

ON THE RIGHT USE OF SUPERVISION

Eric Laurent

From the perspective taken up by Jacques-Alain Miller, which situates Lacan's teaching in a double return to Freud and to logic, I am going to interrogate the status of speaking about cases as a demonstrative procedure.

We formulate the experience in Freudian terms, simultaneously constructing them in the style of a logic that Lacan forged. But at the same time we are led to recognise that the heart of the question is the radical weighing of the case of the analysand reported by another against the case of the analysand's own report. This weighing is congruent with the teaching of Lacan according to which structure, in its logical aspects, is 'in the real'. It is a point of view opposed to the elaboration of a case as 'model' or 'representation' of a real.

If the true case is that of the passant at grips with his *sinthome*, testifying to the irreducibility of the symbolic in the real, what does the telling of a case 'of an other' then become, one that is presented to a public or one that is present in supervision? This double form of the public case and the case that is presented in supervisions appears at first to herald an opposition between what can be said between practitioners, in an esoteric way, and what can be said 'to everyone', in an esoteric way. This is a philosophical distinction. In our epoch of the triumph of technique, it is followed by the distinction between what can be said between specialists and what can be said to anyone.

From one point of view supervision brings out the evaluation of a group of pairs, *peer group evaluation*. The opposition between that which can be exposed to all and that exposed to a group restricted to pairs shows that, even within technical culture, the barrier between esoteric and esoteric remains difficult to reduce. This first distinction is only one aspect of the problem. It requires no doubt the perspective of the pass, with what it isolates of the 'lie in the real' to allow the strangeness of supervision to appear in its proper light. Except that it appears rather as false evidence.

Each in his practice, which takes place largely in the secrecy of the consulting room, about which it is difficult to know the essential, and which is in fact impossible to standardise. This is the prototype of the situation which in our civilisation, with its demand for democratic individualism, calls for surveillance, a 'plus' of transparency. It is for this reason that, as soon as the old soviet system wanted to modernise, the supporters too cried out *glasnost!* It has been a burning problem since the origin of the Rights of Man and the Revolution: Jean Starobinski entitles a fine book on Jean Jacques Rousseau *Transparency and the Obstacle*.¹ He showed the paranoia of Rousseau as consonant with the new world that would come into being. They both regretted that we do not have what Rousseau called an 'intellectual mirror' and that we are condemned to live in opacity.

In the call to supervision of psychoanalytic practice one no longer believes in a standardised operator who would have a clear vision of his action because he would know in relation to the norms of treatment precisely where he would place himself. We are thrown back on opacity of man to man. Thus we have to supervise.

'Thirdness'

It is said in the language of the IPA: 'one must recognise a third'. I recently heard an eminent person give a picture of his association that very broadly took up Jacques-Alain Miller's description in his *Letter to Enlightened Opinion*.² This representative admitted that, since the Freud/Klein controversy, there has no longer been an orthodoxy nor even any schools in the IPA. He added: 'apart perhaps from certain isolated Kleinians' — this no doubt being a barb aimed at certain Kleinians and, without naming him, against Horacio Etchegoyen.

The Lacanian term of School was thus brought back but used in a more general sense of schools, as one speaks of schools of medicine. It played more exactly on the two meanings of the School as institutional invention: the precise meaning, Lacanian, and the meaning of received language. There are no longer any schools of psychoanalysis, but there were still some in the eighties: the School of Lacan, the Kleinians, etc.

He concluded with the even greater necessity of supervision to assure that this dissolution did not lead to a generalised any old thing. Supervision seemed to him the most evident way of 'recognition of a third', accounting to a third. It contributed to the establishment of what he called 'thirdness at every level'. According to this perspective the telling of a modern case is confirmed as a form of a report on activity rather than support of a theoretical advancement.

André Green introduced this neologism of 'thirdness' at a conference he organised as president of the SPP. He took up and developed his contribution in the book he has just published, *La pensée clinique*.⁴ On this occasion he explains in an introduction that: "Since the publication of the *Monograph*

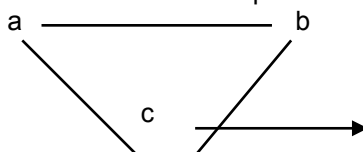
relating the exchanges, thirdness — a concept that I borrowed from C. S. Peirce — has found certain repercussions and its usage has extended”. Thirdness at every level is a supplementary extension of this signifier that has had some success.

