

On Psychoanalytic Discourse

Discourse of Jacques Lacan at the University of Milan on May 12, 1972, published in the bilingual work: Lacan in Italia, 1953-1978. En Italie Lacan, Milan, La Salamandra, 1978, pp. 32-55.

Translated by Jack W. Stone.

I very much thank Mr. Cesa Bianchi for having given us these reference points, these words of information that were very exact on what can constitute a certain number of steps.

Thus, what I have done in the course of these years has led me to say . . .

My difficulty is owed to my not knowing . . . I cannot assess in any way the degree of understanding (*audition*) of French represented by your gathering. I am very happy to see a great number of young faces since it is certain . . . finally, it is in them, these faces I mean, that I put my hope.

I must say that I do not at all like speaking French before people who I know are not familiar with this language. Well, I hope I am going to feel how far I can go in this order of emissions.

At breakfast, I recalled to some friends an experience I had at *John Hopkins University*.

It was so manifest that my audience would understand nothing if I spoke French that, having resolved at first . . . by general consensus, to speak French, I began by excusing myself in English for not being able to continue, which is to say, to speak French, and then this excuse went on for an hour and a half, in English of course . . . It's frightening to hear me speak English. But Americans are so easy to please, one can allow oneself such departures from the norm (*dérogations*), can't one? . . . I see that you understand French--well then, that encourages me. So I will say no more about the Americans: I am completely incapable of speaking to you in Italian, which is why I am speaking French.

I announced that I would speak on *psychoanalytic discourse*--this is a term I have not put forth for very long, but for three years nonetheless.

It is not easy, before an audience not of my students, which is not educated, broken-in to something . . . (you see, I begin to open some parentheses) . . . which is not broken-in to my teaching, my Seminar as it called: it is not a seminar at all, since only I speak in it.

Finally, it has ended up that way. Over the years I have had other persons speak at my seminar, which gave me some rest, but finally, little by little, maybe because of lack of time, I have stopped doing so.

Well, this teaching that has lasted for twenty years, of which the *Écrits*... --I am forced to speak of the *Écrits* since they are coming out, a first piece at least--there will be others, thanks to Giacomo Contri, who has been willing to devote a very great deal of care and a very great deal of time to it.

I am indeed forced to say a little about the *Écrits*, which, it appears, do not appear easy to you.

It's true: they aren't, not at all even.

This is because they were never meant, these famous *écrits*... they were never meant to replace my teaching.

To begin with, a good half of them were written before I began it, which is to say that they are not at all new, since I have told you that I have been doing what is called my seminar for twenty years.

A good half of them are from before it, and in particular those of which many are still to be made the pivot of what I might bring to psychoanalytic discourse, *The Mirror Stage* among them. *The Mirror Stage* was a communication I gave at a congress at a time when I was still part of what one calls the IPA— *Admitted Psychoanalytic International (International Psychanalytique Avouée)*--or respectable (*avouable*), if you like. Finally, this is a way of translating these words.

Then, the second part of these *Écrits* consists of a series where I have found myself, let us say, every year beginning at a certain moment, between a certain moment and another . . . where I have found myself every year giving a sort of reference point, which allows those who have heard me at my seminar to find there, finally, condensed, in sum, concentrated, what I might have been able to bring or what I thought myself able to mark as being axial in what I have stated.

That doesn't prevent this from being a very bad way, in sum, to gather a public.

It is very difficult to begin with, the notion of a public. I am going to risk recalling that since this publication I produced a play on words, calling it *poubellication* – I see that some of you know the word *poubelle* [trashcan]. In fact there is too much confusion, these days, between what constitutes a public and what constitutes a trashcan! This is even why I refuse interviews, because in spite of everything, the publication of confidences is what constitutes the interview.

Thus it consists completely in attacking the public at the level of the trashcan.

We must not confuse the *poubelle* with the pubis – they are not at all alike.

The pubis is related in a lot of ways with the word public.

This is true, eh?

It is not disputable, finally . . . I think.

There was a time when the public was not the same thing as an unpacking of the private, and when one went public one knew that it was an unveiling, but now it no longer unveils since everything is unveiled.

Finally, I am obviously not inclined to tell you my secrets, and yet I am forced nonetheless to say something that, given that I will only see you once-- I would be a little surprised to see you again elsewhere--I am all the same forced to tell you something that is on the order of a confidence.

Namely, how I might feel currently in this position I occupy *vis-à-vis* people who are not part of my audience.

What I can establish is what I have said to begin with, that the *Écrits* seem to me difficult when exported out of the context of a certain effort I make and of which I am going to tell you on what it is centered, that the *Écrits*, finally, suffice for all that one might elucubrate of whatever truly corresponds to my discourse.

