

... we don't know much about sects. We  
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mpts, but this becomes more difficult in  
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... language in some subjects, something  
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**Translated from the French by Adrian Price**  
Footnotes established by the translator  
o, Issue 80/81, January 2004, pp. 6-13.

Event/Horizon - Athens 2013

**Jacques Lacan**

## **Address on Child Psychoses**

*Delivered on 22 October 1967 as the conclusion to the Study Days on this theme.*

**M**y friends,

First of all I would like to thank Maud Mannoni, to whom we are indebted for the meeting of these past two days and, therefore, for everything that has emerged from it. She has achieved what she set out to achieve, thanks to the extraordinary generosity that characterises her, and which has led her to pay, through her efforts with each and every one of us, for the privilege of bringing together from every which horizon whomsoever could provide a reply to a question she has made her own. After which, stepping aside to make way for the object, she voiced some well-placed queries about it.

To start off from this object which has been so well-centred, I should like to get you to sense its unity by repeating a few sentences I uttered some twenty years ago now in a meeting hosted by our friend Henri Ey who was, as you know, what we call a "civiliser" in the field of French psychiatry. He posed the question of what mental illness is about in a way that may be said at the very least to have awoken the body of French psychiatrists to the more serious question of what this body stood for.

In order to lead everything back to its most rightful conclusion, I had to take issue with the organo-dynamism that Ey was promoting. So it was that, on man in his Being, I expressed myself in the following terms:

Rather than resulting from a contingent fact<sup>1</sup> – the frailties of his organism – madness is the permanent virtuality of a gap opened up in his essence.

And far from being “an insult” to freedom [as Ey states], madness is freedom’s most faithful companion, following its every move like a shadow.

Not only can man’s Being not be understood without madness, but it would not be man’s Being if it did not bear madness within itself as the limit of his freedom.

On the basis of this, you will not find it strange that our meeting should have united questions that bear on the child, on psychosis, and on the institution. It must strike you as something quite natural that nowhere is freedom evoked more constantly than in these three themes. If psychosis really is the truth of everything that is verbally brandished under this banner, behind this ideology, which is currently the only one with which the man of civilisation arms himself, then we get a better sense of what, by their accounts, our British friends and colleagues have been doing in psychosis, of how they move precisely into this field and precisely with these partners, establishing modes and methods whereby the subject is invited to utter what they think of as manifestations of his freedom.

But isn’t this a somewhat short-sighted perspective? I mean, doesn’t the freedom which has been elicited and suggested by a certain practice that targets these subjects carry within it its limit and its illusion?

With respect to the child, the psychotic child, this gives rise to laws, laws of a dialectical order, which are in a certain sense summed up in Dr Cooper’s pertinent observation that obtaining a psychotic child requires at least two generations’ work, the child being the fruit of this work in the third.

That should the question ultimately arise as to an institution that is properly related to the field of psychosis, it always turns out that at some point, in situations that vary, there prevails a legitimate relation to freedom.

What does this mean? It certainly does not mean that I hereby intend in any way to seal off these problems, nor to open them up, as people say, or leave them open. It is a matter of determining them and grasping the reference point from which we can deal with them without remaining ourselves trapped in a certain illusion and, in order to do so, of accounting for the distance to which the correlation whose prisoners we are inclines. The factor at stake here is the most burning issue of our times in so far as this era is the first to have to undergo the calling into question of every social structure as a result of the progress of science. This is something which we are going to be contending with, not only in our domain as psychiatrists, but in the furthest reaches of our universe, and in an ever more pressing fashion: with segregation.

1 [TN, Reading *fait contingent* instead of *faillie contingente*, Cf. Lacan, J., *Écrits*, Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 110.]

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1. Cf. Lacan, J., *Écrits*, Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 176.

Mankind is entering a period that has been called "global", in which it will find out about this something that is emerging from the destruction of an old social order that I shall symbolise by the *Empire* whose shadow was long cast over a great civilisation, such that something very different is replacing it, something that carries a very different meaning, the *imperialisms*, whose question runs as follows: what can we do so that human masses, which are destined to occupy the same space, not only geographically, but sometimes in a familial sense, remain separate?

