THE SEMINAR OF
JACQUES LACAN

Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller

BOOK II

The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955

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BEYOND THE IMAGINARY, THE SYMBOLIC OR FROM THE LITTLE TO THE BIG OTHER

FINALE

XXIII

Psychoanalysis and cybernetics, or on the nature of language

LECTURE[1]

Professor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In what I am going to say, I would like to single out from amongst you those who come regularly to hear me on Wednesdays, in order to associate them in the gratitude we feel for the person I named first, Jean Delay, who agreed to inaugurate this series of lectures, and who is honouring us by his presence at this session.

On a personal note, I would like to thank him for having given a home to the seminar which I have been running here for the last two years, giving us a roof which adds renown to this teaching through all the memories accumulated under it, and allowing it to share in the resonances of his own speech.

Today I would like to talk about psychoanalysis and cybernetics. As it involves bringing together psychoanalysis and the various human sciences, it seemed to me to be a subject worthy of attention.

[1] This was the last in a series of special lectures organised under the auspices of the Société Française de Psychanalyse, under the patronage of the Clinique de la Faculté de Medecine, around the theme 'Psychoanalysis and the human sciences'. Although some of these lectures have already been referred to, when Lacan or others made allusions to them in the course of the seminar, we thought it convenient to list the entire series, which ran parallel to the work of the seminar throughout the year.

10 November 1954 Jean Delay, *Neurosis and Creation*
16 November 1954 Alexandre Koyré, *Problems of the Platonic dialogue*
30 November 1954 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Kinship versus the family*
4 January 1955 Jean Hyppolite, *Psychoanalysis and phenomenology*
18 January 1955 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Philosophy and psychoanalysis*
8 February 1955 Étienne De Greeff, *Homicide symbolism in Maeterlinck*
15 March 1955 Marcel Griaule, *Symbolisation of the world and the conditions of communication in the Sudanese*
19 April 1955 Medard Boss (Zurich), *Psychoanalysis and analysis of the Dasein*
10 May 1955 Émile Benveniste, *Psychoanalysis and linguistics*
24 May 1955 Daniel Lagache, *Psychoanalysis and psychology*
22 June 1955 Jacques Lacan, *Psychoanalysis and cybernetics, or on the nature of language*

I'll tell you right away, I won't be talking about those varieties of cybernetics which are more or less fashionable, nor will I be talking about the big or the little machines. I won't be calling them by their names, I won't be telling you about the wonders they accomplish. In what way could all that be of interest to us?

But nevertheless there is something that can, it seems to me, be got from these two roughly contemporaneous techniques, these two orders of thought and of science, psychoanalysis and cybernetics. Don't expect anything claiming to be exhaustive. Our concern will be to find an axis by means of which some light will be shed on a part of the signification of the one and of the other. This axis is none other than language. And I'm going to give you a quick glimpse of some aspects of the nature of language.

The question we will start off with came up in our seminar when, through a series of associations, we reached a point where we were asking ourselves what it would mean to play a game of chance with a machine.

The game of chance was the game of even and odd, and it may seem surprising that this is of interest in a seminar which deals with psychoanalysis. On occasion we have also talked about Newton. I don't think that these things come up by chance – if I may say so. It is precisely because we talk about the game of even and odd and also of Newton in this seminar that the technique of psychoanalysis has a chance of not falling into disrepair, not to say disrepute.

Well, in the course of this game of even and odd, we wanted to remind ourselves, us analysts, that nothing happens by chance, and also that something might come out of it which might pertain to chance at its purest.

The result was amazing. In this audience of analysts, we encountered genuine indignation at the thought that, as someone told me, I wanted to eliminate chance. In fact, the person who told me this was someone with staunch determinist convictions. And that is what was really frightening. This person was right – there is a close relation between the existence of chance and the basis of determinism.

Let us think about chance for a bit. What do we mean when we say that something happens *by chance*? We may mean one of two things, which may be very different – either that there is no intention, or that there is a law.

Now, the very idea of determinism is that law is without intention. That is indeed why the determinist theory always seeks to find out how something which is constituted in the real, and which functions according to a law, is engendered, starting off with something that is originally undifferentiated – chance as the absence of intention. To be sure, nothing happens without a cause, determinism tells us, but it is a cause without an intention.

