

Jacques Lacan Geneva lecture on the symptom

A transcript of this lecture was sent to me by Mario Cifali. After having verified the text, I happily agreed to his request to authorise its publication in his journal, *Le Bloc-Notes de la psychanalyse*.

According to the information he gave me, the lecture, advertised under the title 'The Symptom', was delivered 4th October 1975 at the Centre Raymond de Saussure, at a study week-end organised by the *Swiss Society of Psychoanalysis*, to an audience consisting of members and guests of the Society; it was introduced by Olivier Flournoy.

A note indicates where there is a passage missing.

Jacques-Alain Miller

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I shan't start without thanking Olivier Flournoy for having invited me here, which gives me the privilege of addressing you.

It seemed to me that, from when I began my practice, I have owed you at least a word of explanation—a word of explanation about the fact that I practiced first and then one day started to teach.

I really had no need to teach. I started at the time that what has since been called the Psychoanalytic Institute of Paris was founded—founded in the name of a take-over by someone who had, indeed, no great claim to this role. I did it solely because at the time, which was a time of crisis—it was, in short, the setting up of a kind of dictatorship—, a group of these people, psychoanalysts, who were emerging from the war—it had taken them eight years to emerge from it nevertheless, since this foundation was in 1953—a group asked me to start speaking.

At the time there was a professor of psychiatry at [the hospital] Sainte-Anne, since then a member of the *Académie Française*, who invited me there. He had been psychoanalyzed, supposedly, but really, his *Jeunesse d'André Gide* doesn't bear this out, and he wasn't very enthusiastic about playing a role in psychoanalysis. Thus he was only too happy, after ten years, not so much to give me notice, since it was rather I who gave him notice, as to see me leave.

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Then a new crisis broke out, due, my God, to a sort of aspiring, with a kind of empty fuss, to the level of the *International [Psychoanalytic Association]*. There's something here that Joyce, who is on the list of my current preoccupations, symbolises with the English word *suck*—it is the noise that the lavatory makes when you pull the chain, when it sinks down the hole.

This is not a bad metaphor for the function of this *International* such as Freud wanted it. It must be remembered that he was led, by his belief that there was no guarantee that immediately after his death his thought would be safeguarded, to confide his thought in no other person than his own daughter. It can't be said, can it, that this daughter is directly aligned with Freud himself? The so-called *Mechanisms of Defense* she produced doesn't seem to me to be any proof that she continues in the same line as Freud. Far from it.

I thus found myself in 1953 beginning a seminar, which a certain number of you, Olivier Flournoy tells me, have followed. This seminar is nothing but the collection I left in the hands of Jacques-Alain Miller, who is fairly close to me. I left it in his hands because this seminar was a bit distant from me, and if I had reread it, I would have rewritten it, or at the very least, I would have simply written it.

Writing is not at all the same as speaking, they're not similar at all. I will illustrate this a bit later. It so happens that during the time I was at Sainte Anne I wanted something of what I was saying to remain. At that time a review appeared in which I used to write, in the strict sense of the term.¹ I published a collection of the articles that had appeared in this review. As I had also written quite a few things before then, half of this collection is made up of these previous writings—which are writings [*écrits*] properly so-called, hence my title, simply *Ecrits*. Someone I know, a charming young woman, who is Japanese, was a bit shocked by this title. The resonance of the word *écrit* probably isn't the same in Japanese and French. By *écrits* I simply wanted to point out that it was in some sense the residue of my teaching.

Roughly once a year, I used to publish a writing in this review, *La Psychanalyse*, one that was intended to preserve something of the turmoil [*remous*] that my word had created, in order to retain an apparatus that one could refer to. I did this with the idea in mind that, after all, it could have served as a reference point for me with respect to the *Internationale*. To be sure they laugh at all these writings—and after all, they are right, since psycho-

¹ Seven issues of the review *La psychanalyse* appeared between 1956 and 1962.

analysis is something quite different from writing. However, it would perhaps not be a bad thing that the analyst give some sort of proof that he knows what he is doing. If he does something, if he speaks, it would perhaps not be unreasonable to expect him, in a certain sense, to testify to what he does.

Nor is it unreasonable to hope that he thinks about what he is doing. He thinks from time to time. He thinks sometimes. This is in no way obligatory. I don't give any connotation of value to the term 'thinking'. I would go even further than this—if there is anything I have claimed, it is very much of a kind to reassure the analyst of what could be called his automatism. I think that ultimately one gets bogged down in thought. And psychoanalysts know this better than anyone. One gets bogged down in what I have described as the imaginary, and an entire philosophical tradition has observed this perfectly well. If man—it seems banal to say this—did not have what is called a body, I'm not going to say that he would not think, since that's obvious, but he would not be profoundly captivated by the image of this body.

Man is captivated by the image of his body. This point explains many things, the first of which is the privileged position that this body holds for him. His world, assuming that this word has a meaning, his *Umwelt*, what there is around him, he *corpo-reifies* it, he makes it a thing in the image of his body. He does not have the slightest idea, of course, of what happens inside this body. How does a body survive? I don't know whether you are struck by this in any way—when you get scratched, it heals. This is just as surprising as, no more or less than, the fact that the lizard that loses its tail grows a new one. It is of exactly the same order.

