

Remarks on Hysteria

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" ... a knowledge content with always beginning arrives at nothing. This is why I went to Brussels; I did not speak of psychoanalysis in the best of terms.

To begin knowing not to arrive goes, all told, quite well with my lack of hope. But it also implies a term that it remains for me to let you guess. The Belgian persons who heard me say it, and whom I recognize here, are free to share it with you or not¹.

What does it mean to understand, above all when one does a job that on one occasion, at the home of someone who is there, named Thibault, I qualified as a swindle [escroquerie]²."

*Jacques Lacan is speaking in Brussels, in February 1977.*³

⁽⁵⁾ ... Where have they gone, the hysterics of yesteryear, those marvelous women, the Anna O.'s, the Emmy von N's . . . ? Not only did they play a certain social role, but when Freud took to listening to them, it was they who permitted the birth of psychoanalysis. It was from listening to them that Freud inaugurated an entirely new mode of human relation. What replaces those hysteric symptoms of old? Is not hysteria displaced in the social field? Would not the psychoanalytic craziness have replaced it?

That Freud was affected by what hysterics told him, this now appears to us certain. The unconscious originates from the fact that the hysteric does not know what she is saying, when she is well and good saying something by words that fail her [*qui lui manque*]. The unconscious is a sediment of language.

The real is in extreme opposition to our practice. It is an idea, a limit idea of what has no sense. Sense is what we operate with in our practice: interpretation. The real is this vanishing point like the object of science (and not of *connaissance* which is more than criticizable), the real is the object of science.

Our practice is a swindle, at least considered beginning from the moment we start from this vanishing point. Our practice is a swindle: bluffing to make people blink, dazzling them with words that are a put-on [*du chiqué*], this is all the same what is usually called a put-on – what Joyce designated by those more or less swollen words – from which all our pain comes.⁴ All the same, what I say there is at the heart of what we bring (I speak in the social fabric). It was for this that just now, I all the same

¹. J. Lacan, seminar of March 8, 1977, transcription in *Ornicar ?*, 16, p. 13.

². J. Lacan, conclusion of the *journées de Lille*, transcription in *Lettres de l'EFPP*, 22, p. 499.

³. The unpublished text of this conference was transcribed by J. Cornet at the beginning of his own and more faithful manuscript notes like those of I. Gilson.

⁴. Lacan is probably alluding here to the passage in the "Proteus" chapter of *Ulysses* where Stephen Dedalus responds to Mr. Deasey's statement "We are a generous people but we must also be just" by saying "I fear those big words . . . which make us so unhappy" (Gabler edition, 26:262-264).

suggested that there was some-⁽⁶⁾thing that replaced this *soufflure*⁵ that is the hysteric symptom. It is a curious thing, a hysteric symptom: it withdraws from the business beginning from the moment the person, who truly does not know what she is saying, begins to blablabla (and the male hysteric? one doesn't find one who is not a female).

This unconscious of which Freud did not strictly understand anything, these are unconscious representations. What indeed can that be, unconscious representations? There is a contradiction of terms there: *unbewusste Vorstellungen*. I have tried to explain that, foment it to institute it at the level of the symbolic. It has nothing to do with representations, this symbolic; these are words and, at the limit, one can conceive that some words are unconscious. One even tells us nothing but that, in spades: as a whole, they speak without absolutely knowing what they say. This is indeed in what the unconscious has no body but from words.

I am embarrassed to give myself a role on this occasion, but if I dare say it, I have put a cobble in Freud's field, I have nothing else to be proud of; I would say even more, I am not proud of having been sucked [*aspiré*] into this practice that I have continued, that I have pursued like that, as I could, of which after all it is not sure that I can sustain it until death [*jusqu'à crevaison*]. But it is clear that I am the only one to have given its weight to what Freud was sucked toward by this notion of the unconscious. All this brings with it certain consequences. That psychoanalysis is not a science, this goes without saying; it is even exactly the contrary. This goes without saying if we think a science is only developed with little mechanisms that are the real mechanisms, and that one must nonetheless know how to construct them. It is in this that science has a whole artistic side; it is the fruit of human industry, one must know-how-to-do-there [*savoir-y-faire*]. But this knowing how-to-do-there debouches on the plane of the put-on. The put-on is what one usually calls the Beautiful.

Q. – The put-on, isn't that artifice? Artifice aims for the beautiful, but what is beautiful is the demonstration; let us us take the number 4 in non-demonstrable propositions, one says of it: Elegant! Beautiful demonstration!

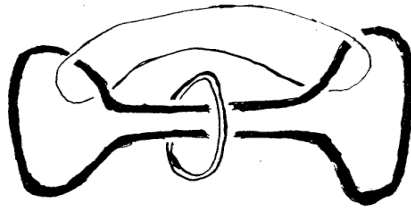
In this geometry I elucubrate and call a geometry of sacs and of cords, a geometry of weaving (which has nothing to do with Greek geometry, which is made of nothing but abstractions), what I try to articulate is a geometry that resists, a geometry that is in reach of what I could call all women if women were not characterized precisely as not being all: this is why women have not succeeded at doing this geometry I am caught up in; it is however they who had the material for it, the threads. Perhaps science would take another turn if one made of it a weave, which is to say something resolved with threads.

