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## Introduction and reply to Jean Hyppolite's presentation of Freud's *Verneinung*

THE LINGUISTIC CRISS-CROSSING  
THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISCIPLINES  
STRUCTURE OF HALLUCINATION  
IN EVERY RELATION TO THE OTHER, NEGATION

Those who were here last time heard an exposition on the central passage in Freud's paper, 'The dynamics of transference'.

The whole of this exposition consisted in showing you that the principal phenomenon of transference starts with what I could call the basis of the movement of resistance. I isolated that moment, which remains masked in analytic theory, in which resistance, in its most essential aspect, is manifested in a see-saw motion of speech towards the presence of the listener, towards the witness who is the analyst. The moment when the subject interrupts himself is usually the most significant moment in his approach towards the truth. At this point we gain a sense of resistance in its pure state, which culminates in the feeling, often tinged with anxiety, of the analyst's presence.

I also taught you that the analyst's questioning when the subject interrupts himself – a questioning which, because it has been pointed out to you by Freud, has become almost automatic for some people – *Aren't you thinking about something that has to do with me, the analyst?* – is only an activism which crystallises the orienting of the discourse towards the analyst. All this crystallisation shows is the following, that the subject's discourse, in so far as it doesn't attain this full speech in which its base in the unconscious should be revealed, is already addressed to the analyst, is so made as to interest him, and is supported by this alienated form of being that one calls the *ego*.

### 1

The relation of the *ego* to the other, the relation of the subject to this other himself, to this fellow being in relation to whom he is initially formed, is an essential structure of the human constitution.

It is by taking our cue from this imaginary function that we can conceptualise and explain what the *ego* is in analysis. I am not talking about the *ego* in psychology, where it performs a synthetic function, but the *ego* in

analysis, a dynamic function. The *ego* makes itself manifest there as defence, as refusal. Inscribed in it is the entire history of successive oppositions which the subject manifested to the integration of what will subsequently be called within the theory, but only subsequently, his deepest and most misunderstood drives. In other words, in these moments of resistance, so clearly pointed out by Freud, we gain a sense of the means by which the very movement of the analytic experience isolates the fundamental function of the *ego* – misunderstanding [*méconnaissance*].

I showed you the mainspring, the fine point of Freud's investigation, in relation to dream analysis. You there saw, in an almost paradoxical form, the extent to which the Freudian analysis of the dream presupposes a function of speech. This is clinched by the fact that Freud grasps the last trace of a vanishing dream just at the moment when the subject turns completely towards him. It is at the precise moment when the dream is no more than a trace, a fragment of a dream, an isolated vocable, that we rediscover its transferential tip. I have already mentioned this significant, isolated interruption, which may be the turning-point of a phase in the analytic session. The dream is hence modelled on an identical movement.

Similarly, I have shown you the significance of speech that is unspoken because it is refused, because *verworfen*, rejected [*rejetée*] by the subject. I made you realise the specific weight of speech in the forgetting of a word – with an example taken from *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* – and the extent to which there is, in this instance also, a sizeable difference between what the subject's speech should have proffered, and what is left to him with which to address the other. In the present instance, on account of the effect of the word *Herr*, something is lacking in the subject's speech, the vocable *Signorelli*, which he will no longer be able to bring to mind with the interlocutor, with whom the word *Herr* had, in an implicit manner, been called up a moment earlier, with all of its signification. Revealing as this moment is of the fundamental relation between resistance and the dynamic of the analytic experience, it leads us to a question which can be polarised between these two terms – the *ego*, speech.

This is a question which has been so little explored – although it should be the object of the essential investigation for us – that somewhere, under Mr Fenichel's pen, we find, for example, that the subject indisputably gains access to the meaning of words via the *ego*. Does one have to be an analyst to think that such a view is, at the very least, subject to dispute? Even if we admit that the *ego* is indeed what, as they say, controls our motor activities, and as a consequence the issuing of these vocables known as words, can one claim that, in our discourse, right now, the *ego* is the master of everything that these words harbour?