The audience (*L'auditoire*) and the editor (*l'éditoire*), if I can put it this way, are not at all on the same level, as you can see.

Finally, when we play on *éditoire* as we do... *poubellication*... it makes it obscene and at the same time *auditoire* is contaminated.

All of this is a fashion, in sum, of seeing what I might say and introduce to you in this way, quite carefully, to what is very serious.

What I will call the play of signifiers.

The play of signifiers slips to meaning (*sens*).

But what is important in what I state is that it only ever slips in the manner of a skidding (*dérapiage*).

For those of you who are completely unaccustomed to these terms, I will simply say this: the signifiers, or the play of signifiers, are linked to the fact of *la langue*, of *langage*.— they are not equivalent. *La langue* is something quite specific for each of us, it is the mother tongue, Italian for most of you.

That is what constitutes *la langue*.

It is found that that there is something that one can mark, as being determined toward a same end, for all tongues, and it is in generalizing, as one puts it, that one speaks of *langage*: as characterizing man.

(*A murmuring in the audience*)

What's wrong?... I could ask for nothing better than to give over the podium to someone else, who would prove to me thereby that I myself do not speak in vain . . .

Well, *le langage*, one feels that this defines a being, which one generally calls man, and, finally, in limiting oneself strictly to defining him in this way, why?

It is certain that there is an animal on whom *le langage* has descended, if I can say this, and that this animal is truly marked by it.

He is marked by it to the point that I indeed do not know how far I can go in saying it.

It is not only that *la langue* is part of his world, it is what sustains his world from end to end.

This is why . . . Do not try to find out what my *Weltanschauung* is— I have no *Weltanschauung*, for the reason that the only one I could have with any rigor consists of saying that the *Welt*... the world, is built with language.

This is not a world view, it leaves no place for any view--what one imagines to be a view, an intuitive being, is obviously linked to the fact that we have eyes, that the gaze is truly a passion of man.

Speech also, of course. This is less often grasped.

Then there are other elements that are very much cause of his desire.

But it is a fact that psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic practice, has shown us the radical character of the signifying incidence in this constitution of the world.

I do not say for the being who speaks, because what I have just called this skidding, this slippage that is made with the apparatus of the signifier . . . this is what determines being for he who speaks. The word being has no meaning (*sens*) outside of language.

One has ended up nonetheless grasping that it is not by meditating on being that one will make the least progress in anything.

One has ended up grasping by the consequence . . . a consequence a little excessive . . . what follows from this practice that I have called the slipping with the signifier.

The fashion one has, more or less sophisticated, of skidding to the surface of what one calls things . . . of what one calls things up to the moment when one begins to consider that things are not very serious.

One succeeds truly at concentrating the potency (*puissance*) of the signifier in a way that one part of this world ends up, simply, writing itself in a mathematical formula.

Mathematical formulas to which, for schoolchildren of course, one tries to conjoin a meaning. In fact one succeeds at it: the formulas of Einstein and even of Heisenberg, finally, are of little terms that designate mass.

And mass always has an effect, one imagines that one knows what it is. And in fact one does not always imagine it--sometimes when one has precise physical notions, one knows how it is calculated, but one would be wrong to believe that mass is this or that . . . by the feeling.

It is not only because we weigh a little that we can imagine that we know what the notion of mass is.

It is only from the moment when one begins to make something turn that one sees that the body has a mass.

But this remains so contaminated by something that is linked to the fact that there is a correlation between mass and weight that in reality one does better not to seek to understand, and simply to stick with the formulas.

It is in this that mathematics truly demonstrates the apogee of the usage of the signifier. Of course, we have not succeeded ... [...] ... that in fact we are already plunged into language.

You see, I do not say: we are speaking beings.

We are in language, and I do not believe myself capable of telling you why we are, nor of telling you how it began.

This is even how one could begin to say some little bit about language, disembarassed of the prejudice that it is essential that it have a meaning: it is not essential that it have a meaning, and this is even what this new practice called linguistics is founded on. What is needed--it is indeed on this that linguistics is centered--is to center oneself on the signifier as such.

There is no need to believe that the signified--which is, of course, produced in the wake of the signifier--is in any way something that is there first; and to say that language is there to allow for a signification is a step of which the least one can say is that it is a bit hasty.

Something more primary than the effects of signification, and it is here that research--insofar as one never searches for something unless one has already found it, eh?--it is here that discovery is susceptible of having an effect.

Finally, you can see, for the signifier, I just arrived there with what I called the skidding, the effect of slippage . . .

Finally, I would be inclined to produce the metaphor that the signifier is like style: they are already alike. It is style that one would already have there.

It is perhaps possible that the human animal fabricated it one day . . . We do not have the least trace of what could be called the invention of language . . . As far into the past as we can see it function, it is it language itself that covers the cobble stones.

