

*Press Conference by Doctor Jacques Lacan at the French Cultural Center, Rome, 29-October-1974.*¹ *Published in the Lettres de l'École freudienne, 1975, n° 16, pp. 6-26.*

J. Lacan – I already took up my positions in psychoanalysis, in 1953 more precisely. There was a first Congress in October, in Rome. I think, (I didn't ask), I imagine a sort of anniversary party was being planned for me: it's quite a long time 21 years; the 21 years during which I have taught in a way that has carved out, it might be said, my positions. I had already started my teaching two years before 1953. Perhaps that is what they had in mind therefore.

On the other hand, I didn't really have any reason to object to it, especially since Rome, despite everything, is a place that continues to hold great importance, especially for psychoanalysis. If ever, (who knows it might happen), you end up hearing what I prepared to say, because I did prepare something for them; they were expecting me to speak; I didn't want it to be announced, but I did prepare something; in fact I must say I even prepared it carefully; anyway if you do happen to come, you will hear something related to the relations between psychoanalysis and religion. They are not very friendly. The short version is it's *either one or the other*. If religion triumphs, which is the most likely outcome, (I'm talking about the true religion, there has only ever been one true one), if religion triumphs, that will be the sign that psychoanalysis has failed. It would make sense if it did fail, because what it works with is very difficult. But anyway since I don't want to give a speech right now, that's all I can say – that psychoanalysis is something very difficult.

Which newspaper do you work for?

M^{me} X. – Agence Centrale de Presse de Paris.

J. Lacan – Psychoanalysis is a very difficult thing. First of all it's very difficult to be a psychoanalyst, because you have to put yourself in an untenable position. Freud already said it, that the position of the psychoanalyst is untenable.

M^{me} X. – How many of Dr. Lacan's students will be at the Conference?

J. Lacan – At this one? I have no idea.

M^{me} X. – Attendees?

J. Lacan – I imagine there will be many more in attendance than there are people at my School, because a kind of curiosity-effect has grown up around me. It's kind of nutty but that's the way it is.

M^{me} X. – What fuels this nuttiness?

J. Lacan – Probably by my own. But of course I'm not in the loop as far as that's concerned.

M^{me} X. – I think my competitor Agency wants to take the floor.

M. Y. – (inaudible)

¹. Complete transcript unrevised by the author.

M^{me} X. – I was just asking Professor Lacan why he said the psychoanalyst was in an untenable position?

J. Lacan – In the same breath I also pointed out I was not the first to say it. There is a person we can trust as concerns what he said about the position of the psychoanalyst, and that person, more precisely, is Freud. Then he broadened the field, pointing out there were a certain number of untenable positions, including “to govern.” As you can see, it’s precisely the untenable positions that everyone rushes to take up – there is never a shortage of candidates to govern, just like in psychoanalysis.

Then Freud added: “to educate.” The shortage there is even less acute, and it’s a position that has even gained a reputation for being advantageous; I mean not only is there no shortage of candidates but also plenty of people who receive its stamp, that is to say who are authorized to educate. That doesn’t mean they possess the slightest idea as to what to educate means. At any rate it does give one pause. People seem to only dimly perceive what they are trying to do when they are educating. They give their all for a brief glimpse of what it means, but rarely take the time to reflect more fully. However the sign that there is still something that is able to, from time to time at least, trouble them, is that sometimes they experience something extremely peculiar that not only psychoanalysts are familiar with – they are gripped with anxiety. When they start thinking about what it is to educate, they are gripped with anxiety. But there are tons of remedies for anxiety, in particular a certain number of “conceptions of Man,” of what Man is. There is a lot of variation in them. No one notices it but there is enormous variety in the conceptions of Man we manage to come up with.

Jean Chateau published a really good book related to this, to education I mean. He was one of Alain’s students. I mention it because it was a book that caught my attention recently. In fact I haven’t even finished yet. It’s absolutely sensational. It starts with Plato and then goes on to talk about some other pedagogues, and you start to realize what the root is, what I would call the root of education, meaning a certain idea of what must be done to make men into Men – as if education is what made them; whereas in fact we can be sure of is that Man doesn’t have to be educated, he completes his education on his own; at any rate he educates himself, since it has to be that he learns something, and that he set himself to it – but anyway educators, in essence, are people who believe they can help men with this, and even that there is some sort of minimum to be done for them in order for men to be men, and this gets achieved through education. In fact they aren’t at all wrong. Men do need a certain amount of educating in order to be able to stand being in each other’s company.

