

Jacques-Alain Miller

Milanese Intuitions [1]

[Invited last May 12 to Milan for the creation of the Lacanian school of the Freudian Field in Italy, Jacques-Alain Miller improvised a talk on the theme chosen for this study day: "Psychoanalysts in the City." In the text that follows he pursues the theme for his Course in Paris three days later, after a six-week interruption for vacation.]

Politics, during the interval in which I did not give my class, reminded us it was still around.¹ The eruption came as a surprise. I have to admit that my taste for surprises can go even that far: I welcomed this one with a smile. For a brief moment. After which I realized to what extent the calculations of the experts could, like those of the multitude after all, prove false, to what extent they could be thwarted. How, with the evidence staring them in the face for so many years, these calculations could crumple and produce a mass effect, with certain traits of depression or panic, but also of defense and mania. A political mobilization followed and the psychoanalysts and a certain number of their associations were explicitly part of it.

Before that, we must admit, we were far from suspecting what was transpiring in the depths; we were laboriously studying counter-transference and the history of the analytic movement during the past half a century. It was in these circumstances that I accepted with pleasure the opportunity given me last Sunday to speak in Milan, on the occasion of the creation of the Freudian Field in Italy, on the theme "Psychoanalysts in the City", resuming the inspiration of the Seminar that Eric Laurent and I gave in Paris in 1996-97 entitled "The Other who does not exist and his ethics committees".

Improvising, I entertained in Milan some thoughts about things that concern us in psychoanalysis, and I do not want to bypass that moment. I am, then, going to share with you my Milanese intuitions and begin to develop them. They were about the relations between the unconscious and politics.

My departure point was a remark of Lacan's taken from his Seminar "La logique du fantasme", a remark that I found in a book, a sort of psychopathology of political life, which had just been published before I took off. This is the remark: "I do not say 'politics is the unconscious' but simply 'the unconscious is politics'".

The person who used this quotation purely and simply ruled out the second formula as abrupt and absurd. He accepted the first, but with restrictions. So we must give him credit for having grasped that the two formulas are not equivalent. It is not: if $A = B$, $B = A$. Yes, the author says, there is something of the psychic in politics, but in politics there is not only the unconscious, even if there is in it something of the unconscious, fantasies, dreams, blunders and torments...

¹ "The Disenchantment of Psychoanalysis, The Lacanian Orientation", course given under the auspices of the Department of Psychoanalysis of the University of Paris VIII, May 15, 2002; text established by Nathalie Georges, published with the authorization of J.-A. Miller.

What is the point of quoting Lacan if it is only to take the edge off his purport and extract from it such vacuity? We find fantasies, dreams, blunders and torments everywhere man is, in action and contemplation, in cultures and ways of doing, in State or society, alone or in a crowd. There is nothing left of Lacan when someone makes this kind of comment on his statements, when there is evidently in his formula a flash, which provokes at least an instant of surprise, before disappearing into the night where all cats are grey. We have in these remarks of Lacan's something worth hearing, and this is precisely what the comment I have referred to has amputated.

But, the *agalma* of this statement is a formula, "The unconscious is politics", and it must at least be remarked that this formula is within the competence of a psychoanalyst, while the other, which proposes a definition of politics, is more of a risk when it is pronounced by a psychoanalyst whose business is not to define politics. This is why Lacan says "I do not say [...], but simply [...]".

This is how I summarize the theme that our Italian colleagues proposed to treat: are the psychoanalysts in the City? This is up for discussion. In any case, psychoanalysis is in politics. That allowed me to find a thread in Milan to develop the theme under discussion. I will, then, pursue my reflections, in the order that they came to me in Milan.

First reflection: "politics is the unconscious"

"I do not say", says Lacan, who thus places his remarks within the empire of denegation, saying all there is to say when he says he does not say. Let's say that, from the logical point of view, Lacan recoils from transforming this statement into a thesis and he stresses that if it were a thesis, it would go further than the other.

Still, is it the thesis of no one, a thesis without a father? If this thesis had a father, it would be Freud, Freud who says something like this, that politics, at least when he writes about it, can be reduced to the unconscious. This is the thesis he put forth in *Group Psychology*, where he analyzes collective formations as unconscious formations, having the same identificatory signifier and the same cause of desire.