The problem at the level at which Oury set it out just now using the pertinent term "segregation" is therefore merely a local point, a small model of something to which we need to know what the rest of us, I mean psychoanalysts, are going to respond: segregation, which has been put on the agenda by an unprecedented subversion. Here, one should not neglect the perspective from which Oury was able to formulate just now that, within the collective, the psychotic presents himself essentially as the sign, a sign in deadlock, of what legitimises the reference to freedom.

The greatest sin, Dante tells us, is sadness. We need to ask ourselves how we, committed to the field I have just outlined, can nevertheless stand outside it.

Everyone knows that I am cheerful [*gai*], even childlike, so they say: I amuse myself. In my texts, I am constantly indulging in jokes that are not to the taste of academics. This is true. I am not sad. Or more precisely, I have but one sadness in the career that has been traced out for me, which is that there are fewer and fewer people with whom I can speak of the reasons behind my cheerfulness, when it comes my way.

However, let's consider the fact that we are able to pose the questions that have been asked over the last couple of days because in the place of the *x* whose task it is to provide an answer, who for a long time was the alienist, and then the psychiatrist, someone from elsewhere had a word to say about it, and that someone is called the psychoanalyst, a figure that was born of Freud's oeuvre.

What is this oeuvre?

As you know, it was so as to cope with the shortcomings of one particular group that I was led to the place, for which I had no ambition whatsoever, of having to examine, together with those who were able to hear me, what we do as a consequence of this oeuvre, and which for this reason we revisit.

Just before reaching the heights of the path I was establishing through my reading of it, prior to broaching *transference*, then *identification*, and then *anxiety*, it was not by chance, no one could possibly entertain such an idea, that in that particular year, four years before my seminar at Sainte-Anne came to an end, I thought I ought to secure for us *the ethics of psychoanalysis*.

Indeed it seemed that we were running the risk of forgetting that, in the field of our function, an ethics lies at its root and that thereafter, whatever might be said, and this includes what goes without what I profess, on man's end, our chief torment concerns training that may be qualified as human.

The essence, and not the accident, of all human training is the reining in of *jouissance*. This appears to us quite nakedly – and no longer through the prisms and lenses that go by the name of religion, philosophy,... even hedonism, for the pleasure principle is the rein on *jouissance*.

It is a fact that at the end of the nineteenth century, and not without some antinomy with respect to the assurance gained from the utilitarian ethic, Freud restored *jouissance* to its central place in order to assess everything we can see, down through history, as standing as a testament to morality.

What kind of upheaval did it take, I mean right down to the very foundations, for the gulf to re-emerge unto which we serve up – twice nightly? twice monthly? – our relation with some sexual spouse?

It is no less remarkable that nothing has been scarcer in our comments over these last two days than any use of the terms that go by the name of *the sexual relation* (leaving aside the act), *the unconscious*, and *jouissance*.

This does not mean that their presence was not controlling us, invisibly, though also, in the case of one particular gesticulation behind the microphone, palpably.

Nevertheless, it was never theoretically articulated.

What gets (inaccurately) heard in what Heidegger proposes on the grounding to be taken in Being-unto-death, lends credence to the echo that it causes to resound down through the ages, and indeed Golden Ages, of the penitent as he who is placed at the heart of spiritual life. Not failing to acknowledge in the antecedents of Pascal's meditation the support to a surpassing of love and ambition can only better assure us of the commonplace, up until his time, of the withdrawal in which the confrontation with Being-unto-death is consummated. This observation acquires its value from the fact that Pascal, by transforming this asceticism into a wager, in actual fact brings it to a close.

And yet, can we measure up to what the Freudian subversion seems to call upon us to sustain, namely Being-unto-sex?

We do not seem to be quite doughty enough to hold this position.

Nor quite cheerful enough. Which proves, I think, that we are not quite there.

