

PART III

**Discourses of  
Contemporary Life**

Éric Laurent

**12**

**Symptom and Discourse**

Lacan, in the classical phase of his teaching, insists that we must not forget the “tragic sense” or the “tragic experience” at the heart of psychoanalytic treatment. The political experience, as formulated by Marcel Gauchet, is also the experience of an irreducible division.<sup>1</sup> In classical terms it is an experience of “stasis,” of conflict. Or, in the terms of Carl Schmitt, it can be defined in terms of friend and enemy.<sup>2</sup> In all these cases, it is the experience of a pulling apart that is tragic because without remedy. In turn, psychoanalysis is an experience of the bar over the subject and a bar over the Other. This is above all our own version of the “tragic experience,” as it is lived out in the treatment itself. When psychoanalysis neglects this initial rupture it collapses into psychotherapy.

The mass diffusion of psychotherapies is accompanied by a therapeutic posture in politics. This has been described by one author in the following terms: “Groups and institutions increasingly adopt the posture they believe to be that of the psychoanalyst: listening to suffering. This triumph of the psychotherapist has disastrous effects: the abandonment of autonomy, depression, regression.”<sup>3</sup>

How can we adopt a psychoanalytic position whose effects are different from these? How do we address the collectivity? In his “Theory of Turin,” Jacques-Alain Miller has reintroduced the sometimes neglected distinction between the subject and the individual: “What is individual is a body, it is me. The subject-effect that is produced within the indi-

vidual, and which disturbs its functions, is articulated with the Other, the big Other.”<sup>4</sup> The collectivity is a collectivity of subjects. Miller deduces two interpretative practices from this. One reinforces alienation on a massive scale; the other refers each of the members of the community to their own solitude, which is the solitude of their relationship to an ideal.

We could, in the same vein, analyze Lacan’s intervention in 1970 when on two separate occasions he addressed the public at his seminar and the students at the University of Paris at Vincennes with the avowed intention of “shaming” them. The final sentence of *Seminar XVII* reads: “I happen to make you ashamed, not too much, but just enough.” From the good-enough mother to the analyst who makes one ashamed enough—now that’s a detour Winnicott would have never predicted!

### Two Attitudes in the Face of Guilt: To Shame and to Forgive

Strange intervention! How psychoanalytic is it to shame people? As if there weren’t already enough shame to go around! As if the shame of living was not the nucleus of what subtends the demand addressed to the psychoanalyst in the register of neurosis! Lacan stresses it himself in this seminar. How are we to conceive of the position of the psychoanalyst as adding to this shame? Is it a matter of a “moralist of the masses,” or even of an “immoralist,” as André Gide said, who refers each person to the solitude of his or her *jouissance* in their relationship to the master signifier?

This same *Seminar XVII* includes an appendix, an “impromptu” that took place at Vincennes on December 3, 1969, under the heading “Analyticon.” The reference of this title is quite precise. The mention of Petronius’s *Satiricon* is explicit in February 1970. Lacan refers to this satire in order to distinguish between the wealthy and the master. The occasion arose for him with the appearance of Fellini’s film by the name of *Satyricon*, with its “spelling mistake.” The Roman comedies, like the satires, constitute an original genre, particular to the Republic, and then to the Empire, distinct from the Greek models that inspired them.

This “shaming” comes on the heels of Lacan’s reflection on the main-spring of the psychoanalyst’s action, as seen by Freud. For Freud, it is a question above all of an action that is founded on the “love of truth.”

This is psychoanalytic frankness. In its name Freud sweeps aside the niceties of social communication in order to bring about the recognition of a real. Lacan thus draws an opposition between the limits of action in the name of the love of truth, and action that bears upon shame, which relates to a different field.

Shame is an eminently psychoanalytic affect that belongs in the same series as guilt. One of the reference points for psychoanalytic action is never to alleviate guilt. When the subject says to you that he feels guilty, he will have excellent reasons for saying so and, as it happens, he is always right. This, in any case, is what the hypothesis about unconscious guilt feelings holds. Contrary to psychotherapies, psychoanalysis recognizes and admits this guilt. The phrase “making ashamed” is inscribed in the Freudian tradition, and it is a constant clinical position throughout Lacan’s work.

When Lacan makes a political action out of the way one handles this register, he is in advance of the “moral” phase that the forgetting of politics was to soon engender. The importance of moral language in exchanges in the public sphere was not so obvious in 1970 when the final echoes of the politics of that century were still resonating. As soon as we became as one after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, we began to encounter the language of morality. We experienced an unfolding of the demand for apologies, for regrets, for forgiveness, for repentance, all terms borrowed from the language of morality; “being ashamed” has become a worldwide symptom.

Contrary to “making ashamed,” the master’s discourse seeks to treat guilt through the act of forgiving. But this “moral vocabulary” was only a symptom, as Gauchet notes, of what the “rights of man” would come to assume with respect to politics. We have gone some distance further in the collapse of political discourse and are now at a point at which politics has been reduced to a discourse about legal redress for individual harm: “Approaching the problem from a different angle, we live in societies that have integrated their own critique as a means of self-constitution. . . . The rights of man come as a simultaneous response to these needs and these questions. . . . they define what is wished for without the interminable disputes over what moves history and over what its course foreshadows.”<sup>5</sup>

Foreseeing the moral phase of political language, Hannah Arendt, in

1958, placed forgiveness and the promise at the center of her reflections in *The Human Condition*, which has been translated into French with the title *Condition de l'homme moderne*, in reference to André Malraux. She makes forgiveness and promising two fundamental forms of the bond that transports human action into the dimension of language, two founding acts of the new moral discourse, the sole regulator of action and its faculty for triggering new processes without end.<sup>6</sup> But are we still in a perspective in which the world of rules now seeks to be regulated by forgiveness and the promise, rather than by the death penalty and its administration? Jacques Derrida took this question up in his seminar at the École des Hautes Études between 1996 and 1999, which was devoted to the question of forgiving. Since 1999, his seminar has been devoted to the death penalty.<sup>7</sup>