Where does this success in the French linguistic air come from? This neologism translating Peirce’s thirdness makes one think of the solution that Serge Leclaire found, in another register, to the institutional difficulties of the psychoanalytic movement. For him, everyone could proceed institutionally according to his inclination, on condition that he had a third as he called it, to serve as a recourse in possible conflicts and to verify that a code of procedures be followed. This continuity between ‘the authority of a third’, ‘thirdness’ and ‘thirdness at every level’ from three readers of Lacan such as Serge Leclaire, André Green and Daniel Widlöcher no doubt brings out the value of the common source of this inspiration in Lacan’s teaching. Without doubt the repercussions of his teaching are not foreign to the receptivity that the ‘third’ has found in psychoanalysis.

Lessons in logic

Philippe la Sagna drew my attention to the fact that certain American psychoanalysts⁵ take up this idea of an ‘analytic third’, taking their references both from Lacan and from American philosophers like Donald Davidson or Richard Rorty. This would be the occasion, for those who make this reference, to note that the first psychoanalyst who took the trouble to read Peirce attentively from the 60s and to draw lessons from him for psychoanalysis was Jacques Lacan. We encourage our American friends to read their great philosopher logician in one hand and Lacan in the other, since before him this reference had not been integrated into the psychoanalytic discourse.

Peirce uses the term *thirdness*⁶. The notion can be represented by a schema:



This schema is based on the idea that it is necessary to count to three in order to engender the mechanism of meaning. First there is the presence of One, an element ‘a’. It is by comparing that to ‘b’ that an effect of meaning is produced in order to know that it is ‘a’ that otherwise would be given in ‘primarity’. By the very fact of putting them in relation a median term arises that comes as a third to assure the comparison, and that assures the constitution of a chain. Peirce adds that the median term only occupies its place in so far as it verifies the link between ‘a’ and ‘b’. The comparison between ‘a’ and ‘b’, judgement in relation to one or the other, implies an anticipation of a verification to come.

The place of a third is profoundly correlated with the term of inference. For Peirce all judgement, all perception, is already caught up in an anticipation, in an inference, in a phenomenon of third.

The dritte person

In psychoanalysis it is Lacan who places the accent on the function of the third and on ternary structures, indispensable to conception of experience itself. He adds however that it is necessary to count to four: “for the unconscious a quadripartite structure is always required in the construction of a subjective ordering”.⁷ To arrive at four, three are already necessary — a course by Jacques Alain Miller, ‘1,2,3,4’⁸ consisted of the necessity of enumeration.

There are two sources of the relation to a third in Lacan’s teaching, which do not quite overlap. First there is the logical source in which the third is present as the one that dummies. On the other hand, and even more profoundly, Lacan situated the function of a third, in the return to Freud, as the role of the *dritte person*, of the third person in the functioning of the witticism. He made it the foundation of the procedure of the pass, but there is something of the same order in the procedure of supervision.

From the IPA point of view, the *dritte person* is interpreted in a certain way. The will to establish the third at every level, according to the French authority that I quoted, is consonant with the importance given by Otto Kernberg to the process of supervision in the analytic institution such as he conceives of it.⁹ It corresponds for them to the putting in place of the Other of the symbolic, the Other of good faith, the Other that will establish the passage from private to public in transmission. The problem seems to be on the path to resolution through the introduction of this symbolic instance that will bring things out of the imaginary enclosure. But is it really resolved in the right way? Is it even posed correctly?

It cannot be thought about for two distinct reasons. First because the Other of good faith and the Other as a logical place must be separated. The Other of good faith as a universal place is not quite the same as that of the Other of the witticism such as Lacan presents it in *Seminar V*.¹⁰ There this Other in the place where the particular of the witticism is welcomed in its irreducible novelty.¹¹ It is the place where the new that is produced must be registered as belonging to the family of games, of previous

words, in a way homological with that of Wittgenstein and his logical families, emerging from one same series without however being qualifiable as having a common trait.

Which is the Other that is going to be put in place? Is it the Other of surveillance who verifies that things are going according to norms, or is it rather the Other of authorisation of the new in the same family? These are always the two sides: in a sense I am the Other of interdiction, in a sense the Other of authorisation. One has to be attentive because that can bring in confusions with the place of the superego that psychoanalysis addresses: in one sense interdiction, in another sense 'push to'.