It is by means of the look, to which Olivier Flournoy was referring before, that this body carries weight. The majority—but not all—of what man thinks stems from there. It is really very difficult for an analyst, given what he is dealing with, not to be sucked in—in the way I was referring to before—by the glug-glug of the escaping water, of this thing that captivates him, ultimately, narcissistically, in the discourse of what Olivier Flournoy was calling—unfortunately—the analysed [*analysé*]. Why this is unfortunate is that it is now some time that the term 'analysand' [*analysant*], which I proposed in my seminar one day, caught on. Not only in my School—I would only attach relative importance to that, relative to me—but it came as a sort of thunderclap the very week I formulated it, this 'analysand'. The *Psychoanalytic Institute of Paris*, which is very up to date with everything I recount—I would go even further, what I say is the main thing that is taught

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there—this *Institute* relished this 'analysand' that fitted them like a glove, even if it was only used to relieve the analyst of his responsibility for the analysis when the occasion arises.

I must say that when I put this thing forward I was only parodying—if I can put it like that, since an entire tradition is of the order of parody—the term 'analysand', current in English. Of course, it isn't strictly equivalent to the French term. [The English] 'analysand' evokes more the to-be-analysed, and that is not what I meant at all. What I meant was that in analysis the person who truly comes to formulate a request for an analysis [*demande d'analyse*] is the one who does the work—on condition that you haven't put him on the couch straightaway, in which case you've ruined it. It is essential that this request has really taken shape before you get him to lie down. When you tell him to start—and this must be neither the first nor the second time, at least if you want to conduct yourself with dignity—the person, then, who makes this request for an analysis, when he starts to work, is the one who does the work. You are not to consider him at all as someone that you have to mould. It is the exact opposite of this. What is it that you are doing? This question is the reason for everything I have enquired about ever since I began.

I began, my God, I would say, in all innocence. I mean that I didn't know what I was doing, as what followed proved—proved to my mind. Would I have had second thoughts if I had known what it was I was undertaking? I feel certain I would have. This is why at the final point, that is, at the latest stage I had got to at the beginning of the academic year in 1967, in October, I instituted that thing that consists in asserting that when someone sets himself up as analyst, no one else can do it for him. This seems to me to be a self-evident truth.

When someone sets himself up as analyst, he is free in that kind of inauguration, which I introduced and which I called the *Proposal*. He is free, he can also refrain from doing it, and keep things to himself, but he is also free to volunteer for this trial of coming and confiding things—confiding them to people that I chose on purpose because they are at the same point as he is.

It is obvious that if he addresses himself to an older person, to one who is registered [*titularisé*], or even to someone called a training analyst, you can be sure that his testimony will miss the point entirely. Because, first, he knows perfectly well that the poor idiot he is addressing has matured such that he, just like me, has absolutely no idea why he entered this profession of being an analyst. I myself can remember why a little, and I regret it. But on the whole they have completely forgotten. All they see is their position of

authority, and in these conditions one tries to place oneself on the same footing as the authority—that is to say, one lies, quite simply. So I tried to ensure that they always address themselves to beginners like themselves.

Despite everything, I retained—one always has to beware of innovating, it's not like me, I've never innovated in anything—a sort of panel established out of the consent of all. There is nothing more striking than this—if you elect any panel whatsoever, if you get people to vote, by secret ballot, the result is the names of people who are already perfectly well identified. The group wants leaders. It is already a piece of good fortune if the group wants more than one. So, the group that wants leaders elects those who are already there through the way things function. The people who have received the testimony of those who want to be analysts testify to this panel.

In the spirit of my *Proposal*, this exercise is carried out so as to cast light upon what happens at this point [of deciding to become an analyst]. It's exactly as Freud said—when we have a case [*cas*], what is called a case, in analysis, he recommends that one not place it in a pigeon-hole [*casier*] in advance. He would like us to listen, if I may say so, entirely independently of any knowledge [*connaissances*] we have acquired, to be aware of what we are dealing with, namely the particularity of the case. This is very difficult because obviously the nature of experience is to prepare a pigeon-hole. It is very difficult for us analysts, men, or women, of experience, not to make judgements about a case in the process of functioning and to develop the analysis, of not calling other cases to mind concerning it. Whatever our supposed freedom—since it is impossible to believe in this freedom—it is clear that we are unable to obliterate our experience. Freud insists upon this a great deal, and if it were better understood we would have the path to a completely different type of intervention—but this cannot be.