Derrida makes forgiveness an altogether central question in what he singles out as a new religiosity. In a sense, the return of the religious, more so than a return of belief, is a renewal of the request for forgiveness. Derrida notes that the request for forgiveness is carried out in an Abrahamic language around the entire world, and that this has something artificial about it. It may very well have no significance in the language of the religion or in the dominant forms of wisdom in the society in which this demand appears. The contrast between East and West is very interesting in this respect. Is this something the East has borrowed, like the discourse of science, from the Abrahamic discourse? Derrida raises this question by pushing the logic of forgiveness beyond the “request for forgiveness,” beyond the question of its address. He wishes to explain forgiveness purely in terms of reason and its failure. We would say that he is questioning it beyond the Name-of-the-Father. He formulates a strange paradox: absolute forgiveness would be to forgive the unforgivable to someone who has not asked for forgiveness. It is for him a way to “explode human reason, or at least the principle of reason interpreted in terms of calculability. . . . The impossible is at work in the idea of unconditional forgiveness.”<sup>8</sup>

The horizon of generalized forgiveness combines with the question of knowledge. Generalizing forgiveness with a global movement that seeks reconciliation can be approximated to the function, in Hegel, of absolute knowledge. Moreover, Derrida describes Hegel as a “great conciliator.” Forgiveness, like absolute knowledge, delivers us from the ques-

tion of truth. It assures the homogeneity of the world, that all the bad jouissance could be reintegrated by means of forgiveness.

Not for one second does Lacan believe in the State deduced from absolute knowledge, from reconciliation, or from regulation. He believes not in absolute knowledge but in incompleteness. He said as much at Vincennes in December 1969.<sup>9</sup> On the basis of incompleteness, all dimensions of the interpretation of the political unconscious can be located, knowledge cut off from its tragic sense and from its meaning as truth, but which, however, enables human action to be accompanied. Lacan's making ashamed does not presume any forgiveness. It is a making ashamed that contrasts with identificatory fixation. Lacan concluded his intervention at Vincennes by saying to his audience, "The regime is looking at you, it is saying, 'Look at them enjoying!'" (240). The master puts on display those who do not make themselves responsible for their own jouissance. Not being responsible for one's own jouissance was not sexual liberation, and all the stupidities that were then beginning were rather a fixation on a regime of jouissance. Lacan thus predicted the rise in power of "communities of enjoyment" under the universalizing language of "liberation." The fascination with the "enjoying class," including the young, has reinforced the system: "There are people who enjoy! Yet another effort, you are not there yet!" The effect of fascination and repulsion was guaranteed, as was the indication of the effort that needed to be made in order to attain this point of jouissance for which everybody had to work even harder, which just reinforces the system of the master: back to work! Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, yet another effort in order to enjoy as they do!

Confronted by this, the position of "making ashamed" does not consist in *fixing* the subject to, but in *dissociating* the subject from, the master signifier and thereby bringing out the jouissance that the subject derives from the master signifier. There, where the master signifier displays obscenity with an absence of modesty, psychoanalysis on the contrary reinstates the veil and evokes this demon in the form of shame. With this "Look at them enjoying!" Lacan announced the regime of fascination with reality shows, which are a declension of enjoyment and its demonstration.

The Mode of Enjoyment as a Symptom:  
Interpreting *Rameau's Nephew*

Lacan discussed this issue in 1967. A discourse attempting to reconcile the subject with truth is not the same thing as one trying to reconcile a subject with his shame. He notes that one fights in the name of truth, and one could even say that one dies in the name of truth. This is the whole value of the beginning of chapter 13: "It does have to be said that it is unusual to die of shame." This resonates like a *Witz* and immediately manifests the difference between dying for the truth, which traverses all of History, and dying of shame, which is rather rare (209). Lacan adds, "Yet it is the one sign . . . whose genealogy one can be certain of, namely that it is descended from a signifier." In effect, there have not been any "dead from shame" among beings who do not have language. They live and die without it being possible for their existence to be glorious or shameful, servile or noble. Lacan compares this relationship of the living with the powerful contrast Hegel makes between noble consciousness and vile consciousness. He speaks of Hegel and his cold humor (197). We could say that Hegel builds a work out of this cold humor, in his reference to the function of the living being's vile mode of enjoyment.<sup>10</sup>

Let's see how Hegel contrasts noble consciousness with vile consciousness. He states that the heroism of serving the nobility has been transformed into the heroism of flattering the monarch. The subject pursues his action of renunciation toward the absolute monarch, but to the point of sacrificing his life. In order for the heroism of flattery to take up the lead and assure the monarch's being, it was necessary that not every member of the nobility die. As a result, to Hegel's delight, in the passage from the heroism of silent service to the heroism of flattery, culture will encounter a new development: the values of death will be continued in life by passing into language.

It is therefore fortunate that we have had the heroism of flattery, since it enabled civilization to take a leap forward. The elevation of flattery to heroism was a step in the direction of a new organization. Here you have a point of view that stems from cold humor, if one compares for example these pages from Hegel with the rhetoric of authenticity. The inauthenticity of the language of flattery is not a problem for Hegel, because there is no psychology at work, there is only the entry of the heroic posture into language.

