

ysis and Culture

Editor

READING SEMINARS I AND II

LACAN'S RETURN TO FREUD

Seminar I: Freud's Papers on Technique
Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in
the Technique of Psychoanalysis

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THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX



Éric Laurent

I have chosen to address the status of the Oedipus complex in Lacan through the end of Seminar II. In a sense, you cannot isolate particular seminars as being indicative of the Oedipus complex. Yet at the same time, it is discussed throughout Seminar II. In Lacan's analysis of "The Purloined Letter," for example, the king, the queen, and the letter are read as an allegory or a new presentation of the structure of the Oedipus complex.

The cover of the French edition of Seminar II is a detail of Mantegna's painting, on exhibit at the Louvre, where you see two Roman soldiers throwing dice at the foot of a cross. That painting presents the whole theme of the seminar. The status of the father is related to the fact that it is the son's cross. What exactly is the status of the father, not only once those soldiers throw the dice, but once cognitive sciences appear on the intellectual scene? What is the situation of the father once science appears in a new form, which is now known as cognitive science, but which in 1954 was known as cybernetics?

The lecture included in the seminar as chapter 23, "Psychoanalysis and Cybernetics or On the Nature of Language," would today be entitled "Psychoanalysis and Cognitive Sciences or On the Nature of Language." In the first part of this lecture Lacan makes a distinction he maintains throughout his teaching: that between "conjectural sciences" and "exact sciences." He introduces his notion of conjectural sciences in straightforward opposition to *sciences humaines* as they were called in French at that time. Lacan wanted to emphasize the fact, not that the "human sciences" are somehow more human than the exact ones or just as human, but rather that they address something

which is not exactly human, but which is subjective: the calculus of conjecture. And when he discusses the conjectural sciences, he refers to the origins of probability in the seventeenth century, probability as an economic calculus, and he says that probabilities were first introduced in thinking about throwing dice and all manners of gambling.

The problematic Lacan introduces in that lecture is still quite interesting to us today. I read in the *Times Literary Supplement* last week a critique of a book by Lorraine Daston entitled *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). During the past decade or so, one of the most exciting controversies in the history of ideas has concerned the origin of contemporary ways of thinking about probability. For instance, we can now interpret probability either subjectively or objectively. I don't see why the critic who discusses Daston's book says that it is only today that we can interpret probability either subjectively or objectively, when three decades ago Lacan stated that we have to address probability and the calculation of probabilities as the problem of what appears on the subjective side or the objective side. The critic goes on to make a very interesting point about Daston's book; Daston criticizes a book by Ian Hacking entitled *The Emergence of Probability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). It is a very good book, I might add, in the French tradition of Pascal, Condorcet, Poisson, and Laplace, as opposed to the English tradition which flourishes with Keynes and Ramsey. It poses the problem of whether these probabilities have an effect as such on the status of the subject. Condorcet's position was that they do, in speaking about social mathematics just before the French Revolution, probabilities on the subjective side having been repressed. Probability used only as a statistical calculus was the main interpretation or the main sense in which probabilities as such were or are considered. And if we stick to the statistical approach, as opposed, let's say, to the social mathematical approach, probabilities have no consequence at all on the status of the subject. The status of the subject is beyond the reach of that type of calculus.

In his lecture, Lacan begins with the fact that, for psychoanalysis, cybernetics continues the tradition of what started in the seventeenth century with probability; psychoanalysis has a great deal to do with a new status of the subject that was introduced at that time. Cybernetics has developed through a variety of approaches that can be labelled "cognitive science" or "artificial intelligence." The status of the subject with which psychoanalysis is confronted has to be considered through this introduction of the subject of science into our work. Lacan stresses the fact that in the seventeenth century—between 1659, which marks the invention of Huygens' pendulum, and the calculus introduced by Pascal in the second half of the seventeenth century—science changes status in a crucial way: what had been the science or calculus of what was in one place