It was, then, in this spirit that I wanted a person who was at the same level as the one crossing this threshold to be a witness. In short, it was designed to enlighten us. It happens from time to time that a person's testimony has the character—and it is possible to recognize it—of authenticity. So I made it possible for this person to be accepted at a level at which there are supposed to be people who think about what they are doing, in such a way as to sort them out. What immediately became of this? Of course, it became another mode of selection. That is, people who testified in all honesty to what they had done in their analysis, retroactively called a training analysis, felt a bit miffed if, following their testimony, they didn't belong to that by means of which I tried to enlarge the group of those able to reflect a bit on what they are doing. They feel devalued, whatever I do to prevent this

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occurring. I try to explain to them that their testimony has contributed something about a certain way of becoming an analyst by having been trained in whatever it is that is required of them. What can be demanded of them is obviously to have passed through that experience. How can it be transmitted if you haven't been subjected to it yourself? Well, anyway . . .

I would like to mention Freud's remark, *Soll Ich Werden*, which I have stressed more than once.² *Werden*, what does that mean? It is very difficult to translate. It goes towards something. Is this something the *den*? Is *Werden* a becoming green, a verdification? What is there in the German *becoming*? Each language has its own genius and translating *Werden* by *devenir* really carries weight only in so far as *den* is already in *devenir*. It is something of the order of *destitution*, if it can be put like that. Destitution [*dénuement*] is not the same thing as outcome [*dénouement*]. But let's leave that up in the air.

What is at issue is to evaluate what Freud—a very surprising thing on the part of a man so thoroughly a practitioner—only emphasised in the first part of his work, in this first stage that ends around 1914, before the First World War—in his *Traumdeutung*, in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and in his *Jokes* in particular. He emphasised this, and it is surprising that he didn't put his finger on it, it is that his hypothesis of the *Unbewusstsein*, of the unconscious, if one can say so, is poorly named.

The unconscious is not only being un-known. Freud himself had already formulated it in saying *Bewusst*. I am exploiting the German language here, in which a relationship can be established between *Bewusst* and *Wissen*. In the German language the conscious of consciousness is formulated as what it really is, namely the enjoyment [*jouissance*] of knowledge [*savoir*]. Freud's contribution is this, that there is no need to know what one knows to enjoy knowledge.

Let's turn to our everyday experience. If what we say is true, if it is indeed at an early stage that what we must call by their name, that is, symptoms, crystallise, if the period of infancy is indeed decisive for that, how can this fact fail to be linked to the manner in which we analyse dreams and bungled actions? I won't mention jokes, completely outside the range of analysts who naturally do not have the slightest humour. That's Freud, but it proves all the same that here Freud, nevertheless, must have observed that the statement in a bungled action gets value only from the explanations given by the subject. How does one interpret a bungled action? We would be completely in the

² The transcript of part of the lecture is missing at this point.

dark if the subject didn't say one or two things about it, which make it possible to say, 'But then, when you took your own key out of your pocket to enter my, the analyst's, place, it has meaning all the same', and according to his state of progress, the meaning will be explained to him in one of several ways—either by the fact that he thinks he is entering his own home, or that he wants to enter his own home, or even a bit further on, that the fact of inserting the key into the lock proves something symbolic that has to do with keys and locks. The symbolism of the *Traumdeutung* is cut from exactly the same cloth. What are these dreams if they're not recounted dreams? It is in the unfolding of the report that what Freud calls their meaning is read. How can one sustain a hypothesis such as that of the unconscious, unless one sees that it is the manner in which the subject, if indeed there is such a thing as a subject that is not divided, is impregnated, as it were, by language?

We well know in analysis the importance the way a subject was desired has for him or her, I mean who at that moment was still nothing at all. There are people who live under the threat, and this will last their whole life, under the threat that one of the two parents—I won't say which—did not desire them. That's what our everyday text is.

Parents mould the subject in this function that I call *symbolism*. Strictly speaking this means, not that the child is in any way the basis of a symbol, but that the way in which a mode of speaking has been instilled in him can only bear the mark of the mode in which his parents have accepted him. I well know that this can have all sorts of variations, and fortunes. Even an undesired child may, in the name of whatever it is that may arise from his first wriggles, be more welcome later on. This won't prevent from being retained some mark of the fact that the desire didn't exist before a certain date.

How could people fail to appreciate before Freud that these people called men, or women on occasion, inhabit talking? It is very odd for people who believe they think not to realise that they think with words. There are things there that have to come to an end, don't you agree? The thesis of the Würzburg School, on the so-called apperception of I know not what synthetic thought that isn't articulated, is really the most delusional that a school of supposed psychologists has ever produced. It is always with the help of words that man thinks. And it is in the encounter between these words and his body that something takes shape. Moreover, I would even use the term 'innate' in this respect—if there were no words, what could man bear witness to? This is where he places meaning.