Then there is the analyst. People who govern and people who educate differ in one considerable way from the analyst, in that what they do has been done for ages. And let me repeat that there are lots of them, since governing and educating are a constant. The analyst lacks such a tradition. He’s new to the scene. I mean he has found a new untenable position among the untenable positions. So it’s not particularly easy to maintain a position that, for most analysts, has only a short century behind it with which to take its bearings. It really is something entirely new, and this ends up reinforcing the impossibility of the thing. I mean we have yet to really discover what it’s all about.

This is why it was analysts, starting that is with the first one among them, because of their position whose impossible nature they quickly realized, who spun it out of the positions of governing and educating. Like them, they are in the waking-up stage, which enabled them to grasp that at the end of the day the people who govern and the people who educate have no idea what they are doing. It doesn't stop them from doing it, and even from doing it not half bad, because after all governors are necessary, and governors govern, it's a fact. Not only do they govern but this is what makes everybody happy.

M^{me} X. – Thus getting back to Plato.

J. Lacan – Back to Plato, sure. It's not hard to get back to Plato because Plato said an enormous amount of banal things, and so we naturally get back to them. But it has become increasingly clear that the analyst's arrival and the assumption of his proper function have enabled something verging on a kind of spotlighting of the other functions. I devoted an entire year of my seminar to precisely this idea, in an attempt to explain the relationship that emerges from the mere fact of the existence of this totally new function of analyst, and how it sheds light on the others. This then enabled me to demonstrate the existence of some highly uncommon articulations in discourse – since if they had been common they would not have been distinguishable – and to furthermore show how they can be manipulated in a very straightforward way. They consist of four tiny elements that turn in a circle, and of course in doing so each of these four elements change places, and some truly interesting things result from this.

One thing Freud did not talk about, because for him it was taboo, was the position of the scholar (*savant*), the position of science. Science still has a chance. Its position is also impossible, but it still lacks even a dim awareness of this. In fact it is only recently that scholars (*savants*) have begun to have attacks of angst! They are only now starting to wonder – their attacks are not any more serious than any other, after all anxiety is always a sort of half-assed, trivial affair – it's amusing to watch how some of these scholars, working in major laboratories, have suddenly become alarmed and are starting to get “the willies” as we say (*avoir les foies*) – do you speak French? Do you know what getting the willies means? It means being scared to death – because they are starting to wonder, “What if, once we have fashioned all these tiny bacteria that we are doing such wonderful things with into an absolutely sublime instrument for the destruction of life, What if some character decided to take it out of the lab?”

They're not quite there yet, this hasn't yet been done, but still they are beginning to conceive of ways to make bacteria which are resistant to everything, and once they manage that feat they will become unstoppable and could even wipe the surface of the globe clean of all the troublesome things we find in it, human beings in particular. So now they suddenly feel themselves to be in the throes of a crisis of responsibility. They have declared a so-called moratorium on certain avenues of research – maybe they know what they're doing after all, I mean it's true that it is probably risky, but I don't believe it's possible – animal life is unstoppable I think, and the bacteria are not going to be the ones to manage to rid us of it! But the scholars who started having angst about all this had the “classic attack” as it were, and so a sort of prohibition was put in place, a temporary one no less, insofar as it was decided it would be necessary to take a second look before pushing bacterial research too far in certain directions. It would be nothing short of a sublime release instead if we

suddenly had a plague on our hands, handmade by the biologists, that would have been a real triumph, that would mean humanity had finally reached something, its own destruction for example – one being's superiority over all the others is after all genuinely signaled by its ability to destroy not only itself but all life on Earth! That would be a sign that Man is truly capable of something, but it makes us a little angst-ridden too. We have not quite reached this point as yet.

Anyway since science has no idea whatsoever what it is doing, except for the occasional whiff of the aforementioned anxiety, it is going to get to continue for a while longer and, probably because of Freud, nobody has even dreamt of pointing out that it is just as impossible to actually do science, that is to do one which might produce results, as it is to govern and to educate. Analysis is the only way we might have some small idea of it being possible to point this out, because this is what analysis truly deals with. Psychoanalysis, I'm not sure if you got the memo, is very specifically devoted to that which does not work. This function is even more impossible than the others, but precisely because it is devoted to that which does not work, it is devoted to that thing which must be called by its true name, and I must add that I am the only one to have called it by this name so far, which is the Real.