Finally one does not know if all this will have the least fecundity because, if it is certain a demonstration might be called beautiful, one completely loses the pedals at the moment when it is not a question of a demonstration but of this something that is very, very paradoxical, which I try to call as I can: monstration. It is curious to grasp that in the intertwining of threads there is something that is imposed as being real, as another kernel of real, and which makes is so that, when one thinks of it . . . ⁽⁷⁾ I have indeed experienced this . . . because one cannot imagine to what point I am worried by these histories I have called from time to time "rounds of thread" . . . it is not nothing to call them rounds of thread . . . these histories of rounds of thread give me a lot of worry

⁵ A term from metalurgy: a *soufflure* is a bubble, cavity, or pocket produced in something solid, like metal or glass, by gasses released during smelting or blowing [*Le Littré*]. It can also mean "blowhole" or "mouthpiece."

when I am all alone – I pray you try it, you will see how it is unrepresentable; one loses the pedals right away.

The Borromean knot, one still succeeds in representing it to oneself, but it takes practice. One can also very well give representations of it black on white, flattened-out representations where one can find oneself again: one does not recognize it. This is a Borromean knot because if one breaks one of these threads, the other two are set free.



It is not by chance if I have come to smother myself with these nodal representations – it is truly these that worry me.

If I have continued the practice, if, conducted, guided as if by a ramp, I have continued this blabla that is psychoanalysis, it is nonetheless striking that, in relation to Freud, it has led me there (because there is no trace in Freud of the Borromean knot). And I consider however that, in an altogether precise fashion, I was guided by hysterics, that I held no less to the hysteric, to what one still had of the hysteric within hand's reach (I am annoyed at employing the "I" because saying "the *moi*," confusing consciousness with the *moi*, is not responsible [*sérieux*] and it is easy however to slip from the one to the other). (...)

It is nonetheless astounding to think that we employ the word character also at random. What is a character and what also an analysis of character, as Reich expresses himself? It is all the same bizarre that we slip up like that so easily. We only interest ourselves easily in some symptoms, and what interests us is knowing how with the blabla, with our own blabla, which is to say the usage of certain words, we succeed

...

This is what is striking in the *Studien über Hysterie*: it is that Freud almost succeeds, and even completely, in (puking up) that it is with words that this is resolved and that it is with the words of the patient herself that the affect is evaporated.

There is a guy who spent his existence reminding us of the existence of the affect. The question is of knowing if, yes or no, the affect is ventilated with words; something blows with these words, which renders the affect inoffensive: which is to say, not engendering some symptom. The affect no longer engenders a symptom when the hysteric has begun telling of this thing concerning which she is frightened [*elle s'est effrayée*]. The fact of saying: "*elle s'est effrayée*" has all its weight. If there must be a reflexive term to say it, it is because one has scared oneself [*c'est qu'on se fait peur à soi-même*]. We are in the circuit of what is deliberate, of what is conscious.

The teaching? One tries to provoke in others the knowing-how-to-do-there, and that is to say to get by in this world that is not ⁽⁸⁾ at all a world of representations but a world of the swindle.

Q.– Lacan is a Freudian but Freud is not a Lacanian?

Quite true. Freud hadn't the least idea of what Lacan finds himself chattering about concerning this thing of which we have the idea . . . I can speak of myself in the third person. The idea of unconscious representation is a totally empty idea. Freud knocked [*tapait*] altogether to the side of the unconscious. To begin with, it is an

abstraction. One can only suggest the idea of representation in withdrawing from the real all of its concrete weight. The idea of unconscious representation is a mad thing; now, that is how Freud approaches it. There are traces of this very late in his writings.

The unconscious? I propose giving it another body because it is thinkable that one think things without weighing them [*qu'on pense les choses sans les peser*], words suffice there; the words constitute a body, which does not at all mean that one understands what this might be. That's what the unconscious is: one is guided by words of which one understands nothing. One nonetheless gets a hint of this when people speak at random; it is altogether clear that they do not give the words their weight of sense. Between the usage of the signifier and the weight of signification, the fashion in which a signifier operates, there is a world. That is where our practice is: it is approaching how words operate. What is essential in what Freud said is that there is the greatest relationship between this usage of words in a species that has words at its disposal and the sexuality that reigns in this species. Sexuality is entirely taken in these words; this is the essential step he made. This is much more important than knowing what the unconscious means or does not mean. Freud put the accent on this fact. All this is hysteria itself. It is not a bad usage to employ hysteria for a metaphysical purpose [*emploi*]; metaphysics is hysteria.

Q. – Swindle and *prôton pseudos*.⁶

Swindle and *prôton pseudos* are the same thing. Freud says the same thing as what I give a French name to; he could not however say he educated a certain number of swindlers. From an ethical point of view, our profession is untenable, this is moreover why I am sick from it, because I have a superego, like everyone else.