The symbolic system is extraordinarily intricate, marked as it is by this *Verschlungenheit*, property of criss-crossing, which the translation of the papers

on technique has rendered as *complexity*, which is, and how, much too weak. *Verschlungenheit* designates linguistic criss-crossing – every easily isolable linguistic symbol is not only at one with the totality, but is cut across and constituted by a series of overflowings, of oppositional overdeterminations which place it at one and the same time in several registers. This language system, within which our discourse makes its way, isn't it something which goes infinitely beyond every intention that we might put into it, and which, moreover, is only momentary?

It is precisely on these ambiguities, on these riches already involved in the symbolic system as it has been constituted by the tradition in which we as individuals take up our places, far more than we can spell out or learn of it, it is on these functions that the analytic experience plays. At every moment this experience consists in showing the subject that he is saying more than he thinks he is – to take up only this aspect of the question.

We might be led to take up the question from the genetic point of view. But we would then get caught up in an investigation in psychology which would lead us so far away that we can't broach it now. Nevertheless it seems to be indisputable that one cannot make judgements concerning the acquisition as such of language on the basis of the acquisition of the motor mastery revealed by the appearance of the first words. The punching in of words which observers are pleased to record leaves intact the problem of knowing to what extent the words which do indeed emerge in motor representation emerge precisely as a result of an initial appreciation of the totality of the symbolic system as such.

The words that first appear have, as clinical experience shows, an entirely contingent signification. Everyone knows the degree of diversity shown by the first fragments of language as they appear in the child's elocution. And we also know how striking it is to hear the child give expression to adverbs, particles, words, to *perhaps* or *not yet*, before having given expression to a substantive, the minimal naming of an object.

Setting up the problem in this way from the outset seems indispensable to finding a place for any valid observation. If one doesn't manage to grasp clearly the autonomy of the symbolic function in the realising of the human, it is impossible to proceed from the facts without at once committing the crassest of errors in understanding.

Since this isn't a course in general psychology, I will probably not have an opportunity to return to these questions again.

## 2

Today, I think I will only be able to introduce the problem of the *ego* and of speech, starting, of course, with the way in which it is revealed in our experience.

We can only address this problem in the form which it now has. We cannot pretend that the Freudian theory of the *ego* doesn't exist. Freud opposed the *ego* to the *id*, and this theory permeates our theoretical and technical conceptions. That's why today I want to draw your attention to a text called *Verneinung*.

*Verneinung*, as M. Hyppolite pointed out to me just now, is *dénégation* and not *négation*, as it has been translated in French. That is how I myself have always referred to it in my seminars, each time I had occasion to.

The text dates from 1925. It comes after the publication of the articles dealing with the psychology of the *ego* and its relation to the *id*. Specifically, it comes after the article *Das Ich und das Es*. In it Freud takes up again this relation, always so alive for him, of the *ego* with the spoken manifestation of the subject in the session.

It seemed to me, for reasons which will become apparent to you, that M. Hyppolite, who by his presence, not to speak of his interventions, does us a great honour in coming here to participate in our work, could make us privy to a critique that is sustained by everything that we know of his previous work.

The problem at issue, as you are going to see, concerns nothing less than the entire theory, if not of knowledge, at least of judgement. That is why I asked him, no doubt a little insistently, to be so good as, not only to stand in for me, but to bring what he alone can bring to a text as rigorous as *Die Verneinung*.

I think that this could present difficulties for any mind not trained in those philosophical disciplines which we could not do without in our present capacity. Our experience is not that of affective smoochy-woochy. We don't have to elicit in the subject the return of more or less evanescent, confused experience, in which would consist all the magic of psychoanalysis. Hence we are plainly doing our duty in listening, when it comes to a text like this, to the expert opinions of someone who is practised in the analysis of language and trained in philosophical disciplines.

This paper shows once more the fundamental value of all of Freud's writings. Every word is-worthy of being measured for its precise angle, for its accent, its specific turn, is worthy of being subjected to the most rigorous of logical analyses. It is in that way that it is distinguished from the same terms gathered together more or less hazily by the disciples, for whom the apprehension of the problems was at second-hand, if one may say it, and never in any depth, which resulted in this degradation of analytic theory to which its hesitations so constantly attest.

Before giving the floor to M. Hyppolite, I would like to draw your attention to an intervention that he made in the course of the sort of debate that was instigated by a certain way of putting things concerning Freud and his intentions with respect to the patient. M. Hyppolite had at that time come to Z\*'s rescue . . .

