Reflections on *Seminar XVII*

Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis

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editors

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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS Durham and London 2006

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Introduction

Much was new in Paris universities in 1969. An old conservative system had been overhauled and restructured following the student uprising of the year before. This included a new, "experimental" university, the Université de Paris VIII (Vincennes), tucked away in the spacious grounds of the Bois de Vincennes east of Paris. Not least of the innovations of this radical and, in its early days, often fractious university was the new Department of Psychoanalysis, the first of its kind in France. The department, overtly Lacanian in orientation—its first chairman was Serge Leclaire—was created under the patronage of the Department of Philosophy, headed by Michel Foucault. The department itself boasted an impressive list of a new breed of philosophers, including Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, and Jean-François Lyotard.

At the same time as this new academic institution was founded, Lacan was obliged to move his seminar from the Ecole Normale Supérieure in the rue d'Ulm (which had hosted his seminar since 1964), to the Faculté de Droit, located a few hundred meters up the hill, in the Place du Panthéon. There he continued to attract what was by then a large and extremely diverse audience. Though the social order was no longer on the brink of collapse as it had been in May 1968, contestation was still in the air—on several occasions, Lacan's seminar was interrupted or even cancelled—and his appearances at the campus at Vincennes proved occasions for agitation and protest.

It is in this context that Lacan delivered what we know as his *Semi-*

nar XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, a yearlong, fortnightly deliberation on psychoanalysis (as always). But he was also deliberating on the contemporary social order. In *Seminar XVII*, Lacan speaks of Freud and Marx by way of Hegel; of changing patterns of social and sexual behavior, and of what will become of them; of the nature and function of science and knowledge. It is pertinent to note that these reflections take place in the context of the foundation of the Department of Psychoanalysis, since for Lacan this raised the question—which had confronted Freud himself—of the place that psychoanalytic knowledge might occupy in the university. But it equally raised the inverse question: what is the impact of *university* knowledge upon psychoanalysis? The new circumstances raised this question in an acute form, particularly as Lacan recognized that unlike, say, psychology or psychiatry, psychoanalysis had always tended to operate outside the university system. Similarly, the Freudian School of Paris, Lacan's school, had the function—to which Lacan's seminar contributed—of training psychoanalysts and transmitting psychoanalysis. Is, then, the extramural nature of psychoanalytic training purely contingent, a consequence of Freud's marginal relationship to the academic institutions of Vienna and the subsequent foundation of an independent International Psychoanalytic Association? Or are there reasons intrinsic to the practice of analysis that have to do with the place of knowledge and the way it functions in the university? Both the new Department of Psychoanalysis and the aspirations of a radical student movement are the immediate causes of this reflection.

Lacan's response to this issue is to set it in a broader context. The introduction and discussion of the four discourses forms a kind of reference point by which Lacan orients himself throughout the year, even as he discusses issues as varied as thermodynamics, Marx, Hegel, Freud's cases, the Oedipus complex, and the university.

At the beginning of the year, Lacan writes out what he takes to be the four structures of discourse, one of his first attempts to use letters to define a fundamental structure of psychoanalysis. The four discourses are given in the form of "mathemes," which, as Jean-Claude Milner puts it, are "atoms of knowledge [*savoir*]"; that is, they are entirely transmissible without loss. The four discourses are as follows:

Figure 1: The Four Discourses

$$\frac{S_1}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a} \qquad \frac{\$}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

Master's discourse Hysteric's discourse

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1} \qquad \frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

Analyst's discourse University discourse

The terms are as follows:

S_1 Master signifier
S_2 Knowledge, as in *le savoir* or "knowing that—"
$\$$ The divided subject
a both *objet a* and surplus-pleasure.

The places are:

$$\frac{\text{agent}}{\text{truth}} \rightarrow \frac{\text{other}}{\text{product}}$$

The four discourses are based on the original matrix that characterizes the signifier as what represents a subject for another signifier:

$$\frac{S_1}{\$} \rightarrow S_2$$

This matrix captures a number of features: the fact that the subject is a being of language, differing in this respect from an individual; the fact that the subject is divided by language; and, on the other hand, the fact that the signifier is diacritical, that is, each signifier is defined by its difference from and opposition to other signifiers. Lacan calls the place of agent the "dominant," just as he thinks of the master's discourse as the dominant discourse of the four.

The fourth term in the discourses, the *a*, is Lacan's *objet a* viewed in the light of the new theory of *plus-de-jouir*, surplus jouissance or surplus pleasure, which he had introduced at his seminar the previous year.