One has therefore to think the thing in its difference and not be content to think that it exhausts itself in the 'accounting to a third'. What is the intention that supports this 'accounting' and what is the operation expected of it? The qualification that leads a subject to think of occupying the place of the guarantee of the norm, and occupying that of the one who welcomes the new in the family of practices are not the same.

There is a second order of arguments that objects to this solution, it is that 'thirdness at all levels' gives an error of perspective on the whole of the problem of transmission in psychoanalysis.

The place of the psychoanalyst

The psychoanalyst is not in the place of the universal Other of good faith in the procedure. He occupies rather, as soon as the process happens and is put in place, the place of the dead one, anticipating the place of the object *a* that will come to decomplete the Other of signifiers.

Thirdness at every level — I anticipate the translation of the slogan — is a sort of good-natured false evidence. To declare 'the place of the dead at all levels' would be more worrying. In this vein we recall that to support a structure of three Lacan summoned the fourth term, which implies the question of death: "The fourth term is given by the subject in his reality, as such foreclosed in the system and only entering in the form of the dead in the game of signifiers, but becoming the veritable subject in so far as the game of signifiers will make him signify".¹² The reality of the living foreclosed in the system will then be addressed differently with the objet petit *a*. Yet it is in the thread of the fourth term that it objects to the omnipotence of the third of the symbolic.

Lacan did not take things in a manner according to which it would be a question of knowing what qualifies the one who occupies the place of the Other, big O. One is never qualified to take it, and Lacan was able to say at one moment that the belief in being able to do so is a con¹³: to believe one can occupy the place of the Other in a legitimate fashion is an imposture.

The place of the psychoanalyst in Lacan's teaching is addressed from a 'making oneself dead' in order then to be situated in the place of the objet petit *a*: he decompletes the place of good faith and does not identify himself with it.

Since *Variantes de la cure-type* in the mid 50s, Lacan qualifies what is required of the person of the psychoanalyst by evoking, in the order of the subjectivity to be realised, everything that effaces the ego, in order to leave space for the 'subject-point'¹⁴ of the interpretation. What is a desire for effacement in order to come back to the subject-point of the interpretation? It is sufficient for the moment to underline the list of qualities required of the analyst: "reduction of the personal equation, [...] authority that knows how not to insist, [...] defiance of the altars of benevolence, [...] true modesty about knowledge".¹⁵ It is not a question here of playing at really being in the place of the Other, but more of being in the place of the dummy or of the barred subject, to allow the coming into being of the veritable subject.

In his *Proposition of 9 October 1967 for the Psychoanalyst of the School*, in relation to the pass, Lacan specifies the order of the subjectivity to be realised more strongly. He no longer evokes only 'reduction' but 'destitution'¹⁶ of the subject that is produced. To the reduction of the imaginary of the ego is added 'the effacement of the name'. It is no longer only a question of the 'ego' but of the 'name', ready to 'reduce itself [...] to any old signifier'.¹⁷ Destitution goes together with the loss of the hold the subject had on his desire through the fantasy. Through the authority of the fantasy that played him, he believed he knew what his desire was. In Lacan's late teaching, once the taking up of desire in the fantasy capsizes, it is the presence of the *sinthome* that surfaces. The effacement of the subject then brings to light the place outside-meaning of the symbolic in the real, the partner-*sinthome*.

Taking things in this light brings us to the cover that could swell the third by an identification with his third place, with his name, with his listening, with his position of vigil of truth. In the last instance it is a question of distancing oneself from a vocation to make an Other who does not exist.

To count up to four

To put it as a 'veridictional instance', to paraphrase Foucault, the temptation with the third is to localise the 'falsehood' of the case in the powerlessness of the supervisee to maintain himself on top. The temptation with the third is to historicise itself as third, forgetting the irreducible remainder of the analytic operation and that which will never have a name in the Other. Lacan's warning to those who would occupy the place of universal supervisor is still relevant: "The improper is not that something attributes superiori-

ty to it, or to the sublime in listening, nor that the group guarantees in the therapeutic margins, [...] it is that infatuation and prudence take the place of organisation".¹⁸ This warning goes for the perspective of the supervisor at all levels, and goes for our organisation.

