

## THE REAL AND THE GROUP

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There are certain texts whose the context of enunciation determines the keys to their reading with strong constraints. Lacan's *British Psychiatry and the War* is one such text. The pretext which gave rise to the text is provided by a conference at which Lacan recounts the details of a five-week research trip that he made in September 1945 as a French psychiatrist in order to study the transformations of British Psychiatry by the war. In fact, it is about the impact of psychoanalysis and its methods on British Psychiatry. A chronicle of the end of the war, the rewriting of the conference in 1946 is at the same time a travel diary, a technical inquiry, a philosophical tale, a psychoanalytical interpretation of a state of discontent in civilisation.

The journey takes place in Britain and in the land of psychoanalysis. The technical inquiry bears on the handling of small groups and the installation of the future of psychiatry within the framework of the welfare state. The philosophical tale explores the sense to be given to realism and utilitarianism. The psychoanalytic interpretation bears upon the comparative impact of the decline of the paternal imago in two distinct cultural areas. Finally, it is an ethical treatise in which the place of the psychiatrist-psychoanalyst in the post-war world is defined. It is a manifesto for the definition of his duties and the responsibilities inherent in his action.

We are in an epoque which is already very far away from us. It is a historical rupture in which everything seems to bear the seal of novelty and of a calling. As it emerges from hell, a world is to be reconstructed. The atmosphere is utopian and geared towards social projects. It is one of those turning points of history where man seems to be master of his destiny. The presence of the collective dimension is not, for the subject, lived as a cast-iron law but as an opportunity to take up a position. Let us note how Lacan, in a period in which the need for ideology was so

present, makes use of the term ideology in a very particular fashion. The 'iron curtain' has hardly fallen. The clash of ideologies is not yet that of communism against liberalism. For a brief moment, one could still speak of British ideology and oppose it to French ideology.

In this very precise context, immediately after the war, it is in the name of 'realism' that Lacan will express himself. Without a doubt, it concerns a very particular realism, psychoanalytic realism. As Lacan was well aware, the reintroduction of the term realism and the appreciation of the dimension of the real is delicate in this context. He rises to the challenge. He knows that the notion of 'political realism' served to cover the worst compromises with nazism at the time when it was growing in power. The indirect reference made to Julien Benda's book, published in 1927, *Trahison des clercs*, clearly identifies the problem; in this work, Benda glorified the mission of the intellectual, the 'clerk' in his relation to truth. He was never to give way in his duty to speak the truth, over and against all service to ideology. And yet, with the collapse of democracies between the wars, too many intellectuals put themselves to the service of a so-called 'realism', abandoning their primary mission. At the end of the war realism had a bad press. Lacan nevertheless places himself under its aegis. Let us appreciate the difficulty of the undertaking. If the second world war demonstrated anything, it was the horrifying docility of modern man, ready to enrol under the banner of 'ideologies of nothingness'. As Lacan said ironically at the end of the text, "it is not from too great an indocility of individuals that the dangers for the future of humanity will come". Such is the great lesson of the war, and Lacan will always remember it. From the psychoanalytical point of view it formulates itself for him in a perfectly observed conjunction of the 'most cowardly abandonments of conscience' and the tyranny of the death drive in its superegoic aspect. Yet, he wishes to demonstrate that there exists a realism which is not made of compromise or abandonment. There exists a realism which confronts the 'dark powers of the superego' with determination, and with the intention of vanquishing them. This is the horizon necessary for Lacan to interest himself so passionately in an experience which could otherwise be reduced to little more than an insignificant operation in the service of a contingent politics. Why should one decipher the future in this enterprise

of 'adaptation' of men to the British war effort? It is because it testifies to the possible victory of reason, not only over the nihilism of nazism but against the powers of the death drive. Let us also add that at the time that Lacan was writing, the eugenic fantasies of human biological selection were very present. Huxley's *Brave New World* responded to the will to power of nazi biological selection. Our current context, that of the reading of the human genome, will renew these fantasies and necessitate combats for which we must prepare.

It is thus that Lacan begins by defining the context as that of a 'realism of struggle' in order to then turn to the techniques for adaptation that he saw operating in all their efficiency. If psychoanalysis is presented in its dimension of social efficiency, it is in so far as it is an instrument for the struggle against the death at work in Civilisation. Already, one sees the emergence of the mission that will be ascribed to a School of psychoanalysis: that of being 'a base of operations against the discontents of civilisation'.

