantages of surrender.

This relapse into childhood has a name that phenomenologists will understand straight away: psychologism—or another that Marxists will understand straight away: pragmatism. The modern history of psychoanalysis illustrates Lacan's judgement. Western Reason (legal, religious, moral and political *as well as* scientific) will only agree to conclude a pact of peaceful co-existence with psychoanalysis after years of ignorance, contempt and insults—means that are still available anyway if all else fails—on condition of annexing it to its own sciences or myths: to psychology, whether behaviourist (Dalbiez), phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty) or existentialist (Sartre); to a more or less Jacksonian bio-neurology (Ey); to 'sociology' of the 'culturalist' or 'anthropological' type (dominant in the USA: Kardiner, Margaret Mead, etc); and to philosophy (cf. Sartre's 'existentialist psychoanalysis', Binswanger's '*Daseinanalyse*', etc.). To these confusions, to this mythologization of psychoanalysis, a discipline officially recognized at the price of compromise alliances sealed with *imaginary* ties of adoption but very real powers, some psychoanalysts have subscribed, only too happy to emerge at last from their theoretical ghetto, to be 'recognized' as full members of the great family of psychology, neurology, psychiatry, medicine, sociology, anthropology, philosophy—only too happy to certify their practical success with this 'theoretical' recognition which at last, after decades of insults and exile, confers on them citizen's rights in the world: the world of science, medicine and philosophy. They were not alerted to the suspicious side of this agreement, believing that the world was coming round to their positions—when they were themselves, with these honours, coming round to the world's positions—preferring its honours to its insults.

They thereby forgot that a science is only a science if it can claim a right to an object *of its own*—an object that is its own and its own *only*—not a mere foothold in an object loaned, conceded or abandoned by another science, one of the latter's 'aspects', the leavings that can be rehashed in the kitchen once the master of the house has eaten his fill. Concretely, if the whole of psychoanalysis is reduced to behaviourist or Pavlovian 'conditioning' in early childhood; if it is reduced to a dialectic of the *stages* which Freud's terminology designates oral, anal and genital, latency and puberty; if, finally, it is reduced to the primitive experience of the Hegelian struggle, of the phenomenological for-others, or of the Heideggerian 'gulf' of being; if all psychoanalysis is merely this art of assimilating the leavings of neurology, biology, psychology, anthropology and philosophy, what can it claim as its specific object, what really distinguishes it from these disciplines and makes it in the full sense a science?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The most dangerous of these temptations are those of *philosophy* (which gladly reduces the whole of psychoanalysis to the dual experience of the cure and thereby 'verifies' the themes of phenomenological intersubjectivity, of the existence-project, or more generally of personalism); of *psychology* which appropriates most of the categories of psychoanalysis as so many attributes of a 'subject' in which, manifestly, it sees no problem; finally, of sociology which comes to the aid of psychology by providing it with an objective content for the 'reality principle' (social and familial im-

## Lacan and his Language

It is here that Lacan intervenes: he defends the irreducibility of analysis against these 'reductions' and deviations, which dominate most contemporary theoretical interpretations; he defends its irreducibility, which means *the irreducibility of its object*. That this defence requires an uncommon lucidity and firmness, sufficient to repulse all the voraciously hospitable assaults of the disciplines I have listed, can not be doubted by anyone who has ever in his life measured the need for security (theoretical, moral, social and economic), i.e. the uneasiness, of corporations (whose statute is indissolubly scientific-professional-legal-economic) whose balance and comfort is threatened by the appearance of a unique discipline that forces them all to re-investigate not only their own disciplines but the reasons why they believe in them, i.e., to doubt them, by the appearance of a science which, however little it is believed, threatens to violate the existing frontiers and hence to alter the *status quo* of several disciplines. Hence the contained passion and passionate contention of Lacan's language, unable to live or survive except in a state of alert and accusation: the language of a man of the besieged vanguard, condemned by the crushing strength of the threatened structures and corporations to forestall their blows, or at least to feint a response to them before they are delivered, thus discouraging the opponents from crushing him beneath their assault. Hence also the often paradoxical resort to the security provided by philosophies completely foreign to his scientific undertaking (Hegel, Heidegger), as so many intimidating witnesses thrown in the faces of part of his audience to retain their respect; and as so many witnesses to a possible objectivity, the natural ally of his thought, to reassure or educate the rest. As this resort was almost indispensable to sustain a discourse addressed *from within* to the medical profession alone, one would have to ignore both the conceptual weakness of medical studies in general and the profound need for theory felt by the best medical men, to condemn it out of hand. And since I am dealing with his language, the language which is the sum total of his prestige for some of his audience ('the Gongora of psychoanalysis', 'the Grand Dragon', the great officiant of an esoteric cult in which gesture, hushedness and solemnity can constitute the ritual of a real communication—or of a quite 'Parisian' fascination)—and for the rest (above all scholars or philosophers) his 'artifice', his strangeness and his 'hermeticism', it is clear that it bears some relation to the conditions of his practice as a teacher: since he has to teach the theory of the unconscious to doctors, analysts or analysands, in the rhetoric of his speech Lacan provides them with a dumb-show equivalent of the language of the unconscious (which, as is well-known, is in its ultimate essence '*Witz*', successful or unsuccessful pun and metaphor): the equivalent of the lived experience of their practice, whether as analyst or as analysand.