Well then, you will say to me, what does this have to do with psychoanalysis?

It has to do with it in the most direct way, because if one does not begin at this level, the level of departure, one can do absolutely nothing more in the psychoanalytic experience . . . one can do no more than good psychotherapy . . .

This is to say, as psychoanalysts also admit . . . they admit all, they unpack all . . .

One day . . . Claudel . . . who imagined that Pontius Pilate's chastisement, finally, must be this: because he asked, very much at the wrong moment: "What is truth?"--every time he spoke before an idol, the idol would open its stomach, and what would come out? A formidable unpacking of the coins of the time, of things that one put in the piggy bank.

Psychoanalysts are like that, they admit all to you . . . they admit all . . . and all they recount proves that obviously they are very good people.

It is crazy that they like the human being, that they wish its good, its normality--it is incredible, finally, isn't it? it is incredible this madness of curing, curing what? It is precisely this that we must never bring into question . . .

In the name of what is one considered sick? How is it that a neurotic is sicker than a normal being, a being said to be normal? If Freud brought out something, it was precisely in demonstrating that neurosis, finally, is strictly inserted somewhere in a flaw that he names, that

he designates perfectly, that he calls sexuality, and he speaks of it in a way that what is clear is precisely . . . this is why man is not at all at ease.

Man, in the larger sense, woman is no more so: finally, there is nothing that goes so badly as the relations of man and woman.

That's it. What is admirable is that there are people who act as if they are hearing this for the first time. This is absolutely sublime, as if you were not born into it . . . That is, for you, fucking a girl never works . . . It's the same for the girl . . . since the world was the world, there has been a whole literature, literature period (*la littérature*), that serves only to say this.

So then, Freud one day speaks of sexuality [*in falsetto*] and it is enough for this sweet word to come out of his mouth for everyone to think that the question is resolved.

This is to say, that from the moment, as I have just said, that one asks a question, one already has the answer, therefore if he asks the question, he has the answer--which is to say that, with this, it should work.

Which would suppose that Freud might have had the idea of the sexual accord.

Now, finally, it is enough to read, to open his work, to see that to the end, he, because he was a man, finally, stayed there.

And he says it, he writes it, he lays it out, finally, in asking himself: a woman, what is it that she could possibly want (*une femme, qu'est-ce que ça peut bien vouloir*)? [*laughter*].

There is no need to allude to Freud's biography for this, because this is always how one shrinks the question, all the more in that he was neurotic like everyone else, and, then, he had a wife who was a pain in the ass (*une emmerdeuse*) . . . Finally, everyone knows . . . Old Mrs. Freud . . .

This is truly to minimize the question.

This is precisely why I would never take it upon myself to psychoanalyze Freud, all the more because he was someone I did not know.

What Freud said is what I am saying. This skidding of the signifier I have just spoken of is what, based on the fact that he portrayed it as "sexuality," makes us suppose that he knew what that means: sexuality.

But precisely what he explains to us is that he does not know.

He does not know. The reason he does not know, precisely, is that this is what made him discover the unconscious.

Which is to say, to grasp that the effects of language are in play at this place where the word "sexuality" might have a meaning.

If sexuality for the speaking being functions otherwise than to entangle itself in these effects of language . . .

I am telling you that language has come there to fill in the hole--I don't know if the hole is primary (*primitif*) or second: that is, if language is what has messed up everything (*a tout détraqué*).

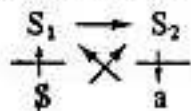
I would be surprised if language were there to mess everything up.

There are fields where this succeeds . . . but where it only ever succeeds in distinguishing what appears to go well for the animals--that is, that they seem to fuck in quite a polite way.

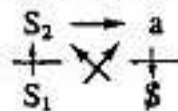
Because it's true, for the animals this seems--this is what strikes us by contrast-- this seems to happen gracefully.

There is the parade. There are all sorts of charming approaches, and then it seems to turn in a circle until the end . . . All said, it happens for them in a civilized fashion [*laughter*]. For animals, neither rapes, nor of all those complications, all the fuss we make over it, ever appear.

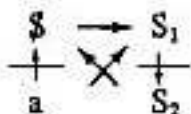
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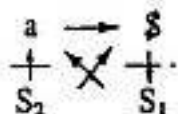
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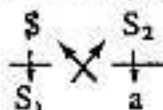
Discours de l'Hystérique



Discours de l'Analyste



Discours du Capitaliste



*That one say as fact remains forgotten behind what is said in what is heard.
This statement which is assertive by its form, belongs to the modal for what it emits of existence.*

For man, it makes for what one calls dramas [. . .]. By which of course all the misunderstanding [. . .]. Were it to please heaven that men made love like the animals, that would be agreeable.

