

# Lacanian Theory of Discourse

Subject, Structure, and Society

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### 3. Extimité

Jacques-Alain Miller

The term “extimacy”<sup>a</sup> (*extimité*), coined by Lacan from the term “intimacy” (*intimité*), occurs two or three times in the *Seminar*. Our task will be to transform this term into an articulation, a structure, to produce it as an  $S_1$  that would allow us to go beyond and over the confusion that we first experience when faced with such a signifier.

#### 1. §

For analysts, referring only to the analytic experience is illusory, for Freud’s and Lacan’s works are also part of our relation to psychoanalysis. And our common reading of the commentary on Freudian texts that forms the subject of the first ten years of Lacan’s *Seminar* is not unlike the *lectio* of the Middle Ages. At that time, the lesson of a master was to be divided into three parts: *littera*, *sensus*, and *sententia*. *Littera* is the level of the construction of the text, the most grammatical level; *sensus* is the level of the signified, of the explicit and easy meaning; and *sententia* is the deep understanding of meaning. Only this level of *sententia* can justify the discipline of commentary.

The problem posed by Lacan’s teaching is precisely that one of its constants is a commentary on Freud. Moreover, of his own sayings, Lacan makes maxims, or *sententiae* (in the Middle Ages, the word also meant “commonplace”). Thus, he does not allow the Other to choose what of Lacan must be repeated—because he formalizes his own thought by expressing it in formulas that are simple, or that at least seem simple. Thus, “The unconscious is structured like a language,” “Desire is the desire of the Other,” and “The signifier represents the subject for another signifier,” are *sententiae* of Lacan. At present, part of our task lies in culling these *sententiae*, in gathering them into a florilegium.<sup>b</sup> This we do with Lacan, because he seems to present himself

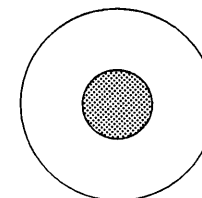
as an author in the medieval sense of the word, that is, as the one who knows what he says.

Despite his *sententiae*, however, Lacan is not an author. His work is a teaching. We must take this into consideration; we must know that following his star requires that we do not synchronize and dogmatize this teaching, that we do not hide but rather stress its contradictions, its antinomies, its deadlocks, its difficulties. For a teaching on the analytic experience is like a *work in progress*<sup>c</sup> and implies a back-and-forth motion between text and experience.

#### 2. Extimacy (*Extimité*)

Why this title? First, because last year I gave my attention to gathering, developing, and articulating the quaternary structures in Lacan’s teaching; and as a result it seems to me that extimacy must be formalized and dealt with apart from these structures. Second, I could not disregard this question of extimacy, because I am particularly devoting myself to the question of the real in the symbolic. It so happens that “extimacy” is a term used by Lacan to designate in a problematic manner the real in the symbolic. Third, it seems to me that this term has a great potential for crystallization. When reconsidering the problems of analytic experience and of Lacan’s teaching from the standpoint of this term, one realizes indeed that a number of scattered questions raised by our practice fall into place. Fourth, this expression “extimacy” is necessary in order to escape the common ravings about a psychism supposedly located in a bipartition between interior and exterior.

Let us qualify this last point, however, for it is not enough to say that this bipartition is unsatisfactory. We must also elaborate a relation in its stead. Indeed, it is so easy to slide into this interior-exterior bipartition that we need, for our own use, to substitute for it another relation, the simplest possible, which we will represent with the following drawing:



This very simple diagram of Lacan's means that the exterior is present in the interior. The most interior—this is how the dictionary defines “intimate” (*l'intime*)—has, in the analytic experience, a quality of exteriority. This is why Lacan invented the term “extimate.” The word indeed is not current yet. But with a little effort and luck, it will perhaps come to exist—in a few centuries—in the *Académie française* dictionary!<sup>d</sup>

It should be observed that the term “interior” is a comparative that comes to us from Latin and of which *intimus* is the superlative. This word is like an effort on the part of language to reach the deepest point in the interior. Let us note as well that quotations from literary works given by dictionaries show that one says commonly, constantly, that the most intimate is at the same time the most hidden. Therefore, paradoxically, the most intimate is not a point of transparency but rather a point of opacity. And this point of opacity is generally used to found the necessity of certain covers, the most common being the religious cover, as we are going to see.