The first thing that speaks to the difference between what works and what doesn't is the world itself – the world turns around and around – this is its worldly function. If you want to get a glimpse of the idea that there is no world, meaning that there are things that only imbeciles take to be 'in-the-world,' all you have to do is observe that there are certain things which lead this world to assume a rather, if you'll permit me to put this way, 'otherworldly' stench. This is what analysts have to deal with. So much so in fact that contrary to what everyone believes it is they who are much more affronted by what is Real than the scholars are. 'That' (*ça*) is all they dedicated to. And what is more since the Real is that which does not work, they are even forced to endure it with a stiff upper lip. To be able to do this means they have to have a full coat of armor against angst.

Angst, in other words, is something they are in a position to be able to say something about. I said a little something about this at one time. This was to at least some effect, it stirred things up a bit. In the aftermath of it a guy, one of my students who had attended the angst seminar for an entire year, came to see me and he was very "enthused" about it, since this was the year when the second scission in French psychoanalysis occurred ("scission" is what we call it at least). He was so "enthused" in fact that he had become convinced they were going to have to tie me up in a burlap sack and toss me in the river. He loved me to such a great extent that this conclusion seemed inevitable to him.

At which point I let him have it – I hurled insults at him and kicked him out. Somehow or other, however, he survived, and he even ended up joining the cause of my School. So you see how things are. Things are comical. Indeed this may be our only hope for a future for psychoanalysis – if it is able to sufficiently devote itself to comical things.

So I think this is perhaps somewhat of a response to your question.

Mrs. Y. – Can you specify what makes the *École freudienne de Paris* different from other schools?

J. Lacan – It is serious. That is the decisive distinction.

M^{me} Y. – The other schools are not serious?

J. Lacan – Absolutely not.

M^{me} Y. – Earlier you said “if religion triumphs it will be because psychoanalysis will have failed.” Is this because you believe people go to psychoanalysts today whereas before they went to see their confessors?

J. Lacan – I knew someone would ask me that question. This whole story about psychoanalysis and confession is a load of crap. Why do you think people go to confession?

(13)M^{me} Y. – But when you go to a psychoanalyst you also confess something.

J. Lacan – Absolutely not! It’s completely different. In Psychoanalysis 101 you learn to explain to people in the beginning of analysis that they are not there to confess. They are there to say something, anything.

M^{me} Y. – How do you account for this triumph of religion over psychoanalysis then?

J. Lacan – Not at all with reference to confession.

M^{me} Y. – You said, “if religion triumphs it will be because psychoanalysis will have failed.” How do you account for the triumph of psychoanalysis over religion?

J. Lacan – Psychoanalysis will not triumph over religion. Religion is inextinguishable. Psychoanalysis will never triumph over it – it will either survive or not survive.

M^{me} Y. – Why use this expression the triumph of religion over psychoanalysis? Do you think religion will triumph?

J. Lacan – Yes. It will triumph over psychoanalysis, and over many other things too. We can’t even begin to imagine how powerful religion is. I mentioned the Real a moment ago. In this regard religion is going to have many more grounds for soothing people’s souls, as we say, because science will hardly be able to ground the Real from its perspective, since science, as I just said, is about novelty, and it is going to introduce tons of absolutely earth-shattering things into people’s lives. And religion, especially the true one, possesses resources for grounding things that we haven’t even begun to suspect. It’s absolutely teeming with them, it’s incredible. It took them a while, but they finally figured out what a boon science is for them. Science is going to introduce such earth-shattering things that religion is going to be needed to make sense of them. And they know a thing or two about making sense out of things. They can make sense of anything, no matter what, out of human life for example. This is what they’re trained to do. From the beginning “religious” meant making sense out of formerly natural things. But just because things are becoming less natural, thanks to the Real, doesn’t mean religion is going to stop spewing its meanings. It is going to make sense out of some of the most unheard of future ordeals, the ones I mentioned earlier which the scholars are beginning to get slightly anxious about. Religion will make very mundane senses out of them. All you have to do is watch how it has already kicked into gear. They have already gotten into the swing of things.

M^{me} Y. – Psychoanalysis is going to become a religion?

