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Am I qualified? · The essence of comedy · What is a praxis? · Between science and religion · The hysteric and Freud's own desire

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this series of lectures, which I have been invited to give by the École pratique des Hautes Études, I shall be talking to you about the fundamentals of psycho-analysis.

Today I should like simply to point out to you the meaning I intend to give to this title and the way I hope to justify it.

And yet, I must first introduce myself to you—despite the fact that most, though not all of you, know me already—because the circumstances are such that before dealing with this subject it might be appropriate to ask a preliminary question, namely: *am I qualified to do so?*

My qualification for speaking to you on this subject amounts to this: for ten years, I held what was called a seminar, addressed to psycho-analysts. As some of you may know, I withdrew from this role (to which I had in fact devoted my life) as a result of events occurring within what is called a psycho-analytic association, and, more specifically, within the association that had conferred this role upon me.

It might be said that my qualification to undertake the same role elsewhere is not, by that token, impugned as such. However that may be, I consider the problem deferred for the time being. And if today I am in a position to be able, let us simply say, to *further* this teaching of mine, I feel it incumbent upon me, before embarking on what for me is a new phase, to express my thanks to M. Fernand Braudel, the chairman of the section of the Hautes Études that appointed me to appear before you here. M. Braudel has informed me of his regret at being unable to be present: I would like to pay tribute to what I can only call his nobility in providing me with a means of continuing my

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teaching, whose style and reputation alone were known to him. Nobility is surely the right word for his welcome to someone in my position—that of a refugee otherwise reduced to silence. M. Braudel extended this welcome to me as soon as he had been alerted by the vigilance of my friend Claude Lévi-Strauss, whom I am delighted to see here today and who knows how precious for me this evidence of his interest in my work is—in work that has developed in parallel with his own.

I wish also to thank all those who on this occasion demonstrated their sympathy to such effect that M. Robert Flacelière, Director of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, was generous enough to put this auditorium at the disposal of the École des Hautes Études—and without which I should have been at a loss to welcome you in such numbers—for which I wish to express my most heartfelt thanks.

All this concerns the *base*, in the topographical and even the military sense of the word—the base for my teaching. I shall now turn to what it is about—the fundamentals of psycho-analysis.

I

As far as the fundamentals of psycho-analysis are concerned, my seminar was, from the beginning, *implicated*, so to speak. It was an element of those fundamentals, because it was a contribution, *in concreto*, to them—because it was an internal part of psycho-analytic praxis itself—because it was aimed at what is an essential of that praxis, namely, the training of psycho-analysts.

There was a time when, ironically—temporarily, perhaps, and for lack of anything better in the situation I was in—I was led to define a criterion of what psycho-analysis is, namely, the treatment handed out by psycho-analysts. Henry Ey, who is here today, will remember the article in question as it was published in a volume of the encyclopaedia he edits. And, since he is present, it is all the easier for me to recall the fury that the article aroused and the pressure exerted to get the said article withdrawn from the said encyclopaedia. As a result, M. Ey, whose sympathy for my cause is well known, was powerless to resist an operation masterminded by an editorial committee on which there were, precisely, some psycho-analysts. The

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article concerned will be included in a collection of a number of my essays that I am trying to put together, and you will, I think, be able to judge for yourselves whether it has lost any of its relevance. For me, this seems all the less likely given that the questions I raise in it are the very same as those that I shall be grappling with here, and which are resuscitated by the fact that here I am, in the present circumstances, still asking that very same question—*what is psycho-analysis?*

No doubt there are certain ambiguities in all this, and the question—as I pointed out in the article—still has a certain bat-like quality. To examine it in broad daylight is what I proposed to do then and, whatever position I am in, it is what I propose to do today.

The position I refer to has changed, in fact; it is not wholly inside, but whether it is outside is not known.

In reminding you of all this, I am not indulging in personal reminiscence. I think you will agree that I am having recourse neither to gossip nor to any kind of polemic if I point out here what is simply *a fact*, namely, that my teaching—specifically designated as such—has been the object of censure by a body calling itself the Executive Committee of an organization calling itself the International Psycho-analytical Association. Such censorship is of no ordinary kind, since what it amounts to is no less than a ban on this teaching—which is to be regarded as nul and void as far as any qualification to the title of psycho-analyst is concerned. And the acceptance of this ban is to be a condition of the international affiliation of the Psycho-analytical Association to which I belong.

