

PART I

**Clinic of
the Discourses**

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On Shame

Shame and Guilt

“Dying of shame” is the signifier with which Lacan opens his final lesson of *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*: “It has to be said, dying of shame is an effect that is rarely obtained.” This term *shame* does not open the lesson by chance; Lacan will close this lesson by returning to the concept: “If . . . there are some slightly less than ignoble reasons for your presence here in such numbers, . . . it is because I happen to make you ashamed.”

Éric Laurent has given a particularly stimulating presentation in which he wonders whether it really belongs to psychoanalysis to increase this shame, and whether thereby it is not taking the path of the moralist. This led him onto the theme of guilt: “Shame is an affect that is eminently psychoanalytic and belongs to the same series as guilt.” This presentation thus offered a perspective not on the actualities of 1970, noticeably different from our own, marked by the blossoming, the excitement of an agitation of which we were contemporaries, but on an anticipation of the moral phase in which we have entered since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and giving place to an “unfolding of excuses, regrets, pardons, repentances,” to the point where being ashamed would have thus become a global symptom. He places a minor key on this construction and opens another way by emphasizing that Lacan has chosen to punctuate shame rather than guilt, adding also that this “being ashamed” does not allow for any pardon. I want to address this dis-

junction between shame and guilt. Why do shame and guilt evoke one another while being distinct? When he wanted to locate the analytic discourse in the context of a current moment of contemporary civilization, Lacan chose to conclude his seminar with the term *shame* and not *guilt*. In *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* Lacan implicitly gave us a new edition of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, after having done so more explicitly in his seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, which thus makes it possible for us to measure the displacement from one seminar to the other.

No doubt in the intervening period a new relationship has been teased out between the subject and *jouissance*. The novelty of this relationship stands out in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, where Lacan could say, without any objections being raised, “The movement the world we are living in is caught up in . . . implies an amputation, sacrifices, indeed a kind of puritanism in the relationship to desire that has occurred historically.”¹ In 1960, it was still possible to say that capitalism—a term fallen into disuse because it has no antonym—was coordinated with Puritanism. There is no doubt that behind this word coming from the mouth of Lacan was his knowledge of Max Weber’s analyses, taken up and reworked, but not really disconfirmed, by the English historian R. H. Tawney, and which conditioned the emergence of the capitalist subject on the repression of enjoyment—accumulating instead of enjoying.²

Lacan returns to the theme of the discontents of civilization in his seminar *The Other Side*, indicating that this diagnosis according to which the movement the world is caught up in is now outdated, whereas the new mode—if it bears the mark of a style at all—is rather that of permissiveness, where what can sometimes be the cause of difficulty is the prohibition on prohibiting.

The least that one can say is that capitalism has disconnected itself from Puritanism. In this respect, Lacan’s discourse is, in the terms of Éric Laurent, the most anticipatory. In Lacan’s terms, this is expressed, in the final chapter of *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, in the statement “There is no longer any shame.” I will follow Laurent in emphasizing this term *shame*, to the point of declaring that one thereby uncovers the question at work in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, the cards being put on the table only in the final session.

What does it mean for psychoanalysis when there is no longer any

shame, when civilization tends to dissolve shame, to make it disappear? This is not lacking in paradox, since it is traditional to suppose that civilization is bound up with instituting shame.

Perhaps we can formulate that shame is a primary affect in relation to the Other. By saying that this affect is primary, one is no doubt seeking to differentiate it from guilt. If one wanted to pursue that path, one would say that guilt is the effect on the subject of an Other that judges, thus of an Other that contains the values that the subject has supposedly transgressed. One would also claim that shame is related to an Other prior to the Other that judges, that it is a primordial Other, not one that judges but instead one that only sees or lets be seen. Nudity can thus be taken to be shameful and covered up, partially if the shame bears upon this or that organ, independently of anything of the order of misdeed, harm, or transgression that might give rise to it. It is moreover in this immediate manner that shame is introduced into one of the great religious mythologies that condition, or used to condition, the movement of our civilization.