I am letting myself lead a little bit to something . . . finally, so very patent. It is indeed necessary to recall it [. . .] something that is nonetheless in the experience of the psychoanalyst.

If he acts as if he knows nothing about it, it is owed to a necessity of a discourse written there on the board.

I must nonetheless make use of it, since I came fifteen minutes early to write it on the board.

It shows the key character in each discourse of this point I call the *semblant*.

My last seminar--or call it what you like, but it is not the last, since the last is the one I am in the process of finishing--my last seminar, the one before, was called: *Of a Discourse that would not be of the Semblant*.

I spent the year demonstrating that this discourse is altogether excluded.

There is no possible discourse that would not be of the *semblant*.

That (*Ça*) is of the *semblant*, eh?

Well then, it is altogether admissible at a certain level that the psychoanalyst make a *semblant*, as if he were there so that things would work on the level of the sexual. What is annoying is that he ends up believing it, and that screws things up, completely.

This is to say, to call things by their name, he becomes stupid.

I believe that it was necessary at a certain date--to allow him to get a little exercise, so that, in the experience as it is instituted, he might make some additional step--that it was necessary to remind him what he does: despite everything, it is to make someone speak in

explaining to her how she must do so, which is to say, not just any way. To explain to her the rule: to explain to a person how she must speak . . . And that this succeeds in giving something, that it is a question of understanding why something done with this apparatus I call the signifier can have effects.

That there is a necessary disentangling that consists precisely . . . in not understanding too quickly, which is what I try to produce.

At a certain time . . . obviously this time was not very well chosen, but I had no choice . . . I entered into analysis, a little late. In fact, until that moment . . . in neurology one fine day . . . what could have happened to me? . . . I made the mistake of seeing what it might be that one calls a psychotic.

I wrote my thesis on that: *On Paranoid Psychosis--scandalous!--in its Relations with the Personality.*

Personality, you think it wouldn't be me who would ever have a good laugh about it.

But, finally, at that time it represented for me, a cloud, finally, something . . . that was already sufficiently scandalous for that time, I mean that it had a true effect of horror.

Finally, that led me to experience psychoanalysis myself. After that, the war came, during which I pursued this experience. At the end of the war I began to say that I could perhaps say a little about it.

"Above all"--they told me--"no one would understand any of it . . . we know you, we have known what you are about already for some time now (*on vous a repéré déjà depuis un moment*)."

Finally, in brief, for this there had to be a type of crisis, of political crisis, of internal political crisis . . . the squabble between psychoanalysts, for me to find myself extracted.

And since there were some who seemed to want me to do something for them . . .

I would have only begun, as one says, very late: but, me, I have never been annoyed with being late . . . I have never experienced any need, after all, to force people.

So as not to force them I began to recount things at the level where I had seen them.

The return to Freud: naturally one has given me this stamp, which I well deserve, because it is how I first produced it.

I am crazy about you Freud. Simply, this was the process for getting psychoanalysts to grasp that what I was saying to them was already in Freud.

In other words, that it suffices to analyze a dream to see that it only a question of a signifier. And of a signifier in all the ambiguity that I have just called the function of skidding.¹

In other words, there is no signifier of which the signification would be assured. This signification can always be something else, and it even passes its time in slipping as far as one likes in signification.

So easily felt in *The Traumdeutung*, it is no less so in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* . . . it is even more so in *Jokes and the Unconscious (Le mot d'esprit)*.

This appears to me essential. It is essential.

The striking thing is . . .

[*The changing of the tape interrupts the discourse.*]

. . . this priority of the signifier.

Now everyone is on the same page. What you will find in any revue of the avant-garde, or even not of the avant-garde, of no matter what, as for this signifier . . . is that they beat us over

¹ *Déparage* (disfigurement) in the original transcription. As the editors of the transcription suggest, this may have been a *lapsus*. Lacan probably meant to say *dérapiage* (skidding or side-slipping).

the head with it (*on nous en rabat les oreilles*).

When I think that at the moment I began we were under the reign of existentialism, and now . . . I don't know . . . I would not want to seem, finally, to attempt a style, on the level of a writer for whom I have the greatest admiration: it is a question of Sartre.

And even Sartre . . . finally, the signifier has now entered into his vocabulary.

Everyone, finally, knows that the signifier signifies Lacanization.

What does that mean?

Yeah.

From time to time I imagine that I am here for something, and in that case, this indeed has made me . . .

. . . I rediscovered in my notes that I had written something on April 11, 1956, in a seminar published . . . It is true that before this became absolutely . . . finally, my now well-known work, of course, it was an all other . . .

