

THE LANGUAGE OF THE SELF

THE FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE IN  
PSYCHOANALYSIS

JACQUES LACAN

*Translated with notes and commentary*

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## *Translator's Introduction*

Although the *Discours de Rome* is primarily addressed to psychoanalysts, Lacan's work has found readers in many different fields of *les sciences de l'homme*, many of whom have only a peripheral interest in psychoanalysis as such. This is often the case when a specialist employs and correlates material from different domains, as Lacan has done, especially when these correlations are daring and dramatic. Certainly in 1953, when the *Discours* was first delivered, most of the later developments of Lacan's interrogation of the Freudian texts, as well as the epistemological, linguistic, and other considerations upon which it was founded, were no more than hinted at. This, coupled with the wide range of Lacan's own interests, makes the writing of an Introduction somewhat difficult, since the writer is not at all sure to whom he is writing. The reader will find this difficulty reflected in the explanatory and amplificatory notes added to the translation, many of which will probably seem simplistic to the specialist and, in some cases, perhaps overly technical to the more general reader.

Lacan's dense and allusive style compounds the problem, for although reading Lacan is by no means as difficult as it may seem at first, the translator is continually faced with the question of knowing whether he is spelling out the obvious or contributing to the ambiguity of the ambiguous. Certainly after the struggle to put this peculiar French into less than peculiar English, the translator may still fear that his unwitting errors will lay him more than usually open to the common charge of being a traitor to his text. If the English should be difficult, awkward, or inaccurate, I can only refer the reader to the original French, recently made widely available by the publication of Lacan's *Écrits* (Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1966).

I can think of no better way to introduce this translation than to borrow what Juliette Boutonier said of Lacan in reviewing the republication in 1950 of Lacan's "Propos sur la causalité psychique" (1947),<sup>1</sup> one of his less difficult texts. She said:

To attempt to sum up his thought seems as impertinent an undertaking as to try to translate certain poems. Moreover, to deprive Lacan's thought of the style with which it is born is to be completely false to it and tends to deceive the reader into thinking that he knows something about it, whereas in fact an essential aspect of the work has escaped him. Lacan's own theory justifies this importance of the *verbe*: "The use of the Word requires vastly more vigilance in the science of man than it does anywhere else, for it engages in it the very being of its object."

This caveat, which is certainly typical of any first approach to Lacan, needs only slight modification to apply to the translation offered here. Lacan obviously makes few concessions to the uninitiated, and, in 1953 at least, he displayed much of the characteristic French carelessness over references, usually relying on his audience to recognize the echoes from his own and other works. This is perhaps understandable, however, in the context of a report written in great haste within six weeks and addressed to professionals and students more or less familiar with the theses developed in his seminar since its inception in 1951. But it does not simplify matters for the reader widely separated in space and time from the climate in which Lacan addressed his audience, especially when that climate assumes a familiarity with a different intellectual tradition. For, if the full comprehension of Lacan's text depends upon a more than usual intimacy with the texts of Freud, it is further dependent upon an acquaintance with Hegel and his French commentators, upon a familiarity with the early Heidegger and the early Sartre, and upon a knowledge of the concepts of modern structural linguistics (Saussure, Jakobson) and structural anthropology (Mauss, Lévi-Strauss).

But this is not all, unfortunately. Lacan's constitutional predisposition to ambiguity, sometimes even on insignificant points, makes him difficult enough in French, where a tradition of *préciosité* gives him far greater latitude than is the case for the writer in English. And over the years since 1953, he seems progressively to have become a prisoner of his own

<sup>1</sup> For bibliographical information on Lacan's writings mentioned here and in the translator's notes by short title and date, or by another obvious reference, as well as other articles or books repeatedly referred to, see the bibliography.

style. Nevertheless, a number of brilliant and provoking intuitions, couched in aphoristic form, emerge through the difficulties of the text to bring together once disparate and seemingly unconnected ideas. These intuitions have such a striking relevance to contemporary thought that they provide a fertile ground for those occupied with the discourse of our own and other epochs.

