

## SOURCES

### At the *Institutfrançais* in London (3 February 1975)

Jacques Lacan<sup>1</sup>

Can you hear me? I am surprised to have been asked on so many occasions to come to London. I had no idea how numerous you would be. I wasn't expecting such a big audience.

I am aware that my work is still being ignored. Erich Fromm, a renowned psychoanalyst, doesn't mention me. In Paris, the first scission occurred at the *Institut de Psychanalyse* in 1953, around the same time it was actually created. I felt I had to support a certain number of people, and all kinds of consequences ensued in which history has shown no interest whatsoever. French psychoanalysis would have benefited from this interest had it continued to be unified. It would also have had the advantage of accepting my teaching. Fromm's book *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* - he observes that there are fewer people in the US who start an analysis - surprised me.<sup>2</sup> He doesn't mention me. I remain unknown to him.

I insist on explaining how I experience things. Why do people follow my lectures in Paris? Because they contribute something. They contribute something of the order of the sign. Psychoanalysis appears in the world when a word like that [sign] is introduced. What I mean is that it has nothing to do with a certain idea of the world, but with something that puts into perspective the very notion we can have of what constitutes a world. It's a completely imaginary notion - let me introduce a term, here, which I am used to employing, a 'pivot'. People imagine that there is such a thing as a world, and this is precisely what is in need of revision, because that's what history teaches us to do. For example, Aristotle's world is completely unthinkable for us, simply because it's a spherical world that is based on the idea of the harmony of the spheres - a world that is supposedly dominated and ordered by a divine wisdom.<sup>3</sup> It was sufficient for Galilei and Newton to arrive on the scene for this idea to be radically undermined. These spheres are a pure illusion, something

imaginary. At the time, it caused some kind of vertigo. Some of you will know that in this famous 'silence of the

infinite spaces', which Pascal talks about, the important word is 'infinite'.<sup>4</sup>

Things became more difficult when Newton arrived, because he observed that what seemed to exist without turning around was none the less turning because things were made to fall; each of the forms of this strange movement fell in relation with the sun and put itself in its place. A question posed itself to Newton: how do bodies know what they correspond to in movement, which for them stands in an inverse proportion to the square of distance? How do they know that there is another body and in order for this to exist, a fall? Thinking about this problem has all sorts of consequences. The first one is: why had nobody discovered this before, before the emergence of this invention which allows us to move on, in what is starting to become more and more difficult to conceive of as a world? Because it seems to me that people are about to invoke another dimension, that of the Real. If one considers the fact that for such a long time people were satisfied with having only one world, at one point it doesn't suffice anymore. There is a new meaning, that of the Real, yet this notion, this function of the Real, is precisely what has meaning for us. It's difficult to avoid trying to end with this meaning. It's difficult not to acknowledge that it has much more meaning than realism. Realism is situated in what isn't subjected to meaning. (Lacan is sighing). Of course, one needs to give what is called 'souls' the time to find themselves. But it's very important to acknowledge this link, which is also an antinomy, and which polarizes the function of the Real and that of meaning. One needs to ask oneself what makes this Real extracted from meaning.

I have a habit of mentioning names: Richards and Ogden, *The Meaning of Meaning*.<sup>5</sup> It's a book inspired by neo-positivism, in which certain things are being mentioned that are not without interest. Yet what is most disorienting about what the book questions is precisely the issue of meaning, when it examines the meaning of meaning, and the dimension of beauty. It's not at all certain that neo-positivism examines symbols, that is to say the order of words. It's difficult not to take words into account. Because from the moment one confronts words, from the moment they are being examined linguistically, one notices that any word can have any meaning. I can demonstrate to you that in my language any given word, however fixed its usage may be, may serve to express any

meaning. It suffices to invoke the dimension of homology, when it appears necessary to say something by means of homology, to make language function by 'homoiasis'. Isn't this the only way to make language function? It starts with metaphor, then we have analogy, it moves on to whatever it is one wants, and it terminates with the trajectory of what is fundamental and intrinsic to any

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given figure, it terminates with the use of small letters. It's with these letters that Galilei started to write 'speed is in direct proportion to

..in other words, that he started to note what is called a proportion, a mathematical proportion which he had spent a long time elaborating. It's clear that he is forcing the dimension of the Real. Nothing new here. Aristotle proceeds in the same way when he writes down the three elements of a syllogism.<sup>6</sup> He observes a function by means of a letter; he makes the first steps towards a logic and it's strange to see that twenty centuries were necessary to get through it. A discourse allows us to engender this dimension of the Real.