J. Lacan – Psychoanalysis? No. At least I hope not. But who knows, it might end up becoming in effect a religion, why not after all? But this is not the tack I think I am trying to take. I believe psychoanalysis did not arrive on the scene at just any historical moment. It emerged after a capital step was taken, a key advance in the discourse of science. Analysis arrived – I am going to tell you what I am saying in my little report I thought up for this Conference – psychoanalysis is a symptom. Only the important thing is to know what it is a symptom of. But still it clearly is one, as Freud himself said, (when he used the words “Civilization and its Discontents”) – psychoanalysis is part and parcel of this discontent in civilization. So the most likely outcome is that people will not rest content with this vague knowledge that the symptom is the most Real thing there is. Instead all kinds of meaning will be spewed out here, there and wherever you please, and this will end up nourishing not only the true religion but a ton of false ones too.

M^{me} Y. – What does “the true religion” mean?

J. Lacan – The *Roman* religion is the true one. Just try putting all the religions into one bag and then make for example what is called a history of religions. It’s truly horrific. There is only *one* true religion, and that religion is Christian. The only thing is to know whether this truth will hold on, whether it will end up able to actually drown us in the meanings spews forth. I’m sure it will be able to because it does have resources. Lots of things are ready-made for these purposes. It will interpret the Book of Revelations (*l’apocalypse de Saint Jean*). A lot of people have already taken a stab at it. It will unearth correlations between everything. This is its function in fact.

The analyst on the other hand is another thing entirely. He inhabits a kind of coming-of-age moment. For a short period of time, we caught sight of what the intrusion of the Real really is. The analyst remains tied to this point. He is there like a symptom and can only endure as a symptom. But you shall see, the day will come when humanity will be cured of psychoanalysis. This symptom will eventually be repressed by dint of its being drowned in meaning, religious meaning of course. Do you get it? Has some small corner of your faculty of judgment been enlightened? Does this position of mine seem immoderate to you?

M^{me} Y. – I’m listening.

J. Lacan – Ah yes. You are listening. But in the process are you picking up on anything that might resemble the Real?

M^{me} Y. – (beginning inaudible) and then it is up to me to sort of synthesize things afterwards.

J. Lacan – You’re going to effect a synthesis? You are lucky! Have at it, piece it together as best you can.

Psychoanalysis has given us one brief shining moment of truth, but nothing says it has to last.

M. X. – (speaking Italian) – translation: Mr. __ has read your *Ecrits* in Italian, in the collection entitled *Cosa freudianna*.

J. Lacan – How is that possible? No such collection *Cosa freudianna* exists?

Interpreter – Various articles have been grouped together under the title *Cosa freudiana*.

⁽¹⁶⁾J. Lacan – *Cosa freudiana* was the title they gave to the translation of my *Ecrits*? And here I was thinking it was just one of the articles in them. In French “La chose freudienne” (The Freudian Thing) was the title of just one of my writings.

Interpreter – He says an abridged collection of five or six of your articles which was translated two or three years ago is called *Cosa Freudiana*...

Mr. X. – (in Italian) translation: Mr. ___ is saying that your *Ecrits* are highly obscure, very difficult to understand and that someone seeking to get a better grip on his own problems by reading these texts ends up feeling deeply dismayed and uneasy.

His second impression is that you are one of the most famous advocates of the return to Freud. However his first impression of this return is that it is highly problematic. He feels the way you have revisited Freud, Freud’s texts, has made the reading of them even more difficult.

J. Lacan – Perhaps this is because I am affording a glimpse into what Freud himself took a long time to pound into the heads of his contemporaries. Don’t forget that *The Interpretation of Dreams* did not sell well when it first came out. It only sold...I don’t remember now how many copies exactly but something like 300 copies in the first 15 years. Freud had to go to a lot of trouble to force, to introduce into the thought of his day something that was so highly specific and yet only vaguely philosophical. Just because he borrowed the word *Unbewusste* from whomever that philosopher was, Herbart, doesn’t mean it had any connection to what philosophers referred to as “unconscious” – it was totally unrelated.

This is exactly what I have striven to demonstrate, the specificity of the Freudian unconscious. Academics were slowly but surely managing to digest what Freud, with relative ease by the way, tried to make more palatable for them – he took great pains to try to convince them. So this is what I mean by the return to Freud, to demonstrate what was truly incisive about Freud’s position, about what Freud discovered, about what it was that he introduced in what I would call a completely unexpected manner, because this truly was one of the first times something that had strictly nothing to do with what had been said before it emerged. This is the Freudian unconscious – the incidence of something completely new.