### 3. A → §

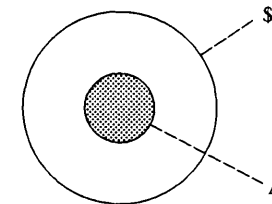
Extimacy is not the contrary of intimacy. Extimacy says that the intimate is Other—like a foreign body, a parasite. In French, the date of birth of the term “intimacy” can be located in the seventeenth century; it is found for instance in Madame de Sévigné's *Correspondance*, a model of intimacy, from which comes this sentence: “I could not help telling you all this detail, in the intimacy and love of my heart, like someone who unburdens herself to a maid whose tenderness is without parallel.” Is it not charming that one of the first occurrences in the French language of the term “intimacy” already has a relation to a kind of confession of the heart to someone full of tenderness?

In psychoanalysis, it seems to us natural from the start to place ourselves in the register of intimacy, for there is no experience more intimate than that of analysis, which takes place in private and requires trust, the most complete lack of restraint possible, to the point that in our consulting rooms—these places reserved for the confessions of intimacy—analysands, though in the house of someone else, sometimes act as if they were at home. This is confirmed when such an analysand takes out of his pocket the key to his own house as he is reaching the doorstep of his analyst.

However, in no way can one say that the analyst is an intimate friend of his analysand. The analyst, on the contrary, is precisely extimate to this intimacy. Perhaps this shows that one cannot have one's own house. Perhaps also it is this position of the psychoanalyst's extimacy that makes so distinct and so constant the role of the Jew in the history of psychoanalysis.

If we use the term “extimacy” in this way, we can consequently make it be equivalent to the unconscious itself. In this sense, the extimacy of the subject is the Other. This is what we find in “The Agency of the Letter,” when Lacan speaks of “this other to whom I am more attached than to myself, since, at the heart of my assent to my identity to myself, it is he who stirs me” (*Ecrits: A Selection*, 172; translation modified)—where the extimacy of the Other is tied to the vacillation of the subject's identity to himself. Thus the writing  $A \rightarrow §$  is justified.

There are several covers of this point of extimacy, one of which is the religious cover. Thus Saint Augustine speaks of God as *interior intimo meo*, “more interior than my innermost being.” “God” here is thus a word that covers this point of extimacy that in itself has nothing likeable. This implies this schema—



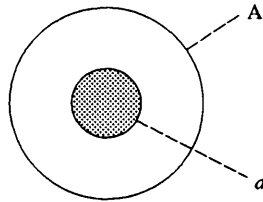
—where the circle of the subject contains as the most intimate (*intime*) of its intimacy the extimacy of the Other. In a certain way, this is what Lacan is commenting on when he speaks of the unconscious as discourse of the Other, of this Other who, more intimate than my intimacy, stirs me. And this intimate that is radically Other, Lacan expressed with a single word: “extimacy.”

We could apply this term to the psychiatric clinic and call mental automatism “extimate automatism” insofar as it manifests in an obvious fashion the presence of the Other and of its discourse at the very center of intimacy. In the analytic clinic, it is interesting to note that it is always when extimacy is punctualized that an analyst's hesitations about the diagnosis occur—between obsession and psychosis, for example—de-

spite the very clear distinctions that he makes in other respects between one and the other. Extimacy indeed is so structural for the speaking being that no analyst can say he has never encountered it, if only in the experience of his own hesitations.

#### 4. $a \diamond A$

Let us introduce now a dimension other than the one from our previous schema, by posing the small  $a$  as part of the Other. The structure is the same, but this time the exterior circle is that of the Other, and the central area, the area of extimacy, is occupied by  $a$ .



This is not the negation of the preceding schema but a new use of the same structure, which responds to another consideration. Up to this point in our argument, we have used the concept of the Other as something obvious. Now, the question of extimacy leads us to problematize this concept, to ask the question of the alterity of the Other, that is, of why the Other is really other.