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peratives) which the 'subject' need only 'internalize' to be armed with a 'super-ego' and the corresponding categories. Thus subordinated to psychology or sociology psychoanalysis is usually reduced to a technique of 'emotional' or 'affective' re-adaptation, or to a re-education of the 'relational function', neither of which have anything to do with its real object—but which unfortunately respond to a major demand, and what is more, to a demand that is highly tendentious in the contemporary world. Through this bias, psychoanalysis has become an article of mass consumption in modern culture, i.e., in modern ideology.

An understanding of this language's ideological and educational preconditions—i.e., the ability to maintain the distance of historical and theoretical 'exteriority' from its pedagogic 'interiority'—is enough to let us discern its objective meaning and scope—and recognize its basic proposal: to give Freud's discovery its measure in theoretical concepts by defining as rigorously as is possible today the *unconscious* and its 'laws', its whole object.

## II

What is the *object* of psychoanalysis? It is *what* analytical technique deals with in the analytical practice of the cure, i.e., not the cure itself, not that supposedly dual system which is tailor-made for any phenomenology or morality—but the '*effects*', prolonged into the surviving adult, of the extraordinary adventure which from birth to the liquidation of the Oedipal phase transforms a small animal conceived by a man and a woman into a small human child. . .

One of the '*effects*' of the humanization of the small biological creature that results from human parturition: there in its place is the object of psychoanalysis, an object which has a simple name: *the unconscious*.'

That this small biological being survives, and not as a 'wolf-child, that has become a little wolf or bear (as displayed in the princely courts of the eighteenth century), but as a *human child* (having escaped all childhood deaths, many of which are human deaths, deaths punishing the failure of humanization), that is the test all adult men have passed: they are the *never forgetful* witnesses, and very often the victims, of this victory, bearing in their most hidden, i.e., in their most clamorous parts, the wounds, weaknesses and stiffnesses that result from this struggle for human life or death. Some, the majority, have emerged more or less unscathed—or at least, give this out to be the case; many of these veterans bear the marks throughout their lives; some will die from their fight, though at some remove, the old wounds suddenly opening again in psychotic explosion, in madness, the ultimate compulsion of a 'negative therapeutic reaction'; others, more numerous, as 'normally' as you like, in the guise of an 'organic' decay. Humanity only inscribes its official deaths on its war memorials: those who were able to die on time, i.e., late, as men, in human wars in which only *human* wolves and gods tear and sacrifice one another. In its sole survivors, psychoanalysis is concerned with another struggle, with the only war without memoirs or memorials, the war humanity pretends it has never declared, the war it always thinks it has won in advance, simply because humanity is nothing but surviving this war, living and bearing children as culture in human culture: a war which is continually declared in each of its sons, who, projected, deformed and rejected, are required, each by himself in solitude and against death, to take the long forced march which makes mammiferous larvae into human children, *masculine* or *feminine subjects*.

