

## 11-24-1975 Yale University. Conversation with Students

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*Translated by Jack W. Stone.*

(32) *Freud and his errors?*

What Freud called the unconscious: a knowledge expressed in words. But this knowledge is not only expressed in words the subject does not have any kind of idea of: it is Freud who rediscovers these words in his analyses.

*The choice of my patients and its articulation with my theory?*

It is a matter of making them enter through the door, if analysis is a threshold, if they have a true demand. This demand: what do they want to be relieved of? A symptom.

A symptom is curable.

Religion is a symptom. Everyone is religious, even atheists. They believe sufficiently in God to believe that God is not there for nothing when they are sick.

Atheism is the sickness of the belief in God, the belief that God does not intervene in the world.

God intervenes all the time; for example, in the form of a woman.

The priests (*curés*) know that a woman and God are the same type of poison. They watch their step; they never stop slipping.

Perhaps analysis is capable of making a viable atheist, which is to say someone who does not contradict himself at every end of the field.

I try to make this demand force them (the analysands) to make an effort, an effort that will be made by them. As for being relieved of a symptom, I promise them nothing.

(33) Because, even for an obsessional symptom, among the most cumbersome there are, it is not certain that they will make a regular enough effort to get free of it.

In this filtering, there is a wager (*pari*), an element of chance (*une part de chance*).

I put the accent on the demand. In fact, something must push. And it cannot be to know oneself better; when someone asks me for that, I send him away.

*What is an error?*

I call that an error. Cf. the err of a ship, the non-dupes err (*les non-dupes errent*<sup>1</sup>). The non-dupes, this can get stuck and the symptom is when, in not being a dupe, this gets stuck all the same.

The symptom was not part of current thought before a certain epoch.

*Sinthome*: the word exists in the incunabula; I found this old spelling in

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<sup>1</sup> The title of Lacan's twenty-first Seminar, and a homophone of *Les Noms-du-Père* (The Names -of -the-Father). [tr.]

*Bloch and von Wartburg.* This spelling is not an etymology; it is always being reworked (*elle est toujours en voie de réfection*). I did not know that Rabelais, in the following century, wrote: *symptomate*.

I am going to try to make up for my ignorance with a certain number of citations.

*The importance of literature in my writings?*

I would say, rather, of the letter. I still don't yet know very well what literature is: in the final analysis, it is what is in the textbooks, of literature among others. I have tried to approach it a little; this is a production, but a doubtful one, and one Freud was fond of because it helped him to clear the way for the idea of the unconscious. When he imputed to Jensen having followed I don't know what direct thread of the wholly fanciful function that he, Freud, imputed to the woman, Jensen answered that he had never seen anything of this and that he had just scribbled it, spit it out of his pen.

There is an inflection of literature; it means no more in our day than it did in the time of Jensen. Everything is literature. Me, I have done it too since it sells: my *Écrits* are a literature to which I have tried to give a little status that is not that that Freud imagined. Freud was convinced that he was doing science; he distinguished *soma/germen*, borrowed<sup>(34)</sup> some terms that have their value in science. But what he made was a sort of ingenious construction, a practice and a practice that functions.

I do not imagine myself to do science when I do literature. Nevertheless, it is literature since it is written and it sells; and it is literature because it has some effects, and some effects on literature.

This is difficult to grasp.

Why would I not grasp myself as an effect?

When a river flows, there are little particular currents.

The central current seems to suck in the others, but this is simply because the others converge (*confluent*).

*Who are the theoreticians of psychoanalysis with whom I have a sympathetic relationship?*

Physicians take symptoms for signs.

The symptom in the psychoanalytic sense is of a wholly other nature than the organic symptom; analysts are not idiots when it comes to this.

The first to have the idea of the symptom was Marx.

Capitalism is marked by a certain number of effects that are symptoms; it is a symptom to the extent that Marx imputes to humanity having a norm, and he chooses the proletarian norm (when man is cleaned, completely naked, then he is Adam).

If there is a cardinal law of psychoanalysis, it is not to speak at random, even in the name of analytic categories. No wild analysis; no plastering about of words that only have a meaning for the analyst himself.