In order to grasp what is at stake in a mode of enjoyment, Lacan refers in his Seminar to the grand figure of *Rameau's Nephew*, who for Hegel incarnates the culmination of the moral impasse of the Enlightenment. This reference has to be understood as a "You have been preceded by this great man." *Rameau's Nephew* is a great work of French literature, but it became one quite late, not during Diderot's lifetime: none of his masterpieces, none of those considered his masterpieces today, were published during his lifetime. Neither *Rameau's Nephew* nor *Jacques the Fatalist* saw the light of day during his lifetime. *Rameau's Nephew* was really something quite contingent, an unforeseen event. It lay unknown at the bottom of a drawer, a fact to which Lacan is referring when he says:

A character called Diderot published *Le Neveu de Rameau*, let it fall from his pocket. Someone else took it to Schiller, who knew very well it was by Diderot. Diderot never worried about it. In 1804 Schiller passed it on to Goethe, who immediately translated it and, up until 1891—I can tell you this, because here is the tome, which I brought from my own library—we only had a French retranslation of the German translation by Goethe, who, moreover, had completely forgotten about it one year after it appeared, and who perhaps never saw it, for they were in the midst of that Franco-Prussian brawl. . . . Goethe himself was no doubt unaware that it had appeared. (222)

Lacan is emphasizing the contingency in order to show that things like that, unsigned, unpublished, forgotten at the bottom of a drawer, can still have an impact.

### Satire and Symptom

In the *Phenomenology*, in his analysis of the Enlightenment, Hegel goes so far as to say that *Rameau's Nephew* is "culture in its pure state."<sup>11</sup> He says it in the sense in which the work describes the social semblant in a direct way. "There are lots of beggars in this world, and I can't think of anybody who doesn't know a few steps of your dance"—the dance of seduction, of enjoyment. The nephew replies, "You are right. There is only one man in the whole of a realm who walks, and that is the sover-



eign. Everybody else takes up positions.” Even the master signifier does not escape.

Do you think he doesn't find himself from time to time in the vicinity of a dainty foot, a little lock of hair, a little nose that makes him put on a bit of an act? Whoever needs somebody else is necessitous and so takes up a position. The king takes up a position with his mistress and with God; he performs his pantomime step. The minister executes the movements of courtier, flatterer, flunkey or beggar in front of his king.<sup>12</sup>

Describing it as pure culture means that one is using words that mean nothing, nothing effective in Hegel's sense—that is, cut off from the capacity to do anything.

This is the point of view that Kojève develops, when he aligns Rameau's nephew, in Hegel, with the beautiful soul. Rameau's nephew is, apparently, the figure who is the antithesis of the beautiful soul; there is nothing pure about him, and yet the two are the same. The beautiful soul is the one who criticizes and is indignant, who is the man of the republic of letters. For Hegel, it is Voltaire. In the indignant man of letters lies a “critique of society.” According to Kojève, “It is a purely verbal critique but it is already an action since it is negative. [The critic] is more active or more true than the man of pleasure.”<sup>13</sup> The tenderhearted man is someone who, unlike the man of pleasure, refuses to enjoy the world as if he were a pig: “He wants to realize himself as an isolated individual, unique in the world, but he only thinks he has value through his critique of society. In order to preserve his own value, he therefore wants to preserve the society that he criticizes. It is a purely verbal critique, he does not want to act.”<sup>14</sup> The tenderhearted man contrasts a utopia with the given world, for, as Kojève says, “He has no need to know what link exists between the ideal and reality,” that is, how one might realize the ideal.<sup>15</sup> This is where Lacan took this point from Hegel, whom he cites in “Proposal on Psychological Causality,” where one finds the famous remark, “Utopia ends in madness because it is in permanent disharmony with the real.”<sup>16</sup> For the tenderhearted man, “it is nevertheless through his utopian critique that he becomes more real,” as Kojève says. “The tender-hearted man finally becomes conscious of the reality of the society that consists of individuals such as the man of pleasure and the

tender-hearted man. And he becomes a man of virtue. He aligns himself, not with the order that he criticizes but with other criticisms. He thereby founds a party.”<sup>17</sup> He joins with the party of the virtuous. The man of virtue not only forms a party but also wishes, according to Kojève, “to suppress individuality, egoism, by subjecting it to a discipline of education. This is his mistake. He believes that the ideal society will automatically result from the reform of all the particulars. Fortified with the real *Aufhebung*, that of particularity, the one that can unite it with the universal is not a personal sacrifice; yet it is this sort of sacrifice that virtue is seeking.”<sup>18</sup>

This is the pathway that leads to the man of the Enlightenment. First, the emergence of the isolated man of letters, the tender-hearted man: the language of the *Aufklärung* is essentially different from that of the intellectual because it lays the ground for an effective revolution. “In *Rameau’s Nephew* Diderot, an ‘honest man,’ can say nothing new in comparison with what Rameau’s nephew says to him because the latter is perfectly conscious of himself.”<sup>19</sup> In a sense he is the perfect scoundrel. When Kojève says that Diderot has nothing to say to anyone who is perfectly conscious of himself, one sees the root of what Lacan denounces as one of the ailments of psychoanalysis: producing scoundrels. If the subject becomes perfectly aware of himself, maintaining the strict discourse of Rameau’s nephew would be drive-based cynicism. One could emerge from an analysis like Rameau’s nephew, thinking moreover that one was a genius. At least Rameau’s nephew knew that he was a failure. But there is something of the perfect scoundrel in this becoming conscious of oneself, in being at the level of his turpitude, of his jouissance, not having to give an account of himself. Lacan has called into question the relations between this and genius by enquiring into the relations between the scoundrel and stupidity. He did not say that if one gives Rameau’s nephew an analysis he will lose all his genius, but that if you take a scoundrel he will become stupid. These questions are similar, even homologous. But, Kojève says, Diderot “transcribes the language of Rameau’s nephew and renders it universal, legible to all. Rameau’s nephew is at the extremity of individualism. He is not concerned about others. Diderot suffers and wants the whole world to know. If everybody speaks like Rameau’s nephew then this will change the world.” Kojève ends by saying, “The *Aufklärung* is Rameau’s nephew universalized.”<sup>20</sup>

In this universalization of the discourse that Kojève produces or imagines, in which everybody speaks this way, as a will to change the world, one sees the hallmark of a discourse that changes the world: a certain type of relationship with the master's discourse that touches upon semblances; the world of the Enlightenment as coming to the end of semblances by identifying everybody as scoundrels. Good scoundrels: he doesn't say that one has to kill everyone, one's neighbor, and so on. Rameau's nephew is a good dog. What is striking is that, at base, within the horizon in which everybody is speaking like this, it would be, Hegel adds, pure culture after all: it wouldn't be effective in any way. In order for it to be effective, sooner or later all this is important only if the semblances are reconstructed. The *Aufklärung* is the reign of propaganda, that is, of reason as propaganda that allows for the defamation of society. This is how Kojève translates an Enlightenment reflection on society. He adds, concerning the revolutionary agitator who slanders the existing order: "The revolutionary is therefore a liar. Through him society slanders itself. Because he denounces a lie, he is a liar himself."<sup>21</sup> This is a strange way to be a man of truth. Yet it is what Lacan takes up in his *Écrits* when he presents the revolutionary as a *man of truth*.