Thus politics can be reduced to the unconscious and that is why this thesis, even if it can be found in Freud, calls forth objections which are all of the type: there is more in politics than what belongs to the unconscious. As soon as we find ourselves in face of a reductionist thesis, the objections are variations on the theme "it is only partial, it is more complex, more extensive, etc". I evoked *Group Psychology*, but we could read *Civilization and its Discontents* and *Moses and Monotheism* in the light of the same thesis.

And we could take exception to this thesis by saying that it's not politics Freud is talking about, but still the unconscious, taking his examples from the field of politics. We must nevertheless remark that this field is structured by the instance of the father, that Freud broaches it within the paternal regime, and that is why the terms, the themes which organize his approach are identification, censorship, suppression, including the suppression of jouissance.

Second reflection: "the unconscious is politics"

This thesis qualified as abrupt, absurd, which this author thinks he can eliminate with a wave of the hand...! I left for Milan, exasperated by the offhandedness manifested with respect to this formula, which is more modest than the first since it proposes a definition of the unconscious. That's the way it is with Lacan, and it is much more reasonable. We know so little about what the unconscious is, it is so unrepresentable that it is implausible and very risky to define anything, taking the unconscious as a

departure point: on the contrary, it is always the unconscious which must be defined, because we do not know what it is. So it is never for Lacan the *definiens*, but always the *definiendum*. Take the formula “the unconscious is structured like a language”. This is a thesis that supposes we have at our disposal a definition of language and in effect Lacan uses the one that Saussure and Jakobson produced. There is of course not this “like” in the statement that I am commenting on today, so, what we need to ask is how we can define politics in such a way that saying the unconscious is politics makes sense.

What I found amusing was that after having fallen on this irritating comment, I opened a second recently published book, *La démocratie contre elle-même*, by a politician who has probably read Lacan, Marcel Gauchet, and I fell on a definition of politics: “Politics consists specifically in this: it is the place of a fracture in the truth”. Nice definition, both infiltrated with Lacanism and perhaps, underneath, with a sort of Merleau-Pontyism; “fracture” is a word this author is fond of and we also find him using, in a 1992 work, the expression “social fracture” taken up again in 1996 when it fell beneath the eyes of a French political figure who was able to go very far with this signifier...

This politician is, to begin with, a Lacanoid figure who defines politics as a field structured by $S(A)$, in which the subject undergoes, with pain, the experience that the truth is not one, that the truth does not exist, and that the truth is divided. And this is a definition of politics which retains all its virulence at the time in which we live, a moment that is, after all, on the whole a “post-totalitarian” moment – I put it in quotation marks –, within which we have been enclosed since 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall, which, it must be added, everyone did not applaud.

I do not necessarily validate this category, totalitarianism, which served a certain political propaganda during the twentieth century. Totalitarianism was a great hope; it enchanted the masses of the twentieth century, something that we who are of the twenty-first century have almost forgotten. It was the hope of mending the division of truth, of installing the reign of the One in politics, in conformity to the model of *Group Psychology*. At the level of this aspiration to concord, harmony and reconciliation, totalitarianism is perfect, taken as these terms resound in the discourse of President Schreber.

So, the triumph of democracy, which has the wind aft in the spirit of the times, at least in a good part of the globe, – obviously the case of China is a bit apart, and my attention has been drawn to the appearance there of a new pathology, death by overwork, in a region where the word “union” would be a new idea – does not generate the same enthusiasm and as a matter of fact a depressive effect does seem to be its marker; it comports this effect insofar as it implies consenting to the division of the truth, a division which takes the objective form of political parties engaged in an unresolvable contradiction, since the truth is fatally divided.

Which is what Mr. Gauchet says with a lyricism worthy of Merleau-Ponty: “From now on we know that we will inevitably encounter the other under the sign of an opposition without violence, but also irrevocable and irreparable. I will always find myself in face of not an enemy who wants my death, but a contradictor. There is something metaphysically terrifying in this pacified encounter” – I like this link between terror and pacification – “a war can be won”, he says, “whereas we never get out of this confrontation”.

From this comes the paradoxical idea that the pacification of the public space is accompanied by a private, intimate, subjective suffering, and that, at the same time we celebrate the virtues of pluralism, tolerance and relativism, we undergo the experience of a truth, I quote, “which is proposed only in the figure of dilaceration”. The approach of politics we find here, as a question of you or me, remains nevertheless to be reconsidered.