But this is not all. It is expressly spelt out that this affiliation is to be accepted only if a guarantee is given that my teaching may *never again* be sanctioned by the Association as far as the training of analysts is concerned.

So, what it amounts to is something strictly comparable to what is elsewhere called major excommunication—although there the term is never pronounced without any possibility of repeal. The latter exists only in a religious community designated by the significant symbolic term *synagogue*, and it was precisely that which Spinoza was condemned to. On 27 July 1656—a singular bi-centenary, for it corresponds to that of Freud—Spinoza was made the object of the *kherem*, an

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excommunication that corresponds to major excommunication, since he had to wait some time before becoming the object of the *chammata*, which consists of appending the clause of no return.

Please do not imagine that here—any more than elsewhere—I am indulging in some metaphorical game—that would be too puerile in view of the long and, God knows, serious enough terrain we have to cover. I believe—you will be able to judge for yourselves—that not only by virtue of the echoes it evokes, but by the structure it implies, this fact introduces something that is essential to our investigation of psycho-analytic praxis.

I am not saying—though it would not be inconceivable—that the psycho-analytic community is a Church. Yet the question indubitably does arise—what is it in that community that is so reminiscent of religious practice? Nor would I have stressed this point—though it is sufficiently significant to carry the musty odour of scandal—were it not that like everything I have to say today, it will be useful in what follows.

I do not mean that I am indifferent to what happens to me in such circumstances. Do not imagine that for me—any more, I suppose, than for the intercessor whose precedent I have not hesitated to evoke—this is material for comedy. It is no laughing matter. Nevertheless, I should like to let you know *en passant* that something of the order of a vast comic dimension in all this has not wholly escaped me. What I am referring to here is not at the level of what I have called excommunication. It has to do with the situation I was in for two years, that of knowing that I was—at the hands of precisely those who, in relation to me, were colleagues or even pupils—the object of what is called *a deal*.

For what was at stake was the extent to which the concessions made with respect to the validity of my teaching could be traded off with the other side of the deal, namely, the international affiliation of the Association. I do not wish to forgo this opportunity—we shall return to it later—of indicating that the situation can be experienced at the level of the comic dimension proper.

This can be fully appreciated, I think, only by a psycho-analyst.

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No doubt, being the object of a deal is not a rare situation for an individual—contrary to all the verbiage about human dignity, not to mention the Rights of Man. Each of us at any moment and at any level may be traded off—without the notion of exchange we can have no serious insight into the social structure. The kind of exchange involved here is the exchange of individuals, that is, of those social supports which, in a different context, are known as ‘subjects’, with all their supposed sacred rights to autonomy. It is a well known fact that politics is a matter of trading—wholesale, in lots, in this context—the same subjects, who are now called citizens, in hundreds of thousands. There was nothing particularly exceptional, then, about my situation, except that being traded by those whom I referred to just now as colleagues, and even pupils, is sometimes, if seen from the outside, called by a different name.

But if the truth of the subject, even when he is in the position of master, does not reside in himself, but, as analysis shows, in an object that is, of its nature, concealed, to bring this object out into the light of day is really and truly the essence of comedy.

This dimension of the situation is worth pointing out, I think, especially in the position from which I can testify to it, because, after all, on such an occasion, it might be treated, with undue restraint, a sort of false modesty, as someone who had experienced it from the outside might do. From the inside, I can tell you that this dimension is quite legitimate, that it may be experienced from the analytic point of view, and even, from the moment it is perceived, in a way that overcomes it—namely, from the point of view of humour, which, here, is simply the recognition of the comic.

This remark is not without relevance to my subject—the fundamentals of psycho-analysis—for *fundamentum* has more than one meaning, and I do not need to remind you that in the Kabbala it designates one of the modes of divine manifestation, which, in this register, is strictly identified with the *pudendum*. All the same, it would be extraordinary if, in an analytic discourse, we were to stop at the *pudendum*. In this context, no doubt, the fundamentals would take the form of the *bottom* parts, were it not that those parts were already to some extent exposed.

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Some people, on the outside, may be surprised that certain of my analysands, some of whom were still under analysis, should have taken part, a very active part, in this deal. And they may ask themselves how such a thing is possible were it not that, at the level of the relation between your analysands and yourselves, there is some discord that puts in question the very value of analysis. Well, it is precisely by setting out from something that may provide grounds for scandal that we will be able to grasp in a more precise way what is called the *training analysis*—that praxis, or that stage of praxis, which has been completely ignored in all published work on psycho-analysis—and throw some light on its aims, its limits and its effects.