We see two opposed types of institutional organisation: that which counts on a third at all the levels and that which counts up to four. The institutions that only count to three in fact eliminate the question of the desire of the analyst, preferring the knowledge of the analyst that allows the sustaining of the figure of a subject who will escape the error of the subject supposed to know.

The function of supervision

Following these perspectives which oppose two types of institutions, we come to the precise function that supervision can have. Lacan never scorned the function of supervision. The end of *On a Question Prior to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis* is a call for supervision, at least a reference to what can be transmitted of the pragmatic of the treatment. The text ends on "the conception to be formed on the manoeuvre of the transference in this treatment. To say what we could do in this terrain would be premature".¹⁹ Thus he opposes what it would be premature to say esoterically, and encouraging supervision esoterically.

After having focused on the pass, Lacan recognised an original dimension of what is said in supervision, and he notes in 1975: "I do not know why we have called it supervision. It is a super-audition. I mean that it is very surprising, in listening to what a practitioner has told you — surprising that through what he tells you one can have a representation of the one who is in analysis [...]. It is a new dimension".²⁰ He recognises that there is a real in play in this experience. He does not take it as evidently acquired, but he notes it as surprising.

What the procedure of the pass modifies in the false evidence of supervision is the fantasy of the supervisor, of the one who would be the only one to be able to hear the dimension in play in the supervision. It is the fantasy of a knowledge of which a subject would be master. It is always to this that the narcissism that covers little *a* points. The narcissism of the supervisor would be the reverse of having to occupy the place of the little *a* in the analytic experience.

To be contemporary, supervision must have integrated the aporia of the analytic act. Lacan made this point in his *Discourse at the EFP*: "It is something other than supervising a 'case': a subject [...] whose act overtakes him, which is nothing but which, if he is overtaken by his act produces the incapacity that we see flourish in the psychoanalysts' flowerbed".²¹ Lacan recognises first the function of supervision: it is "to supervise a subject whose act goes beyond him". He adds: 'which is nothing' — it exists, it is the work, we do it, the question is not there. The question is that of the subject who goes beyond his act, that is, who believes he is master of it, the cunning one who covers the act of his narcissism and who, in place of grasping the dimension of desire at play, wants to bring that back to a knowledge, to a know-how that he would have.

The problem of supervision is not to rectify the position of the subject whose act overtakes him. The problem is the experienced analyst, the one who no longer recognises that he has left the analytic act, the one who wants to escape the necessity of the 'desire of the analyst'. The problem begins when one has to intervene in the incapacity of the analyst to make himself the cause of desire. This incapacity is the source of all the temptations to give way on the desire of the analyst. It is why, in the *Discourse at the EFP*, the examples given, the exhortations bear on the experienced analyst who puts himself in the position of the one who has the knowledge and who, in the same movement, gives way: "before the seat of the obsessional [...] gives way to his demand for the phallus and interprets it in terms of coprophagy".²²

Giving up on the desire of the analyst

The critique bears on an interpretation proffered by one of the great listeners of the moment in the EFP. It comes, however, from a model of which the French IPA, following Maurice Bouvet, has proved itself to be fond. This position is anyway still current for some. The interpretation that is criticised consisted in giving way to the siege of the obsessional by responding in terms of the 'here and now', in interpreting: "Is that what you want from me? I'll give it to you". The demand, interpreted in terms of regressive object, is considered as if it returned to an objective truth, to a veritable objectivation of desire.

In the case of Bouvet that Lacan criticised in *Seminar V*,²³ the analyst gives way before the siege of the obsessional by interpreting the desire in terms of oral demand for the imaginary phallus. Lacan says that the analyst interprets desire in terms of phallophagy. It is not a question of *coprophagy* as in the *Discourse at the EFP*, but of *phallophagy*. It suffices to put these two *phagies* together homologically to see that it is a question of the same problem.