So it doesn’t surprise me since you only speak Italian, I imagine at least, because if you didn’t then why would you not speak to me in French, if you are reading my *Ecrits* in Italian translation, perhaps for starters they are not well translated. I cannot say for certain, I am not in a capacity to verify this. The translator visited me frequently seeking advice for clarification but since he had his own ideas as well, perhaps my answers did not serve this purpose for him.

And then furthermore let me point something else out that is characteristic of my *Ecrits* – I did not write my *Ecrits* in order for people to understand them, but in order for

people to read them – it's not the same thing at all. It's a fact that, as opposed to Freud, quite a few people are reading them. Certainly more than who read Freud in the first fifteen years. Of course Freud's works sold enormously well in the end. But he had to wait a long time for this success; whereas I never had to. I was completely surprised to hear my *Ecrits* were selling well, I never understood why. What I have observed however is that even though people don't understand them, they have an effect on them nonetheless. I have seen it often – they don't get a word, it is true, for a while at least, but it does something to them anyway. This is why I am led to believe, (contrary to what outsiders think, which is that people are just buying my *Ecrits* and then not even opening them), that they are wrong because people are opening them, working on them and even picking them apart. This I know because obviously when one begins reading them the best one can hope to do is try to understand them, and then since they aren't understood – I didn't purposefully try to make them incomprehensible, but that was how things turned out – I was speaking, I was giving courses which were very well attended and very understandable, but because I transposed them into written form only once a year the inevitable result was a writing which was a more or less unbelievable concentrate of the mass of things I had said – a concentrate that has to be put in water, like Japanese flowers, if you want to see them fully unfurl. I'll leave this comparison at that.

What I *can* tell you, since it happens often enough, is that I know how things are going to unfold in the future because I already happened to have written some things a long time ago – it happens often enough that after 10 years or so one of my writings becomes transparent. My dear fellow even *you* will understand one day! In ten years my *Ecrits*, even *in Italy*, even translated just as they are, will taste to you like light beer, commonplaces. It's strange how even my writings, which are very serious writings, all end up as commonplaces. In a very short while, you shall see, you will bump into Lacanianism on every street corner! Like Freud even! At the end of the day people think they have read Freud just because he is drudged up everywhere – in the newspapers, etc. And this is going to happen to me too, you'll see – it happens to anyone who works a bit harder, who does something a bit more rigorous, more rigorously centered on that precise point I called earlier the symptom, meaning that which does not work.

There occurred a moment in history when enough people were out of work to be able to devote themselves specifically to the question of that which does not work, and to come up with a formula of “that which does not work” in its nascent phase, if you will. As I explained to you earlier though, the tables will eventually turn, by which I mean they will be drowned out by all the disgustingly habitual things we have always known for centuries, and which are of course going to reestablish themselves. Religion, I was telling you, is tailor-made for this kind of thing – it's tailor-made to heal people so that they no longer perceive that which does not work. There was a brief flash of light – between two worlds if you will, between a world that has already passed us by and another that is going to reorganize itself into a superb world to come. I don't think psychoanalysis holds any keys to the future. It will however have been a privileged moment during which we will have been able to rather precisely gauge the extent of what I have called in one of my speeches the *parlêtre* (“speakingbeing”). Speakingbeing is another way of saying the unconscious. The fact that humans become speaking animals is totally unforeseen, is totally inexplicable. Knowing what this means, by what means this act of speech is accomplished – this is

something I am going to try to shed a little light on in the presentation I'm giving at this Conference. It's closely related to certain things Freud took to be connected to sexuality, and they are indeed connected to it, but in a highly unique way.

So there you have it. You shall see. Hold on to that little book in your pocket and re-read it in four or five years – you'll see, you will be up to your ears in it someday!

⁽¹⁹⁾M. Y. – (in Italian) translation: As far as I can tell, according to Lacanian theory the root of humanity is not biology or physiology, but language. However Saint John already said this: “In the beginning was the Word.” You have not added anything to this.