And it is in this context that we read this text today. We read it as a link in the chain which will culminate in Lacan's 'doctrine of the School', as J.-A. Miller named it. We read in this text one of the threads of a genealogy of the small group which Lacan will name 'cartel'. He will make it the base of an institution for psychoanalysis. This interest for the small group must be situated in a broader context, that of the definition of the principles of action for psychoanalysis in the social field in its entirety. If this action is possible, it is by considering that this field is not structured differently from the Freudian Unconscious. Lacan draws this lesson from the Freudian *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* as early as the second paragraph of the text with which we are concerned. On the scale of France and its ideology, "I couldn't fail to identify in the group... the self-same modes of defence that the individual makes use of... in neurosis". Throughout the text, the term 'collective' is strictly homologous with subjective processes. From the point of view of psychoanalytic reasoning, the 'collective scale' is nothing but the dimension of the subject. This is what is at stake when Lacan speaks of 'the use of psychological sciences on a collective scale' as he addresses his audience of psychiatrists.

**What a realism of struggle is**

It is first of all Britain and its emergence from the war which interests Lacan. He opposes from the outset British pragmatism to "that mode of unreality under which the whole of the French people had lived the war from beginning to end". This unreality is not simply due to the Pétainist ideology, the 'fairground ideology' in the sense that it was an ideology worthy of fairground stands. It is not for all that that it was any less serious. Gérard Miller accurately drew out all the consequences from Lacan's remarks on Pétainism. The cause of this feeling of unreality is not simply to be ascribed to a bad compass. It is presented by Lacan as the consequence of a moral act, that of the capitulation before the enemy, which had as a consequence the 'truly panicked dissolution of the moral status' of the group. Let us note that Lacan does not make much of the action of General de Gaulle when it comes to this business of morale. We can see that the Gaullist myth of 'resistant France' had not yet had time to construct itself. In the face of the unreality induced on the French side, Lacan opposes the real sense [*sens véritable*] of the 'British ideology': utilitarianism. He translates it as a 'veridical relation to the real'. The link thus made between truth and real indicates the horizon at which Lacan wants to situate himself. He rejects the term 'adaptation' to designate this relation, and this will take on its full import when the 're-adaptation of subjects' comes into question. Since the true value of the term 'realism' can no longer be heard, Lacan proposes instead the term 'heroism'. This connection is unprecedented.

He attributes concrete senses to this term. Heroism is first of all an anti-romanticism, and in this sense, Lacan is Stendahlén. He notes the contempt expressed by his interlocutors for the term 'ruin'. More clinically, he extracts a sign from a series of encounters. He attests to a 'reactional depression on a collective scale', where he finds proof that each one, one by one, has pushed himself to his limits, 'right up to the intimate exhaustion of creative forces'. It is thus that Lacan makes of this depression a positive sign. He says that a 'tonic factor' emanates from it. It is a clinical lesson to remember. One must always distinguish reactional depression from sadness, the pathos of existence, or again melancholia.

In order to approach what strictly constitutes the object of his conference, he makes reference to a book and two men. The book, *The*

*Shaping of Psychiatry by the War*, is by the Director of the Tavistock Clinic before the war, Major General Rees. The two men are Bion and Rickman. First, he draws the elements of the British problem from Rees' book: how a "still very young psychological science was called upon to effect what one may call the synthetic creation of an army" and above all how to care for its morale, conceived in psychoanalytic terms as an identification. The theory of Freudian identification is presented as the first scientific approach of "the incantation designed to absorb the fears and anxieties of each individual in the solidarity of a group". The British army and more broadly the Anglo-American army is presented by Lacan in all its dimension of artefact, of the 'creation of reason'. Its triumph over an army which incarnated the utmost degree of military tradition tarnishes the figure of the military man here seen as a 'residue' of discourse. Reason has dissolved yet another tradition.