Thus one could try saying that guilt is related to desire, whereas shame is related to the *jouissance* that touches on what Lacan, in his “Kant with Sade,” calls “that which is most intimate in the subject.”³ He refers to this in relation to Sadian *jouissance*, insofar as it traverses the subject’s wish and establishes itself in what is for him most intimate, that which is more intimate than his will, and provokes him to go beyond his will and beyond good and evil, attacking him on the point of his modesty—a term that is the antonym of *shame*.

Lacan describes this modesty in a striking and at the same time enigmatic fashion, as being “amboceptive of the conjunctures of being.” *Amboceptive* means that modesty is attached, that it takes hold, on the side of both the subject and the Other. It is attached to both subject and Other. As for the “conjunctures of being,” the relationship to the Other constitutes the essential conjuncture of the subject’s being and demonstrates itself as such in shame. Lacan makes this explicit when he says, “The shamelessness of one forms the veil for the shame of the other.”⁴

In this inaugural relationship not only is there shame over what I am or what I do, but if the other goes beyond the limits of modesty, my own modesty is affected by this very fact. This is not exactly the way of making ashamed that Lacan prescribes at the end of his seminar. The

experience of shame uncovers, as it were, an amboception or pseudo-coincidence of subject and Other.

The Gaze and Shame

In *Seminar XI*, Lacan refers to a celebrated episode for the appearance of shame, the one sketched out by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* with respect to the look or the gaze, and which takes place in two moments. The first moment: “I am looking through a keyhole.” The second moment: “I hear the sound of footsteps in the hallway, I am being looked at. And so I become ashamed.” It is an account of the emergence of the affect of shame as a collapse of the subject. While he is there, “looking through the keyhole,” he is “a pure spectator subject, absorbed by the spectacle, unaware of himself.” He is not “conscious of himself in a positional mode,” as he puts it, and strictly speaking, “in this ‘looking through the keyhole,’ I am nothing.” He attempts to describe for us a moment of the subject’s fading, which we could write with its Lacanian symbol, $\$$.

The second moment, bound up with the sound, makes the gaze emerge as such. We can clearly see why the footsteps are necessary. Sartre wants to capture the subject before he recognizes the one who is about to see him. He formulates his “I’m being looked at” before seeing the person’s face. The gaze is anonymous. Behind this anonymity there is hidden, no doubt, in Lacanian algebra, the Other’s gaze. And Sartre describes the decadence of the subject, who is previously eclipsed in his action and becomes an object, who then finds himself seeing himself, via this mediation, as an object in the world, and Sartre is trying to grasp the subject’s fall in the status of this shameful reject. This is where shame is introduced: “I recognize that I am this object that the Other regards and judges. I am that being-in-itself.”

The Sartrian conjunction of gaze and judgment perhaps needs to be called into question, or at least unsettled, since it produces what looks like a slide from shame to guilt. Saying “I am this being-in-itself” means that I am thereby cut off from time, from a project. I am seized in the present, a present deprived of my transcendence, of my projection toward my future, toward the meaning that this action could have and which would permit me to justify it. A judgment is something different.

In order to judge, one has to begin to talk. I may have very good reasons for looking through the keyhole. Perhaps what is happening on the other side should be judged and reproached: a present deprived of all transcendence.

I mention this episode only to give some background, a resonance, to Lacan's diagnosis "There is no longer any shame." It can be translated as this: we are at the time of an eclipse of the Other's gaze as the bearer of shame.

Gaze and Jouissance

Éric Laurent, with a striking intuition and construction, has connected this final chapter of *Seminar XVII* with the proposal Lacan addressed to students at Vincennes representing the sublime, the fever of the agitation of the period: "Look at them enjoying!" He remarked that this invitation, this imperative, is in some way echoed today in that fever the media has had, which has abated a little, but which retains its significance as a fact of civilization, for reality shows—*Big Brother*.

This "Look at them enjoying!" recalls the gaze, which previously was the preeminent agency for making one ashamed. For the period in which Lacan is speaking, if it is necessary to recall the gaze, it is because the Other who could be looking has disappeared. The look that one solicits today by turning reality into a spectacle—and all television is a reality show—is a gaze castrated of its power to shame, which it is constantly demonstrating. As if the mission, or at least the unconscious consequence, of this capture of the television spectacle was to demonstrate that shame is dead.