And we are not there because of what psychoanalysts say too well to bear actually knowing, and which they designate, thanks to Freud, as castration: this is Being-unto-sex.

Some light is shed on this business by what Freud said in little stories which we need to bring into sharper focus, and this is that, as soon as there are two of you, whatever those who cultivate Being-unto-death believe, the faintest slip shows that what is at issue is the death of the other party. Which explains the hopes invested in Being-unto-sex. In contrast to this however, the analytic experience demonstrates that, when there are two of us, the castration that the subject uncovers cannot only be his own. Which for the hopes invested in Being-for-sex plays the role of the second term in the Pecci-Blunts' surname: that of shutting the doors that were initially wide open.<sup>2</sup>

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of pleasure the open.<sup>2</sup>

The penitent thus loses a great deal in forming an alliance with the psychoanalyst. Back when the penitent was the one who set the tone, he left the field of sexual frolicking free, incredibly freer than it has been since the advent of the psychoanalyst, as is borne out, in the guise of memoirs, epistles, contemporary accounts and other amusing passages, by a great many documents. To spell it out, whilst it is hard to judge exactly whether sexual life was an easier matter in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries than in our own, the fact, on the other hand, that judgement regarding sexual life was given more freely at the time, rules justifiably against us.

It is certainly not going too far to put this decline down to the "presence of the psychoanalyst", to be understood purely in the sense in which use of this term is not presumptuous, that is to say, in the sense of its effect of theoretical influence, marked precisely by a lack of theory.

In reducing themselves to their presence, psychoanalysts deserve acknowledgement for the fact that they rule neither better nor worse in matters of sexual life than the era that made way for them, for being no more often twain in their couples than anyone anywhere else, which does not get in the way of their profession since such a pair has no place in the analytic act.

Of course, castration figures only at the terminal point of this act, although it is covered over by the fact that at this moment the partner is reduced to what I call the object *a* – which means, as it should, that Being-unto-sex has to be experienced elsewhere: and this happens in the mounting confusion that is brought to it by the propagation of psychoanalysis itself, or what goes by this title.

In other words, that which institutes the entry into psychoanalysis stems from the difficulty of Being-unto-sex, but the way out of it, if we read today's psychoanalysts, would ostensibly be nothing else but a reform of the ethics whereby the subject is constituted. Therefore it is not I, Jacques Lacan, who trusts only in operating on the subject as a passion of language, but rather those who let him off, having obtained a flow of high words.

When one remains within this fiction without understanding anything of the structure in which it is wrought, one can only dream of feigning that it is real and slide into forgery.

The worth of psychoanalysis is that it operates on the fantasy. Its degree of success has demonstrated that here is judged the subjecting form, as neurosis, perversion or psychosis.

Hence the postulate that, in simply sticking to this, the fantasy forms reality's frame: self-evidently!

2 [TN, In French, *blunt* is an outmoded term for the "door-closer" device that shuts a door hydraulically, derived from the name of its inventor, Eugene I. Blount. Pecci-Blunt was the surname taken by Count Cecil Charles Blunt and Countess Donna Anna Laetitia Pecci after their marriage in 1919. The couple were known in France for their extravagant parties and the count's long-standing homosexual affair with Cecil Everly.]

And furthermore, it is impossible to budge, were it not for the margin left by the possibility of an exteriorisation of the object *a*.

They will tell us that this is exactly what they speak about when they use the term "partial object".

But, precisely in presenting it under this term, they are already saying too much to be able to say anything that can add up to very much.

If it was as easy as that to speak about, we would call it something else besides object *a*.

An object that requires us to reconsider the whole discourse on the cause is not destined to assignation, even theoretically.

We are only touching on these confines here as a way of explaining why in psychoanalysis the return to reality is so brief, for want of having any view of its contour.

Note that we are not mentioning the real here, which in an experience of speech only crops up in virtuality, which in the logical edifice is defined as the impossible.

It takes a good deal of havoc wreaked by the signifier for there to be any question of reality.

This havoc can be grasped in a well-tempered form in the status of the fantasy, failing which the chosen criterion of adaptation to human institutions simply comes down to pedagogy.