M. HYPOLITE: . . . *for a brief moment.*

. . . yes, for a brief moment of rescue. What was at issue, if you remember, was to find out what was Freud's basic, intentional attitude with respect to the patient, when he claimed to have substituted the analysis of resistances by speech for the subjugation that operates through suggestion or through hypnosis.

I showed myself to be extremely guarded on the question of knowing if there were at this point signs of combativeness in Freud, indeed of domination, vestiges of an ambitious style which we might see betrayed in his youth.

On this point, I think there is a quite decisive text. It is a passage from *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. It is in connection with collective psychology, that is to say, relations to the other, that the ego, in so far as it is an autonomous function, is brought into Freud's work for the first time – a simple point, perhaps, but worth making because it justifies the particular manner in which I myself am introducing it to you. This passage comes from chapter four, entitled 'Suggestion and libido'.

*We shall therefore be prepared for the statement that suggestion (or more correctly suggestibility) is actually an irreducible, primitive phenomenon, a fundamental fact in the mental life of man. Such, too, was the opinion of Bernheim, of whose astonishing arts I was a witness in the year 1889. But I can remember even then feeling a muffled hostility to this tyranny of suggestion. When a patient who showed himself unamenable was met with the shout: 'What are you doing? Vous vous contre-suggestionnez!' I said to myself that this was an evident injustice and an act of violence. For the man certainly had a right to counter-suggestions if people were trying to subdue him with suggestions. Later on my resistance took the direction of protesting against the view that suggestion, which explained everything, was itself to be exempt from explanation. Thinking of it, I repeated the old conundrum:*

*Christoph trug Christum,  
Christus trug die ganze Welt,  
Sag' wo hat Christoph  
Damals hin den Fuss gestellt?*<sup>1</sup>

So – Freud experienced genuine revulsion on contact with the violence that speech can bring with it. This potential tendency of the analysis of resistances which Z\* attested to the other day is precisely the misconstrual to be avoided in putting analysis into practice. I think that in this respect this passage has a very great value, and deserves to be cited.

In thanking him once more for the collaboration that he is willing to give us, I will ask M. Hyppolite who, from what I have gathered, was willing to devote a considerable amount of time to this text, to tell us straightforwardly what he makes of it.

<sup>1</sup> (1921c) GW XIII 97; Stud IX 84; SE XVIII 89. 'Christopher bore Christ; Christ bore the whole world; Say where did Christopher then put his foot?'

*Jean Hyppolite's contribution to the seminar, 'A spoken commentary on Freud's Verneinung', will be found in an Appendix.*

### 3

We cannot thank M. Hyppolite enough for giving us the opportunity, through a movement coextensive with Freud's thought, to encounter straightaway this beyond of positive psychology, which he has so very remarkably located.

In passing, let me point out to you that in insisting in these seminars on the trans-psychological character of the psychoanalytical domain, we are only rediscovering what is quite evident from our practice, and which the very thought of the person who opened its gates to us constantly manifests in the very slightest of his writings.

There is a great deal to be drawn from a careful reflection on this text. The great concision of M. Hyppolite's presentation is perhaps, in a sense, much more didactic than what I myself, in my own way, tell you, with specific intentions in mind. I will get it duplicated for the benefit of those who come here, because it seems to me that one couldn't have a better preface to this differentiation of levels, to this critique of concepts, which I have myself endeavoured to introduce to you, with the aim of avoiding confusions.

M. Hyppolite's elaborations on Freud's text has shown us the difference between the levels of the *Bejahung*, of affirmation, and of negativity in as much as it sets up at a lower level – I use much more clumsy expressions quite on purpose – the constitution of the subject-object relation. That is exactly what this text, so minimal in appearance, introduces us to from the start, and it clearly links up with some of the most recent philosophical thinking.

By the same token, it allows us to criticise the ambiguity that always dogs us concerning the notorious opposition between the intellectual and the affective – as if the affective were a sort of colouration, a kind of ineffable quality which must be sought out in itself, independently of the eviscerated skin which the purely intellectual realisation of a subject's relationship would consist in. This conception, which urges analysis down strange paths, is puerile. The slightest peculiar, even strange, feeling that the subject professes to in the text of the session is taken to be a spectacular success. That is what follows from this fundamental misunderstanding.