If one can imagine that Lacan evokes this "Look at them enjoying!" in 1970 as an attempt to reactivate the gaze that shames, one can no longer think this is the case for reality shows. The gaze that is distributed there—a mouse click away—is a gaze that carries no shame. It is certainly no longer the gaze of the Other that might judge. What is transmitted in this shameful universal practice is the demonstration that your gaze, far from conveying shame, is nothing other than a gaze that enjoys as well. It is the "Look at them enjoying so as to enjoy!"

This connection that Laurent brings us reveals the secret of the spectacle, which one has even wanted to make into the insignia of contempo-

rary society by calling it, like Guy Debord, the society of the spectacle.⁵ The secret of the spectacle is that you look at it because you enjoy it. It is you as subject, and not as Other, that is looking. This television signifies that the Other does not exist. This is why one can hear, in the harmonics of Lacan's proposition, the enactment of the consequences of the death of God, a theme to which Lacan devoted what is effectively a chapter in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. What Lacan describes—and what we have to deal with since it anticipates the path to our current situation—is the death of the gaze of God. I see testimony, perhaps slight, to this in the truly Lacanian phrase that appears in this final seminar: “Appreciate why it was that Pascal and Kant fidgeted about like two valets in the process of acting like Vatel with respect to you.”

The Death of the Other

Vatel is better known these days due to a film in which this character is played by Gérard Depardieu.⁶ François Vatel, who is known to those who, like the grandmother of Marcel Proust, frequent the correspondence of Mme. de Sévigné, was an organizer of festivities who went into service with Prince de Condé in April 1671. Prince de Condé invites the entire court to spend three days with him at his chateau, and Vatel is in charge of all preparations and service. According to Mme. de Sévigné, he goes without sleep for twelve whole nights and, added to this, apparently, suffers a disappointment in love (embodied in the film by a star who shows how much he happens to be losing). He has provided for a dozen deliveries of fish and seafood, but only two arrive. He comes to the point of desperation—he is visibly depressed—and persuades himself that the feast has been spoiled through his own doing. He goes up to his room, fixes a sword to the door handle, and runs himself through with it two or three times, thereby killing himself and inscribing his name in the history books. Lacan didn't see the film—it is too recent—yet it is the name of Vatel that comes to him as the paradigm of a person who dies from shame, and who was sufficiently in tune with this “dying of shame,” despite being not of the nobility in any way, but, as Lacan stresses, a steward instated in a world which is the world of the nobility.

Lacan compares Pascal and Kant with Vatel, and he sees them on the verge of suicide through shame, fidgeting about, constructing their laby-

rinth in order to escape. In what way were Kant and Pascal tormented by the shame of living and twisting around to the point where they bring the gaze of the big Other into existence, the big Other under which one can be lead to the point of dying of shame? Lacan gives an indication in passing: "There has been a lack of truth up above for the last three centuries." He says this in the twentieth century, but he is referring back to the seventeenth.

Is this not the meaning of Pascal's famous wager we discover here? Pascal's wager is an attempt to sustain the Other's existence. It is a piece of chicanery, agitation, in order to get to the point of stating that there is in effect a God with whom, as Lacan says elsewhere in this seminar, it is worth going to the trouble of playing double-or-nothing surplus jouissance. You cannot rest on the fact that there is a God; you have to make an effort of your own by means of the wager. Pascal's wager is his way of making an effort of his own in order to sustain the Other's ex-sistence.

What does the wager mean? It means that one has to wager one's life in the game—as an object small *a* that one places in the game as a wager, which one accepts might be lost, in the aim of gaining eternal life. This God needs the wager in order to exist. If one makes the effort, if this crutch of a wager is necessary, then it is ultimately the case that this God is on shaky ground, as it were, and that he does not fill his place entirely. This supposes that the Other in question is an Other that is not barred. One is hoping that he will be up to the task.

As for Kant, briefly put, it is a matter not of a wager but of hypotheses. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, both the immortality of the soul and the existence of God are recuperated, not as certitudes, but as necessary hypotheses for morality to have a meaning.