Given its powerlessness to set this status of the fantasy in Being-unto-sex (which is veiled in the misleading idea of a subjective "choice" between neurosis, perversion and psychosis), psychoanalysis dashes off a postiche fantasy with some folklore mixed in, the fantasy of harmony lodged in the maternal habitat. Neither inconvenience nor incompatibility are purported to arise here, and anorexia nervosa is banished as a quirk.

The extent to which this myth obstructs any consideration of these moments which stand to be explored, so many of which have been mentioned here, is beyond measure. That, for instance, of language broached under the banner of misfortune. What manner of prize for consistency can one expect in pinpointing as "preverbal" the moment just prior to the patent articulation of the very thing upon which the presenter's voice seemed to waver: *la gage*? *La gâche*? It took me a while to recognise the word: *langage*.

But what I ask of anyone who heard the presentation I am reappraising is whether or not a child who covers his ears, so we are told – to what?... well, to something that is being spoken – is not already in the post-verbal dimension, since he is protecting himself from the word.

As concerns a so-called construction of space that the speaker thought he had grasped here just as it was emerging, it seems to me rather that a moment was being uncovered that vouches for a relationship that had already been established with *here* and *over there*, which are language structures.

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excludes any consideration of these moments of which have been mentioned here, is a language broached under the banner of consistency can one expect in pinpointing the patent articulation of the very thing that led to waver: *la gage? La gâche?* It took a long time.

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of space that the speaker thought he was occupying, it seems to me rather that a moment of a relationship that had already been established, which are language structures.

Need I remind you that when one deprives oneself of linguistics as a reference, the observer can only miss the possible impact of the oppositions for connoting distance that typify each language, even if only thereby to enter the knots that more than one language prompts us to situate between *here* and *over there*. In short, there is something of linguistics in the construction of space.

So much ignorance, in the active sense that this term harbours, can hardly allow the difference that is so firmly marked in Latin between *taceo* and *silet* to be evoked.

If *silet* already targets the configuration of the stars and planets, without yet frightening us off by it for want of the context "of infinite spaces", isn't this to make us notice that space appeals to language in an altogether different dimension from the one in which mutism squeezes out a word that is more primordial than any *mom-mom*.

What ought to be indicated here is nevertheless the irreducible prejudice that burdens the reference to the body so long as the myth that covers the child's relation to the mother has not been dispelled.

An elision occurs that cannot be noted except by way of the object *a*, whereas this is precisely the object that the elision snatches from any exact hold.

Let's say therefore that this elision can only be understood by opposing the idea that the child's body is what corresponds to the object *a*: which is a delicate matter where no such pretension comes to light, the latter only being animated when the existence of the object *a* is suspected.

It would come to be animated precisely by dint of the fact that the object *a* functions as inanimate, for it appears in the fantasy as a cause.

A cause with regard to what desire is, whereof fantasy is the *montage*; but also in relation to the subject who is newly cleft in the fantasy by being set into it through an alternation, a mount that nevertheless makes it possible for desire not to undergo any reversal.

A more exact physiology of placenta-bearing mammals, or simply giving fuller consideration to the obstetrician's experience (it is astonishing how this experience in actual fact makes do with the psychosomatics of *Les Cacquets de l'accouchée* on painless deliveries) would be the best antidote to what amounts to a pernicious mirage.

Remember that, to top it all, we have been served up primary narcissism as a function of inter-cellular attraction postulated by body-tissues.

We were the first to pinpoint exactly the theoretical importance of what is known as the "transitional object", isolated as a clinical feature by Winnicott.

In assessing it, Winnicott himself stays within a developmental register.

His great finesse exhausts itself on ordering his discovery into a paradox, being able only to register it as frustration, whereby it turns necessity into need, for whatever purpose Providence might have in store for it.

However, the important thing is not whether the transitional object is maintaining the child's autonomy, but whether the child is serving, or not, as the mother's transitional object.