This object is no business of the biologist's: this story is certainly not biological!—since from the beginning it is completely dominated by the constraint of the sexed human order that each mother engraves on the small human animal in maternal 'love' or hatred. History, 'socio-

logy' or anthropology have no business here, and this is no surprise! for they deal with society and therefore with culture, i.e., with what is no longer this small animal—which only becomes human-sexual by crossing the infinite divide that separates life from humanity, the biological from the historical, 'nature' from 'culture'. Psychology is lost here, and this is hardly strange for it thinks that in its 'object' it is dealing with some *human* 'nature' or 'non-nature', with the genesis of this existent, identified and certified by culture itself (by the human)—when the object of psycho-analysis is the question with absolute priority, whether to be born or not to be (*naître ou n'être pas*), the aleatory abyss of the sexual-human itself in every human scion. Here 'philosophy' loses its bearings and its cover ('repères' and 'repaires'), naturally!—for these unique origins rob it of the only origins it renders homage to for its existence: God, reason, consciousness, history and culture. It is clear that the object of psychoanalysis may be specific and that the modality of its material as well as the specificity of its 'mechanisms' (to use one of Freud's terms) are of quite another kind than the material and 'mechanisms' which are known to the biologist, the neurologist, the anthropologist, the sociologist, the psychologist and the philosopher. We need only recognize this specificity and hence the distinctness of the object that it derives from, in order to recognize the radical right of psychoanalysis to a specificity of its concepts in line with the specificity of its object: the unconscious and its effects.

### III

Lacan would be the first to admit that his attempted theorization would have been impossible were it not for the emergence of a new science: *linguistics*. It is in the nature of the history of sciences that one science may often not become a science except by recourse to a detour through other sciences, not only sciences that existed at its baptism but also some new late-comer among sciences that needed time before it could be born. The temporary opacity of the shadow cast on Freudian theory by the model of Helmholtz and Maxwell's thermodynamic physics has been dispersed today by the light that structural linguistics throws on its object, making possible an intelligible approach to that object. Freud himself said that everything depended on language. Lacan makes this more precise: 'the discourse of the unconscious is structured like a language.' In his first great work *The Interpretation of Dreams* (which is not anecdotal and superficial as is frequently suggested), Freud studied the 'mechanisms' and 'laws' of dreams, reducing their variants to two: *displacement* and *condensation*. Lacan recognized these as two essential figures of speech, called in linguistics metonymy and metaphor. Hence slips, failures, jokes and symptoms, like the elements of dreams themselves, became *Signifiers*, inscribed in the chain of an unconscious discourse, doubling silently, i.e., deafeningly, in the misrecognition of 'repression', the chain of the human subject's verbal discourse. Hence we were introduced to the paradox, formally familiar to linguistics, of a double yet single discourse, unconscious yet verbal, having for its double field only a single field, with no beyond except in itself: the field of the 'Signifying Chain'. Hence the most important acquisitions of de Saussure and of the linguistics that descends from him began to play a justified part in the understanding of the process

of the unconscious as well as that of the verbal discourse of the subject, and of their interrelationship, i.e., of their identical relation and non-relation, in other words, of their reduplication and disjuncture (*décalage*). Thereby philosophico-idealist interpretations of the unconscious as a second consciousness, of the unconscious as bad faith (Sartre), of the unconscious as the cankerous survival of a non-current structure or non-sense (Merleau-Ponty), all the interpretations of the unconscious as a biologico-archetypical 'id' (Jung) became what they were: not the beginnings of a theory but null 'theories', ideological misunderstandings.

It remained to define (I am forced into the crudest schematism, but how could I avoid it in such a short article?) the meaning of this *primacy* of the formal structure of language and its 'mechanisms' as they are encountered in the practice of analytical interpretation, as a function of the very foundations of this practice: its object, i.e., the 'effects' still present in the survivors of the forced 'humanization' of the small human animal into a *man* or a *woman*. This question cannot be answered merely by invoking the factual primacy of language as the sole object and means of analytical practice. Everything that happens in the cure does take place in and through language (including silence, its rhythms and scansion). But it is necessary to show *why* and *how* in principle the factual role of language in the cure as both raw material of analytic practice and means of production of its effects (the passage, as Lacan puts it, from an 'empty speech' to a 'full speech'), is only founded in fact in analytic practice because it is founded in *principle* in its object, the object that, in the last analysis, founds this practice and its technique: hence, since it is a science, in the *theory* of its object.