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I tried, as much as I could, to bring alive again something that didn't come from me, but that had already been perceived by the old Stoics. There is no reason to think that philosophy has always been the same thing as it is for us. In those times philosophy was a way of life—a way of life concerning which it could be perceived, well before Freud, that language, this language that has absolutely no theoretical existence, always intervenes in the form of what I call—using a word that I have wanted to make as close as possible to the word 'lallation', 'babbling'—'lalangue', 'llanguage'.³

Llanguage. The Greeks, from the time of Aesop on, were well aware that it was of absolutely capital importance. There is a well-known fable on this topic, but nobody notices it. It is no coincidence at all that, whatever llanguage it is that one receives the first imprint of, words are equivocal. It is certainly no coincidence that in French the word 'ne', 'not', is pronounced the same as the word 'noeud', 'knot'. It is no coincidence at all that the word 'pas', 'not', which in French, contrary to many other languages, doubles the negation, also designates *un pas*, a step. If I am so interested in 'pas', 'not/step', it is not by chance. This doesn't mean that llanguage in any way constitutes a heritage. It is absolutely certain that it is in the way in which llanguage has been spoken and also heard as such, in its particularity, that something will subsequently emerge in dreams, in all sorts of mistakes, in all manners of speaking. It is in this *moterialism*, if you will allow me to use this word for the first time, that the unconscious takes hold.⁴ What I mean is that here there resides what it is that prevents anyone from finding another way of nourishing what just before I called the symptom.

Read a bit of the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud's *Vorlesungen*—I'm sure this doesn't happen to you very often. There are two chapters on the symptom. One's called *Wege zur Symptom Bildung* [*Paths to Symptom Formation*], it's the chapter 23, then you will see that there is a chapter 17 called *Der Sinn*, the meaning, of symptoms. If there is any contribution Freud has made, this is it. It's that symptoms have a meaning, and a meaning that can only be interpreted correctly—'correctly' meaning that the subject lets some of it go—as a function of his early experiences, namely in so far as he encounters what today I am going to call, through lack of being able to say anything more or anything better, sexual reality.

Freud placed a lot of emphasis on this. And he thought, notably, that the term 'autoeroticism' needed to be accentuated, in the sense that the child

³ 'Lalangue' joins article and noun.

⁴ 'Motérialisme'. *Mot* means word.

initially discovers this sexual reality on his own body. I permit myself—this doesn't happen every day—to disagree—and in the name of Freud's work itself.

If you study the case of little Hans closely, you will see that what appears there is that what he calls his *Wiwimacher*, because he doesn't know how to call it anything else, is introduced into his circuit. In other words, to call things quietly by their name, he has his first erections. This first enjoyment [*jouir*] manifests itself, it could be said, in everyone. Is this, if not true of everyone, then verified in everyone? But this is precisely the *point* of Freud's contribution—its being verified in certain people is enough for us to be in a position to construct something upon it that has the closest of connections with the unconscious. For it's a fact, after all, that the unconscious is Freud's invention. The unconscious is an invention in the sense of a discovery, which is linked to the encounter that certain beings have with their own erection.

Being, this is what we call it, because we don't know how to say it any differently. It would be better to do without the word 'being'. Some people have in the past been sensitive to this. A certain Saint Thomas Aquinas—he is a holy man [*saint homme*] and even a symptom [*symptôme*—wrote something called *De ente et essentia* [*On Being and Essence*]. I can't say I recommend that you read it, because you won't, but it's very astute. If there is something called the unconscious, it means that one doesn't have to know what one is doing in order to do it, and in order to do it while knowing it full well. Perhaps there is someone here who will read *De ente et essentia* and who will see what this holy man, this symptom, works out very well—being is not grasped so easily, nor is essence.

There's no need to know all that. One only needs to know that with certain beings, whatever they are called, the encounter with their own erection is not at all autoerotic. It is the most hetero thing there is. They ask themselves, 'But what is this?' And they wonder about it so much that this poor little Hans thinks of nothing else and incarnates it in the most external of all objects, namely in this horse that paws the ground, that kicks, rolls over and falls to the ground. This horse that comes and goes, that has a certain way of drawing a cart along the quay, is for him the most exemplary thing of everything he is caught up in, but that he understands absolutely nothing of, owing to the fact, to be sure, that he has a certain type of mother and a certain type of father. His symptom is the expression, the meaning of this rejection.

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This rejection does not deserve to be labelled 'autoeroticism', under the sole pretext that after all this *Wiwimacher* is somewhere stuck onto him, below his belly. The enjoyment that has resulted from this *Wiwimacher* is alien to him—so much so that it is at the root of his phobia. 'Phobia' means he has got the wind up. The intervention of Professor Freud mediated by the father is entirely faked, and has one single benefit—that it worked. He will end up having his little prick borne by someone else, namely his little sister.

I abbreviate the case of little Hans. I only introduce it because, since you are in total ignorance, I don't see why I shouldn't have improvised totally today. I won't get round to reading out all the things I've cooked up for you today. I simply want to try to convey something of what happened, towards the end of the last century with someone who was not a genius, as people say, but an honest imbecile, like me.

Freud observed that there were things of which no one could say that the speaking subject knew them without knowing them. There you have things highlighted. That's why I spoke of the signifier and of its signified effect [*effet de signifié*]. Naturally, with the signifier I have not completely exhausted the question. The signifier is something embodied in language. It just so happens that there exists a species that has learnt how to bark in such a way that one sound, qua signifier, is different from another. Olivier Flournoy told me he has published an article by Spitz. Read his *On the Birth of Speech* to try to see how the relationship with barking arises. There is an abyss between this relation to barking and the fact that in the end, the humiliated being, the humus being, the human being, or whatever you want to call it—I'm talking about you and me—that the human being manages to be able to say something. Not only is he able to say it, but moreover this ulcer, as I define language because I don't know what else to call it, this ulcerous language implies a kind of sensitivity right from the start.