The use of psychological tests required for this 'synthetic creation' of the British army is described with the emphasis being laid upon the significance of the process of horizontal identification and its institution. It is a distinct dimension of the process of identification to the ideal brought to light by Freud. Lacan takes stock in this text and recalls that he had underlined the anxiety-inspiring nature of nazi crowds and their frenzied egalitarianism before the leader as early as the published version of his presentation on *The Mirror Stage*, delivered at the 1938 Berlin Congress. From this, he deduces very accurately that the nazi army had been reinforced by the 'moral addition of a democratisation of hierarchical relations'. He does not present democratic equality as an absolute good. Indeed, it remains to be known what purpose it serves. To this universal equality, without exception, of a levelling 'for all', Lacan opposes the pragmatic quest for a homogeneity in groups in view of a precise task. What interests him in the 'small group' is precisely that it does not aim at the universal. The solidarity which emerges from the institution of a common ideal following the Freudian mechanism does not necessarily have to be addressed to the 'for all' of the army or the Church. Here it concerns groups which are limited, differentiated. The stake is to constitute homogeneous groups in their simple relation to a norm of efficiency so that "grouped amongst themselves, these subjects [may]

prove themselves to be infinitely more efficient". Lacan extols the virtues of pragmatism in so far as it is an instrument in the struggle against blind universalism. Group psychology is thus considered as a 'revolution'. This revolution is not only a prolongation of Freudian group psychology. It draws from it a number of developments, of new contributions. In putting the accent upon the vertical identification to a leader, Freud 'neglected the process of horizontal identification'. It is the fundamental theoretical import of this homogeneity aimed at by the practitioners of the group.

### ***The Group and the One***

Bion and Rickman are presented as those who knew how to articulate the practical consequences of this new dimension of horizontal identification. Lacan considers 'striking' Rickman's remark to the effect that the reproaches of narcissism addressed to the neurotic, his difficulty in working with others, may be "because he is rarely placed in an environment where every member would be on the same footing as himself when it comes to relating with one's counterpart [*semblable*]".

Lacan links this 'anti-segregating' declaration with the inspiration that subtends some experiences in France of which he is aware, carried out by progressive psychiatrists. The latter attempt to set up utopian places where one begins by restoring an exchange or a human bond as a preliminary to a 'rational treatment of mental disorders'. This refers to the first attempts at 'Institutional Psychotherapy', as would be called in France what in England would go under the name of 'Community Therapy'. It must be noted that as early as 1946, Lacan encounters a number of psychiatrists wanting to draw a practical inspiration from the teachings of Freud in order to organise the psychiatric care of the future. Some of these had been working with Dr Tosquelles at St Alban's hospital. Others were linked to the student movement, especially the protestant student youth. Before Rickman and Bion's experience, military hospitals were mainly organised through invigoration, moral treatment, reminding each man of his duties, the wish to shame and the threat of various punishments. Instead of accentuating the inequality of the patient suffering from psychological disorders in relation to his duties, and his

inequality before them, Bion organises small groups of people who are all on the same level regarding a task to be accomplished.

This homogeneous environment thus established, with its identificatory strength, is considered by Bion from the angle of its internal tensions. Despite its being homogeneous, it must nevertheless be considered in its disparity. Freud underlined that the unity of the army in war-time is founded upon the bond with the leader and a common enemy. For the men entrusted to his care for purposes of rehabilitation, Bion will thus occupy the position of a severe but just leader, and consider that the common enemy for each is the enemy within. It is their *drop-out*<sup>1</sup> trait, to use an anachronism. Lacan speaks of extravagance. Each is ill from the Ideal, an illness of common discipline to which he cannot submit in reason.

Bion divides the men into groups centred on a task to be accomplished. The methods for the registration of the groups, their inscription on a grid undertaken by one of the groups itself, the sole exigency of novelty imposed on the definition of the groups' tasks, are so many fundamental points isolated by Lacan. These principles, in their prescriptive elegance, will be retained as the basis of all the future work of Community Therapy. As soon as they are formed, the groups find it difficult to exist. They give rise to complaints and to various forms of escapist behaviour. The working hypothesis rests on the fact that the most important difficulties of the neurotic consist in facing up to paternal figures, figures of authority, and that the escapist or rebellious attitudes of the neurotic are linked to the castration complex. What Lacan retains from Bion's construction, grounded on the Kleinian object of the fantasy; is that the task as such is an object which divides the group according to regulated modalities. As a psychoanalyst, Bion considers that the difficulties these subjects encounter in forming a group have no foundation other than a difficulty with regard to identification. His only aim is to make them 'become aware of it'. The point is to stress 'its difficulties of existence as a group' so that they may come out into the open. They have to be systematised just as one systematises the symptom in the individual treatment. These difficulties have to be exposed to the group itself just as the symptom is to be exposed for the subject. Characteristically, Lacan makes use of the term 'readability'. The stake is to