In this vein, it can be said that Pascal and Kant have struck a blow. They have worn themselves out, if I may say so. They have been at work—this is why they are on the side of the valet—so that the gaze of the Other retains a meaning, that is, so that shame exists and that there is something beyond life pure and simple.

Shame and Honor

With respect to the pathetic effort of these great minds, Lacan inscribes Vincennes, which at the time he called "obscene," and which in 1970

he grasps as a place where shame has no currency. He advanced toward this Vincennes. Lacan apparently said it too indirectly for anyone to call out in protest. How did he view it? As the renunciation of what was still the pathetic trembling of Pascal and Kant, and the assumption of the nonexistence of shame. It is an irony of history that Lacan has been classified as a partisan of the 1968 frame of mind. One cannot read anything as severe with respect to '68, but within this severity there was a friendly tone. Lacan has no doubt never been forgiven this.

Why, Laurent asks, and he gave a reply, should the disappearance of shame, in civilization, be of interest to a psychoanalyst? If we take it up from the angle of Vatel, there is a reply: because the disappearance of shame alters the meaning of life. It changes the meaning of life because it changes the meaning of death. Vatel, who died of shame, died for honor, in the name of honor. The term forms a pair with the word *shame*, shame hidden by modesty, but heightened, enlarged, by honor.

When honor retains its value, life does not prevail over honor. Where there is honor, life is purely and simply devalued. This pure and simple life is what is traditionally expressed as *primum vivere*.⁷ Live first, we will see why later; saving life is the supreme value. The example of Vatel is there to tell us that even a valet can sacrifice his life for the sake of honor. The disappearance of honor instates the *primum vivere* as supreme value, the ignominious life, the ignoble life, life without honor. This is why Lacan evokes, at the end of this final seminar, the reasons that could be "less than ignoble."

This can be expressed in mathemes. The matheme in play is the representation of the subject by what Lacan constructs in this seminar as the master signifier S_1 .

The disappearance of shame means that the subject ceases to be represented by a signifier that matters. This is why Lacan presents, at the outset of this lesson, the Heideggerian term of being-toward-death as the "visiting card by which a signifier represents a subject for another signifier."⁸ He gives this S_1 the value of a visiting card, "the being-towards-death." It is death that is not pure and simple, death conditioned by a value that outclasses it, and once this card is torn up, he says, it is a shame. Its destination is from now on a mockery, since by way of its inscription as \S the subject can be meshed with a knowledge and an order of the world in which he has his place, as a master of ceremonies in this

case, but he must maintain his place. As soon as he no longer fulfills his function he disappears, that is to say, he sacrifices himself to the signifier that he was destined to incarnate.

When one has come to the point at which everybody tears up his visiting card, where there is no shame any more, the ethics of psychoanalysis is called into question. The entire seminar, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, and the example taken of Antigone, are there to show us on the contrary that the analytic operation supposes something beyond the *primum vivere*. It supposes that man, as he put it at that time, has a relationship to the second death. Not to a single death, not to death pure and simple, but to a second death, a relationship to what he is insofar as he is represented by a signifier. This should be sacrificed for nothing in the world. He who sacrifices his life sacrifices all but that which is the most intimate, the most precious in his existence.

Lacan searches for an example of this in the tragedy of Oedipus, precisely when he enters the zone between-two-deaths where he has renounced everything. He is no longer anything other than a cast-off accompanying Antigone. He puts his own eyes out and thus all the goods of this world disappear for him, but, as Lacan notes, "That doesn't prevent him from demanding . . . all the honors due to his rank."⁹ In the tragedy, one does not give Oedipus what he has the right to after the sacrifice of a beast—some parts are valued, others not—he is not given what is his, and, although he has already passed beyond the first limit, he highlights what is a slight on his honor as a terrible insult, says Lacan. Even as he abandons all his goods, he affirms the dignity of the signifier that represents him.

The other example that Lacan takes in this respect, that of King Lear, goes in the same direction. Here too is a character who leaves everything, but who, having renounced all his power, continues to hang onto the faithfulness of his own family and onto what Lacan calls a pact of honor.