All of this may seem very far removed from what you are expecting me to tell you. Yet it seems necessary to me to say it to you, in order to make clear that it's no coincidence that psychoanalysis appeared well after the appearance of this scientific discourse. Psychoanalysis does not cease to have a relation with the scientific discourse. They are of the same nature. Freud believed that the history of psychoanalysis would reach its culmination with the knowledge of hormones and enzymes - substances which really don't have anything substantial about them.<sup>7</sup> They are made up of atoms, and people now believe that their function is to work like messages, that a cell has a nucleus, a chromosomal intertwining, and so one has arrived at the conception of genes. Freud believed that one day we would know more about it. But how on earth is it possible that a practice such as psychoanalysis works? How can it be that a certain practice works? (Lacan is sighing again.) It's certain that when Freud refers to this future stage, which will of course never happen, because there are limits to what one can know, we will have a retroactive idea of how psychoanalysis works. It's a very daring thought, and it seems to me that he was constantly concerned with finding a justification for the effects of psychoanalysis. There is no doubt that psychoanalysis has effects, and we have to be content with this reference to a future which, as a future, has the characteristic that it's not there.

For Freud, it's worth reducing what is happening to an act of faith. It seems to me that it's worth featuring who is at stake, here, and I'm pleased that the English language allows for a better designation than

other languages. Analysts refer to the patient with the notion 'analy sand'. It's very unusual in the English language to use a gerund. The one who is about to be analysed - we ask ourselves whether he is the one who does the analysis. He does the analysis because he is the patient, because he suffers from something he doesn't understand. The analyst puts in his two pennies' worth, which is (badly) called 'interpretation'.

I am as stupid as all the others, as all the other analysts - and they are quite stupid. Freud took his time in finding his way, and the only  
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thing he realized is that he was turning around something, in going all the way round. It suffices to read 'The interpretation of dreams' (*Die Traumdeutung*), 'The psychopathology of everyday life' and, above all, 'Jokes and their relation to the unconscious' in order to observe where psychoanalytic practice leads him from the start.<sup>8</sup> It suffices to read these three books in order to realize that they are about words (that they play on words), that 'The interpretation of dreams' plays on equivocation, which means that a word may serve to express anything. There is no dream, no act of forgetting which isn't a play on words. Let me remind you that in French we say *mot d'esprit*. Putting it in economic terms, it is to the devastating character, to the lightning of the behaviour of words that we need to pay attention for speech to have an effect. The economy in question is an economy of words.

It led me to talk about a return to Freud, to centre the question around what he himself discovered, the existence of the unconscious.<sup>9</sup> The unconscious has nothing to do with the body's functions. As in the case whereby we have no idea what is happening in our stomach when we are digesting food. Freud never makes this type of identification. He reserves the term [unconscious] for dreams, slips of the tongue, bungled actions - they can be interpreted by means of a series of words. I am referring to words, but it may concern entire sentences, which make up the unit of the symbolic. The symbolic concerns the usage of language [*langue*]. I distinguish between *langue* and *langage*. I realize that I have been preoccupied with this for quite some time now. It's difficult to give you an idea of my work, of speculations ... To put it simply, I myself was led to some notations, quite literally, and I believed it was possible for me to describe things by means of something whose reference is essentially the order of the symbolic, and I believed it was possible to distinguish between different types of discourse.<sup>10</sup>

I have been speaking for twenty years. That's a long time. And I repeat myself. I don't offer the same programme every year, which means I don't really repeat myself. No, I don't really repeat myself, but at the same time I am always saying the same thing. It's not the same to repeat

oneself and to say the same thing. Saying the same thing may be gauged as the difference between speaking and chattering [*bavarder*]. What's the word for '*bavarder*' in English? (someone in the audience shouts 'chatter'). In French we say '*la bave*' (dribble). There you see how people find a way to designate something by means of something that is related to metaphor: *la bave*. (The audience comments that in English something similar exists with the word 'bladder'). These are the only things that interest me. It doesn't mean that what

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I've said before has no bearing on the question, but only because of a certain number of prejudices, things one believes to be natural... As I was preparing for my lecture - I am happy to tell you that I do prepare my lectures, but I really want to stop it here, because I am only interested in your questions and I don't want to summarize twenty years of my seminar - I read Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*.<sup>11</sup> I actually met him and he promised to come tonight, so perhaps he is in the audience. It's one of the most Lacanian texts I have ever seen, although it affected me and has even made me a bit sick (Lacan is hoarse), because I realized that in a story, as mad as the psychoanalytic discourse, it makes you enter another world. I had read it before, because I studied Hamlet - it's one of the things one needs to do when one is interested in Freud. It suffices to question *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*, a natural question, in order to notice that one is in the psychoanalytic world. Because there is no opposition between nature and culture. Nature is a cultural idea. It suffices to question what one sees in order to realize that it has nothing to do with the Real. It concerns designations of words and this is what constitutes the thing that makes the world go round.