This exemplary experiment might have suggested to my interlocutor – Lord knows how easily the mind slips about when it comes to such matters – that I was about to introduce determinism back into the game of heads or tails, with

which he was, more or less intuitively, identifying the game of even and odd. If even the game of heads or tails is determined, what will happen next? A genuine determinism will no longer be possible.

This question opens up that of discovering the nature of that determinism which we analysts take to be at the very root of our technique. We try to get the subject to make available to us, without any intention, *his thoughts*, as we say, his comments, his discourse, in other words that he should intentionally get as close as possible to chance. What is the determinism here sought after in an intention of chance? It is on this point that cybernetics can throw some light for us.

Cybernetics is a domain with very indeterminate frontiers. Finding its unity obliges us to cast our gaze over a variety of spheres of rationalisation, from politics, via the theory of games, to theories of communication, even to certain definitions of the notion of information.

Cybernetics, we are told, was born very straightforwardly from the work of engineers concerned with the economics of information passing through conductors, concerned with the way in which one can reduce down to its essential elements the mode in which a message is transmitted. In this guise, it would be about ten years old. It was given its name by Norbert Wiener, one of the most eminent of engineers. I think that that limits its importance, and we should cast further afield to find its birth.

To understand what cybernetics is about, one must look for its origin in the theme, so crucial for us, of the signification of chance. The past of cybernetics consists in nothing more than the rationalised formation of what we will call, to contrast them to the exact sciences, the conjectural sciences.

Conjectural sciences, this, I think, is the real name which should from now on be given to a specific group of sciences which are normally designated by the term human sciences. Not that I think that this is an improper term to use, since, in truth, human action is involved in any conjuncture. But I think it is too vague, too bound up with all kinds of confused echoes from pseudo-initiatory sciences which can only lower its tension and level. We can only gain by rendering our definition of the sciences of conjecture more rigorous and more specific.

If this is how we locate cybernetics, we will easily find it ancestors, Condorcet for instance, with his theory of votes and coalitions, of *parties*, as he says, and further back again Pascal, who would be its father, and its true point of origin.

I am going to start with the fundamental notions of the other sphere of sciences, the exact sciences, whose coming to fruition, in its modern form, doesn't go back very much further than that of the conjectural sciences. The former have in some way occulted, eclipsed, the latter, but they are inseparable from one another.

2

How are we to define the exact sciences? Should we say that, unlike the conjectural sciences, they are concerned with the real? But what is the real?

I don't think that in this respect the opinion of men has ever varied very much, contrary to what a psychologising genealogy of human thought would have us believe, according to which in early times man lived in dreams, and which claims that children are habitually hallucinated by their desires. A strange conception, so contrary to observation that it can only be described as a myth – a myth whose origin one should inquire into.

The meaning which man has always given to the real is the following – it is something one always finds in the same place, whether or not one has been there. This real may have moved, but if it has moved, one looks for it elsewhere, one looks for why it has been disturbed, one also tells oneself that sometimes it moves under its own steam. But it is always well and truly in its place, whether or not we are there. And our own displacements have, in principle, with certain exceptions, no efficacious influence on this change of place.

To be sure, the exact sciences are very closely tied to this function of the real. Does that mean that, prior to their development, this function was lacking in man, that he was persuaded by this alleged omnipotence of thought which is identified with the so-called archaic stage of animism? It isn't at all the case that man formerly lived at the heart of an anthropomorphic world from which he expected human responses. I think that this conception is totally puerile, and the notion of the infancy of humanity corresponds to nothing historical. Prior to the exact sciences, man thought, as we do, that the real is what keeps turning up where one expected it. At the same time of night one will always find one particular star on a particular meridian, it will turn up again there, it is indeed always there, it is always the same. It's not for nothing that I take the celestial landmark before the terrestrial, for in fact the map of the sky was drawn up before the map of the globe.

Man thought that there were places which endured, but he also thought that his action was concerned with the preservation of this order. For a long time man had the idea that his rites, his ceremonies – the emperor opening the furrow of spring, the dances of spring, guaranteeing the fertility of nature – his ordered and significant actions – action in the real sense, that of speech – were indispensable to sustaining things in their place. He didn't think that the real would vanish if he didn't participate in this ordered manner, but he thought that the real would be disturbed. He did not pretend to lay down the law, he pretended to be indispensable to the permanence of the law. An important definition, for in truth it entirely safeguards the rigour of the existence of the real.