A rough way of defining surplus jouissance would be to think of it, on analogy with Marx's surplus value, as jouissance that is lost to the subject and recuperated by the Other.

The matrix organizes these four terms in a strict circular order: S_1, S_2, a, $\$$, that allows rotation but no commutation; that is, changing their order relative to one another is not permitted. Through this operation of "circular permutation," four discourses are produced in which each term will occupy one of four different places; one discourse will be transformed into another when the four terms undergo a quarter turn.

The four discourses are not only the most striking aspect of *Seminar XVII* but are fundamental to it. Just as for Aristotle, man thinks with his soul, so, in this seminar, Lacan thinks with his four discourses. The first and perhaps primary question is what purpose Lacan intended that they should serve. This question has been answered in several ways, and many of the papers in this volume address this question in one way or another. At the same time, several of the papers themselves "think with" Lacan's four discourses, thereby demonstrating the productive potential of Lacan's insistent reduction of theory to a kernel of mathemes and formulas. Other of the following papers are more expository or discuss other significant features of the seminar.

In this seminar Lacan also revisits Freud's Oedipus complex, questioning, in particular, the place that the father occupies there. Of interest here is that Lacan's critique of Freud—he speaks of Freud's "prejudices," saying that Freud "falls into error" and that the Oedipus complex is "Freud's dream"—opens up issues that will progressively unfold in later seminars such as *Seminar XX* and the seminar on Joyce, concerning sexuation and sexual difference, the clinical treatment of hysteria, the ends of analysis, and the rethinking of psychosis, in particular.

The contributions to this volume have, somewhat arbitrarily, been grouped into three sections: we have named them "Clinic of the Discourses," "The Other Side of Psychoanalysis," and "Discourses of Contemporary Life."

The first of these sections, on clinical issues, opens with "On Shame" by Jacques-Alain Miller, which explores the consequences for psychoanalysis of a central trait of late capitalism that manifests as a "prohibiting of prohibition." The essays by Paul Verhaeghe, "Enjoyment and Impossibility: Lacan's Revision of the Oedipus Complex," and Russell

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Grigg, "Beyond the Oedipus Complex," both address Lacan's critique and revision of earlier views on the Oedipus complex and the implications for our understanding of hysteria. These implications are picked up in Ellie Ragland's "The Hysteric's Truth," which looks at Lacan's reexamination of the subjective division of the hysteric in relation to sexuality and his very interesting reconsideration of Freud's two cases of Dora and the homosexual woman. Dominiek Hoens, in "Toward a New Perversion: Psychoanalysis," provocatively argues that there is a similarity between the analyst's desire and "perversion" in that not only do both analyst and pervert position themselves as *objet a*, but also aim at "the production of the subject qua subject of the signifier." Hoens's argument raises the question of a reevaluation of this old and frequently discarded category of psychoanalysis.

By "the other side of psychoanalysis" Lacan was referring to the master's discourse, and all the articles in the second part explore this discourse in relation to one or more of the three other discourses. In "*Objet a* in Social Links," Slavoj Žižek's approach ranges across the differences between the hysteric's discourse and the university discourse, on the one hand, and that of the analyst on the other. Drawing attention to the historicity of the four discourses, Žižek introduces a number of crucial distinctions in a discussion of work by Miller, Giorgio Agamben, and Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. Mladen Dolar, in "Hegel as the Other Side of Psychoanalysis," explores the complex or, rather, the *multiple* place that Hegel occupies in the four discourses. For Dolar, Hegel at once functions as a representative of the master's, the hysteric's, and the university discourse, and, ultimately, can be seen to occupy the analyst's place as *objet a* as well. Alenka Zupančič reflects on Lacan's deployment of the four discourses to rework the earlier antithesis between signifier and jouissance in such a way that signifier and jouissance are intertwined. Zupančič gives a convincing demonstration of how, on the one hand, the hysteric's discourse is a reaction to the master's discourse and, on the other, the university discourse has come to be the new form of the master's discourse. In "Enjoy Your Stay," Oliver Feltham discusses a question and a problem that arise out of Lacan's seminar. The first is the question why there are only four discourses and not more, given that the possible number of permutations is twenty-four. The second is the deeper problem of how, in this seminar, Lacan conceives of