In his generalized lie, in this denunciation of semblances by means of a lie, the revolutionary lie which announces an order that will be superior to an existing order and that denounces all semblances, Kojève introduces a dialectical shift: once the revolution has taken place, there will be a new order dependent on absolute knowledge, the State of absolute knowledge. From that point on, truth will no longer have any purchase, because truth will from now on only be able to say what is. And this no longer carries any force, because it will not be able to negate anything.

The analytic discourse allows us to set up the moral-immoral debate of Rameau's nephew in a different way. The cynical exit from discourse brought about by the nephew is defeated by its own ineffectiveness. Psychoanalysis is required if the effectiveness of drives, of jouissance, is to manage to recreate semblances that work, and not an order that falls apart. Only in psychoanalysis can the relations between truth and knowledge illuminate the semblances that render a human order possible, even though it subverts the order of things installed by the master.

### Guilt, Shame, and Self-Hatred

One must remark that the forms of the push to enjoy have reintegrated the formula of “look at them enjoying.” We live in an age of the generalized reality show. Anyone can become the slave of today’s regime of voyeurism. For fifteen minutes of ephemeral celebrity, anyone can occupy the place of the person that one watches enjoying. What the screen of the reality show ultimately refers to is the mortifying dimension of the mirror stage in relation to the superego. In any *Big Brother* or *Kohl-Lanta*, the other has been eliminated, and, on the horizon, so has the self. Shame is in the last instance “the shame of living,” from which the master signifier may occasionally give some relief.

Lacan never forgot that the mirror stage allows us to situate the depressive position. At the end of *Seminar V*, concerning a clinical case of a depressed subject that could have been interpreted in relation to a castrating woman, Lacan instead situates the subject in terms of privation and loss of the maternal love object, commenting on the “depressive position that Freud teaches us to recognize as determined by a death-wish focused on oneself.”<sup>22</sup> Lacan follows Melanie Klein in considering that, in his description of melancholy, Freud is describing the subject’s relations with the Other of jouissance, which he fails to recognize. The depressive position states a truer relation than the first identification with the all-loving father. What is at stake in depression, what Lacan in *Seminar V* calls the “demand for death,” is this very relation articulated in language, that is, in the Other of which I make my demand.

Inversely, this relation to the Other situates the zone of the superego and the commandment, addressed to me by the Other and summarized by the commandment “Love thy neighbor.” For Freud, it is the world outside that comes first; for Lacan it is the Other that starts speaking commandments, this Other that sends me back to that part of myself I reject. “The Christian commandment then reveals its value in being extended: ‘As yourself you are, at the level of speech, the one you hate in the demand for death; because you are unaware of it.’”<sup>23</sup> This is Lacan’s reprise of Freud’s remarks in *The Ego and the Id* that hate comes first in relation to love and that hate originates in the primordial refusal that the *lust-Ich* opposes to the external world. This is why in *Encore* Lacan considers that Freud invented *hateloving*.

This is also why the question posed to us by murder-suicides is not elucidated by an appeal to the psychology of despair alone. Whenever the motive of despair is evoked, one has to be careful. Anything can always be explained by despair, any social catastrophe, any rupture of ties, any act of nihilism, any suicide. It is a suspect causality that Lacan, on occasion, inverts. He notes, in *Television*, that it is rather hope that leads to suicide. At the time, it was the hope for a rosy future. When the Ideal enters into a contradiction with somber reality, crushing it, the subject is found to have no recourse under the speech of the Ideal. He thus commits suicide in an appeal to the Ideal of hope. Hope is a virtue, but virtue does not have solely positive aspects. One must clearly distinguish between different types of despair and relate them to the self-hatred that leads a subject to certain forms of suicide: murder-suicide, altruistic suicide, or assassination suicide.

Self-hatred can manage to inscribe itself in the Other, in a spectacular manner, via the suicidal assassination or attack. Bernard Henri-Lévy has recently reminded us of the systematic use of human bombs in the Sri Lankan civil war for a generation now. But there are many varieties of suicidal assassination. It is a spectacular mode that has been privatized. Recall the one who called himself HB, human bomb, at Neuilly. This paranoid subject wrapped himself in explosives and threatened to blow up a kindergarten class in order to have an obscure fraud linked to his professional activity recognized. We almost never learned about this because the incident was terminated by HB's brutal death. The memory of this incident is alive today because it is said that the conduct of the mayor of Neuilly, who himself engaged in direct negotiations despite the risks involved, plus the discrete political management he then set in motion, were not without their effect in his appointment as minister of the interior. We also know of murder-suicides in the offices of American companies that have been made more murderous by the circulation of weapons benefiting from considerable technological advances. From the paranoid-schizophrenic employee to the frank paranoiacs, those excluded from the job market have taken their revenge, testifying in their manner to the privatization of the Other. Since then, there have been the high school massacres involving American adolescents, which demonstrate that it is not material misery that provokes this taste for suicide in a generation. Columbine High, scene of the school shootings on

April 20, 1999, remains the name associated with these facts. Columbine was followed by the most contemporary wave of bomb suicides, those inspired by religious fanaticism, especially throughout the Muslim world, which are inscribed in a secular tradition that the complicated East has never abandoned.