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active: the calculus of conjecture. In places, he refers to the origins of probability as an economic calculus, introduced in thinking about throwing

that lecture is still quite interesting. I presented last week a critique of a book, *Probability in the Enlightenment*. During the past decade or so, the history of ideas has concerned the probability. For instance, we can speak objectively. I don't see why there is only today that we can intervene, when three decades ago probability and the calculation of probability had a subjective side or the objective side. The point about Daston's book; I think *The Emergence of Probability* is a very good book, I might say. Poisson, and Laplace, as well as Keynes and Ramsey. It has an effect as such on the way that they do, in speaking about probability, probabilities on the subject, used only as a statistical calculus in which probabilities as such are a statistical approach, as opposed to, probabilities have no consequence. The status of the subject is beyond

that, for psychoanalysis, cybernetics in the seventeenth century with probability a new status of the subject is developed through a variety of "science" or "artificial intelligence." Psychoanalysis is confronted with the subject of science into our eighteenth century—between 1659, Newton, and the calculus introduced in the eighteenth century—science changes status. The calculus of what was in one place

(essentially the planets that always return to the same place) was replaced by the calculus or science of the combination of places.

Lacan introduces the crucial term: "The science of what is found at the same place is replaced by the science of the combination of places as such. It arises in an ordered register which assuredly assumes the notion of the throw, that is, the notion of scansion" (p. 299).

I think that some of you have already encountered the term "scansion" in Lacan's other texts on interpretation in the practice of psychoanalysis. It is interesting that it was introduced along with the notion of probability at the end of the seventeenth century. Scansion goes with the idea of chance, chance not randomness, which introduces the idea of *la rencontre scandée* (translated as "scanned encounter" on p. 300)—the "scanded encounter" or the fact that, after that date, any encounter can only be determined by the fact that the places as such are already numbered. If we read Lacan in a Champollionesque way, reading only the terms themselves and not what they mean or what we suppose them to mean, we see nothing but that kind of approach. The "scanded encounter" is a term used by Lacan not only in an epistemological way but as applicable to interpretation as such. This Champollionesque approach is confirmed in Lacan's text on Gide in the *Écrits* where he speaks about nightmares and the presence of death in nightmares—Gide had a nightmare that he was in a house and that death was already there; Lacan says that Gide wandered in the labyrinth of life knowing that death had already numbered the places. That was a reference to this type of problematic.

The encounter always has to do with the subject as Lacan tries to isolate him or her in the practice of analysis: the subject always encounters what s/he is looking for through a previous scansion or numbering of the places s/he cannot define. We can refer to Gide or to the analysis of "The Purloined Letter"—there too, in one sense, the places are perfectly numbered, and the letter the subject explores can only occupy a certain number of places.

This is merely a logification of what Freud said when he claimed that *Objektfindung*, the finding of the object, is always a refinding of the object. The place where the object is found has already been numbered. The scanded encounter to which Lacan refers is a presentation, from a logical point of view, of the fact that the object one is seeking—pleasure—has already been numbered.

That leads us to the questions Lacan raises in this lecture on cybernetics: what exactly is the status of chance in the unconscious? That question implies a reformulation of the status of free association. What exactly is the status of the "freedom" in free association? The problem does not disappear simply because we think there is no freedom at all since there is repetition. Of course there is repetition. That does not eliminate the problem.

That leads us to the critique Lacan provides here of the object relations approach in psychoanalysis which was new at that time. As he says, there are

two schools in psychoanalysis. Is it a matter in analysis of co-optation of fundamental images for the subject, that is rectification or normalization in terms of the imaginary, or of a liberation of meaning in discourse, the continuation of the universal discourse in which the subject is engaged?—that is where the schools diverge.

To update the problem a bit more, you would have to replace the fundamental images with fantasies. Is psychoanalysis merely an exploration of the repetition of the subject's fantasies? At the end of an analysis do we have to attain the point where one knows one's crucial fantasies and can thus stick to them? In the 1960s, Lacan calls that the fixation of the subject on his fantasies (*Discours à l'EFPP*). When he speaks of "fixating the subject on his shit," a technique, especially in the analysis of the obsessive neurotic, fixating him on his anal fantasies, he is criticizing a technique which was employed by Bouvet. And Bouvet was not the only one to use that technique. By fixating the obsessive neurotic on his shit, Bouvet stressed that at the end of his analysis, the patient can be completely devoted to an ideal: that of giving to others—that is, he becomes the object to be given.