I have observed a number of small children closely, even if they were only my own. The fact that a child says, *perhaps, not yet*, before he is able to construct a sentence properly, proves that there is something in him through which everything is sieved, whereby the water of language happens to leave something behind as it passes, some detritus which he will play with, indeed which he will be forced to cope with. This is what all this non-reflected activity leaves him with—debris, to which, later on, because he is premature, there will be added problems that will frighten him. Owing to this he will, as it were, coalesce this sexual reality and language.

Allow me to advance some humble equations, concerning what I put forward in my *Ecrits* as the meaning of the phallus, which is a very bad translation of *Die Bedeutung des Phallus*.

It is surprising that psychoanalysis hasn't in any way provided any stimulation to psychology. Freud did everything in his power, but of course psychologists are deaf. This thing exists only in the vocabulary of psychologists—a psyche as such glued on to a body. Why in the devil [*diable*], if you will excuse the pun, why in the devil would man be double [*double*]? The fact that he has a body disguises enough mysteries, and Freud, guided by the path opened up by biology, differentiated between soma and germ fairly well. Why in the devil don't we get this feeble psychology out of our mind and try to spell out what there is in the *Bedeutung* of the phallus? I had to translate it as meaning [*signification*], through lack of any equivalent. *Bedeutung* is different from *Sinn*, from the sense effect, and designates the relation to the real. Why, ever since psychoanalysis has existed, have the questions not been addressed at this level? Why did this so-called being, why did this 'enjoys itself' [*se jouit*], appear on what is called the earth? We imagine that this is a privileged heavenly body on the pretext that man exists there, and in a certain way it is true—on the one condition there are no other inhabited worlds.

Does it not occur to you that what is specific to man in 'sexual reality', as I put it just before, is that between male and female man there is no instinctual rapport? That nothing makes it the case that all men—to designate man by what suits him reasonably well, given that he imagines the idea of the all naturally—that not all men are suited to satisfy every woman? This does indeed seem to be the rule for how things are with other animals. Obviously, not every male satisfies every female, but it is just a question of whether they are suited to do so or not. Man has to make do with dreaming about it. He has to make do with dreaming about it because it is quite certain that not only does he not satisfy every woman, but that Woman—I ask any members of the Women's Liberation Movement who may be present to excuse me—Woman does not exist. There are women, but Woman is a dream of men.

It is not for nothing that man is happy with one, or even several, only. It is because he doesn't desire the others. Why does he have no desire for the others? Because they are not consonant, if I can put it like this, with his unconscious.

It is not only that there is no Woman, Woman defined as being what some time ago I pinned down, and now repeat for you, as not-All [*pas-toute*].

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This goes further, and it doesn't come from man, contrary to what members of the Women's Liberation Movement believe, it comes from themselves. It is within themselves that they are not-All—namely, that they do not lend themselves to generalization. Not even, I say this parenthetically, to phallogocentric generalization.

I didn't say that woman is an object for man. On the contrary, I said that here is something he never knows how to cope with. In other words, he never fails to burn his fingers whenever he approaches any whatever—either because he has made a mistake, or because she is precisely the one for him. But he only ever realises this after the event.

This is one of the meanings of '*après coup*', 'after the event', which I have spoken about on occasion, and which was so poorly conveyed in the famous and eternal *Language of Psychoanalysis* by which Lagache has ruined [*à là gâché*] psychoanalysis in its entirety. Well, all right, it isn't as bad as all that, let's not exaggerate. Probably the only thing that was of interest to him was to *lagache* what I said. After all, why wouldn't one *lagache* it?⁵

I am not absolutely sure I am right about everything. Not only am I not sure, but I really do have the Freudian attitude. The next thing that causes me to revise my system, on the appropriate occasion, I would ask for nothing more than to gather it up. All I can say is that, thanks no doubt to my stupidity, this hasn't yet happened.

There you are. Now it is over to you.

I would be happy, after all this chatter, to know what you've got out of it.

Questions and replies

J.L.: To encourage whoever may have a question to raise, I would like to say that someone who had a train to catch, I don't know where for . . .

—: *For Lausanne.*

—: You know who it is?

—: *Dr Bovet.*

—: That name is not unknown to me. Dr Bovet asked me a question that I think is a good one, manner of speaking. *Up to what point*, he said to me, *do you take yourself seriously?* That's not bad, and I hope it will encourage you. It is the type of question that I couldn't care less about. To continue for so long as to be at the twenty-second year of my teaching

⁵ Although *The Language of Psychoanalysis* is by Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, the work was conceived and begun by Daniel Lagache.

implies that I take myself seriously. If I didn't answer, it was because he had a train to catch. But I've already answered the question, implicitly, by identifying the serious with the series. A mathematical series, whether convergent or divergent, means something. What I announce is of the same order, utterly. I am trying to get closer and closer, to construct a convergent series. Am I succeeding? Naturally, when one is captivated. . . . But even a divergent series is interesting, in its own way, it converges too—this is for the people who have some idea of mathematics. Since this concerns Dr Bovet, would someone please convey my reply to him?