“What is the Other of the Other?” is the very simple question asked by Lacan in order to ground the alterity of the Other. To say that the Other of the Other is the subject would not take us very far, for the precise reason that the subject of the analytic experience is nothing, is a barred function.

The first attempt made by Lacan was to posit that the Other of the Other of the signifier was the Other of the law. This hypothesis concludes his essay on psychoses.<sup>1</sup> There would exist an Other who lays down the law to the Other. This would imply the existence of a metalanguage that would be the Law, for the Law as absolute is a metalanguage.

Later, Lacan, thinking against Lacan, says on the contrary that “there is no Other of the Other,” that “there is no metalanguage.” To whom does he say this? He says it to the previous Lacan. Thus, there is no reason to confuse an effort at rationality with a dogmatization. Let us

note that this famous *sententia*, “There is no Other of the Other,” implies a devalorization and a pluralization of the Name-of-the-Father. But it also implies a problem in grounding the alterity of the Other. Indeed, what is it, this Other, if not a universal function, an abstraction? Father Takatsuga Sasaki’s reaction, for example, testifies to this when he tells us that this kind of abstraction seems impossible in the Japanese language, in which there is no Other but various categories of alterity, of plurality.

The Other that we experience through the religious cover is omnivalent. It is precisely what is called, in Christianity, the neighbor.<sup>6</sup> It is a way to nullify extimacy; it grounds what is common, what conforms, conformity. It belongs fundamentally, as universal, to this conformity. But if there is no Other of the Other, what is the ground of his alterity?

*Jouissance* is precisely what grounds the alterity of the Other when there is no Other of the Other. It is in its relation to *jouissance* that the Other is really Other. This means that no one can ground the alterity of the Other in the signifier, since the very law of the signifier implies that one can always be substituted for the other and vice versa. The law of the signifier is indeed the very law of 1-2, and in this dimension, there is a kind of democracy, an equality, a community, a principle of peace.

Now, what we are attempting to see is what makes the Other other, that is, what makes it particular, different, and in this dimension of alterity of the Other, we find war. Racism, for example, is precisely a question of the relation to an Other as such, conceived in its difference. And it does not seem to me that any of the generous and universal discourses on the theme of “we are all fellow beings” have had any effectiveness concerning this question. Why? Because racism calls into play a hatred that is directed precisely toward what grounds the Other’s alterity, in other words, its *jouissance*. If no decision, no will, no amount of reasoning is sufficient to wipe out racism, this is indeed because it is founded on the point of extimacy of the Other.

It is not simply a matter of an imaginary aggressivity that, itself, is directed at fellow beings. Racism is founded on what one imagines about the Other’s *jouissance*; it is hatred of the particular way, of the Other’s own way, of experiencing *jouissance*. We may well think that racism exists because our Islamic neighbor is too noisy when he has parties. However, what is really at stake is that he takes his *jouissance* in a way different from ours. Thus the Other’s proximity exacerbates racism: as

soon as there is closeness, there is a confrontation of incompatible modes of *jouissance*. For it is simple to love one's neighbor when he is distant, but it is a different matter in proximity.

Racist stories are always about the way in which the Other obtains a *plus-de-jour*:<sup>f</sup> either he does not work or he does not work enough, or he is useless or a little too useful, but whatever the case may be, he is always endowed with a part of *jouissance* that he does not deserve. Thus true intolerance is the intolerance of the Other's *jouissance*. Of course, we cannot deny that races do exist, but they exist insofar as they are, in Lacan's words, races of discourse, that is, traditions of subjective positions.

##### 5. $a \subset A$

One usually stresses what, of the Other, is subject. When Lacan speaks, for example, of the subject assumed to know, there seems to be no difficulty: there is a way of the Other that is to be a subject. However, we must point out something else—that is, what in the Other is object. We will develop this point from two seminars by Lacan, *The Ethics* and *Transference*.