. . . it is no less true that what I am in the process of saying now--which will of course be exploited twenty years from now--what I am in the process of telling you now, when I take recourse to mathematical logic to define what is at issue in what I call psychoanalytic discourse, I can very well grasp that there are some funny things there: you understand, for example, that if I have told you that, of course, you don't have to tire yourself with my *Écrits* . . . but all the same, in the next to last paragraph of my "Intervention on the Transference" is written: "The case of Dora appears privileged for our demonstration in that, when it is a question of an hysteric, the screen of the ego is transparent enough that nowhere, as Freud puts it, is the threshold between the unconscious and the consciousness lower, or to put it better, between analytic discourse and the *word* of the symptom."

Obviously--this was in '51, analytic discourse--I obviously took the time to give it its place. But, finally, I never write words by chance, and analytic discourse is completely the same, is it not, as on the day that I produced it.

Finally, five years later, when I had begun my teaching, structure . . . structure, I wrote then . . . but now I will pay attention, I would not like to ally myself or appear to ally myself with that mish-mash (*salade*) called structuralism.

But finally, structure, I spoke of it then because no one knew the word. Finally, structure is a thing that first presents itself as a group of elements, forming a co-variant set.

I am now going to refer to something called precisely *Set Theory*.

I spoke immediately after that of closed structures and open structures, which is also on the same page as what I now state.

And especially . . . we see there some group relations founded on the notion of the set, I stress: open or closed relations.

At the time . . . I cannot express myself otherwise than to say that to enact (*dégager*) a natural law is to enact a pure signifying formula. The less it signifies something, the more we can put it from a scientific viewpoint . . .

I point out [. . .] that the scientific step consists precisely in this: in cutting things, strictly, at the level of the so-called *signatura rerum* . . . [. . .] of the signifier would be arranged there--arranged, of course, by whom? By God, because the *signatura rerum* is from Jacob Böhme... – to signify something. That's the scientific approach.

It is, of course, to punctuate the world with mathematical signifiers . . . but to stop precisely at this . . . that this is to signify . . . For it was indeed this that had until then entangled all the lands, and that one improperly called finalism.

We also are as finalist as anyone who existed before scientific discourse. It is completely clear that nothing in any law is there for anything but to end at a certain point, of course.

Scientific discourse is finalist, completely, in the sense of the functioning [. . .] we do not account for this finalism, that would be finalism . . . if this is made to teach us something, for example to incite us to virtue, to simply amuse us [. . .] in a world that can be completely structured on final causes . . . it would be easy to demonstrate that modern physics is perfectly finalist.

Even the idea of the conservation of energy is a finalist idea . . . also that of entropy, since precisely what it shows is that this goes toward some braking, and it goes there necessarily. What has changed is that there is no finalism, precisely because of this: this has no meaning whatsoever (*aucune espece de sens*).

[. . .]

[. . .] to disentangle the meaning currently given to the subjective and the objective . . . the subjective is something we encounter in the real.

Not that the subjective is given to the meaning that we habitually attribute to "real," which is to say, that which implies objectivity: there is no end to this confusion in analytic writings.

It appears in the real insofar as the subjective supposes that we have in front of us a subject who is capable of making use of the signifier (*se servir du signifiant*) as such . . . and of making use of the signifier as we make use of it, of making use of the play of the signifier not to signify something, but precisely to deceive us about what there is to signify . . . of making use of the fact that the signifier is something other than signification, to present us with a deceiving signifier.

In brief, as you can see, finally, there is nothing new about this (*c'est pas d'hier*).

I insist on this key approach (*biais-clé*).

It is very curious that the position of the analyst does not allow itself to be sustained indefinitely. This is not only because what we call . . . what we have just called the International . . . for completely contingent reasons, creates an obstacle to it.

And even some men, finally, whom I had once trained, they [. . .].

In sum, what I tried to institute ended in what I have called somewhere, black on white, a failure.

That is not the essential thing, because we know very well from analytic experience what a failure is: it is one of the forms of success.

One cannot say that, in the final analysis, I have not succeeded at something . . . I have succeeded in that some analysts are preoccupied with this approach I have tried to explain to you: which is the split between analytic discourse and the others.

And I would add that everyone has been interested in it for some years now.

Everyone is interested in it on the basis of this: there is something that no longer turns in a circle.

Somewhere, on the side of what I call so gently, so tenderly, youth . . . as if this were a characteristic . . . at the level of youth there is something that no longer works (*ne marche plus*) on the side of a certain discourse . . . university discourse, for example . . . I will probably not have time to comment on university discourse.

That one there is the eternal discourse, the fundamental discourse. Man is nonetheless a funny sort of animal, is he not? Where in the animal kingdom is the discourse of the master? Where in the animal kingdom is there a master? . . .

If it does not immediately leap for you into view, at first glance (*à la première appréhension*), that if there were no language there would be no master, that the master is never given by force or simply because he commands, and that because language exists you obey.