It is from my analysands that I learn everything, that I learn what psychoanalysis is. I take my interventions from them, and not from my teaching, unless I know that they know perfectly well what it means.

For the word "word," I have substituted the word. "signifier"; and this signifies that it gives rise to the equivocal, which is to say, always to several possible significations.

And, in the measure that you choose your terms well, the terms that are going to tug at the analysand, you are going to find the chosen signifier, the one that will act.

<sup>(35)</sup> In no case should a psychoanalytic intervention be theoretical, suggestive, which is to say, imperative; it should be equivocal (*équivoque*).

Analytic interpretation is not meant (*faite*) to be understood; it is meant to produce waves.

Thus, one must not be too obvious in it (*il ne faut pas y aller avec de gros sabots*), and often it is better to remain silent; only, one must choose it.

One must be trained as an analyst. It is not only when he is trained that, from time to time, this escapes him; trained, which is to say, having seen how the symptom completes itself.

In analysis, there is no scene except when there is a passage to the act. There is no passage to the act except as a dive into the hole of the blower, the blower, of course, being the unconscious of the subject.

It is only concerning the passage to the act that I have spoken of the scenic.

*Are the models I make use of symbolic?*

I strain myself and even kill myself over that. It consumes me because the unconscious does not lend itself to it.

These Borromean knots are easy neither to show nor to demonstrate because one does not represent them at all.

For what there is of these histories of knots, we still have to invent everything, for there is nothing less intuitive than a knot. Try to represent the smallest one there is, then the following and the following, and to see the relationship between them: one breaks one's head over it. Everything is to be constructed.

It is not because they have a non-verbal character that I utilize them. I try, on the contrary, to verbalize them.

*The truth?*

It has a structure of fiction because it passes through language and language has a structure of fiction.

It can only be half-said. Swear to tell the truth, nothing but the truth, the whole truth; it is precisely this that will not be told. If the subject has the least idea of it, it is precisely this that he will not tell. There are truths that are of the order of the real. If I distinguish real, symbolic, and imaginary, it is indeed that there are real, symbolic, and imaginary truths. If there are truths about the real, it is indeed that there are truths that one does not admit to oneself.

*The consistency of the English language?*

Jones said that the English, thanks to the bifidity of their tongue (from a Germanic root and a Latin root), could, passing from one register to the other, buffer things: that serves to make this not go too far.

It is the equivocal, the plurality of meanings, that favors the passage of the unconscious into discourse.

### *Self-analysis?*

The self-analysis of Freud was a *writing-cure*<sup>2</sup>, and I believe that is why it failed.  
Writing is different from speaking.  
Reading is different from hearing.  
I do not believe in the *writing-cure*.  
What does it mean to have to write, literature of course? . . . a craziness.

### *Phallus and Literature*

The phallus is a lack of nothing at all, an encumbrance. No one knows what to do with it. The literary text, despite its appearances, is without any effect. It only has an effect on academics: it pricks them in the behind.

When I concern myself with Joyce, it is because Joyce tries to pass beyond; he said that academics would speak of him for three hundred years.

Literature has tried to become something more reasonable, something that gives away its reason. Among the reasons, there are some very bad ones: that of Joyce to become an important man, for example. He has, in fact, become a very important man.

How does one let oneself get ensnared in this job of writer? Explaining art by the unconscious appears to me very suspect; however, it is what analysts do. Explaining art by the symptom appears to me more reliable (*sérieux*).

### *Verwerfung-Verleugnung*

*Verwerfung*, the judgment that chooses and rejects.

<sup>(37)</sup>*Verleugnung* is related to denial (*démenti*). Somewhere, I had translated it by "disavowal" (*désaveu*); this appears an imprudence.

Denial has, I believe, a relationship with the real.

There are all sorts of denials that come from the real.

### *The political implications of your psychoanalytic researches?*

In any case, that there is no progress.

What one gains on one side, one loses on the other.

Since one does not know what one has lost, one believes one has won. My "twists" (*tortillons*) suppose that this is limited.

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<sup>2</sup> In English in the original.