The Ethics of Psychoanalysis supposes, if not from start to finish, then at least over the first third, the difference between a death that amounts to kicking the bucket and the death of being-toward-death. The death of a being that wishes death is related to the master signifier. It is a death that is risked or a death that is wished for or a death that is assumed, and which is related to the transcendence of the signifier. On

the basis of this so unusual accent that Lacan places on this “dying of shame” and this “making ashamed”—which horrified a psychoanalyst colleague, or seemed to him to be displaced, according to Laurent—the signifier *honor*, the word *honor*, continues to have its full value for Lacan when he is trying to found the analytic discourse today.

I said to myself, “Honor, honor, where does he say that?” It is to be found, for example, initially when he gives a summary of one of his late seminars, “. . . Ou pire”: “D’autres s’ . . . oupirent,” “Others sigh or worsen. I undertake not to make it my honor.”¹⁰ This word *honor* resonates with the entire configuration that I have been teasing out. It is not only the honor of Lacan, since he adds, “It is a matter of the meaning of the practice of psychoanalysis.” The meaning of this practice is not thinkable without honor, is not thinkable if the other side of psychoanalysis is not functioning, this other side that is the master’s discourse and the master signifier established in its place. For the subject to spit it out, he has to have been marked by it in the first place. The honor of psychoanalysis derives from the subject’s link maintained with the master signifier.

This “honor” is not an anomaly. For example, Lacan feels the need to justify the fact that he is interested in André Gide. Gide deserves our interest because Gide was interested in Gide, not in the sense of a vain narcissism, but because Gide was a subject interested in his own singularity, however fragile it might have been. There is perhaps no better definition of a person who offers to be the analysand. The minimum that can be required is that he is interested in his own singularity, a singularity that draws on nothing else than this S_1 , this signifier that is his alone. Lacan, not yet having formalized this master signifier, calls it, in his text on Gide, the subject’s “emblem,” a term intended to resonate with *honor*: “The emblem that the iron of an encounter has imprinted upon the subject.” He also says, “The seal is not only an imprint but a hieroglyph as well.”¹¹

Each of these terms could be studied for its true value. The imprint is simply a natural mark whereas one deciphers hieroglyphs; but he stresses that in either case it is a signifier, and its meaning is not to have one. One can anticipate that this unusual mark is what he will later call the master signifier that marks the subject with an ineffaceable singularity.

Singularity

At the time Lacan did not recoil from saying that this respect for one's own singularity, this attention to one's signifier singularity, is what makes the subject a master. He opposes it to all words of wisdom, which on the contrary have an air of slavery about them. These wise words that are valid for everyone, these so-called arts of living, all install themselves through neglecting the individual mark in each person that does not allow itself to be reabsorbed into the universal that they proposed. The words of wisdom hiding this mark of the branding iron are hoisted up by the use of this weight, by this travesty, and this is why Lacan imputes an air of slavery to them.

It is no doubt a question, in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, of separating the subject from its master signifier in the analytic operation. But this assumes that he knows he has one, and that he respects it.

Following this line of thought, I would place great weight on what Lacan says, in passing, about his text on Gide, namely that to be interested in one's singularity is the luck of the aristocracy.¹² We are not in the habit of using the term *aristocracy*, but it is nevertheless unavoidable when one returns to Lacan's position in the face of this fact of civilization that was Vincennes. Everything indicates that what he encountered there he classified as belonging to the register of the ignoble, and that, in the face of the emergence of a place from which shame had disappeared, he had an aristocratic reaction. For him this aristocracy is justified because desire is in part bound up with the master signifier—that is to say, with nobility. This is why he can say, in his text on Gide, that the secret of desire is the secret of all nobility.¹³ Your S_1 is contingent and, however fragile you may be, places you apart. The condition for being an analysand is to have the sense of what places you apart.