The limit was crossed when man realised that his rites, his dances and his invocations didn't really have anything to do with the order of things. Was he right or wrong? We haven't the faintest idea. But what is certain is that we no longer have the old conviction. From that point on, the perspective of the exact sciences was born.

From the moment man thinks that the great clock of nature turns all by itself, and continues to mark the hour even when he isn't there, the order of science is born. The order of science hangs on the following, that in officiating over nature, man has become its officious servant. He will not rule over it, except by obeying it. And like the slave, he tries to make the master dependent on him by serving him well.

He knows that nature could be on time for the rendezvous he might give it. But what is this exactitude? It is precisely the encounter of two times [*temps*] in nature.

There is a very great clock, which is none other than the solar system, a natural clock which had to be deciphered, and there's no doubt that this was one of the most decisive steps in the constitution of exact science. But man must also have his clock, his watch. Who is on time [*exact*]?[2] Is it nature? Is it man?

It isn't clear that nature makes every rendezvous. Of course, one can define what is natural as what shows up on time for the rendezvous. When M. de Voltaire said of Buffon's natural history that it wasn't as natural as all that, he was trying to say something of this sort. This is a question of definition – *My loved one always makes the rendezvous, because when she doesn't come, I no longer call her my loved one.* Is it man who is on time? What is the source of being on time [*exactitude*], if not precisely in the synchronisation of watches?

Do note that the watch, the reliable watch, has only existed since Huyghens succeeded in making the first perfectly isochronic clock, in 1659, thus inaugurating the *universe of precision* – to use Alexandre Koyré's expression – without which no truly exact science would be possible. In what does being on time [*exactitude*] reside? It consists in something which we cause to fall in this clock, in this watch, namely a factor borrowed from natural time – the *g* factor. You know that, it's the acceleration caused by gravity, in sum, then, a space time relation. It developed out of a certain *thought experiment*, to use Galileo's term, which is a hypothesis embodied in an instrument. And if the instrument is constructed to confirm the hypothesis, there is no need whatever to do the experiment which confirms it, since the very fact that it works confirms the hypothesis.

But one still has to calibrate this instrument with a unit of time. And a unit of time is always borrowed from, it always refers to, the real, that is, to the fact that

[2] There are a series of puns in this passage and those that follow between 'being on time' (*exact*) and 'the exact sciences'.

it always turns up again in the same place. The unit of time is our sidereal day. If you ask a physicist – for instance let us take M. Borel – he will maintain that, if an imperceptible but not, in the long run, unappreciable slowing down of the rotation of the earth occurred, given that this rotation governs our sidereal day, we would be absolutely incapable, under the present circumstances, of finding evidence of it, given that we regulate our time as a function of this sidereal day, which we cannot control.

I say this to give you a sense of the fact that if one measures space with something solid, one measures time with time – which isn't the same thing.

There's nothing surprising, under these conditions, if a certain part of our exact science comes to be summed up in a very small number of symbols. That is where our requirement that everything be expressed in terms of matter and motion comes from, I mean in terms of matter and time, since, in so far as motion is something in the real, we have in fact succeeded in eliminating it, in reducing it.

The little symbolic game in which Newton's system and that of Einstein is summed up has in the end very little to do with the real. The science which reduces the real to several little letters, to a little bundle of formulae, will probably seem, with the hindsight of later epochs, like an amazing epic, and will also dwindle down, like an epic, to a rather short circuit.

Having considered the foundation of the exactitude of the exact sciences, namely the instrument, we might well go on to ask something else, namely – what are these places? In other words, let us concern ourselves with these places as empty.

It is in fact because this question was raised, contemporaneously with the birth of the exact sciences, that this calculus, which has been ill rather than well understood, began to emerge – the probability calculus, which appears in a truly scientific form for the first time in 1654, with Pascal's treatise on the arithmetic triangle, and emerging in the form of a calculation, not of randomness, but of chances, of the encounter in itself.