### The Law of Order

Herein no doubt lies the most original aspect of Lacan's work, his discovery. Lacan has shown that this transition from (in the limit case) purely biological existence to human existence (the human child) is achieved within the Law of Order, the law I shall call the Law of Culture, and that this Law of Order is confounded in its *formal* essence with the order of language. What are we to understand by this formula, at first sight so enigmatic? Firstly, that the *whole of this transition* can only be grasped in terms of a recurrent language, as designated by the language of the adult or child in a *cure situation*, designated, assigned and localized within the law of language in which is established and presented all human order, i.e. every human role. Secondly, that in this assignment by the language of the cure appears the current, constant presence of the absolute effectiveness of order in the transition itself, of the Law of Culture in humanization.

To give some idea of this in a very few words, I shall indicate the two great moments of this *transition*. 1. The moment of the dual pre-Oedipal intercourse, in which the child, concerned with nothing but one alter-ego, the mother, who punctuates its life by her presence (*da!*) and absence (*fort!*),<sup>3</sup> lives this dual intercourse in the mode of the imaginary

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<sup>3</sup> These are the two German expressions made famous by Freud, with which a small child under his observation sanctioned the appearance and disappearance of its mother by the manipulation of an arbitrary object that 'represented' her: a cotton-reel.

fascination of the ego, being itself *that* other, *any* other, *every* other, all *the others* of primary narcissistic identification, never able to take up the objectifying distance of the third vis-à-vis either the other or itself; 2. The Oedipal moment, in which a ternary structure emerges against the background of the dual structure, when the third (the father) intrudes on the imaginary satisfaction of dual fascination, overthrows its economy, destroys its fascinations, and introduces the child to what Lacan calls the Symbolic Order, the order of objectifying language that will finally allow him to say: I, you, he, she or it, that will therefore allow the small child to situate itself as a *human child* in a world of adult thirds.

Hence two great moments: 1. that of the imaginary (pre-Oedipal); 2. that of the symbolic (Oedipal resolution), or, to use a different language, that of objectivity recognized in its (symbolic) use, but not yet known (the knowledge of objectivity arising at a quite different 'age' and also from a quite different practice).

And the crucial point that Lacan has illuminated is this: these two moments are dominated, governed and marked by a single Law, the *Law of the Symbolic*. Even the moment of the imaginary, that, for clarity's sake, I have just presented as *preceding* the symbolic, as distinct from it—hence as the first moment in which the child *lives* its immediate intercourse with a human being (its mother) without recognizing it practically as the symbolic intercourse it is (i.e., as the intercourse of a small human child with a human mother)—*is marked and structured in its dialectic by the dialectic of the Symbolic Order itself*, i.e., by the dialectic of human Order, of the human norm (the norms of the temporal rhythms of feeding, hygiene, behaviour, of the concrete attitudes of recognition—the child's acceptance, rejection, yes and no being merely the small change, the *empirical* modalities of this constitutive Order, the Order of Law and of the Right of attributory or exclusory assignment), in the form of the Order of the signifier itself, i.e., in the form of an Order *formally* identical with the order of language.<sup>4</sup>

Where a superficial or prejudiced reading of Freud has only seen happy, lawless childhood, the paradise of 'polymorphous perversity', a kind of state of nature only punctuated by stages of a biological type linked with the functional primacy of some part of the human body, the site of a 'vital' need (oral, anal, genital),<sup>5</sup> Lacan demonstrates the effective-

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<sup>4</sup> *Formally*: for the Law of Culture, which is first introduced as language and whose first form is language, is not exhausted by language; its content is the real kinship structures and the determinate ideological formations in which the persons inscribed in these structures live their functions. It is not enough to know that the Western family is patriarchal and exogamic (kinship structures)—we must also work out the ideological formations that govern paternity, maternity, conjugality and childhood: what are 'husband-and-wife-being', 'father-being', 'mother-being' and 'child-being' in the modern world? A mass of research remains to be done on these ideological formations. This is a task for *historical materialism*.

<sup>5</sup> A branch of neuro-biology and psychology has been only too pleased to discover in Freud a theory of 'stages', and they have not hesitated to translate it directly and exhaustively into a theory of 'stadial growth', either neuro-biological or bio-neuro-psychological—mechanically assigning to neuro-biological growth the rôle of an 'essence' for which the Freudian 'stages' are merely the 'phenomena' pure and simple. This perspective is nothing but a re-edition of the old theory of mechanical parallelism. This is directed particularly towards the disciples of Wallon, for Wallon himself did not take any notice of Freud.

ness of the Order, the Law, that has been lying in wait for each infant born since before his birth, and seizes him before his first cry, assigning to him his place and rôle, and hence his fixed destination.