The idea behind this juxtaposition of different suicides is that it shows us how the regression at stake goes far further than that of an identification with an ideal. It concerns our first link to the external world; the connection between religion and this point is no doubt secondary.

Moreover, Lacan criticizes Freud for having wanted to diffuse religion by highlighting the place of the father, even as he founds the necessity for the first identification to an all-loving father. The opposition is clear. One conceptualizes the first identification either through love, on the basis of the father, or on the basis of the worst, of the rejection of the lost and nonrecognizable part of *jouissance*. We are thus brought back to the evil God who demands a death and commands the sacrifice of one's most precious object, which then comes to occupy the position of lost object. This is the God whose very existence leads to the question of murder. Murder-suicides raise the question of *a* that harborer of *jouissance*, the question, in other words, of that God which is one name for the superego (II3).

The discourse of the rights of man, which is "a new discourse of the explanation of self and of conviction concerning the self, is not only multiple and contradictory."<sup>24</sup> It must also know that it has at its horizon an impossibility other than that of forgiving the unforgivable, or a right to conquer other than that of the abolition of being condemned for life, as Jacques Derrida concludes from his examination of the death penalty. It must include the limit of the calculability of the distribution of *jouissance* that self-hatred introduces into the calculus. If we distinguish what is a right and what is a fact, it is a fact about humans that they hate the Other in themselves. In order to distance this hatred of the Other within ourselves, it is better to distance oneself from one's neighbor in the right way, than to lump everything together and treat it all as the same.

Can it be said, concerning such a description of the fascination with self-hatred, a hate without forgiveness that is administered outside any law, a death penalty that is extremely difficult to eradicate in actuality,

that we have formulated an interpretation? It depends on the address and the place it is accorded. It is clear that the community of subjects who have taken the unfathomable decision to pass to an act, to cut themselves off from the Other, this genuinely unavowable community, will not understand anything. It is a community radically separate from the community of those who endlessly go over the scene of their death in their thought, as Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida have said and written. If it is not entirely vain to evoke this, it is by addressing oneself to “enlightened opinion,” which is also a psychotherapized opinion sensitive to subjective pain. The exigency of “asking for forgiveness,” an ethical moment to which a certain number of authors are attached, appears, as such, to be a demand to forget the disappearance of shame. This is a demand of the contemporary superego, which bears inside itself the seeds of its own destruction.

### The End of Shame and Political Death

One cannot forget the effects of *jouissance* even if one is no longer ashamed of them, especially in politics. Shame and guilt are not articulated with the superego in the same way. “The only thing one can be guilty of, at least from the psychoanalytic point of view, is of having given up on one’s desire.”<sup>25</sup> Lacan’s “having given up on one’s desire,” “avoir cédé sur son désir,” translates and transposes Freud’s *Triebverzicht*. What is the consequence of the drive’s functioning in our permissive civilization, in which no one ever hears the voice that incites them to give way on their *jouissance*? This is where the chasm lies that Jacques-Alain Miller has brought to light. On the one hand, permissive society authorizes *jouissance*; on the other, it denounces desire. I would say that the permissive society leaves us with as much dignity as the particularity of our drives. It simply pushes us to express them. This is the post-romantic morality whose fallout Charles Taylor sees in the concern for self-expression in the well-named “free time,” precious to the citizens of Western democracies. As Taylor says,

The notion that the life of production and reproduction, of work and the family, is the main locus of the good life flies in the face of what were originally the dominant distinctions of our civilization. . . . The affirmation of ordinary life . . . involves a polemical stance

towards these traditional views. . . . This was true of the Reformation theologies. . . .

It is this polemical stance, carried over and transposed in secular guise, which powers the reductive views like utilitarianism which want to denounce all qualitative distinctions. . . .

The key point is that the higher is to be found not outside of but as a *manner of living* ordinary life.<sup>26</sup>

In this way of living an ordinary life, valid for everyone, the concern for particularity finds its place in the lineage of the romantic preoccupation with the particularity of peoples beyond a universal relationship to reason. This is now encountered in the concern for self-expression, where everyone has to succeed in locating that part which escapes the production/reproduction process. In this sense the aesthetic care for the self, thought by Foucault as a form of neo-Stoicism, is also inscribed within this neoromantic dimension. Foucault put it in these terms: "What preoccupied [the Ancients] the most, their grand theme, was the constitution of a type of morality that would be an aesthetics of existence. Well I wonder whether our problem today is not, in a certain manner, the same as theirs."<sup>27</sup> This can be summarized in the form of an imperative Taylor takes from the Californian injunction: "Do your own thing."

### Ordinary Life and the Sciences

The distinction between ordinary life and the instance that transcends it is mobilized, at further costs, by the advances of the life sciences, which contribute to a powerful renewal of the ordinary. They radicalize the questions that Hans Jonas has been raising in the public domain from 1968 onward in his work *The Phenomenon of Life: Towards a Philosophical Biology*, and in *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* (1979), with its beautiful title meaning "the responsibility principle," in which he attempts to render us responsible for a subject of the living as such, modeled on the Kantian subject. Peter Sloterdijk announced the dramatic change in register of this question in a lecture published in 2000 with the ironic title, "The Domestication of Being": "A part of the human race, with its entrance into the highly technological era, has brought a case about itself and against itself where what is at stake is a new definition of the human being."<sup>28</sup> He does not hesitate to group together biotechnology and the



techniques of atomic physics over their potential to destroy the species: “Collective memory is thus right to mark the month of August 1945 with its two atomic explosions on Japanese cities as the date of the physical apocalypse and the month of February 1997, in which the existence of the cloned sheep was rendered public, as the date of a biological apocalypse. . . . These are actually two key dates in the human being’s case against itself.”<sup>29</sup>

Francis Fukuyama adopts similar views, though in a less boring way, in *Our Posthuman Future*.<sup>30</sup> As he comes from the English-speaking world, he is obliged not only to warn of the dangers, but also to offer remedies. He sees only one, which is that of preserving “human nature.” This term actually covers two completely heterogeneous notions: on the one hand, that of human nature as originating in natural law, which deduces the nature of Man from God; and on the other hand, a human nature deduced from the living being—the corporeal and genetic integrity of man as defined by biological science. He deliberately runs the two together and thus formulates the undertaking that democracies must adopt: “We do not want to disturb the unity or continuity of human nature, and by that, the rights of man based upon it.”