What Pascal develops with the arithmetic triangle, the first machine, has a claim on the attention of the scientific world, in that it enables one to determine immediately what a gambler has a right to expect at any given moment when the succession of turns which make up a game is interrupted. A succession of turns is the simplest form one can give to the idea of the encounter. As long as one hasn't come to the end of the sequence of turns fixed by convention, something can be evaluated, that is, the possibilities of the encounter as such. What's at issue is the place, and what does or doesn't come to fill it, something then which is strictly equivalent to its own inexistence. The science of what is found at the same place is substituted for by the science of the combination of places as such. It arises in an ordered register which assuredly assumes the notion of the turn, that is, the notion of scansion.

Everything which up until then had been the science of numbers becomes a combinatory science. The more or less confused, accidental traversal of the world of symbols is organised around the correlation of absence and presence. And the search for the laws of presence and absence will tend towards the establishing of the binary order which leads to what we call cybernetics.

And in keeping on this frontier the originality of what appears in our world in the form of cybernetics, I am tying it to man's waiting. If the science of the combinations of the scanned encounter has come to the attention of man, it is because it deeply concerns him. And it is not for nothing that it comes out of games of chance. And it is not for nothing that game theory is concerned with all the functions of our economic life, the theory of coalitions, of monopolies, the theory of war. Yes, war itself, considered in its aspect as game, detached from anything which might be real. It is not for nothing that the same word designates such diverse fields as well as the game of chance. Now, in the first games I mentioned, what is involved is a relation of intersubjective coordination. Does man make a call on something, does he look for something in the game of chance – and also in the calculation he consecrates to it – whose semantic homophony shows that it must have some relation with intersubjectivity, even though in the game of chance it seems to have been eliminated? Here we come very close to the central question with which I began, namely – what is the chance of the unconscious, which in some way lies behind man?

In the game of chance no doubt he will test his luck [*chance*], but also he is going to read his destiny in it. He has the idea that something is revealed there, which belongs to him, and, I would say, all the more so given that there is no one confronting him.

I've told you how the entire movement of the theory converges on a binary symbol, on the fact that anything can be written in terms of 0 and 1. What else is needed before what we call cybernetics can appear in the world?

It has to function in the real, independently of any subjectivity. This science of empty places, of encounters in and of themselves has to be combined, has to be totalised and has to start functioning all by itself.

What is required for that? To support this, something must be taken from the real. From the beginning, man has tried to join the real in the play of symbols. He has written things on the wall, he has even imagined that things like *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*, get written all by themselves on walls, he has placed figures at the spot where, at each hour of the day, the shadow of the sun comes to rest. But in the end, the symbols always stayed where they were intended to be placed. Stuck in this real, one might think that they were just its landmark.

What's new is having permitted them to fly with their own wings. And this has come about thanks to a simple, commonplace apparatus, which anyone can use, an apparatus where all you need do is turn the handle – a door.

3

Please give this a thought – a door isn't entirely real. To take it for such would result in strange misunderstandings. If you observe a door, and you deduce from that that it produces draughts, you'd take it under your arm to the desert to cool you down.

I have spent a considerable amount of time looking in all the dictionaries for the meaning of a door. There are two pages in Littré on the door – ranging from door as opening to door as more or less hinged means of closure, from the Sublime Porte to the door with which one makes a mask on the nose – *if you come back, I'll mask your face with it*, as Regnard writes.[3] After this, without further comment, Littré writes that a door must either be open or shut. That didn't entirely satisfy me, despite its literary echoes, because I am naturally suspicious when it comes to the wisdom of nations – there are a lot of things written into it, but in a form which is a little confusional, and that is indeed why psychoanalysis exists. A door must, it is true, be either open or shut. But they aren't equivalent.

Language can help us here. A door, my God, opens on to fields, but we don't say that it closes on to the sheepfold, nor on to the paddock. I'm aware that here I am confusing *porta* and *fores*, which is the door of the paddock, but one more confusion won't make much difference at this point, so we'll pursue our meditation on the door.

One might think, because I've spoken of the field and the sheepfold, that what is at issue is the inside and the outside. I think this would be a serious mistake – we live in a sufficiently grand age to imagine a great wall which would go exactly round the earth, and if you knock a door through it, which is the inside, which is the outside?