Dr Cramer: You said, if I understood you correctly, that it is the mother that speaks to the child, though the child still has to hear her. It is about this 'though the child still has to hear her' that I would like to ask you a question.

—: Yes!

—: *What makes a child able to hear? What makes a child receptive to a symbolic order that his mother teaches him? Is there something immanent there in the human child?*

—: In what I said it seems to me that I implied it. The being that I called human is essentially a speaking being.

—: *And a being that must be able to hear as well.*

—: But hearing is a part of speech. What I mentioned concerning the *perhaps*, the *not yet*, other examples could be cited, proves that the resonance of speech is something constitutional. It is obvious that this is linked to the specificity of my experience. From the moment at which someone is in analysis he always shows that he has heard. To be sure, the question that you raise whether there might be people who hear nothing is suggestive, but it is difficult to imagine. Perhaps you will tell me that there are people who hear only a hub-hub, that is, all around them there is chatter.

—: *I was thinking of autism, for instance. This would be a case in which the receiver is not in place, and in which hearing doesn't work.*

—: As the name indicates, autistics hear themselves. They hear lots of things. Normally this even leads to hallucination, and hallucinations have always a more or less vocal character. Not all autistics hear voices, but they articulate lots of things, and what they articulate, it is a matter of discovering where they heard it. Do you see autistics?

—: Yes.

—: Well, what do you make of autistics, then?

—: *That precisely they don't manage to hear us, that they remain stuck.*

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—: But that's quite different. They don't manage to hear what you have to say to them, in so far as you are caring for them.

—: *But also that we have trouble hearing them. Their language remains something closed off.*

—: That's precisely what prevents us from hearing them. It's that they do not hear you. But, in the end, surely there is something to say to them.

—: *My question goes a bit further. Is the symbolic—I am going to take a short-circuit—learnable? Is there something in us from birth which makes us ready for the symbolic, to receive precisely the symbolic message, to integrate it?*

—: Everything I said implies this. It is a matter of knowing why there is something in the autistic or in the schizophrenic which freezes, if I can put it like that. But you can't say that he doesn't speak. That you have trouble hearing, grasping the point of what they say, doesn't prevent these people from being rather verbose.

—: *Do you conceive of language as being not only verbal but also non-verbal? The language of gestures, for instance?*

—: That question was raised a very long time ago by someone called Jousse, namely that gestures precede speech. I think that speech has something specific. Verbal structure is altogether specific, and we have evidence for this in the fact that those known as deaf mutes are capable of a type of gesture that is in no way the expressive gesture as such. The case of deaf mutes is illustrative of the fact that there is a predisposition to language, even in those affected by that infirmity—to me the word 'infirmity' seems altogether specific here. There is a perception that there can be something significant as such. Sign language is not conceivable without a predisposition to acquire the signifier, whatever the bodily infirmity. I haven't mentioned the difference between signifier and sign.

O. Flourney: I think M. Auber would be happy for you perhaps to elaborate a bit on the difference that you have just mentioned.

—: That's a big question, on what is specific to the signifier. The sign is typically found in a cycle of manifestation that one may, more or less justifiably, call external. It is the *no smoke without fire*. That the sign is immediately grasped like this—if there is a fire, it's because there is someone who lit it. Even if it's remarked after the event that the forest is burning without anyone being responsible for it. The sign always drifts, immediately, towards the subject and towards the signifier. The sign is immediately grasped as intentional. It is not the signifier. The signifier is from the start perceived as a signifier.

—: *In the course of what was said, you made some remarks about woman that I found very fine. Such as, 'Woman does not exist, there are women. Woman is a dream of man.'*

—: This is a dream because he can't do any better.

—: *Or again, 'Woman is what man never knows how to cope with'. It seems to me that in the title of your lecture one was talking of the symptom, and I finally got the impression that woman is man's symptom.*

—: I've spelt this out in my seminar.

—: *Could one say reciprocally that man is the symptom of woman? Does this signify that in the little girl and little boy the message that the mother transmits, the symbolic message, signifier, will be received from the same thing, because it's the mother who transmits it, whether to the girl or to the boy? Is there a reciprocity, or a difference from which one can't escape?*

—: There's surely a difference, which stems from the fact that women understand very well that man is a strange bird. You've got to evaluate this at the level of women analysts. Women analysts are better. They're better than men analysts.

—: *What ultimately is this relationship with the signifier that has the appearance of being something trans-sexual, bisexual?*

M. X.: Women are better analysts. Better in what way? Better how?

—: It's clear that they are much more active. There aren't many analysts who give evidence of understanding something. Women make progress. You only have to look at Melanie Klein. Women get on with it, and they get on with it with an altogether direct feeling of what the baby in man is. Men require a rude shattering.

M. X.: Men also want to have children.

—: Sometimes, they want to give birth, it's true. From time to time there are men who, for reasons that are always quite specific, identify with the mother. They want, not only to have a baby, but to carry a child, that's fairly common. In my analytic experience I've got five or six quite clear cases, who were able to formulate it.