Going even further back, it is something like an aristocratic reaction that motivates the objections Lacan always trotted out in the face of the objectifications to which contemporary civilization constrains the therapist or the intellectual, the researcher. See, for instance, what he offers as an analysis of modern man's ego once he has emerged from the impasse of playing the beautiful soul who censures the course of the world even as he plays his part in it.¹⁴ How does he describe it? On the one hand, this modern man takes his place in universal discourse, collabo-

rates in the advance of science, takes his place as he should, and at the same time forgets his subjectivity, forgets his existence and his death. Lacan did not get to the point of saying, “He watches television,” but he mentions crime novels and other diversions.

We have here the outline of a critique of what Heidegger calls inauthentic existence, the realm of the “they.” Moreover, in existentialism, even Sartrean existentialism, which included this criticism of the inauthentic, there was also an aristocratic pretension. Do not forget what his existence and his death possessed that was absolutely singular. Here we can see—one does not have to go searching for it or interpret it—Lacan evoking, in contrast with the ego of modern man, what he calls the creative subjectivity, the one that campaigns, he says, for the renewal of the power of symbols.¹⁵ He also says, in passing, “This creation,” subjective creation, where the routine masses recite symbols, go around in circles, and extinguish their own subjectivity in futility, “is supported by a small number of subjects.” He has hardly formulated this thought when he invites us not to subscribe to it; it is a “romantic point of view.” However, there is no mistaking that Lacan places himself among this small number of subjects.

On this basis, at the point in *Television* where he advocates the emergence of capitalist discourse, Lacan writes, “This does not constitute progress if it is only for some.” The precise formulation says that the first thought presented there is that it is only for some and not for everyone. The limit of this small number is what Lacan was indicating as this ridiculous thought that one has to distance oneself from and which was “at least me.”

When Lacan brings this out at the end of *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, I see the traces, the expression of his debate with the aristocracy, his debate with the nobility that is a nobility of desire. The question he asks himself concerning psychoanalysis is this: What is the situation of psychoanalysis in these times when nobility has been eclipsed? Do not forget that when he modified the master’s discourse to make it the capitalist’s discourse, he inverted the two terms and wrote the barred *S* above the line, denoting a subject who no longer has a master signifier as referent.

This is confirmed, in this final chapter of *The Other Side*, by a very precise reference to Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of Mind*, to the dialectic of noble and vile consciousness, which is the truth of noble conscious-

ness. He relies on this in order to formulate that nobility is destined to become villainy, worthless. The time of the nobility flows into the time where there is no longer any shame. This is why he can say to the students, to the agitators in his public, "The more ignoble you are the better it will be."

One can see why he could speak to the students who crowded into his seminar about their ignominy. He explains it, indirectly, "Henceforth, as subjects, you will be pinned down by signifiers that are only countable signifiers and which will efface the singularity of the S_1 ." They have begun to transform the singularity of the S_1 into units of value. The master signifier is the singular unit of value, which cannot be quantified, which will not fit into a calculus in which everything is weighed. This is the context in which he proposes to "make ashamed," which has nothing to do with guilt. Making ashamed is an effort to reinstate the agency of the master signifier.

Honesty

There is no doubt a moment in history where the value of honor was found to be exhausted and then eliminated. It has been deplored over the centuries. There was a continual modification of and decline in this honor. Whereas the civilization that bore this honor was the feudal civilization, one can see, bit by bit, this honor becoming twisted, enfeebled, being captured by the court, which Hegel analyzes concerning vile consciousness and noble consciousness. Kojève read it this way, and Lacan did also no doubt, as a reference to the history of France. Captured by the court following the stupidity of the Fronde, which was the final resistance of an ancient form of honor, before honor turned into courtierism. This culminates over the course of the eighteenth century in the renunciation of aristocratic virtue in favor of bourgeois values.

What was aristocratic virtue in its day? A master signifier that was strong enough for the subject to draw upon for his self-esteem and, at the same time, the authorization and the duty to affirm, not his equality with, but his superiority over, others. This is how magnanimity, which is an Aristotelian virtue, was recycled in aristocratic morality, and it can be found in Descartes under the name of generosity in his *Treatise on the Passions*.¹⁶

On this point even Nietzsche's *Übermensch* finds its historical anchor-

ing point. This aristocratic virtue is in part tied up with heroism. Even if Lacan nuances it—“Everyone is both a hero and a common man, and the goals that he can give himself as a hero he accomplishes as the common man”—a central character that he moves around throughout *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* is the character of the hero, vehicle of aristocratic virtue, and in particular the virtue—and this is elementary—that enables one to go beyond the *primum vivere*.