Each stage traversed by the sexed infant is traversed in the realm of Law, of the codes of human assignment, communication and non-communication; his 'satisfactions' bear the indelible and constitutive mark of the Law, of the claims of human Law, that, like all law, cannot be 'ignored' by anyone, least of all by those ignorant of it, but may be evaded or violated by everyone, above all by its most faithful adherents. That is why any reduction of childhood traumas to a balance of 'biological frustrations' alone, is in principle erroneous, since the Law that covers them, as a Law, abstracts from all contents, exists and acts as a Law only in and by this abstraction, and the infant submits to this rule and receives it from his first breath.<sup>6</sup> This is the beginning, and has always been the beginning, even where there is no living father, of the official presence of the Father (who is Law), hence of the Order of the human signifier, i.e., of the Law of Culture: this discourse, the absolute precondition of any discourse, this discourse present at the top, i.e., absent in the depths, in all verbal discourse, the discourse of this Order, this discourse of the Other, of the great Third, which is this Order itself: *the discourse of the unconscious*. This gives us a hold, a *conceptual* hold on the unconscious, which is in each human being the absolute place where his particular discourse seeks its own place, seeks, misses, and in missing it, finds its own place, its own anchor to its place, in the imposition, imposture, complicity and denegation (*dénégation*) of its own imaginary fascinations.

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<sup>6</sup> There is a risk that the theoretical scope of this formal condition may be misconstrued, if this is countered by citing the apparently biological concepts (libido, affects, drives, desire) in which Freud thinks the 'content' of the unconscious. For example, when he says that the dream is a 'wish-fulfillment' (*Wunschbefriedigung*). The sense here is the same as the sense in which Lacan opposes man's 'empty speech' to his 'full speech', as to the language of unconscious 'desire'. But only on the basis of this formal condition do these (apparently biological) concepts obtain their authentic meaning, or can this meaning be assigned and thought and a curative technique defined and applied. Desire, the basic category of the unconscious, is only intelligible in its specificity as the sole meaning of the discourse of the human subject's unconscious: the meaning that emerges in and through the 'play' of the signifying chain which makes up the discourse of the unconscious. As such, 'desire' is marked by the structure that commands human development. As such, desire is radically distinct from organic and essentially biological 'need'. There is no essential continuity between organic need and unconscious desire, any more than there is between man's biological existence and his historical existence. Desire is determined in its ambiguous being (its 'failure-in-being'—*manque à être*—says Lacan) by the structure of the Order that imposes its mark on it and destines it for a placeless existence, the existence of repression, for its resources as well as for its disappointments. The specific reality of desire cannot be reached by way of organic need any more than the specific reality of historical existence can be reached by way of the biological existence of 'man'. On the contrary: just as it is the categories of history that allow us to define the specificity of man's historical existence, including some apparently purely biological determinations such as his 'needs' or demographic phenomena, by distinguishing his historical existence from a purely biological existence—similarly, it is the essential categories of the unconscious that allow us to grasp and define the very meaning of desire by distinguishing it from the biological realities that support it (exactly as biological existence supports historical existence) but neither *constitute*, nor *determine* it.

## The Oedipal Phase

That in the Oedipal phase the sexed child becomes a sexed human child (man or woman) by testing its imaginary fantasm against the Symbolic, and if all 'goes well' finally becomes and accepts itself as what it is: a little boy or little girl among adults, with the rights of a child in this adult world, and, like all children, with the full *right* to become one day 'like daddy', i.e., a masculine human being with a wife (and no longer a mother), or 'like mummy', i.e., a feminine human being with a husband (and not just a father)—these things are only the destination of the long forced march towards human childhood.

That all the material of this ultimate drama is provided by a previously formed language, which, in the Oedipal phase, is centred and arranged wholly around the signifier *phallus*: the emblem of the Father, the emblem of right, of the Law, the fantasy image of all Right—this may seem astonishing or arbitrary, but all psychoanalysts attest to it as a fact of experience.