M. Vauthier: As an analyst, have you had the opportunity for close contact with psychosomatic patients? What's the position of the signifier in relation to them? What's their position in relation to their accession to the symbolic? One gets the impression that they haven't touched the symbolic register, or it's not known how to hook on to it. I would like to know if in your way of raising the problem, you have a formula that can be applied to this type of patient?

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—: Certainly this is one of the most unexplored areas. Still, it's within the order of the written nevertheless. In many cases we don't know how to read it. Something would have to be said here to introduce the notion of the written. Everything happens as if something were written in the body, something that's given as an enigma. It's not at all astonishing that as analysts we have this feeling.

—: *But how does one get them to speak what is written? There, it seems to me, there is a rupture.*

—: That's quite true. There's what the mystics call the signature of things, what there is in things that can be read. *Signatura* doesn't mean *signum*, does it? There's something to be read faced with which, often, we are at sea.

M. Nicolaidis: Could one say that the psychosomatic expresses himself in a hieroglyphic language, whereas the neurotic does it in an alphabetic language?

—: But that's Vico.

—: *One's never the first.*

—: Sure, one's never the first, there is always someone who has said it.

—: *Still, he didn't speak about psychosomatics.*

—: Vico? Definitely not. But then, come at the thing from this angle. Yes, the body considered as a cartridge, as delivering the proper noun. There would have to be an idea of the hieroglyph that was a bit more developed than Vico's. When he says hieroglyphics he doesn't seem to have—I've read the *Scienza nuova*—very developed ideas for his time.

O. Flourney: I would like our women friends to say a word. Mme. Rossier. Let there be intersexual dialogue.

Mme. Rossier: I wanted to say that while you were speaking, discussing psychosomatics, of something written [d'écrit], I understood cries [des cris], the cry. And I wondered whether the inscription in the body of psychosomatics does not resemble a cry more than something spoken, and whether that's why we have trouble understanding it. It's a repetitive but under-developed cry. I would not at all think of a hieroglyph, which already seems much more complicated to me.

—: It's rather complicated, a psychosomatic illness, and it resembles a hieroglyph more than a cry.

O. Flourney: And yet, a cry is devilishly difficult to translate.

—: That's true.

M. Vauthier: One always attributes a signifier to a cry. Whereas the psychosomatic, one would dearly love to be able to attribute a signifier to him.

—: Freud speaks of the cry at a certain moment. I would have to find it again for you. He speaks of the cry, but nothing comes of it.

Mme. Y: The difference between the written word and the spoken word? You gave the impression of having had some thoughts on this matter.

—: It's certain that here there is, in effect, an altogether striking gap. How is it that orthography exists? It is the most stupefying thing in the world, and that moreover it is manifestly through writing that speech makes its opening, through writing and uniquely through writing, the writing of what are called figures [*les chiffres*], because no one wants to speak of numbers. There's something there that's of the same order as what was raised as a question a while ago—of the order of something immanent. The body in the signifier leaves a trait, and a trait that is a One. I translated the *einzigster Zug* that Freud wrote in his paper on identification as *unary trait*⁶. It's this unary trait that the whole question of the written revolves around. Whether the hieroglyph is Egyptian or Chinese is in this respect the same. It's always a question of a configuration of the trait. It is not for nothing that the binary numeration is written only with ones and zeros. The question should be assessed at this level—what is the sort of enjoyment [*jouissance*] that's found in psychosomatics? If I used a metaphor like *frozen*, it's indeed because there certainly is that species of fixation. It is not for nothing, either, that Freud uses the term *Fixierung*—it's because the body lets itself go to write something of the order of the number.

M. Vauthier: There is something paradoxical. When one gets the impression that the word enjoyment takes up meaning again with a psychosomatic, he is no longer psychosomatic.

—: I quite agree. It's from this angle, its through the revelation of the specific enjoyment that he has in his fixation that one must first of all approach the psychosomatic. This is where one holds out hope that the unconscious, the invention of the unconscious, can be of some use. It is in so far as we hope that we can provide him with the meaning of what it's about. The psychosomatic is something which is nevertheless, fundamentally, profoundly rooted in the imaginary.

⁶ Lacan is referring to *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, SE 18. In the SE '*einzigster Zug*' is translated as single trait.

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M. Z.: Soll ich werden, you have more or less transcribed with the work of 'It is thought'. I think of the discourse of the obsessional, who thinks, who rethinks, who cogitates, who in any case also gets to the 'It is thought'. The 'It is thought', can it be understood also as 'dithought' [dépensé = spent], in the sense in which the 'dis' means from high to low, dismount, disarticulate, and finally topple the statue? Can 'dithought' be joined to the 'It is thought'?

—: That is closely related to obsession. The obsessional is most essentially someone who is *thought*. He is *thought* greedily. He is *thought* in a closed circuit. He is *thought* for himself alone. It's the obsessionals who inspired that formula in me. You have very well recognized the affinity with the obsessional, since I didn't say it myself.