The virtues of what has emerged as the modern man imply the renunciation of aristocratic virtue and of what it obliged in terms of braving death. One of the places this is brought about is in the work of Hobbes, which reveres aristocratic virtue while at the same time deducing that the social bond is above all established in the face of the fear of death, that is, the contrary of aristocratic virtue. Cultivated minds these days refer to this discourse in which one finds the foundation for the claim that security is essential for modern man. This is to affirm that heroism no longer means anything.

This is where new virtues have been proposed—for instance, what the Americans call “greed,” and the famous slogan of the 1980s, “Greed is good.” Capitalism functions by means of greed. It is also the reign, which does not stop growing, of the profit-loss calculus. When we are constantly offered evaluations of the analytic operation, this is nothing other than the reign of the profit-loss calculus that is making ground within psychoanalysis.

Let us not get on our high horse. There is a place for what Lacan calls, on the first page of his final seminar, honesty. This is a very precise reference to Hegel. When setting out his dialectic of the vile consciousness and the noble consciousness, Hegel evokes honest consciousness, consciousness in repose, which takes “each moment as an essence that endures.” For this consciousness, everything is in its place; it “sings the melody of the good and the true.” Hegel opposes to it the dissonances made apparent by the fractured consciousness whose paradigm is *Rameau’s Nephew*.¹⁷ This fractured consciousness appears in the perpetual reversal of all concepts, all realities, which indicates universal deception—self-deception and deception of others—and testifies to what Hegel calls the impudence of speaking this deception.

Rameau’s nephew is the great figure that emerges—and perhaps Diderot kept the manuscript in his drawer out of shame—of the shameless

intellectual, in relation to which he who says “I” in *Rameau’s Nephew* finds himself in the position of honest consciousness, who sees the propositions that he advances being reversed and denatured by the unleashed nephew of Rameau, and who has the wool pulled over his eyes. At Vincennes—which is reproduced under the title “Analyticon” in the published seminar—Lacan found himself in the position of the ego in relation to *Rameau’s Nephew*. He found himself in the position of honest consciousness. He differentiated himself from it in vomiting up the ignoble in his seminar.

Lacan defines the honest person as one who makes it a point of honor not to mention shame. In his seminar he oversteps this limit. It is frankly dishonest to speak like that to people who have received him kindly. The honest person is evidently one who has already renounced honor, renounced its emblem, and who would like it to be the case that shame did not exist—one who enrobes and veils the real of which this shame is the affect.

Even if it is an exaggeration to do so, one cannot help but think that the really honest person that Lacan happens to refer to, and who no doubt held shame at arm’s length, is Freud. He could say that “Freud’s ideal was an ideal tempered with honesty, patriarchal honesty.”¹⁸ Freud was still benefiting from the waning of the Father and, as Lacan demonstrates in his seminar *The Other Side*, psychoanalysis, far from downgrading the Father, has done all it can to try to preserve his status. It has made a renewed effort to found the notion of an all-loving Father.

When Lacan evokes the patriarchal honesty of the Freudian ideal, the reference he takes is Diderot, the Father of the family.¹⁹ Diderot serves as a guide, insofar as he is just on the point of rupture between the patriarchal ideal and the figure of *Rameau’s Nephew*, which treats this patriarchal honesty with derision.

Impudence

Lacan never ceases telling the students of the day that they represent a world in which there is no shame anymore. On the contrary, he tried to indicate to them that, with their frivolous [*éventé*] air—one has to hear *éhonté*, “shameless”—they run up against a highly developed “shame at being alive” at every turn. Having censured this absence of shame, he

shows them that there is nevertheless shame at being alive behind the absence of shame. This is what psychoanalysis is able to point out, that the shameless are shameful. To be sure, they challenge the master's discourse, the solidarity between the master and the worker, both being a part of the same system. He refers to the *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, the Senate and the Roman people, who each benefited from the master signifier. He indicates to these students that they are placed with the others in excess, that is to say, the rejects of the system, not with the proletariat but with the *lumpenproletariat*. It is a very precise remark and it runs right across all the years we have lived through since. This enables him to deduce that this system that adheres to the master signifier produces shame. The students, by placing themselves outside the system, put themselves in the place of impudence.