And this suspension only discloses its reason at the same time as the object discloses its structure, namely, that of a capacitor for *jouissance*, in so far as, through the regulation of pleasure, *jouissance* is purloined from the body.

Might I take the liberty of briefly pointing out here that, should one flee these theoretical avenues, the problems posed at the time can only appear in deadlock.

On one hand, problems concerning birthright – but also in the same vein as: *ton corps est à toi* [“thy body belongs to thee”], by which one adage of liberalism was vulgarised at the start of the century, the question of knowing whether, by virtue of the ignorance in which this body is kept by the subject of science, one will acquire the right to itemise the body for the purpose of exchange.

From what I have said today, can you not discern the point of convergence? Shall we pin down its consequence by using the term “the all-pervasive child”? A certain *Antimemoirs* has been doing the rounds of late (why are these memoirs “anti”? Unless it is to distinguish them from confessions, so we are informed, but hasn’t that always been what sets memoirs apart?). Be that as it may, the author begins with the oddly resonant secret by which a chaplain bids him farewell: “I’ve come to believe, you see, in the twilight of my life, that there are no grown-ups”.

Here you have the signal of an entire world steering onto the path of segregation.

Is it not on account of the fact that this question has to be addressed that we are now glimpsing why Freud doubtless felt duty-bound to introduce our measure back into ethics by means of *jouissance*? And surely one attempt at acting on this, with you and with those whose law it now is, is to leave you with the question: what joy do we find in the labour that is ours?

## Note

**T**HIS is not a text, but an improvised address.

To my mind, there is no commitment that can justify its word-for-word transcription, and so I have to excuse it.

Firstly for its pretext: which was to simulate a conclusion, the absence of which, something quite normal in Congresses, does not exclude their beneficial effect, which was the case here.

I did it to pay homage to Maud Mannoni: to she who, through the rare virtue of her presence, had managed to catch all these people in the toils of her question.

The function of presence is, in this field as everywhere; to be judged by its pertinence.

It is certainly to be excluded, except in cases of notorious impudence, from the psychoanalytic operation.



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For the reappraisal of psychoanalysis, indeed of the psychoanalyst himself (taken essentially), it plays its role of standing in for a lack of theoretical support.

I give generous rein to it in my writings by way of polemics, the latter forming interludes in the interstitial parts, when I have nothing else to resort to against obtuseness, which defies all discourse.

Of course it is always tangible in incipient discourse, but it is a presence that is only worthwhile in as much as it is ultimately effaced, as can be seen in mathematics.

There is however one presence in psychoanalysis that binds itself to theory: the presence of sex as such, to be understood in the sense that the speaking being presents it as the feminine sex.

*What does woman want?* is, as we know, the state of ignorance in which Freud remained until the end, in the thing he brought into the world.

*What woman wants*, as well as still standing at the blind spot of the analytic discourse, entails in its consequence that woman is a born-psychoanalyst (as one can see from the fact that analysis is regimented by the least analysed women).

Nothing of all this relates to the present case since it is a matter of therapy and a concert that only falls in line with psychoanalysis by taking it up in theory.

This was where I had to remedy this for everyone else but those who hear me, through a sort of presence that I really must say is an overindulgence... since it goes from sadness prompted by a suppressed cheerfulness to appealing to a sense of incompleteness right where the latter should be situated in logic.

This presence, it seems, has given *plaisance*. May some trace remain here therefore of what carries over as speech, right where agreement is excluded: aphorisms, confidences, persuasion, even sarcasm.

Once again, as you will have seen, I took advantage of the fact that a language is self-evident where some cling stubbornly to fancying the preverbal.

When will they see that what I favour is a discourse without words?

26 September 1968

**Translated from the French by Adrian Price & Beatrice Khiara-Foxton**

Originally published in *Recherches*, special edition on *Enfance alienée*, December 1968, pp. 143-52; re-printed in two subsequent editions (UGE, 1972, and Éditions Denoël, 1984); collected in Lacan, J., *Autres écrits*, Seuil, Paris, 2001, pp. 361-371.

The French transcription was corrected by the author.

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