I want to show you what I have arrived at. (Lacan draws some lines on the blackboard.) Time. I stick to my categories. (The lines become circles with intersections.) The Symbolic, the Real, the field of meaning. (A number of people in the audience start to laugh, but when Lacan has finished drawing they applaud.) Why is the field of meaning between the Real and the Symbolic? Because that's where analysis is situated ... After Freud, the phallus rises up again (people laugh). It doesn't concern an appetite for difference, what men carry on the left and what women don't have, and what is always being used in order to determine whether a speaking being is on one side or the other. The notion of the phallus is much more complicated than that. It suffices to look at how the little girl reacts in order to see that it does n't simply concern the penis. The notion of the phallus ... doesn't organize anything. The phallus is not what serves the purpose of making babies. When a baby is made, one has

made a faux pas. Of course, from time to time a woman wants to have a baby and in this way she imagines her consecration as a woman. But it's not that simple. Freud made a distinction between phallic and genital.<sup>12</sup> It's an imposition. It took me a long time to realize it. Starting with an egg-cell and a sperm cell one arrives at artificial insemination, but not at a relationship that has anything to do with sexuality.

What links sexuality and death? There must be a connection, but nobody knows. It's no coincidence that Freud talked about a death drive (it scandalized psychoanalysts, who don't have the habit of  
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being very strong).<sup>13</sup> But it doesn't explain sexual relationships. Everything can be summarized in that it is impossible to explain sexual relationships. What Freud calls drive is some kind of primal aspect of sexuality, situated in the precocious years of life, before a speaking being has encountered, not his partner, but the enigma of the phallus. Freud talked about the genital stage as if it had been sustained by chance. Enters love, the encounter.

Why do two people love each other? Impossible to say. The analytic discourse is able to say certain things . . . Love had a bad start. Christianity told us we should love our neighbour [son *prochain*]. The female neighbour [*la prochaine*] doesn't have a chance! The first female neighbour is the mother. I am going to stop. She is annoying.

Freud emphasizes union, fusion - it's hopeless! Love is static! Enjoying the other is beatitude. It's really not that simple. Each his own [*A chacun sa chacune*]. But we have a collection of 'owns' [*une collection de chacunes*] and the same is happening on the other side, because it's not a-symmetrical.

Good, someone should ask me a question. It doesn't have to be an intelligent one. I have rarely had an audience like this one, so big and so mixed.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

A gentleman from the audience asks Lacan whether he knows X. Lacan says he doesn't. The gentleman tells him that it is a French television presenter and that Lacan looks like him.

Lacan (visibly annoyed) - Yes, I know that as a result of my own appearances on television people take me for a clown.

Another gentleman - I have been asking myself why we refer to the motherland. Does it have anything to do with the father-function? But isn't it rather the mother inside the father? What do you think? A nice

Kleinian death-blow, no?

Lacan looks at the gentleman with interest, while the audience is debating in which languages 'homeland' is masculine and in which languages it is feminine.

Masud Khan steps on to the stage near to where Lacan is standing and says 'Until now there were two schemas: Consciousness, Preconscious and Unconscious, and Ego, Id and Superego. You give us another one. Where do you situate the symptom? Where do you place narcissism?'

Making abstraction of the audience, Lacan and Masud Khan enter into a dialogue in a low voice. Two youngsters from the audience step

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on to the stage and move the blackboard closer. The audience applauds. A young woman asks where Lacan situates art in his *dia gram*.

Lacan - Yes, art! I didn't talk about it. One would need more circles.

Someone else asks Lacan a question about the object *a* and its relationship with the work of Winnicott.

Lacan - Yes, object *a* is a function I invented in order to designate the object of desire. Small *a* is what Winnicott calls the transitional object ... I have been fortunate enough to know Winnicott. The audience is starting to leave. Almost two hours of lecture.