With the introduction of the "scanded encounter," Lacan proposes an objective for psychoanalysis: not to fixate the subject on his fantasies, but to liberate meaning in discourse. But what exactly does that mean, the liberation of meaning in discourse? First, who can be against something like that? Everybody is for liberation in everything. But what does that mean, especially in the context of the lecture? It's certainly odd to come across an expression like the "liberation of meaning" in a lecture in which Lacan explains that what is especially useful for us in cybernetics is the fact that these scanded encounters can transmit a message, and that using some very simple cybernetics—0 and 1—you can create a message which has no meaning at all, and which is reduced through the very steps used to generate it.

This is presented in that lecture in a very simple way, but Lacan analyzes "The Purloined Letter" as different steps that can transmit a message which, in the end, is nothing but the steps the message took. The message in "The Purloined Letter" doesn't have the same meaning at the different stages. When the queen has the letter, it's a love letter; when the minister has the letter, it's his only power over the queen; when Dupin has the letter, it means that he can take revenge; and at the end when the queen has it again, it's a useless power, or more precisely the letter at the end has no exact meaning. It persists as a pure message, incorporating the different steps it has been through: it has no precise meaning. Rather, it is a dejection of the different steps it has gone through.

Now, when Lacan says that what is useful in cybernetics is the fact that the message has no meaning at all and can be reduced to the logical steps it has gone through, what does that have to do with the liberation of meaning? What

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That is a crucial point in Lacan’s theory, and it’s precisely at that point that
Oedipus can help us. The nothingness with which we are confronted at the end
had already struck some of Lacan’s students. In the seventeenth chapter, enti-
tled “Questions to the Teacher,” there’s a question by Clémence Ramnoux who
was a most distinguished analyst and wrote a number of books on Greek trag-
edy which I can only recommend—one of which was called *Enfants de la nuit*
(*Children of the Night*). She questions the Greek tradition in, let’s say for those
of you who know the English edition, more or less the same way as Dodds,
stressing the irrational aspects of the rational presentation of the self in Greek
myth. Her question to Lacan runs as follows: “I managed to figure out why
Freud called the source of repetitive symptoms a death instinct, because repeti-
tion manifests a kind of inertia, and inertia is a return to an inorganic state,
hence to the most remote past. I thus understood how Freud could associate
that with the death instinct. But, after having thought about your last lecture,
I realized that these compulsions stem from a kind of indefinite, multiform
desire, without any object, a desire for nothing. I understand it very well, but
now I no longer understand death” (pp. 207–208).

It is in answering Ramnoux’s question that Lacan introduces Oedipus. And
not only Oedipus in Thebes but also at Colonus, Lacan emphasizing a part of
the tragedy that had generally been ignored in psychoanalysis hitherto. In *Oedi-
pus at Colonus*, Oedipus, who has endured his whole destiny and has castrated
himself, lies in the temple at Colonus, and the citizens of Thebes try to get him
to come back to the city. They are willing to have him back in the city, regard-
less of his status. Regardless of his doings, he is still part of the history of the
city. He doesn’t have to stay at Colonus, and they beg him to come back to
Thebes. They send his son to beg him to come back and, of course, Oedipus
refuses. At that precise moment, Oedipus mentions his father’s name to his son.
After Oedipus refuses to come back to the city, his son looks back and sees the
transformation, the impossible instantaneous disappearance of Oedipus in
something that cannot be named as such. It seems to me that that’s the moment
at which Oedipus is transformed from the name he was up until then into an
object that has no name at all. That object has no name—it has only a place
which Lacan designates as object *a*. The theory of that object had not yet been
adumbrated when Lacan gave Seminar II. But I think we can use it here to
explain why Lacan stressed *Oedipus at Colonus* and Oedipus in Thebes rather
than *Oedipus Rex*.