J. Lacan – I have added one small something. In the beginning of his Gospel, Saint John says “In the beginning was the Word” – I completely agree. But where was it *before* the beginning? This is the truly impenetrable mystery. Because he says “In the beginning was the Word” in the beginning of the *Gospel According to Saint John*, however there is this other item known as *Genesis* that is also vaguely connected with this thing, the Word. Of course this is countered by saying that the Word is something that belongs to God the Father and that we can recognize *Genesis* as being just as true as the *Gospel According to Saint John* by noting that God used the Word to create the world – a strange thing indeed, this Word!

In the Jewish Scriptures, the Holy Scriptures, it is perfectly clear why the Word was something that was more “before” the beginning than “in” it, because thanks to this, since it was before the beginning, God felt entitled to dispense all sorts of little seeds to the people whom he had given his little stocking stuffer to, like doling out seeds to chickens bit by bit – sure he taught Adam to name things, but he did not give him the Word because that would have been too much – he taught him to name things. Naming things is not such a big thing, especially because all these names are...(end of first reel)...

...meaning something that is truly on a human scale. That is all human beings ask for, that the lights be kept dim. We cannot tolerate Light (or Enlightenment, *La Lumière*) in ourselves. By the way during the Enlightenment nobody referred to light as such – they referred to *Aufklärung*. “Bring me a small lamp please.” That was already a lot, more even than we can tolerate.

So I for one am all for Saint John and his “In the beginning was the Word,” but this beginning was completely enigmatic. What this means is: Things only begin for this repugnant creature of the flesh that we still call the everyday man, things only begin for him, I mean the drama only begins when the Word gets into the swim, when the Word becomes, as religion (the true religion) says, Incarnate. It's only after the Word is made flesh that things start to really take a turn for the worse. Man no longer looks like a dog wagging its tail or a courageous masturbating monkey. He doesn't resemble anything anymore. The Word devastates him.

So of course I too believe this was the beginning. You'll tell me I haven't discovered anything new and it's true, I never claimed to have done so. All the things I have worked on were pieced together from things I found here and there. And then above all, go figure, I have acquired a certain amount of experience of that sordid profession that is called psychoanalysis, which has really taught me a thing or two. And so I would say it would be

better to say “In the beginning was the Cock” (“*Au commencement était le Verge*”),² because one thing I can tell you – without the Word, which it must be admitted is what gets them off (*les fait jouir*), why would all these people who come to see me keep coming back? If not, that is, to buy another piece, of the Word? This is the angle I see myself from. It pleases them, they become jubilant. I’m telling you, without it why else would I have so many clients, why would they come so frequently, for years on end, can you imagine! It’s more or less like that. In the beginning of analysis at least, that’s definitely how it is. For analysis, it is true, in the beginning is the Word. If it weren’t, I don’t get what the hell we’d be doing there together in the same room!

Mr. X. – (In Italian) Has psychoanalysis really entered an irremediable crisis period? Have human relations in fact become so problematic because this Real is so invasive, aggressive, obsessive...(rest inaudible).

J. Lacan – Anything Real we have experienced thus far is nothing compared to...that which we can not even imagine, since the essence of the Real is that it is unimaginable.

M. Z. – The question was really about psychoanalysis’s role today. You were saying earlier that psychoanalysis institutes a relationship between the individual and the Real. The question had to do with the fact that since the Real is so aggressive, so “obsessive,” as he put it, isn’t it instead necessary to free people from the Real, and thus rob psychoanalysis of its *raison d’être*?

⁽²¹⁾**J. Lacan –** If the Real becomes sufficiently aggressive...

Mr. X. – *Cioé che il reale é diventato cosi distruttivo che l’unica possibilità di salvezza è la sottrazione al reale, perché la psicanalisi a cessato completamente la sua funzione.*

Interpreter – The only way to save ourselves from such a destructive Real...

J. Lacan – Would be to completely push it away?

Interpreter – And he also referred to collective schizophrenia, and thus an end to the role of psychoanalysis in terms of how you depicted it.

J. Lacan – That’s an awfully pessimistic way of describing what I put in rather more straightforward terms as “the triumph of religion.” It’s pessimistic. Pinning the charge of collective schizophrenia on the true religion is a highly specific, though I must admit defensible, way of putting it. It’s a very psychiatric viewpoint.

INTERPRETER – This was not the questioner’s point of view. He did not refer to religion.