I am thinking especially of literary criticism. It is only fair to say at once that this translation has been undertaken with general readers rather than with analysts in mind. Nevertheless, the unexpected revolution in the intellectual acceptance of Freud in France, the new "return to Freud" in French psychoanalysis, and the increasing realization of the subtlety of Freud's own thought, along with the new atmosphere of sophistication within the French analytical movement, would seem to indicate that the central theses of Lacan's work may well become part of the American psychoanalytical corpus.

But the reader of this text does not face an easy task, especially if its technical and philosophical vocabulary is alien to him. To a certain extent, therefore, I have tried to indicate in my notes where the English-speaking reader can find the sort of elucidation one might expect him to need, assuming that he is not necessarily familiar with many of the more recent developments in European thought, to say nothing of the minor texts of Freud. At the same time I have tried to employ Lacan to interpret himself. Thus the bulk of my notes are translations of relevant sections from his other works. These selections are confined as far as possible to the period 1949-57 (the *Discours* was first published in 1956). I have also briefly indicated definitions of certain technical terms from Freud, anthropology, and linguistics, as well as referring to the appropriate German word where it is essential to understanding the possibilities of interpretation of the German text revealed by Lacan. The word "interpretation" is especially important here, since Lacan's own "return to Freud" is manifestly an attempt to return to the spirit of the text in a modern sense, rather than an exegesis in a historical sense.

However, it is almost impossible to write any sort of substantial introduction to Lacan unless the reader has first been introduced to him. I have finally decided to relegate my own theoretical remarks to a separate study referring back to the text and notes rather than forward to them, as an extensive introduction would do. Having read the text and notes, the reader will be saved from some unnecessary repetitions, and, I hope,

he will better be able to understand my preoccupation with certain aspects of the text rather than with others. A number of concepts—for example, the notion of sign, signifier, and signified—which are too complicated to be encompassed in a note are dealt with in this essay. I shall therefore confine myself here to a few generalities, which are amplified later on.

Lacan gained his Doctorat d'Etat in psychiatry in 1932 with a thesis on paranoia and its relation to the personality, which consists of a critical survey of the then-extant theories of psychosis followed by the detailed study of a female psychotic given to literary endeavor. Its concern with language—some of her work was appreciated as literature—meant an especial welcome from the surrealists. Although it is not a psychoanalysis, the thesis bears the mark of Lacan's early acquaintance with Freud, at a time when Freud was not well known in France. Lacan joined the Société psychanalytique de Paris in 1934. He became a full member just before World War II, at about the same time as his later colleague Daniel Lagache, and soon established the beginnings of his special reputation, the central concept of the *stade du miroir* having been introduced in 1936. In 1952 he and Lagache led the break with the Paris society to form the Société française de psychanalyse.

The influence of Heidegger and of the phenomenological movement of the thirties is particularly evident in his prewar writings. His acquaintance with the modern Hegel of the *Phenomenology* dates from the lectures given by Alexandre Kojève at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes between 1933 and 1939. He published nothing during the war, and it is not until 1947 that the influence of Kojève's Hegel became fully manifest in his published work, notably in the "Propos sur la causalité psychique" (1947). This was the beginning of Lacan's interpretation of the dialectic of desire and its application to Freud, especially to the concept of wish fulfillment in the dream.

Ten years before, in 1936, in his "Au-delà du 'Principe de Réalité,'" Lacan had given what he called a "phenomenological description of the psychoanalytical experience." The phenomenon to be investigated, he said, is the language relationship between the analyst and patient, with the analyst seen as the *interlocutor* (a term which appears again in the *Discours*): "But the analyst, because he cannot detach the experience of Language from the situation which it implies (the situation of the interlocutor), touches on the simple fact that Language, before signifying *something*,

signifies for *someone*" (pp. 76-77). By the very fact of listening without replying, said Lacan, the analyst imposes a meaning on the discourse of the subject. Even if what the subject says is "meaningless," what the subject says *to the analyst* cannot be without meaning, since it conceals what the subject *wants* to say (what he means) and the relationship he wishes to establish. The subject thus seeks to turn his auditor into an interlocutor, through the transference, and in fact imposes this role upon the silence of the analyst, revealing as he does so the *image* which he unconsciously substitutes for the person of the analyst. Lacan then goes on to develop a view of interhuman relations and interaction (dependent upon the subject's denials, the mechanism of the *Verneinung*) in opposition to the "orthodox" theory of instinctual conflict.