“render [the group] more and more transparent to itself, to the point where each of its members may be able to judge adequately the progress of the whole, bearing in mind that the ideal of such an organisation for the doctor lies in its perfect readability, such that he may be able to appreciate at any time the exit towards which each ‘case’ entrusted to his care is travelling, whether this be a return to his unit, release into civilian life, or persistence in neurosis”. We note that Lacan places the accent on the ‘each’, the one by one. It is not excessive to say that by presenting us Bion’s working hypotheses, he structures the work of the small group as a variant of the sophism of logical time.

The method utilised for this readability has no other foundation than that of interpretation. The stake is to designate in the behaviour of each the same thing that he complains of in others, other groups, or the army in general. “And suddenly the crystallisation of an auto-critique materialises in the group.” In this production of a divided subject who can then interrogate himself Lacan concludes that there is truly the principle of a group treatment. It ranges from the difficulties of the unity of a group to the production of divided subjects, returned to their intimate question.

### ***What the group teaches us about Leadership, the Leader, and the Master Signifier***

After having presented the work of Bion in the rehabilitation centre or the Northfield selection centre, Lacan comes to the method for the selection of officers by means of the trial said to be that of the ‘group without a leader’. This is a reverse chronology. In fact Bion began to deal with the selection of officers in 1941 before moving on to the rehabilitation centre. If Lacan modifies the chronological order it is in order to place the conceptual emphasis on ‘horizontal identification’, and the complement it brings to the Freudian developments. He then comes to the teachings on the vertical dimension, on the leader.

The method of the ‘group without a leader’ used by Bion, allows Lacan to extract the function of the leader from leadership itself. By ascribing a difficult task to a group without giving it an explicit leader, one can see how the indispensable functions of the leader are spontaneously fulfilled by the various participants according to their respective qualities.

“But what the observer will note is not so much what appears of each subject’s capacities as a leader, but the extent to which he is willing to subordinate the concern of looking good to the common objective pursued by the team and in which it is to find its unity.” Many of the traits of the cartel are drawn from the lessons learnt from Bion. It must be noted that these lessons are organised, ordered, decanted. Lacan does not take all of Bion’s developments. The cartel first appears in 1964 in *The Founding Act* of the *Ecole Freudienne de Paris*. It is conceived as a small work group and Lacan adds that he gives it ‘a name’. Each member is equal in relation to a work to be accomplished. It is no longer a question of rehabilitation and adaptation to a war effort. It is about mixing subjects together efficiently — confirmed psychoanalysts or those in training, psychoanalysts or not — around a work project centred on ‘psychoanalysis’. The small group is a work environment in which everybody works together and at the same level. It is not structured around the *gradus* or hierarchy. When Lacan founds his School we are not longer in 1946. The practice of the small group has developed not only in psychiatric institutions but also in universities. Amongst Lacan’s students many have interested themselves in group dynamics. Let us note Jean Oury and Pierre Felix Guattari in the psychiatric clinic of Laborde, Pierre Kauffmann, a university lecturer who did his thesis on Kurt Lewin. In the university the exigency of small groups in order to take over the old organisation of lectures had become a demand of student unions. Those who suffered from the malaise of the lecture, of the remote teacher distant from everything, were able to refind through the small group a means of inscribing themselves in the discourse. Thus the small group had a psychoanalytic history and a university history. In both discourses, the analytic and the university, the small group is a means to struggle against the difficulties of identifying with an ideal, by means of a group identification. In the same way when Lacan founds a School he chooses to support it by means of these small groups which through their work will have to struggle against the malaise of an identification to the master. They will have to remedy this malaise of ‘having to go through his signifiers’.