The definition of the unconscious by politics goes very deep in Lacan's teaching. "The unconscious is politics" is a development of "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other". This link to the Other, intrinsic to the unconscious, is what inspires from the outset Lacan's teaching. This is also true when it is pointed out that the Other is divided and does not exist as One.

"The unconscious is politics" radicalizes the definition of the *Witz*, of the witticism, as a social process that finds its recognition and satisfaction in the Other, as a community unified by the ring of a laugh.

Third reflection: the unconscious is political

The Freudian analysis of the *Witz* authorizes Lacan to articulate the subject of the unconscious to an Other, and to qualify the unconscious as transindividual. We can pass from "the unconscious is transindividual" to "the unconscious is political" from the moment that it appears that this Other is divided, that it does not exist as One.

Because of this, "the unconscious is politics" does not at all mean the same thing as "politics is the unconscious". "Politics is the unconscious" is a reduction, and when Lacan formalizes the discourse of the master, he says at the same time that it is the discourse of the unconscious, and thus he gives us the key to a great number of Freud's texts. Whereas "the unconscious is politics" is the contrary of a reduction, it is an amplification, it is the transport of the unconscious outside the solipsist sphere, to place it within the City, to make it depend on "History", on the discord of the universal discourse at each moment of the series which is effectuated by it.

Fourth reflection: the City does not exist

Today, we no longer have "the City". It is imaginary. We hear it as a metaphor for politics, but in the *Wirklichkeit*, historical effectiveness, politics, is not developed in the form of the City. The City is a residue nostalgia, it is also imaginary in the sense that we look for it today to find it in the television.

In Milan, in *La Repubblica* of the previous day, consecrated to a criticism of Mister Berlusconi who owns three of the six Italian television channels and orients the three he does not own as President of the Council, television was qualified as *agora*, modern *agora*, stressing to what extent it is crippled. The first move of the ancient *agora* would have been to ostracize Mister Berlusconi. At the same time, the journalist considered television as the place where a consensus is elaborated and propagated. This can only highlight the fact that the *agora* of the epoch of the market has nothing to do with the *agora* of ancient times, which was a place of social homogeneity, supposing the exclusion of those to whom the democratic privilege had been refused.

Not only does the homogenous City no longer exist but the Nation-State itself is shaken; challenged, it turns out to be porous, waning to the extent that some go so far as to prophesy its disappearance. Above and beyond the City, it is the Nation-State that is at stake, so that, rather than talking about psychoanalysts in the City, we should dare pose the question of psychoanalysts in "globalization", an approximate concept but one that is certainly more operative than that of City.

I was able to read, in Italy, in a work of Hans Magnus Enzensberger, a description of the astonishing characters that can be found in the Lower Bavarian countryside, which leaves the country bumpkin flabbergasted in the face of these new identities, a somewhat anticipatory poetic carnival that shows we are exceedingly far away from the homogenous space of the City.

“Globalization” is a term for the glimpse we can have of a social space in which nothing is still in its place, which we already perceived by opposing the ancient and new worlds, but here it is really the notion of place itself that is subtracted, what we amiably call losing one’s marks. When nothing is left in its place, it is the category of lack itself that tends to become obsolete, in accord with the example of the book that can “be out of place” only in a well-ordered library... And suppose “globalization” were the name of what makes that obsolete.

For that, we need a new reflection.

Fifth reflection: Freud and Queen Victoria

I shall recycle one of Lacan’s jokes, told at his Seminar. One day he had read Lytton Strachey’s *Queen Victoria*, and he got a laugh from his audience by situating Queen Victoria as the historical cause of Freud. He was thus tracing the link between the birth of psychoanalysis and the disciplinary society, the exacerbation of this society, which sustained powerful interdictions, censoring any utterance touching on sexuality, although this must be modulated because transgressive forms always existed but, precisely, as transgressions: the prohibitions remained in place.

It is sufficient, *a contrario*, to think of the banalization of the sexual spectacle today, which extends from the pornographic film to Ms. Catherine Millet’s book, in order to grasp that we are in another regime of sexuality: no longer the queen Victoria, but the queen Catherine!