The last Oedipal stage, 'castration', shows us why. When the small boy lives and resolves the tragic and beneficial situation of castration, he accepts the fact that he *has not* the same Right (phallus) as his father, in particular, that he has not the same Right as his father over his mother, who is thereby revealed as endowed with the intolerable status of double use, mother for the small boy, wife for the father; but by accepting that he has not the same right as his father, he gains the assurance that one day, *later on*, when he grows up, he will get the right which is now refused him through his lack of 'means'. He has only a little right, which will grow big if he will grow big himself by taking care to 'mind his p's and q's' (*'manger sa soupe'*). For her part, when the little girl lives and assumes the tragic and beneficial situation of castration, she accepts that she has not the same right as her mother, and hence she doubly accepts that she has not the same right (phallus) as her father, since her mother has not this right (no phallus), although she is a woman, because she is a woman, and she simultaneously accepts that she has not the same right as her mother, i.e., that she is not yet a woman as her mother is. But she thereby gains in return her own small right: the right of a little girl, and the promise of a large right, the full right of a woman when she grows up, if she will grow up accepting the Law of Human Order, i.e., submitting to it if need be to deflect it—by not minding her p's and q's 'properly'.

In either case, whether it be the moment of dual fascination of the Imaginary [1] or the (Oedipal) moment of the lived recognition of the insertion into the Symbolic Order [2], the whole dialectic of the transition in all its essential details is stamped by the seal of Human Order, of the Symbolic, for which linguistics provides us with the *formal* laws, i.e., the *formal* concept.

Psychoanalytic theory can thus give us what makes each science no pure speculation but a science: the definition of the *formal* essence of its object, the precondition for any practical, technical application of it to its *concrete* objects. Thereby psychoanalytic theory escapes the classical

idealist antinomies formulated by Politzer for example, when, while demanding of psychoanalysis (whose revolutionary theoretical scope he was the first in France to realize) that it be a science of the true 'concrete', a 'concrete psychology', he attacked it for its *abstractions*: the unconscious, the Oedipus complex, the castration complex, etc. How, said Politzer, can psychoanalysis claim to be the science of the *concrete* it aims to be and could be, if it persists in *abstractions* which are merely the concrete alienated in an abstract and metaphysical psychology? In fact, no science can do without abstraction, even when, in its 'practice' (which is not, N.B., the theoretical practice of that science but the practice of its concrete *application*), it deals only with those peculiar and unique variants that constitute each individual 'drama'. As Lacan thinks them via Freud—and Lacan thinks nothing but Freud's concepts, giving them the form of our scientificity, the only scientificity there can be—the 'abstractions' of psychoanalysis are really the authentic scientific concepts of their object, in so far as, as concepts of their object, they contain within them the index, measure and basis for the necessity of their abstraction, i.e., the measure of their relation to the 'concrete', and hence of their specific relation to the concrete of their application, commonly called analytic practice (the cure).

So the Oedipal phase is not a hidden 'meaning' which merely lacks consciousness or speech—it is not a structure buried in the past that can always be restructured or surpassed by 'reactivating its meaning'; the Oedipus complex is the dramatic structure, the 'theatrical machine'<sup>7</sup> imposed by the Law of Culture on every involuntary, conscripted candidate to humanity, a structure containing in itself not only the possibility of, but the necessity for the concrete variants in which it *exists*, for every individual who reaches its threshold, lives through it and survives it. In its application, in what is called its practice (the cure), psychoanalysis works on the concrete 'effects'<sup>8</sup> of these variants, i.e., on the modality of the specific nexus in which the Oedipal transition was and is begun, completed, missed or eluded by some particular individual. These *variants* can be thought and known in their essence itself on the basis of the structure of the Oedipal *invariant*, precisely because this whole transition is marked from its beginnings in Fascination, in its most 'aberrant' as well as in its most 'normal' forms, by the Law of this structure, the ultimate form of access to the Symbolic within the Law of the Symbolic itself.

### Freud and Historical Materialism

I know that these brief suggestions will not only appear to be, but are, summary and schematic; that a number of notions put forward here require extended development if they are to be justified and established. Even if their well-foundedness and the relations they bear to the set of

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<sup>7</sup> An expression of Lacan's ('*machine*'), referring to Freud ('*ein anderes Schauspiel*'. . . '*Schauplatz*'). From Politzer, who talks of 'drama' to Freud and Lacan who speak of theatre, stage, *mise en scène*, machinery, theatrical genre, *metteur en scène*, etc., there is all the distance between the spectator who takes himself for the theatre—and the theatre itself.