This is no longer a question of *pudendum*. It is a question of knowing what may, what must, be expected of psycho-analysis, and the extent to which it may prove a hindrance, or even a failure.

That is why I thought I was under an obligation to spare you no details, but to present you with a *fact*, as an object, whose outlines, and whose possible manipulation, I hope you will see more clearly, to present it at the very outset of what I now have to say when, before you, I ask the question—*What are the fundamentals*, in the broad sense of the term, *of psycho-analysis?* Which amounts to saying—What grounds it as praxis?

2

What is a praxis? I doubt whether this term may be regarded as inappropriate to psycho-analysis. It is the broadest term to designate a concerted human action, whatever it may be, which places man in a position to treat the real by the symbolic. The fact that in doing so he encounters the imaginary to a greater or lesser degree is only of secondary importance here.

This definition of praxis, then, is very extensive. We are not going to set out in search of our psycho-analysis, like Diogenes in search of man, in the various, very diversified fields of praxis. Rather we shall take our psycho-analysis with us, and it will direct us at once towards some fairly well located, specifiable points of praxis.

Without even introducing by any kind of transition the two

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terms between which I wish to hold the question—and not at all in an ironic way—I posit first that, if I am here, in such a large auditorium, in such a place, and with such an audience, it is to ask myself *whether psycho-analysis is a science*, and to examine the question with you.

The other reference, the religious one, I already mentioned a little while ago, specifying that I am speaking of religion in the true sense of the term—not of a desiccated, methodologized religion, pushed back into the distant past of a primitive form of thought, but of religion as we see it practised in a still living, very vital way. Psycho-analysis, whether or not it is worthy of being included in one of these two registers, may even enlighten us as to what we should understand by science, and even by religion.

I would like at once to avoid a misunderstanding. In any case, someone will say, psycho-analysis is a form of research. Well, allow me to say quite clearly—in particular to the public authorities for whom this search has seemed, for some time now, to serve as a shibboleth for any number of things—that I am a bit suspicious of this term research. Personally, I have never regarded myself as a researcher. As Picasso once said, to the shocked surprise of those around him—*I do not seek, I find.*

Indeed, there are in the field of so-called scientific research two domains that can quite easily be recognized, that in which one seeks, and that in which one finds.

Curiously enough, this corresponds to a fairly well defined frontier between what may and may not qualify as science. Furthermore, there is no doubt some affinity between the research that seeks and the religious register. In the religious register, the phrase is often used—*You would not seek me if you had not already found me.* The *already found* is already behind, but stricken by something like oblivion. Is it not, then, a complaisant, endless search that is then opened up?

If the search concerns us here, it is by virtue of those elements of this debate that are established at the level of what we nowadays call the human sciences. Indeed, in these human sciences, one sees emerging, as it were, beneath the feet of whoever finds, what I will call the *hermeneutic demand*, which is precisely that which seeks—which seeks the ever new and the never

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exhausted signification, but one threatened with being trampled under foot by him who finds.

Now, we analysts are interested in this hermeneutics, because the way of developing signification offered by hermeneutics is confused, in many minds, with what analysis calls *interpretation*. It so happens that, although this interpretation cannot in any way be conceived in the same way as the aforementioned hermeneutics, hermeneutics, on the other hand, makes ready use of interpretation. In this respect, we see, at least, a corridor of communication between psycho-analysis and the religious register. We shall come back to this in due course.

Before allowing psycho-analysis to call itself a science, therefore, we shall require a little more.

What specifies a science is having an object. It is possible to maintain that a science is specified by a definite object, at least by a certain reproducible level of operation known as *experiment*. But we must be very prudent, because this object changes, and in a very strange way, as a science develops. We cannot say that the object of modern physics is the same now as at its birth, which I would date in the seventeenth century. And is the object of modern chemistry the same as at the moment of its birth, which I would date from the time of Lavoisier?

It is possible that these remarks will force us into an at least tactical retreat, and to start again from the praxis, to ask ourselves, knowing that praxis delimits a field, whether it is at the level of this field that the modern scientist, who is not a man who knows a lot about everything, is to be specified.

I do not accept Duhem's demand that every science should refer to a unitary, or world, system—a reference that is always in fact more or less idealist, since it is a reference to the need of identification. I would even go so far as to say that we can dispense with the implicit transcendent element in the position of the positivist, which always refers to some ultimate unity of all the fields.