This is not the first time that I emphasize the fact that the entire Freudian conceptual apparatus retains the mark of the disciplinary epoch: interdiction, repression, censorship... which is what permitted a junction between psychoanalysis and Marxism, in the form of Freud-Marxism or the 1968 style of contestation.

It must be noted, in effect, that the Lacanian Renaissance of psychoanalysis during the sixties and seventies is contemporary to the times described by Antonio Negri – who sleeps every night in prison, for having, in those days, been the inspirer of the Red Brigades. He attempts, in his most recent book, *Impero*, to give a doctrine to the international far-left and he notes, p. 333 of the French edition: “During the period of crisis in the 60s and 70s, the expansion of social protection and the universalization of discipline, both in the dominating and the dominated countries, created a new margin of liberty for the laborious multitude. In other words, workers used the disciplinary era in order to extend the social powers of work, etc.”

He underlines what the concept of liberation itself owed to the disciplinary forms of domination, and attempts to conceptualize what we might be after this society. What he calls *impero*, empire, is a regime which no longer proceeds by prohibition and repression and which, thus, renders transgression and the very idea of revolution and liberation problematic. Antonio Negri is the son of Deleuze and Guattari; he recycles their *Anti-Œdipe* written 30 years ago. We can find profit in what is after all a reading of Lacan.

That is the essential idea: that Lacan conceptualized psychoanalysis during the disciplinary epoch, but that he also anticipated the psychoanalysis of the imperial epoch, and this is what we tried to bring up to date with “The Other who does not exist”.

Sixth reflection: Lacan and the queen jouissance

Lacan had the historical role of bringing Freud up to date and preparing psychoanalysis for the new order that Mr. Negri calls *Impero*. If we take things as such, three phases can be distinguished:

— The first phase is that of the formalization of the psychoanalysis of the disciplinary epoch. It is founded on the formalization of the concept of the unconscious, starting with the algorithm of the sign; on the unifying formalization of the Œdipus complex, castration and repression through the concepts of the Name-of-the-Father and the metaphor; on the formalization of the libido through the concepts of desire and metonymy. This classical Lacan is Freud formalized.

— Then we have the transition during which Lacan achieves a subversion of Freud, via the subversion of the Name-of-the-Father, which he pluralizes and whose place he also alters by attributing the operation of repression not to interdiction but to the fact of language itself; *via* the subversion of the concept of desire linked to interdiction, a concept he replaces by that of *jouissance* — he places the accent on what fills the lack rather than on the lack itself; via the definition of the function of the object *a* that remains attached to the theme of the lack but in which what prevails is what comes to fill the lack .

— Finally we have the third phase of Lacan’s work in which the essential term is that of *jouissance*, a *jouissance* which has no contrary. Until then it was in tension with the repressive and mortifying signifier, and now the signifier has itself become an operator of *jouissance*; it was in tension with pleasure and it is precisely the opposition pleasure-*jouissance* that tends to dissolve now, not that all validity has been subtracted from it, but pleasure becomes one of the regimes of *jouissance*. The level of the drive, which, unlike desire, is not intrinsically articulated to a defense, is the level to which Lacan has attributed the property “the subject is always happy”, always happy... on the level of the drive that is, the only question being that of the mode of satisfaction, pleasurable, painful etc., while axiomatically, the drive is always satisfied.

This corresponds to the end of the disciplinary epoch. Everything is now an affair of arrangement. We no longer dream of what is outside. There is nothing but trajectories, arrangements and regimes of *jouissance*. The Borromean knot is already an effort to find a way out of a structure based on binary opposition and the disciplinary organization that this cleavage implies.

I should come back to this notion of the disciplinary society. The opposition between the disciplinary society and the society of control comes from Foucault and was defined by Deleuze. It indicates two regimes of mastery. The disciplinary society is the epoch in which there is an exteriority between the structures, the apparatus of repression and training on the one hand, and the subjugated on the other, and in which domination as such is salient, the indoctrination that permits a head-on opposition and a delineation of the figures of the oppressors. Resistance can then get its support from the forms of coercion. Foucault treated these structures one after the other — the prison, the asylum, the hospital, the school, the university — where “surveillance or punishment” supposes a clear delimitation of the “in” and the “out”.