You don't think a door is any the more generous for being open. We say that a window gives on to open country. It is rather bizarre that, when we say that a door gives on to somewhere, it is generally a door which is for the most part closed and sometimes even blocked up . . .

One takes to the door sometimes, and it is always a pretty decisive act. And more often than not, a door is denied you.

There may be two people watching either side of a door, but try to imagine that happening with a window. You can break down a door – even when it is open. Naturally, as Alphonse Allais used to say, that is dumb and cruel. On the contrary, going in by the window is always viewed as a free and easy act, and always intentional, whereas one often goes through a door without noticing it. Thus, to a first approximation, the door doesn't have the same instrumental function as the window.

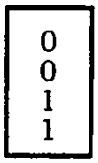
[3] *'Si vous revenez, je vous en fais un masque sur le nez.'*

In its nature, the door belongs to the symbolic order, and it opens up either on to the real, or the imaginary, we don't know quite which, but it is either one or the other. There is an asymmetry between the opening and the closing – if the opening of the door controls access, when closed, it closes the circuit. The door is a real symbol, the symbol *par excellence*, that symbol in which man's passing, through the cross it sketches, intersecting access and closure, can always be recognised.

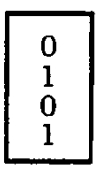
Once it has become possible to fold the two characteristics together, to construct an enclosure, that is to say a circuit, so that something passes when it is closed, and doesn't when it is open, that is when the science of the conjuncture passes into the realm of realisation of cybernetics. If there are machines which calculate all by themselves, add, do sums, do all the marvellous things which man had until then thought to be peculiar to his thinking, it is because the fairy electricity, as we say, enables us to establish circuits, circuits which open and close, which interrupt themselves or restore themselves, as a function of the existence of cybernetised doors.

Note that what's important about this is the relation as such, of access and closure. Once the door is open, it closes. When it is closed, it opens. A door isn't either open or shut, it must be either open and then shut, and then opened and then shut. Thanks to the electrical circuit, and to the induction circuit connected on to it, that is to say what is called feedback,[4] it's sufficient for the door to close for it to be returned by an electro-magnet to an open state and that is its closure again, and its opening again. In this way what is called an oscillation is produced. This oscillation is the scansion. And the scansion is the basis upon which one can inscribe indefinitely the ordered action through employing a series of montages which will be nothing more than child's play.

Here are four cases for a door – in the first two, a closed door, in the others, an open door.



For another door, we can have alternatively an open or a closed door.



[4] English in the original.

As the fancy might take you, you now decide, for instance, that a third door will be open or closed under certain circumstances, depending on the position of the two preceding doors.

0	0	:	0
0	1	:	1
1	0	:	1
1	1	:	1

– Formula 1 –

For the third door to be open, all that's needed is that at least one of the preceding ones be open.

There are other formulae. You can decide that the two doors have to be open for the third one to be open.

0	0	:	0
0	1	:	0
1	0	:	0
1	1	:	1

– Formula 2 –

The third formula has considerable interest:

0	0	:	0
0	1	:	1
1	0	:	1
1	1	:	0

– Formula 3 –

Here, you decide that the third door will only be open when only one of the two doors is.

What does all this amount to? Anything one wishes. Formula 1 can be called, from a logical perspective, reunion or conjunction. Formula 2 also has a logical reading and since its law merges with that of arithmetic multiplication, it is sometimes called logical multiplication. Finally, formula 3 is addition modulus 2. When you add 1 and 1, in a world of binary notation, you get 0 and you carry 1.

Once we have the possibility of embodying this 0, this 1, the notation of presence and absence, in the real, embodying it in a rhythm, a fundamental

scansion, something moves into the real, and we are left asking ourselves – perhaps not for very long, but after all some substantial minds are doing so – whether we have a machine that thinks.

We are very well aware that this machine doesn't think. We made the machine, and it thinks what it has been told to think. But if the machine doesn't think, it is obvious that we don't think either when we are performing an operation. We follow the very same procedures as the machine.

The important thing here is to realise that the chain of possible combinations of the encounter can be studied as such, as an order which subsists in its rigour, independently of all subjectivity.

Through cybernetics, the symbol is embodied in an apparatus – with which it is not to be confused, the apparatus being just its support. And it is embodied in it in a literally trans-subjective way.