And it even makes you sick, if it doesn't continue like that.

All that happens at the level of what one calls youth is easily felt, because I think that if analytic discourse had taken body . . . it would know better what would have to be done to make a revolution.

Naturally, we must not deceive ourselves, eh? Making a revolution, I nonetheless think, that, finally, you others, you who are there and whom I address the most . . . you nonetheless must understand what this signifies . . . that this signifies . . . returning to the point of departure.

This is even because you grasp that it is demonstrated historically: that there is no nastier master discourse than at the place where one makes a revolution . . .

You would like for it to go differently. Obviously it could go better. What would be needed, would be for the master discourse to be a little less primary, and, to say it all, not so fucking stupid (*con*).

. . . [*laughter in the audience*] . . .

. . . so you do know French, eh? . . . That's marvelous.

And in fact, if you look at my little turning formulas, you must see how I structure this analytic discourse . . . it is the exact opposite of the master discourse . . . that is, at the level of the master discourse, what I have just called the master-signifier, it is this, this I am occupied with at the moment: *there is something of the One (il y a de l'Un)*.

The signifier is what introduced the One into the world, and it suffices that there be something of the One for that to . . . that begins, that . . . [*indicates the formula on the board*] . . . that commands the S_2 .

. . . which is to say, the signifier . . . after the One functions: it obeys.

What is marvelous, is that to obey it must know something.

The property of the slave, as Hegel puts it, is to know something.

If he knew nothing, one wouldn't even take the trouble of commanding him, to do anything at all. But by this privilege alone, this inaugural existence alone that constitutes the signifier . . . because there is language, the master discourse, this works (*ça marche*).² Besides, all that the master needs is for this to work.

Well then, to know a little more about the effects of language, to know how it determines what I have called by a name that is not completely its accepted usage: the subject . . . if there has been a certain labor, a certain labor performed at times in the line of Freud, it would have perhaps involved . . . in this place . . . in this place it designates, in this fundamental support sustained by these terms: the *semblant*, truth, *jouissance*, *plus-de-jouir* . . . it would have perhaps involved. . . at the level of production--for the *plus-de-jouir* is what this effect of language produces . . . it would have perhaps involved what is implied by analytic discourse, that is, a little better usage of the signifier as One.

It would have perhaps involved . . . but besides, it will not involve it . . . because it is now too late . . .

. . . the crisis, not of the master discourse, but of capitalist discourse, which is its substitute, is overt (*ouverte*).

I am not at all saying to you that capitalist discourse is rotten, on the contrary, it is

² *Marcher* can be translated as "to work"--in the sense of "to function"--or as "to walk." The dominant metaphor here seems to be that of making persons walk in a circle, like prisoners in a nineteenth-century prison yard.

something wildly clever, eh?

Wildly clever, but headed for a blowout.

After all, it is the cleverest discourse that we have made. It is no less headed for a blowout. This is because it is untenable. It is untenable . . . in a thing that I could explain to you . . . because capitalist discourse is here, you see . . . [*indicates the formula on the board*] . . . a little inversion simply between the S_1 and the $\$$. . . which is the subject . . . it suffices so that that goes on casters (*ça marche comme sur des roulettes*), indeed that cannot go better, but that goes too fast, that consumes itself, that consumes itself so that is consumed (*ça se consomme, ça se consomme si bien que ça se consume*).

Now you have embarked . . . you have embarked, . . . but there are few chances that anything serious will happen in the thread of analytic discourse, except by chance. In truth I believe one will not speak of the psychoanalyst in the lineage, if I can say this, of my discourse . . . my analytic discourse. Something else will appear, which, of course, must maintain the position of the semblant, but nonetheless that will be . . . but that will be perhaps be called the PS discourse. A PS and then a T, which, besides, will be in complete conformity with how one said that Freud saw the importing of psychoanalytic discourse into America . . . that will be the PST discourse. Add an E, and that gives us PESTE [PLAGUE].

A discourse that would finally be truly pestilent, wholly devoted, finally, to the service of capitalist discourse.

This perhaps will one day be able to serve for something, if, of course, the whole business doesn't fall apart totally, before then.

In brief, it is a quarter to eight and that means I have been speaking for an hour and a half. I have, of course, only said a quarter of what I had to say to you this evening. But it is perhaps not unthinkable that beginning with what I have indicated to you, about the structure of capitalist discourse and psychoanalytic discourse, that someone might ask me some questions.

[. . .]

Some very brave people, but completely unconscious of what Marx said himself . . . have a good laugh over it, without Marx.

And Marx teaches them there that what is at issue is solely surplus value.