But in spite of the reference to the linguistic relationship—the expression of an intentionality of signification, where a word is not only a signifier *of* but also *for*—and the reference to interhuman relations, the transference is not explicitly represented as a dialectical relationship in the article of 1936. The relationship is not viewed as intersubjective, but only as a "constant interaction between the observer and the object."

In 1951, however, at the Congrès des psychanalystes de langue romane, reacting against an attempt by a colleague to view the transference in terms of Gestalt psychology, Lacan intervened in order to insist upon a dialectical view of the relationship of the analyst and patient. The psychoanalytical experience, he said, "runs its course entirely in a relationship of subject to subject, signifying in effect that it retains a dimension which is irreducible to any psychology considered as an objectification of certain properties of the individual."<sup>2</sup> The dialectics of analysis, he continues, are to be found in Freud's experiences of negative transference, especially in his discovery of his own countertransference in the case of Dora (1905),<sup>3</sup> a subject to which Lacan returns in the *Discours*. By a cumulative process of dialectic development, reversal, and further development, the analysis of Dora moves on to the stumbling block upon which it foundered: Freud's refusal to recognize Dora's attraction to Frau K, because of his own countertransference, which was the result of his having "put himself a little too much in the place of Herr K" (p. 224). The transference, said Lacan, should surely therefore be considered "as an entity entirely relative to the countertransference defined as the sum of the prejudices, the

<sup>2</sup> "Intervention sur le transfert" (1951); *Ecrits*, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup> S. Freud, *Standard Edition*, VII, 7.

passions, the embarrassments, even the analyst's insufficient information at this or that moment of the dialectical process." "In other words, the transference involves nothing real in the subject except the appearance of the permanent modes according to which it constitutes its objects, in a moment of stagnation of the dialectic of the analysis" (p. 225).

It is in the sense that the dialectical movement of the analysis is not linear, but progressively and cumulatively spiral, and in the sense that the relationship of the two subjects involved is mediated in both directions by subjects who are not present, that Lacan can speak of a "reform"—not so much a reform of psychoanalysis, since the forms upon which it depends are to be found in Freud, but a reform of our view of the subject from both sides of the couch. Hence Lacan's concern with the didactic analysis in the *Discours* (which was addressed to candidates in analysis).

For Lacan, the countertransference—whether it is viewed as something to be recognized and exploited or as something to be battled against—is therefore conjugated in the imperative mode of the "Physician, heal thyself," and it, too, must be interpreted in order to maintain the dialectical progress of the analysis, since the transference, when it is revealed, is a "dead point" blocking further movement. The technical neutrality of the analyst in his silence is not therefore a real neutrality, but a dialectical neutrality:

The analytical neutrality takes on its authentic meaning from the position of the pure dialectician who, because he knows that all that is real is rational (and inversely), therefore knows that all that exists, including the evil which he struggles against, is and will always remain equivalent to the level of his own particularity. Thus he knows that the subject progresses only by whatever integration he attains of his position in the universal: technically by the projection of his past into a discourse in the process of becoming (p. 226).

By intentionalizing his memories of the past (whether real or phantasied) and by seeking to make the analyst play a part in them, the subject projects himself towards a future dependent upon his recognition of the meaning of those memories.