In the *Seminar V* Lacan develops his critique of a technique according to which the analyst will make himself pressing, insistent, in his interpretations so that the subject consents to swallow, to incorporate on the level of fantasy, the partial object. It concerns an obsessional subject who dreams and addresses himself to the analyst: "I accompany you to your own house. In your room there is a large bed. I am extremely irritated. There is a bidet in the corner of the room. I am happy, although ill at ease". The

analyst interprets this obsessional subject straight away saying to him: “it’s your passive homosexual tendency, you want to receive the phallus from me”. This comes at the end of a long series of interpretations where Bouvet is ready, with an availability that does him credit, to give his phallus as a reassuring term to fill in the subject’s lack. He offers himself as a sacrifice to the fantasmatic *phallophagy* in question. Lacan criticises the term: ‘passive homosexual’ because, “until a new order appears, nothing is manifested on this occasion of the Other as object of desire”. On the contrary he brings forward in the dream an object fully articulated as place of the third: it is the bidet, indicating what is problematic. Lacan notes at this time the hollow cup as being able to represent the phallus; he notes how typical it is in the dreams of the obsessional that the hollow cup functions as the genitals, therefore as the phallus. It is the phallus “as a question: Has the Other got it or hasn’t he?”

This is what opens the bidet in third position; it is a position less glorious than ‘third at all levels’. There are some levels where it is not pleasant to find oneself, nor is it easy to be at the height of the phallic question. It is not a question of wanting to be ready for the generalised fantasmatic *phallophagy* and of interpreting it in terms of the here and now but, on the contrary, to allow the question to appear as a question. It is a question of distinguishing between an orientation of the treatment towards a relation of two filled with an imaginary object, and a direction that interrogates the place of the Other and leaves room for the question bearing on the completeness of this Other — whether or not he has the phallus.

Thus Lacan criticises the development of Bouvet’s works, which end by centring especially on the elaboration of a fantasy of fellatio, given as comparable to the absorption of a victim. This perspective tramples the question of the Other. It reduces the question of desire on the basis of a fantasmatic imaginary satisfaction. This reduction of desire to the dual dimension of demand, within the framework of the session, is the product of negligence of the third position of the signifier of desire, the phallus.

The mechanism is very precise. The analysand lays siege to the analyst, who replies in terms of transferable objects. This is what some, formed in the IPA, call ‘interpreting in the transference’. It was also a question of members of the EFP who were formed at the hinge moment between the SFP and the EFP and which would soon separate from Lacan to form an autonomous group. To say to an analysand “You want to incorporate the phallus as a turd”, there you have what qualifies coprophagy. The operation produced in the two cases, pinned as *phallophagy* or *coprophagy*, provokes a reduction of desire to an imaginary demand that Lacan qualified thus: “it’s the stickiness of what the fantasy implies”.

Is this critique not still topical concerning the contemporary orientation in the IPA? Is it not this that risks happening in the accent placed on the ‘two thinking’, in the equilibrium between transference and counter-transference, where the analysand gives his associations and the analyst, more aware, does not immediately give his phallus, but gives all his thoughts, the best he has to help the subject? This perspective of transference/counter-transference, profoundly ignoring the place that should be safeguarded, is it not very close? The accent placed on the call to a third, to thirdness, seems here to be like the trace and the symptom of a torment. Will we really be able to count to four together? This question requires consideration in its current form.

Maintaining oneself at the level of desire

What would the alternative be? How to interpret differently? One would have to maintain oneself at the level of desire and not at the level of the imaginary. Let us take an example. An obsessional subject lays siege to the analyst by declaring to him in a repetitive manner that he has nothing to say, having had an idea of the associative links between retention of his ideas and anal retention dear to his childhood. Now he makes the analyst support the fruits of his discoveries and his retentive *jouissance*. He maintains loud and clear that he has nothing to give, or to say. The point is not to fix him in this stickiness but to re-launch him onto the plane of desire. He has to be shown his game of destruction of the desire of the Other: the anal object retained by the child has the fundamental function of destroying the desire of the parent appended to the imaginary object of which it is a question of letting go.

One can do a number of things: one can say nothing; one can say “you want to put me off analysing you”; one can also point out to the analysand that he is complaining about not having anything to say, nothing to give, but that he is enjoying it. The subject must not be fixed to his imaginary object but must be led to perceive how, with this anal object and the auto-erotic *jouissance* that he gets out of it, he wants to destroy the analyst’s desire. The object through which the analysand operates on the analyst’s desire is in fact indifferent, it can be oral or anal.