Surplus value (*Plus-value*), that's it . . . it's the *plus-de-jour* [surplus enjoyment] . . . eh? [*murmuring in the room*]

But what is it these people have understood? It's marvelous . . . They tell themselves "Well, there it is, it's true!"

Only that makes the system function. It is the surplus value. Capitalism has received from it this boost . . . this wind under its wings which makes it so that currently [. . .].

This is something of an analogy, but not the kind they could have made, if these people truly worked a little, if they truly interrogated the signifier, the functioning of language. If they interrogated it in the same way as what I call an analysand interrogates it-- not someone who is analysed, since it is he who does the work: the guy (*type*) who is in analysis.

. . . if he interrogated it in the same fashion . . . perhaps he would make something come of it (*peut être qu'il en sortirait quelque chose*).

That's the analytic rule. This never happened if one [. . .] not simply the guy with a vague urge (*velléité*). One forces him to say something, and it is there that one captures him, because even when analytic interpretation is done by an idiot, it nonetheless brings something into play, at the level of interpretation. One shows him some logical effects of what he says, which at times contradicts itself. Not everyone contradicts himself.

But one cannot contradict oneself in just any fashion. There are contradictions on which one can construct something, and then there are others on which one can construct nothing at all.

Such is analytic discourse. One says this something, very precisely at the level where the signifier is One, the root itself of the signifier. Which makes it so the signifier, that functions (*ça fonctionne*), because it is there that one captures the One, it is there that *there is something of the One*.

[*The transcript, due to defects in the recording, is at times fragmentary. Lost passages will be indicated by [. . .]*]

Besides, we have all the same arrived at some little cogitations which do not appear to us completely superfluous on the side of the interrogation of whole numbers--because set theory, nonetheless, Cantor and all the rest, consists in asking oneself why there is something of the One. It is nothing else.

And perhaps, with a little effort, we will succeed in grasping that the whole numbers, called natural, are not as natural as all that . . . like the rest of the numbers.

In brief, there is something that would have to arise (*survenir*) at a certain level, which is that of structure. The three-quarters of a century that have passed since Freud brought out this fabulous subversion of all that there is of it . . . there is something else that has rushed in, and rudely well, which is called nothing less than scientific discourse, which for the moment leads the game . . . leads the game even to extent that one sees its limit: and there is something correlative to what is issued by scientific discourse, something of which there was no chance that it would have appeared before the triumph of scientific discourse: it is analytic discourse.

Freud is absolutely unthinkable before the emergence, not only of scientific discourse, but also of its effects, of its effects, which are, of course, always more obvious, always more patent, always more critical, and of which after all one can consider [. . .] one hasn't done it yet, perhaps one day there will be a discourse called: "the sickness of youth" (*le mal de la jeunesse*).

But there is something that cries out . . . and a new function that will not fail to arise, perhaps to begin, barring an accident, a re-departure in the installation of what . . . of what I call discourse.

I have hardly said what a discourse is.

What is a discourse? It is what, in the order . . . in the ordering of what can be produced by the existence of language, makes some social link function. There is perhaps a social bath, a natural one--sociologists partake of it eternally . . . but personally, I don't believe in it at all.

There are not thirty-six possible discourses; there are even only four . . .

There must be at least two signifiers.

This means, the signifier insofar as it functions as an element, what is called an element precisely in set theory: the signifier insofar as it is the mode by which the world is structured, the world of the speaking being, which is to say, all knowledge.

Thus there is S_1 and S_2 --which is where we must start for the definition [. . .] the signifier is what represents a subject for another signifier.

This subject is not what we think, it is not the dream, the illusion [. . .] it is all there is of what is determined by the signifier. And it goes a lot farther than what anyone is conscious of . . . complicit with (*connivent*), that is.

That's Freud's discovery: it is that there is a whole part of the effects of the signifier that totally escapes what we currently call the subject. Mark it well, the subject determined even in all its details by the effects of the signifier [. . .]. We know what language produces: it produces what? What I have called the *plus-de-jouir*, because it is the term applied at that level, which we

know well, which is called desire. More exactly, it produces the cause of desire. And this is what is called the object *petit a*.

The object *petit a* is the true support of what we have seen function in a more and more pure fashion to specify each in his desire.

What analytic experience catalogues by the term drive [. . .] the drive called oral [. . .] a very beautiful object, an object linked to this [. . .] as soon as he has got in the habit of sucking [. . .]. There are some who suck all their lives.

But why would they suck all their lives if this were not in the interstice, in the interval of the effects of language. The effect of language inasmuch as it is learned at the same time, except for he who remains a complete idiot? . . .

This is what gives us its essence . . . an essence so essential that this is what personality is: it is the fashion in which someone subsists faced with this object *petit a* . . . there are others and I have tried to say which.