change. The problem arises because the discourses emerge historically and mutate, which creates the problem for Lacan of how to think structural change without having recourse to a notion of history as sequence. Feltham explores different responses to this problem, both by looking at what Lacan has to offer and by appealing to some of Alain Badiou's work. Juliet Flower MacCannell, in "More Thoughts for the Times on War and Death: The Discourse of Capitalism in *Seminar XVII*," analyzes the master's discourse and, in particular, the new concept of surplus jouissance, introduced by Lacan the previous year but given more extended treatment in *Seminar XVII*. Particularly important is the discussion of the connection between Lacan and Marx around this very point. The discussion of this connection is even more valuable for being the one paper in the collection that explores Lacan's relationship to Marx in detail. In a different way, Dominique Hecq examines the problems of power, impotence, and impossibility as they develop and are treated throughout *Seminar XVII*. Hecq shows how Lacan struggles with certain complexities that arise when jouissance becomes the foundation of any possible link between politics and truth; moreover, how jouissance itself must be reconceived in the breach of such a development.

Part 3 opens with Éric Laurent's "Symptom and Discourse," in which Laurent explores the contemporary place of shame in considerable detail. The essay relates to Miller's, itself in part a response to Laurent's exploration of contemporary mores, foreseen in many ways by Lacan in 1967. Laurent looks at the near-absence of shame as a social phenomena and its relations with other subjective experiences such as guilt, self-hatred, and pride. Discussing the connection with modes of jouissance, Laurent argues that modern science plays a key role in contemporary expressions of subjectivity, and that this has consequences that psychoanalysts cannot ignore. Marie-Hélène Brousse and Pierre-Gilles Guéguen are also interested in the implications of contemporary society for the analyst's discourse. Brousse, in "Common Markets and Segregation," is concerned with the imaginary, symbolic, and real shifts in our contemporary world. She spells out several ways in which a "new universalism" expresses itself, from which she derives a contemporary form of the master's discourse. Guéguen discusses the relationship between intimacy and truth, as it is revealed and treated by literary autobiography and psychoanalysis. Comparing and contrasting truth

and intimacy in literature and psychoanalysis, Guéguen makes astute observations on autobiography, the *journal intime*, and the psychoanalytic process itself. In "Bureaucratic Speech Acts and the University Discourse: Lacan's Theory of Modernity," Geoff Boucher, noting that the master's discourse remains the foundation of the social contract, fleshes out the argument for regarding bureaucratic capitalism as the contemporary form of the master's discourse. Through an analysis of speech acts, including a discussion of the shortcomings of Derrida and Foucault on this issue, Boucher pins down what is specific to the bureaucratic expression of the master's discourse. Similarly, Matthew Sharpe, in "The 'Revolution' in Advertising and the Discourse of the University," invokes Lacan's impromptu remark that university discourse provides the contemporary hegemonic matrix of social relations. If Lacan himself considered Stalinist bureaucracy to be exemplary of this development, Sharpe notes that such bureaucracy finds an unexpected analog in the liberal capitalist West: the discourse of marketing. An analysis of this most characteristic form of late-capitalist discourse is used to locate a subtle shift in the place of authority under the master's discourse.

Most but not all of the articles gathered in this volume originated in a conference run jointly by Deakin University and the Lacan Circle of Melbourne with assistance from the Australian Research Council, whose generous support we would like to acknowledge here.

psychoanalytic theory / cultural studies

This collection is the first extended interrogation in any language of Jacques Lacan's *Seminar XVII*. Originally delivered just after the Paris uprisings of May 1968, *Seminar XVII* marked a turning point in Lacan's thought; it was both a step forward in the psychoanalytic debates and an important contribution to social and political issues. Collecting important analyses by many of the major Lacanian theorists and practitioners, this anthology is at once an introduction, critique, and extension of Lacan's influential ideas.

The contributors examine Lacan's theory of the four discourses, his critique of the Oedipus complex and the superego, the role of primal affects in political life, and his prophetic grasp of twenty-first-century developments. They take up these issues in detail, illuminating the Lacanian concepts with in-depth discussions of shame and guilt, literature and intimacy, femininity, perversion, authority and revolt, and the discourse of marketing and political rhetoric. Topics of more specific psychoanalytic interest include the role of *objet a*, philosophy and psychoanalysis, the status of knowledge, and the relation between psychoanalytic practices and the modern university.

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SIC *A Series Edited by Slavoj Žižek*

duke university press
Box 90660, Durham, NC 27708-0660
www.dukeupress.edu

ISBN 0-8223-3719-3
9 780822 337195

Cover photo: The 1968 May Events: Student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit in front of Sorbonne University, Paris, France, May 6, 1968. Gilles Caron / Contact Press Images.