In the experience of the ‘group without a leader’, Bion had separated the necessity of the function of the leader from hierarchical authority as such. Lacan goes a step further towards this dismantling of the

massiveness of the leader. He insists on the function of rotation leaning for this purpose on the structuralist models proposed by Lévi-Strauss. He reduces this rotating leader to a plus-one function which he no longer calls leader, and this disengages even more the function from the old concretion called leader. It extracts all the better the irreducible function of the master signifier. There we have a special function which must be incarnated by someone, but which must then be rotated, thereby preventing an identification of the person with the function. In 1964 Lacan poses the question of the size of the group. It is a point that Bion did not have the time to thematise and which is not raised in the 1946 text. Generally; in psychology the developments in small group theory insisted empirically on the threshold of six people, as in Philips' group. The group, as Freud noted, begins beyond the couple: namely, three. It therefore was reasonable to fix the size of the small group between three and five plus-One. The *Founding Act* states 'from three to five plus one, four being the right measure'. In 1980, at the time of the break between the *École Freudienne de Paris* and the *École de la Cause Freudienne*, Lacan takes advantage of it to specify that four is the measure of the cartel, not just the right measure. Those two moments are thus to be considered together. In 1980 there were a lot of people [*les mille*] and the idea was to organise groups that would be groups, without them taking themselves for pressure groups. It is a factor in the choice of the reduction to four. And then the four-term structure had come to take a special place in Lacan's teaching. He had been able to reduce the list of objects (*a*) to four, although there also are variants with five objects. There were four places in the four-term structure of each of the discourses, etc. In his 1964 return, Lacan is discreet as to the content of the dynamics of the group. Bion had identified in all human groups reactions of aggressivity, reactions of flight-flight, reactions of adoration of the leader (the mystical relation to the leader: either to adore him or kill him as victim). These different relations with the  $S_1$  coupled with (*a*) can be situated according to the coordinates of the real, imaginary or symbolic dimensions. Reactions of attack-flight on the imaginary axis and reactions of love for the figure of symbolic authority must be coupled with the degradation of the loved one to the level of refuse. This dynamic is always present and one can make it

the centre of interest. One can become enthusiastic about group dynamics, a way chosen by some of Lacan's students. For his part, he preferred insisting on the necessity to void of interest all these effects of the group in order to focus on the work to be done. The task of the plus-one is to make the group think of its work as such and not to its dynamics. As soon as there is a cartel, there are people who don't come to the meetings, this is a reaction of flight. There are people who come in a bad mood, ready to criticise everything that anyone will present, these are reactions of attack. There are those who want to take over to organise everybody's work, those who want to incarnate the function of direction in place of the plus-one, or again there are effects of a push-to-the-leader. All these effects are expected from the beginning. The point is for the plus-one to interpret them in such a way that they will not come to occupy centre-stage in the work. For this to happen, they must be interpreted. Lacan puts the plus-one in an analytic place, which allows him, like the analyst according to Bion, to interpret as such and to avoid the crystallisation of these effects, either on the imaginary axis, on the symbolic axis or as real effect of the refuse.

### *To respond to the subject of the unconscious*

Beyond the problem of the group, it is the discontents in civilisation which are in question at the end of the text. Lacan incites the psychiatrist of the future, armed with the tools of the psychoanalyst, to take up a position. He pushes him to leave behind his old role as medical doctor, to go out of the hospital, to intervene in contemporary debates in the name of his clinical knowledge. Lacan makes of the psychiatrist nothing less than a 'defender of man', for indeed he can access 'this sensitivity to human depths'. If he evokes the 'clerks of treason', it is not in order to encourage the clerk to take himself for a clerk. He derides those clerks who strive to occupy the social roles of Law, of medicine and of the Church in order to feel from the first 'in a position in which superiority over his interlocutor is guaranteed in advance'.

Lacan determinedly breaks 'new pathways'. He evokes a psychiatrist-psychoanalyst taking in hand the global dimension of what in social relations can 'have an influence on mental hygiene'. Lacan draws the

consequences from the proposition vigorously supported in his thesis that psychosis is a pathology of the social bond. He formulates it as follows: "The delirium of interpretation is a delirium of the floor, of the street, of the forum". This conception led him to psychoanalysis and in 1947 he addresses the psychiatrists of the future by assigning them a mission of 'the floor, the street, the forum'. This task implies collaborating with non-medical psychologists, outside the hospital.