The opposition between *das Ding*, the Thing, and the Other is laid out in the seminar on *The Ethics*. This antinomy is worked out enigmatically—which explains the fact that *das Ding* has long remained wrapped in mystery. But it is the case that, in the seminar on transference, which comes immediately after *The Ethics*, this opposition is transformed into a relation that can be written in this way:  $a \subset A$ . Lacan makes this transformation from a metaphor borrowed from philosophy that is nowadays known as that of Silenus, which contains the object, *agalma*, inside itself. Here we see a revolution in Lacan's teaching, for this relation, established in a literary, mythical, nonformalist way, appears to be completely antagonistic to earlier developments. The Other, in the seminar on transference, is no longer only the place of the signifier; there the object is included in the Other—which appears somewhat mystical because the Seminar works only with the idea of interior and exterior. Plato's model is nothing more: a cover that looks like a Silenus and inside which something else is found. We must therefore formalize this model of interior and exterior.

Something has been introduced in Lacan's teaching that has only been understood recently, that is, the devalorization of the Other of the signifier. He could thus say, "The Other does not exist," which does not prevent the Other from functioning, for many things function without existing. However, the sentence, "The Other does not exist," is meaningless if it does not imply that *a*, on the contrary, does exist. The Lacanian Other, the Other that functions, is not real. That is what allows us to understand that *a* is real, to understand how this *a* as *plus-de-jour* finds not only the Other's alterity but also what is real in the symbolic Other. It is not a matter of a link of integration, of interiorization, but of an articulation of extimacy.

Let us illustrate this with the incident that interrupted my class: a bomb scare.<sup>2</sup> The bomb did not exist. However, we had the proof that, without existing, it could produce its effect. My class is of the order of the signifier and is held in a place devoted to teaching, where was introduced an object that, by the way, had a great effect, but that no one knew the location of. This object was impossible to locate. Thus did we prove that at the very moment when this object crops up via the signifier "Bomb!" the Other is emptied, disappears. Only the object remains, the object in a desert.

This is a good example of the antinomy existing between *A* and *a*. And this antinomy is compatible with the formula that we write  $a \subset A$ . For this object, the bomb—an object that is perfectly efficacious without existing or that perhaps will explode tomorrow or next week—is the result of the discourse of the Other. It is not a natural phenomenon, neither a seism nor an earthquake; it is not a substance but on the contrary a result, a product of the discourse of science. The sentence "Bomb!" is located on the level of intersections that Lacan studied to prove that the presence of the subject of the enunciation does not need the presence of the *énoncé*. At the same time, this sentence gives a clear indication of the relation between signifier and object. Indeed, if the signifier "Bomb!" is truly a reference to the bomb, it still does not represent this bomb; it does not say where the bomb is. There is thus a link between this signifier and the object, but we cannot say that "Bomb!" is the signifier of this bomb. The best proof of this is that no one will get the idea to go speak to the bomb so that it will not blow up.

To be done with this point, which has a paradigmatic value, my own

position is to say that the young woman who burst into the room shouting “Bomb!” should have written this on a sheet of paper and handed it to me. At that time, I would have asked the people from one part of the room to leave, then from another part, then from a third one. That is, I would have tried to do things in the most orderly way. This indicates a clinical difference between her and me, and the importance of the way a subject situates itself in a moment of crisis. When I asked this person why she had not warned me in writing, she answered: “But the bomb could have exploded any moment!” Of course, but identifying with the bomb may not be the best way to get out of such a situation.

### 6. *Quod* without *Quid*

This part of my development concerns the type of the object and what makes its localization in the place of the Other difficult. When we speak of the object *a*, we are not speaking about an object summoned opposite the subject of the representation. If we take the bomb, for example, no one is there to gaze at it. It is really an object incompatible with the presence of the subject; it implies a physical disappearance of bodies and persons that, in this example, represent the subject. While you can sit down opposite a painting and chat with the people next to you, it is not so with the bomb; when you speak about this type of object, the subject disappears.

The object *a* is not a chapter of ontology. Indeed, ontology says what is common to all objects. It consists in gathering several features of the object of representation before the object itself is experienced. This is what Heidegger called “ontological precomprehension”: we can know a priori that an object is an object if it has such and such a feature. We can also enumerate the object’s criteria. An ontology tells a priori what can be said about objects. These are Aristotle’s categories, where the said is already placed on the object. An ontology is indeed always a doctrine of categories. It can be said that there the structure of objects is already the same as that of the *énoncé*.