In fact, biotechnology already makes it possible to upset quite a number of things by combining what is currently achievable with various fantasies. One can situate its action in three essential domains. First, the techniques of biotechnology allow us to better control our moods and our personality, even if the results are insufficient. They allow the establishment of a new average personality. The example Fukuyama takes to illustrate this point is the use of medication to remove the inequality of moods between the sexes. He compares the use of Ritalin with that of Prozac. Prozac is prescribed more often to women, in order to combat the depression that affects them unequally by raising their serotonin level to levels that occur in men. Ritalin is frequently prescribed to young men to calm them and to adjust for their higher levels of hypomania. In this sense one can say, if one relates Fukuyama to Taylor, that prescription permits the subject to approach a mean and, moreover, to experience that “ordinary life” that is now the experiential frame of our civilization. From this perspective, a true appreciation of “self-worth,” of depression, can be made. Guilt and shame are now useless virtues. Whatever the feelings of shame might be, there is always the hope of

treatment. From this point of view, shame and guilt are indistinguishable.

Second, we can expect an accentuation of the impact of biotechnologies on life expectancy, which, combined with the decline in the birth rate, has affected retirement schemes and altered the balance of electoral age groups. Again, advances could worsen the situation. The question could be formulated in this way: What will be the consequence of living for forty more years, if there is no remedy for Alzheimer's? More profoundly, this technology changes the meaning of death. There is no longer anything but old age, in its most ordinary manifestation, with its procession of dysfunctions. Here again, biotechnology appears in the service of "ordinary life"; it obliterates the asperities as well as the dramatic meaning of existence. But, from another point of view, they inscribe themselves perfectly well in the more or less hallucinatory project of "the aesthetic amelioration of self," the infernal race with that piece of jouissance that is lost forever. Postromantic or not, it is a chase after the flight of *objet a*.

Whatever one thinks should become reality or remain fantasy, these "improvements" of the species pose a fundamental question. The impact of hopes for genetic treatments makes the shadow of a renewed eugenics reappear. We are no longer in the context of the 1930s, when Franklin Roosevelt wished for the sterilization of mental patients in order not to weaken the democracies in the face of the mounting perils. Today we are confronted with budgetary choices. Will the so-called genetic therapy for intelligence be reserved for the rich, or will it be reimbursable by Social Security? Will this reach the point of creating new, unequal races of humans? Acquired genetic knowledge overturns the juridical fiction of equality between subjects and permits, at least fantasmatically, a tendency toward the parents' preformed ideal. How can we organize a public debate, one that is worthy of the name, on all these questions and not let the markets act blindly? The robber barons of the past century, American and others, have expended fortunes to construct mausoleum-palaces that we continue to visit, such as the Frick or Pierpont Morgan collection in New York and Jacquemart-André in Paris. The rich today, born of industry, finance, or show business, spend as much to make both their own and their children's bodies improved, living mausoleums.

Fukuyama counts on a barrier of "human nature," a fiction to be in-

stalled through regulation, in order to construct a barrier against the unobserved developments of biotechnology, when they operate, like the death drive, in silence. Crossing the barrier would require that one speak about it. The scientists and the liberals in the English-speaking world hesitate to do so. One notes that in the United States, the partisans of human nature predominantly come out of religious fundamentalism and the Catholic Church, where, according to the doctrine established by the pope in 1996, human nature depends on the soul, introduced by God in an “ontological leap” at a certain moment in evolution. Gregory Stock, director of the Department of Medicine, Technology, and Society at the University of California and former advisor to President Clinton, is not one for grand laws or for new grand national agencies. He prefers to delegate the choices to parents where their children are concerned and otherwise use the existing agencies that oversee public health. Geoff Mulgan, for Blair’s cabinet, is not favorable to new regulations and is satisfied with an agency conceived on the model of the current HFEA (Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority) that makes England the most permissive country in Europe for biotechnology research, allowing it to maintain its incontestable industrial advantage. The French, like the Germans, are very happy to oppose pursuing research on stem cells extracted from human embryos. On these questions, a debate was recently organized by the Blairists between Fukuyama and Stock in London. These questions, which will have great importance for our lives, are not the object in France of any important public debate. The Cité des Sciences tries its best but to limited effect. The Swiss pharmaceutical giant Novartis’s planned withdrawal from the United States, which heralds other developments in European industry, has been the object of only a handful of commentaries.

### “Human Nature” and the Habitat of the Subject

What does this fiction of “human nature” presuppose? In its approach to nature and the human, doesn’t it assume that man could inhabit nature harmoniously? Is this not one of those myths that psychoanalysis has contributed to displacing? This is a point Lacan discusses in his 1969 “Allocution on Child Psychoses.” He first examines the myth that psychosis has a link with freedom in its universalizing function, to which

he opposes the real of segregation, then moves on to the myth of “the supposed ease” that the experience of psychoanalysts is said to give in regards to sexual questions. He seriously deflates their pretension to be heralds of the liberation of mores, noting rather that they content themselves with their fine speeches on morality after psychoanalysis. The real that this myth of sexual “liberation” by the psychoanalyst covers is that psychoanalysis operates on fantasy.