This is the point to which Lacan draws attention at the end of *The Direction of the Treatment* but which had still not been heard nine years later at the *Discourse at the EFP*: “This indifferent object, it is the substance of the object [they think], eat my body, drink my blood, (the profane evocation comes from their pen). The mystery of the redemption of the analysed is in this imaginary effusion, of which the analyst is the oblate”.²⁴

In this critique of ‘phallophagy’ or ‘coprophagy’ we thus hear the denunciation of a change of plan. In place of sending the subject back to the enigma of his game with the desire of the Other, who

takes the form of the analyst or of his partners, one fixes the subject to the imaginary object which is simply a means of extinguishing the Other.

A doctrine of supervision

This critique of the cases contains a doctrine of supervision. The right use of supervision is something that Lacan hoped to introduce as widely as possible to those who need “what is not there to veil: namely the need that results from professional demands each time that they require the ‘analysed’ in formation to take an analytic responsibility however small that might be”.²⁵ This is why Lacan does not devalue supervision in his *Founding Act*. On the contrary, in place of curriculum [*cursus*] that, in traditional societies, reserve supervision to the ‘admitted’, according to procedures more or less arbitrary, he proposed that “from the start and in every case a qualified supervision in this context will be assured to the practician in formation in our School”.²⁶ With this offer it is not simply a matter of surpassing that of *outbid*, the rival institution. It is a question of putting supervision and its use in the right place.

It is in this very motion that supervision is offered ‘from the start’ and that the false window that it can open on the ‘desire of the analyst’ must be denounced. Supervision allows rectification of the position of the subject ‘overtaken by his act’ and rectification of the direction of the treatment. If, on the contrary, it allows the installation of a category of supervisors who, in the name of their misunderstood experience, regularly make the mistake of reducing desire to demand, then the situation is hopeless. The false window has triumphed, the analytic act is misunderstood. Lacan does not give up on the demand to give its place to supervision and to its experience. By contrast he is wary of the perverse effects that this can bring in his effort to recapture the act to which he has to be up to. The psychoanalyst is one who defines himself only as not being master of what he expresses, he has to keep open ‘the gap that makes the law [of his act]’.²⁷ This act is not a matter of “thinking of making himself equal to the structure that determines him [...] in its mental form”.²⁸ He has therefore to detach himself from all that comes into the place of the dream of this equality, whether in the supervisor as ‘overlistener’, or in the countertransference as what might allow what escapes to be caught. It is rather a question, as Jacques-Alain Miller has highlighted, of supporting occupation of this extreme point that Lacan formulates as a divestment of all mastery. The aporia formulates itself in the radical form: “An interpretation of which one understands the effects is not an analytic interpretation”.²⁹ It is thus that “the position of the subject [of the analyst] as inscribed in the real is revealed”.³⁰ This inscription of the subject in the real is newly clarified by the proposition to situate the symbolic in the real as the point of structure, or of ‘falsehood’.

The absence of mastery cannot be mimed, it is not the equivalent of distraction. It is not enough to give it up to proclaim its achievement. This is why Lacan carefully differentiates between “the act that never succeeds better than when it lacks”³¹ and the act that supports the different psychological fictions of the subject. The first two fictions taken up by Lacan are that of the subject of representation and that of the subject of communication. Adequate supervision seen from the pass is that which strips itself of all illusion of communication, which is not so simple.

The analyst ‘supervisor knowing how to oversee’ pursues the illusion of displacement of the analyst in the place of the Other. This displacement is coherent with the decline of all orthodoxy and the rise of orthopraxis, of which Jacques-Alain Miller extracted the function.³² It is the last recourse to make an Other consist and not to leave the place empty in the analytic process.

In the opposite direction, Lacan insists on the theme of the act in a radical way in the Italian conferences at the end of 1967: “An act still without measure”³³ against which there is no way of protecting oneself either through the fantasy of power or by a narcissistic covering, or by recourse to experience. The supervision we need is that which respects this aporia and finds a way to situate it ‘in the right way’. One that always knows how to preserve, beyond the mirage of the supplement of knowledge, the place of the desire of the psychoanalyst.

Translated by Heather Chamberlain

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29. J. Lacan, *Réponses à des étudiants en philosophie sur l'objet de la psychanalyse* in *Autres écrits*, *op. cit.* p. 211.
30. J. Lacan, *La méprise du sujet supposé savoir*, *op. cit.* p. 40.
31. *Ibid.*, p.41.
32. J.-A. Miller, *L'orientation lacanienne: Réflexion sur le moment actuel*, Seminar 2001-02, unedited.
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