In the drama, Oedipus is constituted as the Name-of-the-Father or as the
son related to his father, Laius. And what is he, after he has taken all the differ-
ent steps and traversed all the possibilities introduced by his name? What is the

at does all that mean? It is only at meaning is the fact that, in his function, the object.

in "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" when people try to reduce transference. Most interestingly, Poe saw suggestion or hypnotic suggestion as the whole point of that tale, and that is at *Colonus*.

ated in the fullness of meaning. Conjectural sciences and exact sciences and syntax. "In other words, within mathematics. Cybernetics is the science of perceive that the exact sciences do not." It's not so much a distinction between mathematics and semantics, something which is proper to conjectural or human sciences. Consider the works of philosophers of language. In his lectures he gave in 1984, stressed the computer, and the mind (published as *On the Mind*, Searl, the reason why a computer cannot think because the program is purely syntactic is that beyond its formal structure there is no differentiation between machine and mind in semantics.

void throughout this seminar. He deals with has some semantic notion and the syntactic structure within psychoanalysis. That's the same as "intentionality." "Intentionality" is a real problem. It's the problem of the Oedipus at *Colonus* and Poe's "Valdemar." In other terms that, when we use syntactic structure? Is that intentionality? The only way the subject looks for a pleasurable principle. That intentionality is that does s/he find? S/he doesn't know where the object was—the place where the response is something that cannot be put on the same lines as the encounter is in the place of Valdemar once

he's dead, or what is in the place of Oedipus and responds to it once he is dead, really dead, and refuses to rejoin the living.

That introduces us to a problematic found in "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" (*Écrits*). From that article, right up to the end of Lacan's teaching, what is the relationship between the name and what responds in the real? What we can name in the real, in the final analysis, what we are looking for beyond the pleasure principle, is *jouissance*. There are, in Lacan's work, as Jacques-Alain Miller has stressed in one of his classes, two paternal metaphors.

The one developed in "A Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis" (*Écrits*) runs as follows: the Name-of-the-Father occupies or has to occupy the place where the desire of the mother was, and the desire of the mother is what the subject looks for; "What does she want from me?," the child asks himself. When the Oedipus complex functions, the mother is prohibited, as Freud pointed out. Lacan put it as follows: The mother has to be substituted for; there is no direct answer. Nobody can really enjoy his or her mother who is only *real* pleasure, and she is prohibited at that place—thus the father is a name. We see that in the way Lacan writes the paternal metaphor: he clearly distinguishes between a signifier and a name. He doesn't write the name within the parentheses of the set of all possible signifiers, A. There's more in a name than in a description. The point Lacan wants to make in writing the metaphor as he does is that there is a distinction between a name and the set of signifiers.

One of the possible readings of that would be that, after the functioning of the paternal metaphor, the subject knows that the only thing he can name of that forbidden *jouissance* of the mother is the phallic signification of everything he says, of every one of his demands throughout his life. Everything we say has phallic signification. That's the only naming we can attain. Thus, that is the first paternal metaphor in Lacan.

In that same article, he presents the way in which somebody who didn't have any access at all to the paternal metaphor (a strict definition of a psychotic for Lacan), Schreber, tried to elaborate another meaning of his fundamental language—he had no fundamental fantasy, but a fundamental language. In the end, he could name his *jouissance* through the new language, and Lacan describes the way in which Schreber organized his *jouissance* throughout the feminization he underwent. There is then a new metaphor, that Lacan at that time called the "delusional metaphor"—the second paternal metaphor in Lacan's work. The new metaphor was introduced by Lacan via the graph of desire in "Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire" (*Écrits*) in which the Other was no longer written A, but \bar{A} . Which means there is a fundamental inconsistency in the Other that cannot be reduced by the functioning of the father.

The father's name, the only name that introduces law in the Other, is a consistency that gives meaning to what exists beyond the pleasure principle—the

phallus—and produces an answer: a stopping point that can captivate the subject, make him or her believe that that was the pleasure or satisfaction s/he was looking for, and make him or her stop at that point. There is a fundamental inconsistency in the Other, and there is no guarantee that the subject can stop and achieve satisfaction. Hence, Lacan who had previously written the subject as S, began to write it with the same inconsistency as that characteristic of the Other, \$ and \mathcal{A} .

In the 1960s, Lacan elaborates the status of what is left for the subject, and what appears at the end of the *Écrits* is the status of that object which only has a place and cannot be named. In Seminar XIV, *The Logic of Fantasy* (it is not the logic of fantasies, but rather the logic of the object of fantasy as such), he elaborates the logic of what can be named, what can be placed, and of the place to which anyone can travel.