This becomes of interest when we distinguish what, thirty years ago, was already being modified, that is to say that mastery was somewhat immanent to the social field, that the mechanisms of domination the Marxists could analyze were interiorized and the society of communication or information was transmitting fleetingly or invisibly; which produced the idea that, from now on, it is by flexible, transformable and fluctuating networks that a mastery which is no longer exterior can circulate — to the point that Negri gives us the formula of “autonomous alienation” to designate a mastery that is no longer external but internal, and for which the term of *extimate* is perfectly suitable.

Seventh reflection: the analytic cure in the epoch of globalization

I can reassure you: Negri’s book is not the new *Capital*, it is rather a great poem. A Spinozist, he describes

with pathos a world without operators, an empire which is no longer the imperialism of anyone, which is everywhere, nowhere, and at the same time without borders, without an exterior. It is very repetitive, rather a chant; Negri is the Dante of globalization...

So, the cure, of course, is marked by these times, which take their toll. Conceived first as a treatment distinct from medical treatment, it was proposed as an ideal of maturity and a norm of personality, and even Lacan spoke of the achievement of the personality and the effective realization of the Œdipus complex and castration. The effective realization of the Œdipus complex and castration – Lacan went so far as to speak of phallic disidentification – supposes, in effect, a norm and an ideal that operate. As long as Lacan was in this phase of his teaching, the pressing question on this point insisted on this sequence, no doubt refusing it as such, but nevertheless besieged, invested by the insistence of the norm and the ideal.

A second phase can be distinguished in the accomplished demedicalization of the cure. This is the moment at which the cure could be conceived as an experience, the place where something happens for you. We can compare this to the current doctrine concerning the edification of stores, such as those we see developing already in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, and New York, for which the new stores must be conform to the concept of *experientialization*, or the transformation of shopping into a unique and irreplaceable experience, without which everyone would just go do their shopping on the Web!

Lacan “experientialized” the cure before everyone, by putting the stress on the analyzing activity and the production of a new subject, and the pass crystallized that, with the end of the cure being conceived in the transgressive mode, as a passing beyond the fantasy.

There is now a third phase, specific to the regime of globalization. This appears at the end of the *Autres Écrits*, where the pass is resituated as a successful narrative that satisfies an audience, as a procedure. We all know that, in the Freudian Field, the products of the pass have been taken into a process of spectacularization. We have invited the Analysts of the school (the AE) to speak before the largest publics we were able to assemble on an international scale. We were criticized for this, but we do not want to go back on it! And there, if we follow Lacan — of course, everything is compatible, like in Italy, you have the pagan temple in the very place where the church is erected, it’s the Freudian unconscious realized! — the end of analysis is stripped of the pathos of the beyond, of transcendence, of the passage, and the accent is put on the changes in the regimes of jouissance that can be obtained in the cure. Because it is a question of the satisfaction of the drive, which has no contrary, which means that the reference here is the passage from one regime to another.

The extraordinary formula “there is no sexual rapport” is inscribed within this framework, and it signs the definitive obliteration of the norm. We are free of what had kept psychoanalysis rooted in the disciplinary epoch: there is nothing but jouissance. That is what happens in globalization, where we have been for some time. The space of sexual invention opened up at this level, that of norm-less creativity, which today renders inaudible the themes of maturation and achievement. This is obviously congruent with the inclusion of jouissance in human rights, the juridification of jouissance.

And this must be connected to the promotion of the Lacanian writing of *sinthome*, a new name to indicate the symptom that has no contrary or no longer has one, the subject being, as such, doomed. It must be said that the symptom appears as the regime inherent to jouissance, the subject – or rather the living being who speaks – experiencing it necessarily as such.

There are more reflections to come.

Eighth reflection: The depreciation of psychoanalysis

This concerns the depreciation of psychoanalysis such as we find it in this epoch. It must be said, in spite of all. The operators also are aware of it; their act is threatened by depreciation, as psychoanalysis is besieged by psychotherapy. How are we going to classify that? If we have recourse to a particularly astute American economist, psychoanalysts will be put into the class of “attention givers”, those who pay attention to, in which we find psychotherapists, but also baby sitters, butlers, private gym instructors, etc. It is certain that this is a class in expansion, but this growth goes along with a certain disqualification. This achieves a certain depreciation of the position of the analyst.

(to be continued...)

Translated by Thelma Sowley