I've had to proceed by paths which may seem to you to have been long-winded. But you have to have them in your minds in order to understand the true meaning of the contribution of cybernetics, and in particular the notion of the message.

4

In cybernetics, the notion of the message has nothing in common with what we usually call a message, which always has a meaning. The cybernetic message is a sequence of signs. And a sequence of signs always comes down to a series of 0s and 1s. That is indeed why what is called the unit of information, that is to say what the efficacity of any kind of sign is measured against, always refers back to a primary unit called the keyboard, which is nothing other than the alternative, quite simply.

Within this system of symbols, the message is caught in a banal network, that of the combination of the encounter on the basis of a unified scansion, that is to say of a 1 which is the scansion itself.

On the other hand, the notion of information is as simple to grasp as one of these little tables I've been drawing for you.

0	0	:	0
0	1	:	0
1	0	:	0
1	1	:	1

Let us start with this table, which should read as follows – I must have two positive plays to win. This means that at the beginning, I have an expectation of 1/4. Suppose that I have already had one go. If it was negative, I haven't got

another chance. If it was positive, I have one chance in two, 1/2. This means that a differentiation of level has come about with respect to my chances, in the form of an increase.

The phenomena of energy and of nature always tend in the direction of an equalisation of levels of difference. In the order of the message and of the calculation of chances, to the extent that the information increases, the difference in levels becomes more differentiated. I am not saying it always increases, for you may find cases in which it doesn't, but it doesn't necessarily diminish, and always tends towards differentiation.

Everything we call language can be organised around this basic element. In order for language to come into being, insignificant little things such as spelling and syntax have to be introduced. But all that is a given from the start, because these tables constitute a syntax, and that is indeed why one can get machines to undertake logical operations.

In other words, within this perspective, syntax exists before semantics. Cybernetics is a science of syntax, and it is in a good position to help us perceive that the exact sciences do nothing other than tie the real to a syntax.

So what is semantics, that is to say concrete languages, those we deal with, with their ambiguities, their emotional content, their human meaning? Are we going to say that semantics is peopled, furnished with the desire of men?

What is certain is that it is us who introduce meaning. In any case it is certain for a great number of things. But can we say that everything circulating in the machine has no meaning whatsoever? Certainly not in all the senses of the word *meaning*, because, for the message to be a message, not only must there be a sequence of signs, but there has to be a sequence of directed signs. For it to function in accordance with a syntax, the machine must run in a certain direction. And when I say *machine*, you can sense that it isn't simply a little box – when I am writing on paper, when I go through the transformations of the little 1s and 0s, that also is always a directed activity.

It is therefore not entirely rigorous to say that it is human desire which, all by itself, introduces meaning into this primitive language. The proof of that is that nothing unexpected comes out of the machine. That is to say, not so much what interests us, but what we predicted. It stops just where we have determined that it would stop, and that's where a certain result can be read.

The foundation of the system is already in play. How could it be established if it didn't rest on the notion of chance, that is to say on a certain pure anticipation, which already has a meaning?

So this is the symbol in its most purified form. The latter can already by itself yield more than mistakes in syntax. Mistakes in syntax engender only errors, they are only accidents. But mistakes in programming engender falsehood. Already, at this level, the true and the false are at stake. What does that signify for us analysts? What are we faced with when the human subject addresses himself to us?

His discourse is an impure discourse. *Impure* – is it so just because of mistakes in syntax? No, of course not. The whole of psychoanalysis is quite rightly founded on the fact that getting something meaningful out of human discourse isn't a matter of logic. We look behind this discourse, which has its own meaning, for its meaning, in another meaning, and precisely in the symbolic function which is manifested through it. And also there now emerges another meaning of the world *symbol*.

At this point we come upon a precious fact revealed to us by cybernetics – there is something in the symbolic function of human discourse that cannot be eliminated, and that is the role played in it by the imaginary.

The first symbols, natural symbols, stem from a certain number of prevailing images – the image of the human body, the image of a certain number of obvious objects like the sun, the moon, and some others. And that is what gives human language its weight, its resources, and its emotional vibration. Is this imaginary homogeneous with the symbolic? No. And it would be a perversion of the meaning of psychoanalysis to reduce it to an emphasis on these imaginary themes, to the coaptation of the subject by an elective, privileged, prevailing object, which gives the modulus of what is called, in what has now become a fashionable term, the object relation.