In France, it will be six years later, in 1953, that the report of Dr Daumézon and Dr Duchêne will advocate the sharing out of all psychiatric activities in sectors attached to each service of hospitalisation. This model will begin to be applied in 1955. It is the model proposed by Rees of the *area psychiatrist* in times of peace and supported by Lacan. This model is founded on a psychogenetic conception of mental disorders. 'Psychogenesis' here means that mental illness implies the position and desire 'of the Other'. "Indeed, can one still afford to be constantly splitting hairs over the psychogenesis of mental disorders when statistics have once more demonstrated the striking phenomenon of reduction that occurs in a state of war in the number of cases of mental diseases, and this in the army as well as in civilian life?" This conception implies a vast and multiform action which entails our association 'to the civil servant, the administrator and the psycho-technician' (here synonymous with psychologist). For Lacan, this is already the case in 'Child Guidance' centres, these care centres of which the model will be adopted by the French.

Lacan gives his 'acceptance' to this multiform action. Of course he perceives the dangers, in particular that of taking part in multiple segregations. This 'acceptance' is not blind nor is it a submission to a 'pseudo-realism always in quest of a qualitative degradation'. The very extension of the tasks of the psychiatrist-psychoanalyst supposes a firmly recalled ethical position. In the advances of Bion, he reminds us, "nowhere during the realisations we offer as examples have we forgotten the high moral tradition that remains imprinted upon them".

The discussion which follows the conference clearly situates the context of its enunciation. One sees the side of progressive psychiatrists, psychoanalysts or not, speak up in support of the perspective of action of the social psychiatry which is beginning to emerge. Dr Turquet

accentuates further the social missions of psychiatry and asks him to apply himself to the studies of political phenomena such as fascism. One must note that the irony of fate will make of this same Turquet one of the envoys of the IPA who come to examine Lacan's practices and interrogate analysts undergoing a didactic formation when the IPA wants to withdraw Lacan's qualification as didactician in 1961-63. Prof. Bermann, from Argentina, goes with Lacan. He evokes the 'sociological sense on which this new Psychiatry is orienting itself'. Dr Bonnafé, who joins Daumézon, calls for it. The two discordant notes are the intervention of Henri Ey and Dr Minkowsky. Ey opposes himself very clearly and firmly to the new perspective. He opposes it at all levels and only sees in it a dissolution of psychiatry in 'banality'. For him, taking up the task of the 'psycho-sociological dimension' in psychiatry is only due to the failure of psycho-sociologists which lack a concrete spirit. Minkowsky, 'even though he may pass for reactionary', warns against possible developments.

The history of the alliance between psychoanalysts and psychiatrists which will be established in the thirty years that follow will develop itself under the misunderstanding induced by Henri Ey's choice of formulation. He speaks solely in terms of psycho-sociology and not in terms of the subject. He does not, under any circumstances, want to hear what Lacan will enunciate as a fundamental analytic orientation in the approach of the collective dimension: "the collective is nothing else than the subject of the individual". Psychiatrists will follow psychoanalytic theses in so far as they can translate them in terms of psycho-sociology. The acceptance of the fundamental thesis which supports the psychoanalyst is another matter. In a recent intervention, *Theory of the School*, delivered in Turin on 20<sup>th</sup> May, J.-A. Miller recalled its sharpest edge. If it is true that "functions at the collective level are the same as those which deploy themselves in a subject's life: ego, ego ideal, identification, then collective experience is an experience which can be interpreted". This is why Lacan says that Themistocles and Pericles were psychoanalysts. To answer as required to an event insofar as it is significant, insofar as it is a function of a symbolic exchange between human beings "this could be the order given to set sail from Piraeus, it is to make the right interpretation".

Whether it be on a collective scale or for the individual, the psychoanalyst is defined as he who interprets. A collective organisation adapted to psychoanalytic discourse is an organisation in which it is possible to interpret. Whether this be a small group or a larger group the question is the same. What first appeared at the level of the small group must be generalised. The horizontal identification does not suppose any homogeneity. It reveals tensions in the group which can be interpreted. To say that the psychoanalytic School rests upon the small group, on the cartel, is above all to say that it can and must be interpreted. It is the task of constructing a School that may be the one we are presently attached to. It is our way of pursuing with Lacan the paths opened by his text of 1946.

Translated by Véronique Voruz

1. In English in the original