We will extricate ourselves from it all the more easily in view of the fact that, after all, it is disputable, and may even be regarded as false. It is in no way necessary that the tree of science should have a single trunk. I do not think that there are many of them. There are perhaps, as in the first chapter of *Genesis*, two different trunks—not that I attach in any way an ex-

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ceptional importance to this myth, which is tinged to a greater or lesser degree with obscurantism, but why shouldn't we expect psycho-analysis to throw some light on it?

If we hold to the notion of experience, in the sense of the field of a praxis, we see very well that it is not enough to define a science. Indeed, this definition might be applied very well, for example, to the mystical experience. It is even by this door that it is regarded once again as scientific, and that we almost arrive at the stage of thinking that we can have a scientific apprehension of this experience. There is a sort of ambiguity here—to subject an experience to a scientific examination always implies that the experience has of itself a scientific subsistence. But it is obvious that we cannot re-introduce the mystical experience into science.

One further remark. Might this definition of science, based on the field determined by a praxis, be applied to alchemy to give it the status of a science? I was recently rereading a little book that is not even included in Diderot's *Complete Works*, but which certainly seems to be by him. Although chemistry was born with Lavoisier, Diderot speaks throughout this little book, with all the subtlety of mind we expect of him, not of chemistry, but of alchemy. What is it that makes us say at once that, despite the dazzling character of the stories he recounts from ages past, alchemy, when all is said and done, is not a science? Something, in my view, is decisive, namely, that the purity of soul of the operator was, as such, and in a specific way, an essential element in the matter.

This remark is not beside the point, as you may realize, since we may be about to raise something similar concerning the presence of the analyst in the analytic Great Work, and to maintain that it is perhaps what our training analysis seeks. I may even seem to have been saying the same thing myself in my teaching recently, when I point straight out, all veils torn aside, and in a quite overt way, towards that central point that I put in question, namely—*what is the analyst's desire?*

3

What must there be in the analyst's desire for it to operate in a correct way? Can this question be left outside the limits of our field, as it is in effect in the sciences—the modern sciences

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of the most assured type—where no one questions himself as to what there must be in the desire, for example, of the physicist?

There really must be a series of crises for an Oppenheimer to question us all as to what there is in the desire that lies at the basis of modern physics. No one pays any attention to him anyway. It is thought to be a political incident. Is this desire something of the same order as that which is required of the adept of alchemy?

In any case, the analyst's desire can in no way be left outside our question, for the simple reason that the problem of the training of the analyst poses it. And the training analysis has no other purpose than to bring the analyst to the point I designate in my algebra as the analyst's desire.

Here, again, I must for the moment leave the question open. You may feel that I am leading you, little by little, to some such question as—Is agriculture a science? Some people will say yes, some people no. I offer this example only to suggest to you that you should make some distinction between agriculture defined by an object and agriculture defined, if you'll forgive me, by a field—between agriculture and agronomy. This enables me to bring out one definite dimension—we are at the abc stage, but, after all, we can't help it—that of *formula making*.

Is that enough to define the conditions of a science? I don't think so. A false science, just like a true science, may be expressed in formulae. The question is not so simple, then, when psycho-analysis, as a supposed science, appears to have such problematic features.

What are the formulae in psycho-analysis concerned with? What motivates and modulates this 'sliding-away' (*glissement*) of the object? Are there psycho-analytic concepts that we are now in possession of? How are we to understand the almost religious maintenance of the terms proposed by Freud to structure the analytic experience? Was Freud really the first, and did he really remain the only theoretician of this supposed science to have introduced fundamental concepts? Were this so, it would be very unusual in the history of the sciences. Without this trunk, this mast, this pile, where can our practice be moored? Can we even say that what we are dealing with are concepts in the strict sense? Are they concepts in the process

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of formation? Are they concepts in the process of development, in movement, to be revised at a later date?

I think this is a question in which we can maintain that some progress has already been made, in a direction that can only be one of work, of conquest, with a view to resolving the question as to *whether psycho-analysis is a science*. In fact, the maintenance of Freud's concepts at the centre of all theoretical discussion in that dull, tedious, forbidding chain—which is read by nobody but psycho-analysts—known as the psycho-analytic literature, does not alter the fact that analysts in general have not yet caught up with these concepts, that in this literature most of the concepts are distorted, debased, fragmented, and that those that are too difficult are quite simply ignored—that, for example, everything that has been developed around the concept of frustration is, in relation to Freud's concepts, from which it derives, clearly retrograde and pre-conceptual.