But when we speak of object *a*, we speak of another objectivity—let’s say of another “objectivity,” an objectivity that is not summoned opposite the subject of representation. For representation is not an imaginary function. In the seminar on *The Ethics*, *Vorstellung* is the symbolic itself—what Lacan will formalize a few years later with the representa-

tion of the subject by the signifier. The definition, in the Lacanian sense, of *Vorstellung* refers thus to the symbolic and not to the imaginary. However, this new objectivity is such that one cannot avoid experiencing it. It is an object articulated not to the subject but to its division, to a subject that does not represent to itself the objects of the world but that is itself represented. For this reason, we cannot say that the structure of this object is identical to that of the *énoncé*. There is no specificity of the object in the Other, where nonetheless, the object *a* does not dissolve. It escapes categories because it does not have the same structure as the *énoncé*. By using the medieval reference reactualized by Yankélévich, we can say that here it is a matter of a *quod*, in the sense of difference between *quodity* and *quidity*. We could also say that it is a question of the difference between existence and essence, of something that there is, but the essence of which one cannot define in the Other.

One can say that it is—that is, *quodity*—but one cannot say what it is. There we have a kind of paradox of the *quod*: something exists but without *quid*. In this way no one can describe the bomb I was speaking about earlier, except the person who would encounter it, but then, he would not live long! This *quod* without *quid* is a “being without essence” (this expression is found once or twice in Lacan).

$$7. \frac{A}{a}, \frac{i(a)}{a}$$

$\frac{A}{a}$  is constructed on the model of another formula of Lacan,  $\frac{i(a)}{a}$ , which means that in reality, the image of the other clothes or covers the real of the object. But this can also be said of capital A.  $\frac{A}{a}$  is a formula that

implies the devalorization of the Other. It indicates that the Other does not exist, that it has no other status than that of illusion. For this reason, Lacan was able to characterize the end of an analysis as “cynical.” Cynicism means here the end of the illusion of the Other. And sometimes, this fall allows a new access to *jouissance*, to a *jouissance* that Lacan terms perverse because it does not involve the relation to the Other. Sometimes, in fact, this is what someone gains at the end of an analysis—which is then nothing more than the naiveté of this cynicism.

Cynicism as such is indeed a form of naïveté, because it consists in thinking that the fact that the Other does not exist means that it does not function. However, it is naive to deduce from the fact that the Other does not exist that we can erase its universal function and that only *jouissance* is real. Thus Lacan could say that psychoanalysis made scoundrels stupid.<sup>5</sup> They become so because they think, after an analysis, that the values of the Other do not function.

Due to lack of time, we won't develop here the analyst's position between cynicism and sublimation. Let us only specify that sublimation can be written  $\frac{a}{A}$ . This does not mean that the analyst is only a semblance of the object—which would imply that the ultimate truth of the object *a* is that it is real. The apparatus of analytic discourse involves something more difficult: the object *a* is a semblance as such. In the expression “semblance of the object” that we often use, we find the naive belief that the object *a* is real. However, the object *a* as such, as I must emphasize, is a semblance. And the A that is below the bar can function perfectly well as a supposition. The fact that it does not exist, as we have seen, does not at all prevent it from functioning as such.

#### 8. $a \diamond \Phi$

We are going to introduce here a case that was presented in Barcelona<sup>3</sup> and in which we can see a way to refer to the guarantee in order to try to make sure of the absolute risk.<sup>h</sup> The case concerns a woman who gets married, then goes to a lawyer to establish a deed stipulating that she will give up all her rights the day her husband ceases to desire her. This case seems to me paradigmatic for explaining the antinomy between these two terms, since it concerns the very inversion of marriage, marriage being precisely what can permit one to insure oneself against the cause of desire. Marriage implies that the cause of desire is inscribed in the signifier, whereas this woman goes to her lawyer to inscribe in the law the risk of desire.