But concerning this, psychoanalysis, as much as Freud, never more than Freud, never more nor better than Freud . . . One has, of course, added some details, a structure, a status, to this function of the object *petit a*. Melanie Klein has made a large contribution, and some others also, Winnicott . . . the transitional object . . .

That's the true soul . . . the new subjectivity, in the old sense . . .

That's what the psychoanalytic experience teaches us.

Thus it is there that a lot of psychoanalysts . . . That is the role they play at the level of the *semblant*.

That is what overwhelms them. It is the cause of desire, in that to which they open the career of the analysand.

It is from there that something else could arise . . . something that would have to make a step toward another construction . . .

What it is a question of after all, in the final analysis, is that the experience turn as short as possible--which is to say that the subject consider himself finished after some interpretations and find a form of misunderstanding in which he can subsist.

Who is the other person who asked me another question?

X – What is the difference between the master discourse and the capitalist discourse?

L – I have just indicated it--I have spoken Latin, the same song as always-- between the subject and the S_1 . If you like, we will talk about until the end, in a smaller group, but I have already indicated it.

Y – What is the role of the algorithmic apparatus in--pardon the word--the system. If we are in language, what metalanguage could the signifying chain speak? . . . and your style itself is the proof that no metalanguage is possible . . .

L – One must say to people who speak of the metalanguage: then, where is the language?

Y – O.K, on that you are very easy . . . but what is the algorithmic apparatus to the extent that it escapes natural language, which does not have a metalanguage, which is not submitted to the metalanguage? From the moment you employ an algorithmic apparatus, are you not trying to block this flight, this continual skidding of the signifying chain into something that defines it from without? Unless the signifying chain is not natural language but a logical apparatus, algorithmic above all. If you employ the algorithmic apparatus to define it and block it, isn't the algorithmic apparatus the final fulfillment of your one desire?

L – That is quite pertinent, except that what is at issue in what you quite rightly call an algorithm . . . this algorithm does not arise from analytic experience itself.

What takes on a meaning, as I have always directly articulated it, what takes on a meaning valuably is always linked to what I will call, if you like, the point of contact. And it is often an ideal point of contact, as mathematical theory [. . .]

It is inasmuch as this S_1 , this One of the signifier, functions at some points, at different places, in this attempt at a radical reduction, that it can take on a meaning from being, if I can say this, translated [. . .] that it can be translated from one of these discourses into the other.

It is inasmuch as, in these four discourses, the terms are never [. . .] are never functional at the same place, that after all . . .--for what concerns us, for what is the actual incidence of subjectifying effects, in what concerns us that can for the moment . . . , I am not saying that this is the only form possible, but it can for the moment be articulated in this fashion to the algorithm . . . that there is a convergence between the limit where mathematical logic is held for the moment and the problems of us analysts who try a very little bit to master what we do.

That there is a convergence . . . that it has there the same algorithmic limit [. . .] the function of the limit . . .

We cannot say just anything.

Even the most traditional of analysts do not allow themselves to say just anything.

This is what I have written there: "That one say"--I don't even know when I had written that--"That one say as fact remains forgotten"--I say habitually--"behind what is said in what is heard": to what does this refer? It is perfectly ambiguous. It can refer to "remains forgotten"--it is the "that one say" that might remain forgotten in what is heard,--or is it "what is said in what is heard"?

This is a perfectly exemplary usage of ambiguity at the level of general structure--transformational, eh?

It's fucking stupid (*con*), everyone does it, except one does not grasp it.

What, then, is below it?

"This statement which is assertive by its form," which I have qualified as a universal, "belongs to the modal for what it emits of existence."

I have hardly had the time today to bear witness to what there is of existence: I began clearly enough and then, finally, as usual, I have myself become more or less bowed under my burden.

But finally, what is quite clear is that we are at this: to interrogate the "it exists" at the level of the *matheme*, at the level of the algorithm.

It is only at the level of the algorithm that existence is receivable as such. Beginning from the moment when scientific discourse is installed, which means all knowledge, it is only inscribed in the *matheme*. All knowledge is a teachable knowledge . . . we are here to pose existence as being what is linked to the structure-algorithm.

We are here to interrogate an effect of history, not on our being, but on our existence: that I think "therefore I am"--between quotation marks: "therefore I am." It is beginning with this that existence is born; that is where we are. It is the fact of the "that one say"--it is the saying (*dire*) that is behind all that is said (*dit*)--which is something that arises in historical actuality.

And we cannot at all say there that it is a fact of a theoretical desire, on my part for example.

This is how things are situated, emerge . . . the emergence as such of the ordering of discourse: it is beginning with this that there is an emission of existence, of existence as of

something that is also at the level of this *petit a* from which the subject is divided.

This is a question that appears to me, finally, because I am answering you, finally got to (*atteinte*) . . .