Similarly, no one is any longer concerned, with certain rare exceptions to be found among my pupils, with the ternary structure of the Oedipus complex or with the castration complex.

It is certainly no contribution to the theoretical status of psycho-analysis for a writer like Fenichel to reduce, by an enumeration of the 'main sewer' type, the accumulated material of the psycho-analytic experience to the level of platitude. Of course, a certain quantity of facts have been gathered together, and there is some point in seeing them grouped into a few chapters, but one cannot avoid the impression that, in a whole field, everything is explained in advance. Analysis is not a matter of discovering in a particular case the differential feature of the theory, and in doing so believe that one is explaining why your daughter is silent—for the point at issue is to *get her to speak*, and this effect proceeds from a type of intervention that has nothing to do with a differential feature.

Analysis consists precisely in getting her to speak. It might be said, therefore, that in the last resort, it amounts to overcoming the barrier of silence, and this is what, at one time, was called the analysis of the resistances.

The symptom is first of all the silence in the supposed speaking subject. If he speaks, he is cured of his silence, obviously. But this does not tell us anything about why he began to speak.

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It merely designates for us a differential feature which, in the case of the silent girl, is, as was only to be expected, that of the hysteric.

Now, the differential feature of the hysteric is precisely this—it is in the very movement of speaking that the hysteric constitutes her desire. So it is hardly surprising that it should be through this door that Freud entered what was, in reality, the relations of desire to language and discovered the mechanisms of the unconscious.

That this relation of desire to language as such did not remain concealed from him is a feature of his genius, but this is not to say that the relation was fully elucidated—far from it—by the massive notion of the transference.

The fact that, in order to cure the hysteric of all her symptoms, the best way is to satisfy her hysteric's desire—which is for her to posit her desire in relation to us as an unsatisfied desire—leaves entirely to one side the specific question of *why* she can sustain her desire only as an unsatisfied desire. So hysteria places us, I would say, on the track of some kind of original sin in analysis. There has to be one. The truth is perhaps simply one thing, namely, the desire of Freud himself, the fact that something, in Freud, was never analysed.

I had reached precisely this point when, by a strange coincidence, I was put into the position of having to give up my seminar.

What I had to say on the Names-of-the-Father had no other purpose, in fact, than to put in question the origin, to discover by what privilege Freud's desire was able to find the entrance into the field of experience he designates as the unconscious.

It is absolutely essential that we should go back to this origin if we wish to put analysis on its feet.

In any case, such a mode of questioning the field of experience will be guided, in our next meeting, by the following reference—what conceptual status must we give to four of the terms introduced by Freud as fundamental concepts, namely, *the unconscious, repetition, the transference and the drive?*

We will reach our next step, at our next meeting, by considering the way in which, in my past teaching, I have situated these concepts in relation to the more general function that embraces them, and which makes it possible to show their

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operational value in this field, namely, the subjacent, implicit function of the signifier as such.

This year, I promised myself to break off at twenty-past two, so as to leave time for those who do not have to go on at once to other pursuits to ask questions arising from my lecture.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

M. TORT: *When you relate psycho-analysis to Freud's desire and to the desire of the hysteric, might you not be accused of psychologism?*

LAGAN: The reference to Freud's desire is not a psychological reference—and reference to the hysteric's desire is not a psychological reference.

I posed the following question: the functioning of 'Primitive Thinking' (*la Pensée sauvage*), which Lévi-Strauss places at the basis of the statutes of society, is *one* unconscious, but is it enough to accommodate the unconscious as such? And if it is able to do so, does it accommodate the Freudian unconscious?

It was through the hysterics that Freud learnt the way of the strictly Freudian unconscious. It was here that I brought the desire of the hysteric into play, while indicating at the same time that Freud did not stop there.

Freud's desire, however, I have placed at a higher level. I have said that the Freudian field of analytic practice remained dependent on a certain original desire, which always plays an ambiguous, but dominant role in the transmission of psycho-analysis. The problem of this desire is not psychological, any more than is the unsolved problem of Socrates' desire. There is an entire thematic area concerning the status of the subject when Socrates declares that he does not place desire in a position of original subjectivity, but in the position of an object. Well! Freud, too, is concerned with desire as an object.

15 January 1964