The affective is not like a special density which would escape an intellectual accounting. It is not to be found in a mythical beyond of the production of the symbol which would precede the discursive formulation. Only this can allow us from the start, I won't say to locate, but to apprehend what the full realisation of speech consists in.

There is a little time left. I would like just now to try to indicate with some

examples how the question arises. I am going to show it to you from two different angles.

Let us begin by taking a phenomenon whose perspective has been completely transformed by the development of thinking about psychopathology – hallucination.

Up to a certain date, hallucination was considered to be a critical phenomenon around which revolved the question of the discriminating value of consciousness – it couldn't be consciousness which was hallucinated, it had to be something else. In fact, one need only acquaint oneself with the new phenomenology of perception as put forward in M. Merleau-Ponty's book to see that hallucination is on the contrary integrated as being essential to the subject's intentionality.

When it comes to hallucination, one is usually content with a certain number of registers, such as that of the pleasure principle, in order to explain its production. One thus considers it as the initial movement in the order of the subject's satisfaction. We cannot rest content with a theorisation as simple as this.

Recall the example that I mentioned to you last time in the *Wolfman*. The progress of the analysis of the subject in question, the contradictions which are revealed by the traces through which we follow the specification of his position in the human world, point to a *Verwerfung*, a rejection – literally, it has always been for him as if the genital plane did not exist. We have been led to locate this rejection on the level, I would say, of the *non-Bejahung*, because we cannot, in any way, place it on the same level as a negation.

What is striking is what happens next. In the light of the explanations that have been given you today concerning the *Die Verneinung*, it will be much easier to comprehend. In a general way, in fact, the condition such that something exists for a subject is that there be *Bejahung*, this *Bejahung* which isn't a negation of the negation. What happens when this *Bejahung* doesn't happen, in such a way that nothing appears in the symbolic register?

Just let's look at the *Wolfman*. There was no *Bejahung* for him, no realisation of the genital plane. There is no trace of this plane in the symbolic register. The only trace we have of it is the emergence, not at all in his history, but really in the external world, of a minor hallucination. Castration, which is precisely what didn't exist for him, manifests itself in the form of something he imagines – to have cut his little finger, so deeply that it hangs solely by a little piece of skin. He is then overwhelmed by a feeling of a catastrophe that is so inexpressible that he doesn't even dare to talk of it to the person by his side. What he dares not talk about is this – it is as if this person to whom he immediately refers all of his emotions were annulled. The other no longer exists. There is a sort of immediate external world, of manifestations perceived in what I will call a primitive real, a non-symbolised real, despite the symbolic form, in the usual sense of the term, that this phenomenon takes.

The subject is not at all psychotic. He just has a hallucination. He might be psychotic later on, but he isn't at the moment when he has this absolutely limited, nodal experience, quite foreign to his childhood, completely disintegrated. At this point in his childhood, nothing entitles one to classify him as a schizophrenic, but it really is a psychotic phenomenon we are dealing with.

Hence there is here, at the level of completely primitive experience, at the source-point in which the possibility of the symbol lays the subject open to a certain relation to the world, a correlation, a balancing that I would very much like you to understand – what is not recognised irrupts into consciousness in the form of the seen.

If you go deeply into this particular polarisation, you'll find it much easier to broach the ambiguous phenomenon known as *déjà-vu*, which lies between these two modes of relation, the recognised and the seen. In the *déjà-vu*, something in the external world is carried to the limit, and emerges with a special pre-signification. Retrospective illusion relates this perceived thing endowed with an original quality to the domain of the *déjà-vu*. Freud is talking of nothing other than this when he tells us that any experiencing<sup>2</sup> of the external world implicitly refers to something which has already been perceived in the past. This is true as far as you might want to take it – in a certain way, all varieties of the perceived necessarily include a reference to something previously perceived.

That is why we are here brought back to the level of the imaginary as such, to the level of the model image of the original form. What is at issue is not the recognised as symbolised and verbalised. Rather we rediscover the problems raised by Platonic theory, not of remembering but of reminiscence.

I promised you another example, which I am taking from the advocates of the so-called modern way of analysing. You'll see that these principles were already set out in 1925 in this text of Freud's.