Lacan discusses the question of child psychoses on the basis of the child’s implication in the mother’s fantasy: “The child, susceptible to being implicated in any fantasy, becomes the mother’s ‘object’ and henceforth has the sole function of revealing this object’s truth. The child realizes the presence of what Jacques Lacan designates as *objet a* in fantasy. By substituting himself for this object, he saturates the mode of lack in which (the mother’s) desire specifies itself.”<sup>31</sup>

Let’s pause on the lesson Lacan draws from this advance in contemporary psychoanalysis, which for him begins with Winnicott, but of which, he says, he “alone [has] seen the precise import.” That Winnicott had isolated the fact that an inanimate object could be considered as a piece of the mother’s body, a *doudou*, is not as reassuring as this gentle [*doux*] name implies:

The important thing nevertheless is not that the transitional object preserves the child’s autonomy, but whether or not the child serves as a transitional object for the mother. And this suspension will only yield its reason at the same time as the object yields its structure—which is, namely, that of a condenser for jouissance, insofar as, by the regulation of pleasure, it is stolen from the body. It is because jouissance is out-of-body [*hors-corps*] that it can dream of itself as recuperated not only in another body but also in an inanimate object.<sup>32</sup>

This passage of Lacan’s can be read as a direct commentary on chapter 3 of *Civilization and Its Discontents*. In his prejudice bound up with his immoderate love for his mother, Freud maintains a belief in a harmonious relation with the mother, which, ultimately, is covered by “primary narcissism.” He deduces from it the relation to the body as a stable belief in an infrangible totality. For him, objects in the world are an extension of the human body to which they are added. He states that “by

means of his instruments man is perfecting his own organs, both motor and sensory, or is considerably extending the limits of their power.”<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless Freud reserves a place of nonhappiness for the subject of civilization: “Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown onto him and they still give him much trouble at times. . . . we will not forget that present-day man does not feel happy in his Godlike character.”<sup>34</sup> The absence of happiness, the obstacle on the path to *Lustgewinn*, is approached in terms of *Kulturver-sagung*, civilization’s refusal, as such, to satisfy the drives. Freud maintains this perspective, even as he supposes an initial complete satisfaction at the level of the ego. What Lacan emphasizes does away with this inaugural myth.

The Freudian prejudice of a harmonious maternal habitat is continued in his conception of a harmonious relation between mother and son constructed around phallic signification. Freud’s uxorious character, as Lacan says, is deducible from his excessive attachment to this adored mother for whom he was, in return, her Siegfried. Freud would still say in 1933 in this regard that “a mother is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son; this is altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships. . . . Even a marriage is not made secure until the wife has succeeded in making her husband her child as well and in acting as a mother to him.”<sup>35</sup>

In this affirmation of the “most perfect” of relations, Freud is clearly speaking of himself and his constitution as subject in the maternal fantasy, if one relates it to what we have learned from various biographies about the circumstances of his coming into the world. This prejudice could be enunciated only if one stops at the idea of desire as lack’s being completed by phallic signification.

What psychoanalysis noticed first of all with Klein, then with Winnicott, and what Lacan theorized, is that the child is not all in phallic signification. The child is, rather, above all localizable on the basis of its place as object in the mother’s fantasy, the cause of which is the *objet a*. We can easily see the consequences. The first is to situate the mother’s desire in terms of fullness, and not of lack; in terms of causality and therefore of the production of effects, and not in terms of completion; and in terms of plenitude of *jouissance*, of relation to the “condenser,” and not in terms of unlimited satisfaction.

The level of satisfaction at which the subject is “happy” is not that of a harmonious relation to the mother. It is that of the drive where, in order to recuperate *jouissance*, the subject makes the lost object the cause of his or her desire. The unnoticed correlate of this point is that the “happiness in fantasy”—just as one says “happiness in misfortune”—which is out of body returns to the body. Out-of-body *jouissance* increasingly removes itself from this body that is limited by pleasure. The object returns and shears up the body in a way that is different from that of the signifier. Each drive circuit makes increasing demands on the maltreated body. Multiple addictions, epidemics of anorexia/bulimia, and audiovisual hypnosis are there to demonstrate the uncertainty of the hold that phallic signification maintains and the limits that it implies. As inanimate objects animated by fantasy, we are an appendage to these condensers of *jouissance* that carve up the body.

Inversely, from the point of view of the circuit emanating from the Other we are at a point where we have become the Other’s “transitional object”; that is, we have become objects that have passed into the “transition” of generalized exchange. The experience of psychoanalysis indicates that the self-evidence of the “total body” is not at all obvious. By becoming the cause of desire, the body is like an inanimate object that is susceptible to being produced, exchanged, and industrialized. When Lacan expressed this in 1969 the industrialization of the body was in its infancy, yet it was enough for him to raise the question of the future of the body as object: “The question is whether, by virtue of the ignorance about where this body is held by the subject of science, one will come to the point, by law, of cutting up this body for the purposes of exchange.”<sup>36</sup> In the name of analytic experience, Lacan perceived the breach that the biological industry would come to occupy. Similarly, he refers to this carving up of bodies by *jouissance* in a contemporaneous text, “Radiophonie” (1969), where he displaces the question of the sepulchre, so dear to the existential perspective of “being for death.” On the basis of *jouissance*, he relates this question to a logical structure: “The empty set of bones is the irreducible element by which other elements, the instruments of *jouissance*, necklaces, goblets, arms, are organized: there are more sub-elements to enumerate *jouissance* than there are to make it reenter the body.”<sup>37</sup> The bones, the remains of the body, and the instruments of *jouissance* outside the body find themselves taken together as elements of the apparatus for enjoying.

### Enjoying the Unconscious or Condensing One's Jouissance

For the Lacan of the 1970s, we are never contented with organ objects. The necklaces, goblets, and arms are always in excess relative to drive borders. In our societies of abundance, bodies no longer simply plug themselves into trinkets; they plug into objects produced by scientific activity. The new improvements to the body—medicines, gene therapies, anti-aging treatments, production of organs by stem cells, even the production of bodies through cloning—are only extensions. The habitat of language is also a habitat of a world encumbered by these objects produced by the pharmaceutical industry. The psychoanalytic experience does not plead the case for our being able to count on a love of “human nature” among our citizens, strong enough to resist promises of jouissance.