By way of conclusion, let me make two points.

1) The main consequence of the second paternal metaphor was that Lacan tried to inoculate the analyst against the delusion of occupying either the place of the father or that of the mother, paternal transference and maternal transference being a vicious circle. He stressed the fact that transference is directed toward the place of the analyst; transference is fundamentally a direction, a direction introduced at the beginning of analysis through the power of language as such: the fact that any one signifier can only be interpreted through another signifier. That journey can be initiated at the beginning of analysis through the power of language, but at the end of analysis, when analysands have gone through the steps, what are the words of the gods concerning them? What was the discourse that existed before them?

When they recognize the different steps they have gone through, the liberation they can attain is the fact that their true journey consists in having tried to occupy a room in that labyrinth before it was enumerated. Yet that is impossible and, in the end, they find themselves on a new journey. Here their itinerary is only justified by the fact that that room is already occupied by someone, the analyst, who serves to embody the consistency of an object, of everything patients say during analysis. Everything they say, after five, seven, ten, or fifteen years, obtains a certain logical consistency, but not a name. As Lacan said, it's like Orpheus and Eurydice. Should analysands try to name all the truths about their love life they encounter in analysis, these truths just disappear, fade away. But at least they know what they are. They are behind them and will always follow them as a consistency. Thus, we are all, at the end of analysis, Orpheus with our Eurydice, but we cannot look back. That's one of the possible readings of the fact that the object at the end is behind and pushes.

2) Lacan called the analyst a *saint homme*, a holy man. That may seem odd for somebody who was an atheist like Lacan. Lacan says transference with the analyst is like that with a holy man. I'd like to recommend that you read

Peter Brown, an historian of the book is on sexuality in early *Antiquity*, a collection of papers was in the world of early Christianity named. There is a dialogue, for a functionary of the emperor about whether the functionary should become a priest. An enquiry is made by the emperor in Rome. He asks the functionary to know him, I know only that he became a monk and spent forty years in the desert. He was a holy man and that, in the Western world, the emperor absolve men of their sins. The emperor is strictly named by the hierarchy only authorized by the fact that he lived and stayed forty years on a mountain. According to Lacan, is like S, named by a hierarchy to absolve his life, s/he became not a monk but a priest. The analyst's armchair has to be only authorization the analyst's function, the fact is that, on his own, the monk incarnated in the analyst was looking for and then what was analysis.

1. [Nichiren, a Japanese Buddhist, was a *kaidan*.]

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Peter Brown, an historian of late antiquity and early Catholicism. His latest book is on sexuality in early Christianity. In *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, a collection of papers, he explains what the function of the holy man was in the world of early Christianity. He was somebody who could not be named. There is a dialogue, from the synod in 1850, a conversation between the functionary of the emperor and he who carried the sword for the emperor, about whether the functionary of the emperor had really been absolved by a priest. An enquiry is made by the envoy from the Roman legate from the pope in Rome. He asks the functionary: "What was your confessor's name?" "I don't know him, I know only that he once belonged to the Imperial Court, but he became a monk and spent forty years on the pillar. Was he a priest? That I don't know. He was a holy man and I put my trust in his hands." Peter Brown says that, in the Western world, the localization of the holy provided the power to absolve men of their sins. We are always perfectly located and everything is strictly named by the hierarchy; but a holy man had no name. Holy men were only authorized by the fact that they had become monks at one time in their lives and stayed forty years on the pillar like Saint Simeon Stylites. The analyst, according to Lacan, is like Simeon. It's not the fact that the analyst is authorized by a hierarchy to absolve man's sins, but rather that at one time in his or her life, s/he became not a monk, but an analysand, and spent instead maybe fifteen years on a couch and then a number of years in an armchair. In a sense, the analyst's armchair has to be elevated to the dignity of the *kaidan*.¹ It's the only authorization the analyst has, and beyond the paternal and maternal position, the fact is that, on his or her seat or *kaidan*, s/he can incarnate the dejection monks incarnated in the Western world; s/he can present what the subject was looking for and then what is beyond him or her at the end of his or her analysis.

Notes

1. [Nichiren, a Japanese Buddhist, taught that there should be a sacred place of ordination (*kaidan*).]