A great deal is made of the fact that at first we analyse the surface, as they say. It would be the crowning glory to make it possible for the subject to progress by escaping this sort of chance represented by the intellectualised sterilisation of contents re-evoked by analysis.

Well, Kris, in one of his articles, gives an account of the case of a subject whom he took into analysis and who, it should be said, had already been analysed once. This subject is seriously hampered in his profession, an intellectual profession which appears to be, in the glimpses one catches of it, not far removed from what might be our preoccupations. This subject experiences all manner of difficulties producing, as they say. Indeed, his life is as it were fettered by the feeling he has of being, let's say for the sake of brevity, a plagiarist. He is continually discussing his ideas with someone who is very close to him, a brilliant scholar,<sup>3</sup> but he always feels tempted to take on the ideas his

<sup>2</sup> 'toute épreuve'. Cf. *Realitätsprüfung, épreuve de la réalité*, reality-testing.

<sup>3</sup> English in the original.

interlocutor provides him with, and that is for him a perpetual impediment to everything that he wants to get out, to publish.

All the same, he manages to get one text into shape. But, one day, he turns up declaring almost triumphantly that the whole of his thesis is already to be found in the library, in a published article. So there he is, this time, a plagiarist despite himself.

What will the alleged interpretation of the surface that Kris offers us actually consist in? Probably in the following – Kris in actual fact gets interested in what happened and what the article contains. Looking into it more closely, he realises that none of the central theses brought forward by the subject are to be found there. Some issues are raised which address the same question, but there is nothing of the new views brought forward by his patient, whose thesis is thus clearly original. This is where you must start from, Kris says, it's what he calls – I don't know why – taking up things on the surface.

Now, Kris says, if the subject is bent on showing him that his entire behaviour is completely shackled, it is because his father never succeeded in producing anything, because he was crushed by a grandfather – in all the senses of the word – who himself had a highly constructive and fertile mind. He needs to find in his father a grandfather, a father who would be grand, who, in contrast, would be capable of doing something, and he satisfies this need by forging himself tutors, always grander than him, upon whom he becomes dependent by means of a plagiarism which he then reproaches himself for, and by means of which he destroys himself. He is thus doing nothing more than satisfying a need, the same need that tormented his childhood and in consequence dominated his history.

There's no question about it, the interpretation is valid. And it is important to see how the subject reacted to it. What does Kris consider as being the confirmation of the significance of what he put forward, which has such tremendous implications?

In what follows we see the whole history of the subject unfolding. We see that the symbolisation, properly speaking penile of this need for the real, creative and powerful, father, took the form of all sorts of games in childhood, fishing games – will the father catch a bigger or a smaller fish? etc. But the immediate reaction of the subject is the following. He remains silent, and at the next session he says – *The other day, on leaving, I went into such and such street* – it takes place in New York, it is the street where there are foreign restaurants where you can eat rather more spicy dishes – *and I sought out a place where I could find the dish I am particularly fond of, fresh brains.*

Here you can see what makes for a response elicited by an accurate interpretation, namely a level of speech which is both paradoxical and full in its meaning.

What makes this an accurate interpretation? Are we dealing with something

which is at the surface? What does that mean? It means nothing, other than that Kris, via a detour that is doubtless diligent, but whose outcome he could easily have predicted, came to realise precisely the following – that the subject, in his manifestation in this special guise of the production of an organised discourse, in which he is always subject to this process which is called negation and in which the integration of his *ego* is accomplished, can only reflect his fundamental relation to his ideal ego in an inverted form.

In other words, the relation to the other, in so far as the primitive desire of the subject strives to manifest itself in it, always contains in itself this fundamental, original element of negation, which here takes the form of inversion.

This, as you see, only opens up new problems for us.

But to continue, it would be useful if one were to fix precisely the difference of level between the symbolic as such, the symbolic possibility, the opening up of man to symbols, and, on the other hand, its crystallisation in organised discourse in so far as it contains, fundamentally, contradiction. I think that M. Hyppolite's commentary has shown you that today in a magisterial fashion. I would like you to keep both the tool and the means to use it to hand, as milestones to which you will always be able to refer yourselves when you come to difficult crossroads in the rest of our discussion. That is why I thank M. Hyppolite for having given us the benefit of his extraordinary expertise.

10 February 1954