The problem is therefore not that the power or the place of the other is as either a mother or a grandmother, and that one is promised mountains and marvels of biologically improved happiness. What is important is that we are not treated as an object of exchange that can be cut up, detailed beyond all our hopes. The present powers in China do not refrain from taking without consent the organs of those condemned to death. The power in democratic societies proposes inserting into the body every improvement of which science, with its own powers of de-realization, can dream. Parents will want the best for their children, they will want it all: the child and his genetic improvement, one that is more intelligent, more beautiful. The subject will want it all in order to be happy and will want to be used by technology to become a machine for self-discovery.

To be up to the challenge of such a promise, psychoanalysis should also remain a very sophisticated machine of technological experience for self-discovery. Psychoanalytic experience is also a way to displace “human nature” (which does not exist). If psychoanalysis has one fulcrum point, it's that it sees the fundamental futility to which the subject binds itself.

Psychoanalysis presents a manner of enjoying something that is not transcendent but which lies within the subject, though not hidden in its depths. Lacan could state that psychoanalysis is “a symptom,” which we can retranslate, after Jacques-Alain Miller's work on the final teach-

ings of Lacan, as “a way of enjoying the unconscious.” There are many ways of enjoying something besides the Other’s signifiers in me. Saying that psychoanalysis is a symptom is to give a very particular translation of the postromantic specificity of my *jouissance*. It is also to emphasize that each discourse is an apparatus of *jouissance*; that is, at one and the same time a brake upon it and a manner of getting by with it. If science is futile, it is because it does not indicate any means of enjoyment to us. However, it does not simply leave us adrift. Science does not anchor the subject to a discourse. It is, however, anchored to objects that have replaced what, until then, had been a product of art or the beautiful. What was initially perceived as commodity fetishism was a stopping point in generalized futility. Technical objects accumulate a particular *agalma* for us. Science has managed to make *jouissance* out of knowledge. Kant saw the celestial vault above our heads and the voice of conscience within as the limit of our experience. Shall we say that our experience is now that of the international space station above our heads, from which everything might fall down on top of us one day, and the voice of genetic modification within? These voices incessantly provoke us into a political debate over the public place. “Man is he to whom one addresses oneself”; this is all that remains for us. It is up to us to draw from it what we can. There is no other moral conscience than that of the examination of our follies and all our deregulating in order to isolate the consequences in the most explicit manner possible.

The effect of the ramification of the discourse of science is that it produces objects, on the one hand, and, on the other, abjects such as the psychoanalyst. The paradox of the ethics of analysis is that on the side of the analyst there is a “make oneself into the being of abjection,” while on the side of the analysand the dignity of the signifier is set to work. The dignity of this place of the abject is that the ego is effaced. Psychoanalysts’ “way of humility” brings them closest to the point of the real in language, which permits them to touch upon non-sense. Through the mediation of the analyst-object the analysand’s work enables the deciphering of the unconscious to be attained as a result.



## Notes

- 1 See, for instance, Marcel Gauchet, *La démocratie contre elle-même* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002).
- 2 See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 3 M. Schneider, *Big Mother* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 2002), 72.
- 4 Jacques-Alain Miller, "Théorie de Turin sur le sujet de l'École," *Aperçus du Congrès de l'AMP à Buenos Aires, juillet 2000* (Paris: EURL Huysmans, 2001), 62–63.
- 5 Gauchet, *La démocratie contre elle-même*, 346–47.
- 6 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). See, above all, chap. 5.
- 7 See Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *De quoi demain . . .* (Paris: Fayard/Galilée, 2001).
- 8 *Ibid.*, 260.
- 9 Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre XVII: L'envers de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 234. Further references to this edition appear parenthetically in the text.
- 10 See G. W. F. Hegel, "Virtue and the Way of the World" (sections 381–393), *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, with analysis and foreword by J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 228–35.
- 11 Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 238.
- 12 Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew/D'Alembert's Dream*, trans. with introduction by L. Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 121.
- 13 Alexandre Kojève, *Cours de l'année scolaire 1935–1936*, in *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, ed. R. Quenean (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 87.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 87.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 88.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, 89.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 135. And see *Cours de l'année scolaire 1936–1937, II Die Aufklärung*, 383.
- 20 Kojève, *Cours de l'année scolaire 1935–1936*, 135.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 136.
- 22 Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre V: Les formations de l'inconscient*, ed. J.-A. Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 502–3.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 505.
- 24 Gauchet, *La démocratie contre elle-même*, 351.
- 25 Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, livre VII: L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, ed. J.-A. Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 368.
- 26 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23.
- 27 Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Un parcours philosophique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 325.
- 28 Peter Sloterdijk, *La domestication de l'être* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2000), 32.

- 29 Ibid., 34.
- 30 Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future* (London: Profile, 2002).
- 31 Jacques Lacan, "Note sur l'enfant," *Autres écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 373-74.
- 32 Jacques Lacan, "Allocution sur les psychoses de l'enfant," in *Autres écrits*, 368.
- 33 Freud writes, "Motor power places gigantic forces at his disposal, which, like his muscles, he can employ in any direction; thanks to ships and aircraft neither water nor air can hinder his movements; by means of spectacles he corrects defects in the lens of his own eye; by means of the telescope he sees into the far distance; and by means of the microscope he overcomes the limits of visibility set by the structure of his retina. In the photographic camera he has created an instrument which retains the fleeting visual impressions, just as a gramophone disc retains the equally fleeting auditory ones; both are at bottom materializations of the power he possesses of recollection, his memory. With the help of the telephone he can hear at distances which would be respected as unattainable even in a fairy tale. Writing was in its origin the voice of an absent person; and the dwelling-house was a substitute for the mother's womb, the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease." *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1961), 21:90-91.
- 34 Ibid., 21:91-92.
- 35 Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, in *The Standard Edition*, ed. J. Strachey, 22:133-34.
- 36 Lacan, "Allocution sur les psychoses de l'enfant," 369.
- 37 Jacques Lacan, "Radiophonie," in *Autres écrits*, 410.