Someone else - What do you know about despair, anxiety? Lacan - I have no reason to be hopeful, but it doesn't give me anxiety. I answer you on the same level as your question. Anxiety is a concept linked with the encounter with the phallus. See Little Hans.<sup>14</sup>

A young man - It has been said that Freud's interventions in sociology and politics are inadequate. What do you think of this?

Lacan - I have referred to politics in relation to the discourse of the master. The one who came closest to the discourse of the master is Hegel.<sup>15</sup> He says that the master has pleasure and that the slave wants ... to keep it. The discourse of the university is going through a crisis, much bigger than that of psychoanalysis and independently from what Erich Fromm thinks. If I ever return to London, and there are people who don't take me for a clown, I'd like to see Stoppard again and talk to you again. But I'd like you to be less numerous; my discourse will be less diffuse then.

1. [A Spanish transcription and translation of Lacan's lecture appeared for the first time in *Revista Argentina de Psicología*, 1976, 7(21), pp. 137-141, under the heading 'Informes y notas', with the following comment (in Spanish) by Hebe Friedenthal: 'A small poster attached to the background of a notice-board, hidden in one of the departments of the Tavistock Institute, announces that the *Institut français* invites people to *Entretiens avec Jacques Lacan*, on the 3rd of February 1975. English people don't even pay attention to the announcement, which is barely visible. They don't speak French and moreover, who is Lacan? By contrast, South Americans bustle about and start preparing themselves, making
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room in their diaries for an evening lecture. I arrive a half hour early, warned by his large audience at the Sorbonne. The *Institut français* is located in a 'posh' (chic) area, as it is called here, and the lecture will take place in a small theatre. It is slowly filling up. Who will the participants be? Judging by their looks, I would say they are students, men and women who are used to attending 'culturally enriching lectures' (a few), psychoanalysts who have heard about Lacan, and some ten Argentinian psychologists and medical doctors who are studying in London, or simply happen to pass by. In short, a disparate audience. On stage, a table, a micro phone and an empty chair are waiting for Lacan. He arrives in a perfectly tailored grey suit and a white shirt whose high and hard collar has a new type of fastening, a special finishing. Carefully designed - by him? Thick white hair, spectacles, a cigar, thick eye brows. To my surprise I hear that he is 74 years old. Someone introduces him, salutes Lacan's return to London and hopes that, after 10 years, London will also return to Lacan. The speaker announces the forthcoming publication of *Ecrits* by Tavistock Press'. The present English translation is based on a transcription of a tape-recording of Lacan's lecture, with additional interpolations taken from the Spanish text. Transcription, translation and notes by D. Nobus.]

2. [See E. Fromm (1970) *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx, and Social Psychology*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.]
3. [See Aristotle (1939) *On the Heavens*, translated by W. K. C. Guthrie. Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Press.]
4. [See Pascal, B. (1995[1670]) *Pensées*, translated by A. J. Krailsheimer. Harmondsworth: Penguin.]
5. [See C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards (1946[1923]) *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*, 8th edition. London: Kegan Paul, Trench,



Trubner.]

6. [See Aristotle (1994) *Posterior Analytics*, translated with commentary by Jonathan Barnes. 2nd edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press.] 7. [See, for example, Freud, S. (1905d) 'Three essays on the theory of sexuality', in J. Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 7. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, pp. 215-216.] 8. [See Freud, S. (1900a) 'The interpretation of dreams', *S.E.*, Vols. 4/5; Freud, S. (1901b) 'The psychopathology of everyday life', *S.E.*, 6; Freud, S. (1905c) 'Jokes and their relation to the unconscious', *S.E.*, 8.]

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9. [See Lacan, J. (2002(1955)) 'The Freudian thing, or the meaning of the return to Freud in psychoanalysis', in *Ecrits: A Selection* (translated by Bruce Fink). New York: W. W. Norton, pp. 107-137.]
10. [See Lacan, J. (1991(1969-70)) *Le Séminaire. Livre XVII: L'envers de la psychanalyse*. Texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller. Paris: Seuil.] 11. [See Stoppard, T. (1973) *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. London: Faber & Faber.]
12. [See, for example, Freud, S. (1905d) 'Three essays on the theory of sexuality', *S.E.*, 7: 199, n. 2.]
13. [See Freud, S. (1920g) 'Beyond the pleasure principle', *S.E.*, 18: 1-64.]
14. [See Freud, S. (1909b) 'Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy', *S.E.*, 10: 1-149.]
15. [See Lacan, J. (1991(1969-70)) *Le Séminaire. Livre XVII: L'envers de la psychanalyse*. Texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Seuil, pp. 9-24.]