J. Lacan – No he did not refer to religion but it strikes me that what he did say was surprisingly close to what I said earlier, meaning that religion, in the end, is able to put everything in its place. But let’s not over-dramatize the point. We have to be able to get used to the Real, I mean the only one we can conceive because it is the only one we have access to. At the level of the symptom we haven’t yet really reached the Real, the symptom

² Lacan is punning on the expression “In the beginning was the Word” (*Au commencement était le Verbe*) by replacing *le Verbe* with *le Verge* (Penis or Cock).

is a manifestation of the Real on our level as living beings. The symptom takes bites out of us as living beings, we are eaten away by it. In other words, what I mean is at the end of the day we are what we are, we are sick and that's that. The speaking being is a sick animal. "In the beginning was the Word" and all that is really saying the same thing.

But the Real we actually can gain access to is through a highly specific path, the scientific one, meaning via tiny equations. But as far as we are concerned we never truly reach this Real, the real Real or, if you will, the true Real, because as far as we are concerned we are totally separated from it by reason of a very specific thing whose end I for one believe, although I have never been able to absolutely prove it, we shall never reach – we shall never reach the end of the relation between the speakingbeings we sexuate with "male" and those speakingbeings we sexuate with "woman." In this domain we are radically up the creek without a paddle. This is what really designates what is generally known as human being. On this issue there is absolutely no chance of there ever being a success, by which I mean that we will never work out a formula for it, a thing that is written scientifically. This is why all these symptoms then start to multiply, because everything hinges on this issue. This is why Freud was right to refer to what he called sexuality. Let's put it like this: For the speakingbeing, sexuality is hopeless.

However the Real that we do gain access to through our small formulas, the true Real, is an entirely other thing. The only result we have obtained thus far from doing this is gadgetry: we shot a rocket to the moon, we have TV now, etc. This stuff is eating us up, it's eating us up via the intermediary of the things it manages to stir up in us. Not for nothing the TV is devouring, it's because we are "into it." We could if we wanted to draw up a short but very precise list of the extremely elementary reasons why we "get into it." But in the end we are sitting back and being eaten instead. This is why I don't subscribe to the alarmist or angst-ridden camps. When they've had their fill, they will stop that and take stock of how things really are, and then they will start dealing with the right things, meaning what I am calling religion.

Mr. A. – (beginning inaudible) but nevertheless there may be something else, that it is hard to approach the Real, the true Real and not just the symbol, other than through a rupturing – meaning that the Real is transcendent, and to touch something that transcends us...(inaudible) and there you have the gadgets, and we are indeed being eaten up by them.

J. Lacan – Indeed. I for one am not very pessimistic. The gadgets will sort of swab things over instead. Your extrapolation though, I mean your way of making a convergence between the Real and the transcendent, I must say it seems like an act of faith to me, because in truth...

⁽²³⁾Mr. A. – I ask you what is not an act of faith (*foi*)!

J. Lacan – That's the really horrifying part. We are always at the fair (*foire*).

M. A. – I said faith (*foi*), not fair (*foire*)!

J. Lacan – That's my way of translating faith. You see there are so many faiths, filling niches everywhere, that in the end the only way to properly word it is in the forum, the fair that is.

M. A. – Faith, forum, fair. It's a play on words.

J. Lacan – It's a play on words, that's true. But I attach great importance to them you know. To me they seem to hold the key to psychoanalysis.

M. B. – (in Italian).

J. Lacan – I am not a philosopher at all.

M. B. – *Una nozione ontologica, metafisica del reale...*

J. Lacan – This is in no way an ontology.

Mr. A. – What he said was: Professor Lacan is using a Kantian notion of the Real...

J. Lacan – But it's not Kantian in the least. I have insisted on this repeatedly, that any notion of the Real we might have must be extremely complex and thus non-graspable in a way that would enable us to make it into an All. I think it would be overly quick to think that there is an All of the Real without having first verified this is the case. I think it is better to refrain for now from saying that the Real is an All in any sense.

I read something about this issue recently – I happened to get hold of an article by Henri Poincaré on the evolution of laws. You won't know it because it's not in circulation, a friend of mine who is a great bookworm gave it to me. It talks about how Boutroux asked the question whether it was possible for us to develop a notion as to whether laws too for example might have an evolution. And Poincaré, who was a mathematician, was getting into a huff about this idea of laws evolving because laws, at least this is what the scholars are after, are supposed to be laws only insofar as they don't evolve.