#### 9. $\frac{A}{-\varphi}$

This case concerns what I call, in Lacan, the formula of the second paternal metaphor. It corresponds point by point to the formula of the Name-of-the-Father (NF  $\frac{\text{other}}{\text{phallus}}$ ), which we must absolutely not forget,

but in the clinic itself we must refer to the second formula, which poses the signification of the phallus as minus phi ( $-\varphi$ ) and which forces us to operate with the inexistence and the inconsistency of the Other, and not with the function of its consistency. This seems to me to have important consequences for analytic practice.

#### 10. The Object *a*

The real, when it concerns the object *a*, is thus a semblance. It is so because it is a lie. Where does the object *a* come from in Lacan? It comes from the partial object of Karl Abraham, that is, from a corporeal consistency. The interesting thing is to see that Lacan transforms this corporeal consistency into a logical consistency. It is a fact, and a significant one: Lacan reduces the object *a*, which is not a signifier, to a logical consistency. This is why we can read out in full, in *Book XX* of his *Seminar*, that the object *a* introduces a semblance of being. Note that he does not say that there is an opposition between semblance and real; quite the opposite. But it is not enough to develop the logical consistency of the Other; it is also necessary to articulate it with the logical consistency of the object *a*. It is only from there that one can understand that the real can be situated only in relation to the deadlocks of logic. Lacan introduces this use of the category of the real in “L'étourdit.”<sup>4</sup> If there were an ontic in psychoanalysis, it would be the ontic of the object *a*. But this is precisely not the road taken by Lacan. The one he took is the road of logical consistency. It is only in this way that we can conceive of the analyst as the object *a*. The analyst is not only a corporeal consistency. He is so also, obviously, as presence, but his value comes especially from logic. And this does not allow sitting quietly between the signifier and the object, but requires on the contrary seeing in what sense the object *a* is a logical consistency. To speak in this way is perhaps



equivalent to think counter to what we said previously, but you know now that thinking counter to oneself is also the lesson of Lacan.

I will add as a final note that this festival of mathemes that I have given here rests on the in-depth work that is done in my class in a looser, more entertaining way, where I make it more palatable by using stories. But these stories are not, for all that, more valuable than the in-depth work of which the present text is the result.

—Text established by Elisabeth Doisneau,  
translated by Françoise Massardier-Kenney

## Notes

This exposition is a condensed version of the course on “Extimacy” that Jacques-Alain Miller gave during the 1985–86 academic year in the department of psychoanalysis at the University of Paris VIII. It was delivered in Spanish for the Sixth International Convention of the *Champ Freudien*, which took place in February 1986.

1. “Of a Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” in *Ecrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 179–225.
2. The class of February 19, 1986, was interrupted by a bomb scare and was rescheduled the same evening in another location.
3. Published subsequently in *Ornicar?* 43 (1987–88): 107.
4. *Scilicet* 4 (1983): 5.

## Translator’s Notes

- a. Although the established translation of “*intimité*” in Lacan is “intimacy,” this translation does not do justice to the full semantic value of the term. In French, “*intimité*” means “intimacy” but also the deepest, innermost part, as in the “*intimité*” of one’s being, one’s thoughts. Perhaps a more satisfying translation would be “intimateness.”
- b. Or a medieval anthology.
- c. In English in the French text.
- d. Very conservative dictionary.
- e. In French, “*le prochain*,” that is, the one who is close.
- f. “*Plus-de-jour*” indicates a “more than,” but the structure “*plus de*” + infinitive reminds one of the Marxist notion of “surplus value.” “*Plus-de-*

*jour*” would thus be the surplus value, or surplus *jouissance*, in the economy of pleasure.

- g. In French, “*rend les canailles bêtes*.” Here Lacan is performing a linguistic dance: “*canaille*” means “scoundrel,” but the word comes from the Greek and Latin for “dog,” as does the word “cynicism.” Moreover, “*bête*” means “beast, animal” as well as “stupid.”
- h. Here the pun revolves around the dual use of the verb “*s’assurer*.” “*S’assurer de*” means “to make sure of,” whereas “*s’assurer contre*” means “to get insured against.” By using the term “*garantie*” (guarantee, warranty) next to “*s’assurer*,” Miller insures that we will combine the two uses of the term.