This is where we can see what has changed since then. We are in a system that does not obey the same regulation because we are in a system that produces impudence and not shame, that is, in a system that annuls the function of shame. We no longer apprehend it except in the form of insecurity—a form of insecurity that is imputed to the subject, who is no longer under the domination of a master signifier. The present moment of this civilization is permeated by an authoritarian and artificial return of the master signifier. Everyone must work in their place or be locked up.

While in the system Lacan was in, it was still possible to say “make ashamed.” Impudence has progressed greatly since, and today it has become the norm. What does one obtain from saying to the subject, “You owe something to yourself”? There is no doubt that psychoanalysis must define its position in relation to the aristocratic reaction that I have referred to. This is indeed the question that haunts our practice: Is it for everyone?

This is Lacan's fundamental debate. It was never really a debate with ego psychology, nor was it with his colleagues. Lacan's fundamental debate—it is clear in *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, as it was already in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*—has always been a debate with civilization insofar as it abolishes shame, with the globalization that is in process, with Americanization or with utilitarianism, that is, with the reign of what Kojève calls the Christian bourgeois.

The path that Lacan proposes is the signifier as vehicle of a value of

transcendence. This is condensed into S_1 . Again, things have changed since *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, because the signifier has been affected. Speech itself has been reduced to the pair *listening* and *chattering*. What one attempts to preserve in the analytic session is a space in which the signifier retains its dignity.

The begging pardon that Laurent mentions belongs more to the register of guilt; it helps one to forget the register of shame and honor. Why does one find oneself begging pardon? In this practice, which has become a little outdated since things have tightened up over national and international insecurity, one wanted to make it the case that begging pardon for the S_1 s, for the values, which have activated one, and which are deadly or harmful. Throughout this “begging pardon” there is the affirmation of the *primum vivere*. No value one believes one’s self to carry is worth the sacrifice of anyone’s life. Hence the careful compilations of the crimes of all the great idealizing forces over the course of history.

We can estimate the difference between today and the period of *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. We are at a point where the dominant discourse enjoins one not to be ashamed of one’s *jouissance* anymore. Ashamed of all the rest, yes, of one’s desire, but not of one’s *jouissance*.

I had an extraordinary example of this when I met Daniel Widlocher.²⁰ I conveyed to him one of the results of the careful reading of the papers in this orientation, according to which the practice of the countertransference, the passionate attention the analyst brought to his own mental processes, seemed nevertheless to be a kind of *jouissance*. You hesitate to say these things to one of its eminent practitioners. And there it was I who was surprised. “Yes, of course,” he said. “And it’s even an infantile *jouissance*.”

Notes

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- 1 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. D. Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 303.
- 2 See Max Weber, *General Economic History*, trans. F. Knight (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1923); and R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London: Penguin, 1948).

- 3 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 771.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 772.
- 5 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).
- 6 *Vatel*, a French, British, and Belgian film released in May 2000, was produced by Roland Joffé.
- 7 *Primum vivere, deinde philosophari*, live first, then philosophize.
- 8 Lacan, *Ethics*, 209.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 304.
- 10 Jacques Lacan, “. . . ou pire. Compte rendu du séminaire 1971–72,” in *Autres écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 547.
- 11 Lacan, “Jeunesse de Gide ou la lettre et le désir,” in *Ecrits*, 756.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 757.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Jacques Lacan, “Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. B. Fink (New York: Norton, 2002), 69.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 283–84.
- 16 René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of René Descartes*, ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- 17 Denis Diderot, *Rameau’s Nephew and D’Alembert’s Dream*, trans. and intro. L. Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).
- 18 Lacan, *Ethics*, 177. Translation modified.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Miller’s interview with Daniel Widlocher was published in March 2003 in the first issue of the review *Psychiatrie et sciences humaines*.