I must say this is something that happened by accident, it happened by accident that a philosopher turned out to be more intelligent than a mathematician. Such cases are rare, but in this instance, by chance, Boutroux raised a question that seems to me to be thoroughly capital. Why would laws not evolve, given the fact that we have conceived the world as something which has an evolution? Why would laws not evolve too? Poincaré stuck to his guns in maintaining that the essence of a law is that it enables us not only to know on Sunday what will happen on Monday and Tuesday, but that this knowledge works in both directions, and therefore thanks to this law we will also know on Sunday what happened on Saturday and Friday. But as far as I can see there is absolutely no reason why the Real could not allow for a law that changes.

Clearly this once again leaves us up the creek without a paddle. Given we are situated in a precise point in time, how are we ever going to be able to say anything whatsoever about a law that is, in Poincaré's words, no longer a law anyhow? But then again why not also think that we may yet one day know a little more about the Real? It's like Auguste Comte, who claimed we would absolutely never know anything about the chemistry of stars. But then go figure, one day this thing called spectroscopy happened and now we know highly precise things about their chemical composition. So we have to be a bit skeptical, because things happen, totally nonsensical passageways that we can not even imagine or foresee may one day make it possible for us to develop a notion of the evolution of laws. At any rate I don't see why the Real would be any more transcendent as a result.

I think this is a notion that is very difficult to work with. And this is probably why, by the way, it has usually been treated with such prudence.

M. X. – It’s a philosophical problem.

J. Lacan – Yes that’s true, it’s a philosophical problem. There are certain things, tiny domains in which philosophy still has something to say. Unfortunately it’s a funny thing the way it appears to be showing signs of aging so much that, I mean OK, Heidegger said two or three sensible things, but for a long time now philosophy has had absolutely nothing to say that speaks to everybody. In fact it never says anything that speaks to everyone. Whenever it does actually come up with something, philosophy always seems to be saying things that only interest two or three people, and then these are handed over to the University and become the teaching of philosophy. Once this happens they’re screwed, all the philosophy in them, even that philosophy which is conceivable, is through. Somebody called me Kantian earlier, without the slightest prompting. I have only ever written one thing about Kant, and that was my écrit “Kant avec Sade,” in which I made Kant out to be a kind of fruit of de Sade. Nobody paid this article the slightest bit of attention. I think some guy somewhere wrote something about it but I don’t even know if it was published. And nobody ever challenged me on this article. It’s true I am incomprehensible.

Mr. A. – (in Italian) – Translation: My imputation of Kantianism was arbitrary. Since we were talking about the Real as transcendent I was making a blithe reference to the “thing in itself,” but I was not imputing you with Kantianism.

J. Lacan – What I am striving to do is say some things that stick to my experience as an analyst, meaning small things, because no analytic experience can claim to be based on enough people to be generalized. I am trying to determine what an analyst might use to sustain himself from himself, what kind of, if you will, rigorous mental apparatus the function of analyst entails, when one is an analyst. What is the handrail we need to hold onto in order not to get derailed from the analyst function. Because, when you are an analyst, you are constantly tempted to let it slip, or slide, to let yourself slide back down the stairs, which is truly unworthy of the analyst function. You have to be able to remain very rigorous because you must only intervene in a very sober and preferably effective way. I am trying to set forth some of the conditions for ensuring analysis is serious and effective, and sometimes it may seem that I am flowing over into the realm of philosophy, but this is not the case in the slightest.

I am not doing any sort of philosophy whatsoever – on the contrary I run from it like the plague. And when I refer to the Real, which in my view is a totally radical concept capable of knotting something in analysis, but not on its own, only along with what I have called the Imaginary and the Symbolic, I am tethered to all three of these ropes, the only three that enable me to stay afloat in my own way. Of course I have offered to let those who would like to come along to follow me, but many other people will surely come along to offer their help as well. What most surprises me is that I still have so many people at my side, because I must say I haven’t done a thing to keep them. I am hardly tied to their coattails or anything. I am not afraid of someone deciding to leave. On the contrary, I feel relieved when people go. But at the end of the day I appreciate those who are still here because every now and then they do something that gives me the feeling of not being

completely superfluous in what I am teaching – that I am teaching them something that is of use to them.

What nice people you are to have spent such a long time asking me questions.