We do not know how the other animals enjoy, but we know that for us *jouissance* is castration [*la castration*]. Everyone knows it, because it is quite obvious: after what we call without considering it the sexual act (as if there were an act there!), after the sexual act, one loses one's hard-on [*on ne rebande plus*]. The question is of knowing: I have employed the word "the" [*la*] castration, as if this were univocal, but there are incontestably several types of castration; not all castrations are automorphic. Automorphism, contrary to what one thinks – *morphè-forma* – is not at all a question of form, as I have already pointed out in my seminarist chatterings. Form and structure are not the same thing. I have tried to give some sensible representations of it; these were not representations but monstrations. When one turns a torus inside-out it gives us something completely different from the point of view of form. One must maintain the difference between form and structure.

⁹Q. – How would the swindle keep house with form? With structure?

I only pursue this notion of structure in the hope of escaping the swindle. I spin out this notion of structure, which nonetheless has the most obvious body in mathematics, in the hope of attaining to the real. One puts structure on the side of the *Gestalt* and of psychology, it is certain. If one says there is an unconscious, it is there that psychology is a futility and the *Gestalt* is this something of which we have the model. The *Gestalt* is obviously the bubble [*bulle*], and the property of the bubble is to vanish. It is because each of us is made [*foutu*] like a bubble that we cannot have the suspicion that there is something other than the bubble.

⁶ *Prôton pseudos* "refers to false premises, the original error," cf. *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* at <http://www.enotes.com/psychoanalysis-encyclopedia/proton-pseudos>.

It is a question of knowing if, yes or no, Freud is a historical event. Freud is not a historical event. I believe he made a mess of things, just like me; in a very short time, no one will give a damn about psychoanalysis. Something is demonstrated there: it is clear that man spends his time dreaming, that he never wakes up. We know this nonetheless, us other psychoanalysts, in seeing what our patients furnish us (we are as much patients as they on this occasion): they only furnish us with their dreams.

Q. – on the difficulty of getting across the category of the real.

It is quite true that this is not easy to talk about. That's where my discourse began. It is a very common notion, which implies the complete evacuation of sense, and therefore of us as interpreting.



Q. – on castration [*sur la castration*].

Castration is not singular; the usage of the definite article is not healthy, or rather one must always use the plural: there are always *some* castrations. For the definite article to be applied, it would have to be a question not of an automorphic function but of an autostructured one, I mean one that would have the same structure. "Auto" meaning nothing other than structured like itself, thrown together [*foutu*] in the same manner, knotted in the same manner (there are examples of this in spades in topology). The use of "*le, la, les*" is always suspect because there are things that have a completely different structure and that one cannot designate by the definite article, because one hasn't seen how this is thrown together.

That is why I have elucubrated the notion of the object **a**. The object **a** is not automorphic: the subject does not itself always let itself be penetrated by the same object; it happens from time to time that it is mistaken. That is what the notion of the object **a** means: it means that one is mistaken in the object **a**. One is mistaken always at a cost. What would it serve to be mistaken if this was not distressful? This is why one has constructed the notion of the phallus. The phallus means nothing other than that, a privileged object about which one is not mistaken.

One can only say "the castration" when there is an identity of structure, while there are 36 different, non-automorphic structures.⁽¹⁰⁾ Is that what one calls the *jouissance* of the Other, an encounter of identity of structure? What I mean is that the *jouissance* of the Other does not exist, because one cannot designate it by "the." The *jouissance* of the Other is diverse, it is not automorphic.

Q. – On the why of knots.

My knots serve me as what I have found closest to the category of structure. I have taken a little trouble to target what could approach the real. Anatomy for the animal or the plant (it amounts to the same thing) is of triple points, is of things that are divided, is the *y* that is an *upsilon*; this has always served to support forms, that is,

something that has some direction [*du sens*⁷]. There is something one starts with and which is divided, the good to the right, the evil to the left. What was there before the good-evil distinction, before the division between the true and the swindle? There was already something there before Hercules wavered at the crossroads between good and evil; he already followed a path. What happens when one changes direction [*de sens*], when one orients the thing otherwise? One has, beginning with the good, a bifurcation between the evil and the neutral. A triple point is real even if it is abstract. What is the neutrality of the analyst if not precisely that, this subversion of *sens*, that is, this species of aspiration not toward the real but by the real.

Q. – on psychosis, which would escape the swindle.

Psychosis, it's a shame . . . a shame for the psychotic, for finally this is not what one might wish for of the most normal. And, however, one knows the efforts of psychoanalysts to resemble it. Freud already spoke of a successful paranoia.

... *More geometrico*... owing to form, the individual is presented as he is thrown together, as a body. A body is reproduced by a form. The speaking body can only succeed in reproducing itself by a failure, which is to say thanks to a misunderstanding of its *jouissance*.

... What our practice reveals, reveals to us, is that knowledge [*le savoir*], unconscious knowledge, has a relationship with love.

... Structure... when one follows structure, one is persuaded of the effect of language. Affect is made from the effect of structure, from what is said somewhere.

⁷ In this paragraph, Lacan seems to be playing on the double-meaning of the word *sens*, which can denote either direction or meaning [tr.].