The one thing which cybernetics clearly highlights is the radical difference between the symbolic and the imaginary orders. A cybernetician recently admitted to me the extreme difficulty one has, whatever is said about it, in translating cybernetically the functions of *Gestalt*, that is the coaptation of good forms. And what is good form in living nature is bad form in the symbolic.

As has often be said, man invented the wheel. The wheel isn't to be found in nature, but it is a good form, that of the circle. On the other hand, in nature you won't find a wheel which describes the trace of one of its points on each of its circuits. There is no cycloid in the imaginary. The cycloid is a discovery in the symbolic. And whereas the latter can easily be produced by a cybernetic machine, one encounters unprecedented difficulties, except in the most artificial manner, in getting one circle to correspond to another by means of a dialogue between two machines.

That is what highlights the essential distinction between the two planes – that of the imaginary and that of the symbolic.

There is an inertia in the imaginary which we find making itself felt in the discourse of the subject, sowing discord in the discourse, making it such that I do not realise that when I mean someone well, I mean him ill, that when I love him, it is myself that I love, or when I think I love myself, it is precisely at this moment that I love an other. It is precisely the exercise of the dialectic of analysis which should dissipate this imaginary confusion, and restitute to the discourse its meaning as discourse.

The issue is to know whether the symbolic exists as such, or whether the

symbolic is simply the fantasy of the second degree of the imaginary coaptations. This is where there is a choice between two orientations of analysis.

Given that, through the vicissitudes of history, all meanings have for a long time been accumulating as semantic ballast, is it a matter of following the subject in the direction which he has given, in the here and now, to his discourse, in that he knows that he is engaged in psychoanalysis, and that psychoanalysis has formulated certain norms? Is it a matter of encouraging him to be a good person, to become someone of substance who has attained instinctual maturity, leaving behind the stages in which the image of this or that orifice dominates? Is it a matter, in analysis, of a coaptation of these fundamental images, of a rectification, of a normalisation in terms of the imaginary, or of a liberation of meaning in the discourse, in this continuation of the universal discourse in which the subject is engaged? That is where the schools diverge.

Freud had this sense of meaning in the highest degree, which accounts for the fact that so many of his works, *The Three Caskets* for instance, read as if they were written by a divine, as if they were guided by a meaning belonging to the order of poetical inspiration. What's at issue is knowing whether or not, yes or no, analysis will continue in the Freudian direction, searching not for the ineffable, but for meaning.

What is the meaning of meaning? Meaning is the fact that the human being isn't master of this primordial, primitive language. He has been thrown into it, committed, caught up in its gears.

We don't know the origin. We are told, for instance, that the cardinal numbers appeared in languages before the ordinal numbers. That hadn't been expected. One might have thought that man comes upon number by way of the ordinal, through dancing, through civil and religious procession, the order of precedence, the organisation of the city, which is nothing more than order and hierarchy. And yet the cardinal number came first, the linguists tell me.

We must marvel at the paradox. Here man isn't master in his own house. There is something into which he integrates himself, which through its combinations already governs. The passage of man from the order of nature to the order of culture follows the same mathematical combinations which will be used to classify and explain. Claude Lévi-Strauss calls them the elementary structures of kinship. And yet primitive men are not supposed to have been Pascals. Man is engaged with all his being in the procession of numbers, in a primitive symbolism which is distinct from imaginary representations. It is in the middle of that that something of man has to gain recognition. But what has to be recognised, Freud teaches us, is not expressed, but repressed.

With a machine, whatever doesn't come on time simply falls by the wayside and makes no claims on anything. This is not true for man, the scansion is alive,

and whatever doesn't come on time remains in suspense. That is what is involved in repression.

No doubt something which isn't expressed doesn't exist. But the repressed is always there, insisting, and demanding to be. The fundamental relation of man to this symbolic order is very precisely what founds the symbolic order itself – the relation of non-being to being.

What insists on being satisfied can only be satisfied in recognition. The end of the symbolic process is that non-being come to be, because it has spoken.

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