Mme Vergopoulos: There is something that struck me in your seminar, in relation to time. The concept is the time of the thing. Within the framework of transference, you say, speech has value only as speech, there is neither emotion, nor projection, nor displacement. I must say that I did not fully understand what the sense of speech is in the transference?

—: What are you seeking an answer to? On the relationship between the concept and time?

—: On the relationship between former speech and current speech. In the transference, if the interpretation is properly directed, it's because there is a coincidence between former speech and current speech.

—: Occasionally I have to try my hand at something tentative. That the concept is the time is a Hegelian idea. But it so happens that, in a thing that is in my *Ecrits*, on the *Temps logique et l'assertion de certitude anticipée*, I underlined the function of haste in logic, namely that one cannot stay in a state of uncertainty since at some point one has to conclude. There I try to knot time to logic itself. I distinguished three times, but it's a bit old, I wrote that a long time ago, straight after the war. Up to a point, one always concludes too soon. But this *too soon* is simply the avoidance of a *too late*. This is definitely linked to the nether regions of logic. The idea of the whole, of the universal, is already prefigured in some way in language. The refusal of the universal is sketched out by Aristotle, and he rejects it, because universality is essential to his thought. I can progress with a certain likelihood that the fact that Aristotle rejects it is a clue to the ultimately non-necessity character of logic. The fact is that only in a living human is there logic.

M. Melo: In your first reply you started from the word serious, and you were lead to the notion of a series. I am struck by our reaction to this word

series, which was to line up a series of patients one after the other. There was the autistic, the obsessional, the psychosomatic and there was Woman. That made me think of the fact that you came here to speak to us, and that we came here to listen to you. Here is my question. Don't you think that between transference and countertransference there is really a difference situated at the level of power?

—: It is easy to show that power never rests entirely upon force, pure and simple. Power is always a power tied to speech. It so happens that after having drummed things into people over a long period, people are attracted to me by my chattering which, obviously, would not have this power were it not in a series, if it weren't converging on something. It's a power of a very unusual kind, nevertheless. It's not an imperative power. I give orders to no one. But all politics rests on the fact that the entire world is only too happy to have someone who says, *Quick march*—towards no matter what, moreover. The very principle of the idea of progress is that one believe in the imperative. It's the most original thing in speech, which I have tried to schematise—you will find this in a text called *Radiophonie*, and which I can no longer recall where I gave. It is a question of the structure of the master's discourse. The master's discourse is characterised by the fact that at a certain point there is someone who will make a pretence of commanding. This character of pretence—'Of a discourse that would not be a pretence' served as the title of one of my seminars—is altogether essential. That there is someone who is happy to take on the function of pretence, ultimately delights everybody. If no one pretended to command, where would we go? And by virtue of a real consent founded on the knowledge that there has to be someone who pretends, those who know march like the rest. What you have just grasped there, while distancing yourself in certain manner, is something of a shadow of power you evoke.

O. Flournoy: Another question in the series that Dr Melo mentioned. Concerning psychosis you introduced the term 'foreclosure' which is employed without people knowing very well what it covers. I asked myself while listening to you whether in the psychotic what is foreclosed is enjoyment. But is it a matter of a real foreclosure, or is it a pretence of a foreclosure? In other words, can psychoanalysis reach a psychotic, or not?

—: That's a very nice question. Foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father. That leads us to another stage, the stage where it is not only the Name-of-the-Father, where it's also the Father-of-the-Name. I mean that the father is the one who names. It is very nicely evoked in Genesis, where there is all that mimicking of God who tells Adam to name the animals. Everything

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occurs as if there were two stages. God is supposed to know what names they are, since it's he who created them, supposedly, and then everything happens as if God wanted to put man to the test and see whether he knows how to mimic.

There are some stories on this in Joyce—Jacques Auber knows what I am alluding to very well, doesn't he? He who is the first to say *gou* to the *gouse* will say *oua* to the *oua*. It is obvious that, in the text, it all implies that man is put in a grotesque position. As for me, I would be inclined to believe that, contrary to what shocks a lot of people, it's rather women who invented language. Moreover, this is what Genesis gives to understand. Women speak with the serpent—that is, with the phallus. They speak all the more with the phallus, given that it is hetero for them at that time.

While this is one of my dreams, one can still ask the question: how did a woman invent this? It can be said that she has an interest in it. Contrary to what is believed, phallocentrism is Woman's best guarantee. It's never a question of anything else. The Virgin Mary with her foot on the head of the serpent means that she supports herself upon it. That has all been imagined, but in an uninspired manner. This can be said without the slightest bit of seriousness, since someone as crazy as Joyce is necessary in order to put all that back again.

He knew very well that his relations with women were his own unique song. He tried to situate the human being in a way that has the sole merit of differing from what has been asserted about it previously. But in the end, all that, it's the same old story, it's the symptom.

What I'm drawn to the most, is that this is the human dimension properly so-called. That's why I spoke of holy Joyce-the-symptom [*Joyce-le-sinthôme*], like that, in a single stretch.

Translated by Russell Grigg