<sup>8</sup> If this term 'effect' is examined in the context of a classical theory of causality, it reveals a conception of the continuing presence of the cause in its effects (cf. Spinoza).

notions that underly them were clarified, even if they were compared with the letter of Freud's analyses, they would pose their own problems in their turn: not only problems of conceptual formation, definition and clarification, but real new problems, necessarily produced by the development of the work of theorization we have just discussed. For example, how can we *rigorously* formulate the relation between the *formal* structure of language, the absolute precondition for the existence and intelligibility of the unconscious, on the one hand, the concrete kinship structures on the other, and finally the concrete ideological formations in which the specific functions implied by the kinship structures (paternity, maternity, childhood) are lived? Is it conceivable that the historical variation of these latter structures (kinship, ideology) might materially affect some or other aspect of the instances isolated by Freud? Or again, to what extent may the simple definition of the object and location of Freud's discovery, rationally conceived, react on the disciplines from which it distinguished itself (such as psychology, socio-psychology, sociology), and raise for them questions as to the (often problematic) status of their objects? And selecting one more from among so many possible questions: what relations are there between analytic theory and 1. the historical preconditions of its appearance, and 2. the social preconditions of its application?

1. *Who*, then, *was Freud*, *simultaneously* the founder of analytic theory and the inaugurator, as Analyst number one, *self-analyzed*, original Father, of the long line of practitioners who claim descent from him?
2. *Who*, then, *are the psychoanalysts*, who *simultaneously* (and as naturally as if it went without saying) accept Freudian theory, the theoretical tradition that descends from Freud, and the social and economic conditions (the social status of their 'associations' which cling tightly to the status of *medical corporations*) under which they practice? To what extent do the historical origins and socio-economic conditions of the practice of psychoanalysis react on analytical theory and technique? Most important of all, to what extent do the theoretical *silence* of psychoanalysts about these questions (for this is certainly the state of affairs) and the theoretical *repression* these problems meet with in the world of analysis, affect both analytical theory and analytical technique in their content itself? Cannot the eternal question of the 'end of analysis', among others, be related to this repression, i.e., to the *non-thoughtness of these problems* which derive from an epistemological history of psychoanalysis and a social (and ideological) history of the world of analysis?

Here are a number of real questions, really posed, and they constitute immediately an equal number of fields of research. It may be that in the near future certain notions will emerge transformed from this test.

And this test is rooted in the test Freud, in his own field, applied to a particular legal, ethical and philosophical (i.e., definitively ideological) image of 'man', of the human 'subject'. Not in vain did Freud sometimes compare the critical reception of his discovery with the upheavals of the Copernican Revolution. Since Copernicus, we have known that the earth is not the 'centre' of the universe. Since Marx, we have known that the human subject, the economic, political or philo-

sophical ego is not the 'centre' of history—and even, in opposition to the Philosophers of the Enlightenment and to Hegel, that history has no 'centre' but possesses a structure which has no necessary 'centre' except in ideological misrecognition. In turn, Freud has discovered for us that the real subject, the individual in his unique essence, has not the form of an 'ego', centred on the 'ego', on 'consciousness' or on 'existence'—whether this is the existence of the for-itself, of the body-proper or of 'behaviour'—that the human subject is de-centred, constituted by a structure which has no centre either, except in the imaginary misrecognition of the 'ego', i.e., in the ideological formations in which it 'recognizes' itself.

It must be clear that this has opened up one of the ways which may perhaps lead us some day to a better understanding of this *structure of misrecognition*, which is of particular concern for all investigations into ideology.

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**Bibliographical study note:**

Access to Lacan's work will be facilitated if they are approached in the following order:

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4. 'La chose freudienne', *Ecrits*, pp. 401–436.
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9. Of texts written by Lacan's pupils or under his influence, the reader is advised to start with Serge Leclair's articles in *La Psychanalyse*, Serge Leclair and Jean Laplanche on the unconscious in *Les Temps Modernes*, July 1961, J. B. Lefèvre-Pontalis 'Freud Aujourd'hui', *Les Temps Modernes*, 124, 125, 126 (1965), J. Laplanche's book on Hölderlin and Maud Mannoni: *L'enfant arriéré et sa mère*, 1963.