Besides constant references to the journey of consciousness in the face and company of what is other in the Hegelian *Phenomenology*, Lacan's writings abound with the promotion of what he calls the *Imaginary order* (perception, hallucination, and their derivatives) and its distinction from what he calls the *Symbolic order* (the order of discursive and symbolic action) and the *Real*. This distinction is derived in part from the

phase of childhood which Lacan calls the *stade du miroir*: the primary alienation of the *infans* from "himself" and his subsequent discovery of his Self. The *stade du miroir* is an interpretation of findings in both psychological and biological research concerning the perceptual relationship of the individual to others at a crucial phase in his development (from six to eighteen months in the child); for Lacan, it is the root of all later identifications. His view of the ego depends upon this primary identification seen in the light of Freud's important article on narcissism (1914)<sup>4</sup> and the later development of the notion of the *Idealich* and *Ichideal* in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921).<sup>5</sup> The Symbolic, on the other hand, is derived more or less directly from the notion of the symbolic function in human society revealed by anthropology, especially by Marcel Mauss and Lévi-Strauss.

The *stade du miroir* is what Didier Anzieu has called Lacan's heresy, in the sense that each "new way in psychoanalysis" has depended on some such central feature (the birth trauma or the inferiority complex, for instance), in somewhat the same way as the castration complex and the death instinct are privileged in Freud. But they are also privileged in Lacan, and Lacan would be the first to deny that his way is anything but a return to a long misunderstood Freud. The fact is that in the 1950's Freud was almost unavailable in French—and the available translations were uniformly bad. Indeed it is only since the 1950's that Freud has become properly available in English. Since James Strachey's monumental *Standard Edition* (superior in its scholarship to any of the German editions), since the publication of Freud's letters to Fliess and his more personal letters, since Ernest Jones's biography (however disappointing), and since the recent works of Rieff, Marcuse, and Norman O. Brown—all projects of the 1950's—Freud has surely evolved from the status of friend or enemy to more nearly the status of a truly great man.

In France, Lacan has undoubtedly been the single most important influence in that upward evaluation, and especially in sparking a return to what Freud had actually said at a time when the influence of existentialism in France and elsewhere and the work of Horney, Sullivan, Fromm, and others were diverting attention from the texts of Freud. Following the introduction of the *stade du miroir* and insights from Heidegger and Hegel into his writings, Lacan was one of the first to seek to integrate

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV, 69.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII, 67.

Lévi-Strauss's hypotheses about the relationship of linguistic and social structures into psychoanalysis, and the *Discours* of 1953 is his first published elaboration of what might be called the "new terminology." This is in other words the Lacanian terminology of *metaphor* and *metonymy*, of the linguistic and epistemological categories of the *signifier* and the *signified*, of the differentiation between *need*, *demand*, and *desire*, of the categories of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. It is in this sense that the *Discours* was a challenge to the traditional psychoanalytic movement, as well as to "neo-Freudian revisionism," in Marcuse's unhappy phrase; and it remains a manifesto bearing the scars of the circumstances that produced it.

The result of Lacan's writings has been that his seminar, originally attended almost solely by medical men, has now become a meeting place for the most varied kinds of people,<sup>6</sup> including critics (the Tel Quel group, with which one associates Roland Barthes, himself a brilliant transmitter between structural anthropology, psychoanalysis, and literary criticism), philosophers (Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida), neo-Marxists (Louis Althusser), as well as linguists, mathematicians, and students from other disciplines. To a certain extent, however, and especially since the publication of the *Ecrits*, it has simply become intellectually fashionable to hear Lacan, with the inevitable result of a period of *lacanisme* in Paris. Nevertheless, a great number of people owe their present interest in Freud to Lacan, to say nothing of their renewed readings of Freud's text. Their intellectual terrorism is not unrelated to Lacan's own, nor to the climate that Lacan helped to create. In the field of psychoanalysis itself, Laplanche and Pontalis' recent and now indispensable *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse* (1967), however conservatively it approaches Lacan, is the direct result of the direction of a master. No one reads Freud in quite the same way after reading Lacan—but then again, no one reads Lacan in quite the same way after reading Freud.

#### Remarks on the Translation

The article translated here, now known as the *Discours de Rome*, originally appeared in 1956 in the first volume of *La Psychanalyse* (pp. 81-166), the journal founded by the Société française de psychanalyse after

<sup>6</sup> Including, no doubt, the wit who, as Lacan tells it, labeled the seminar as "là où ça parle."

the secession from the Paris society in 1952. The full title of the *Discours* is: "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse." After the distribution of printed copies of the *Discours* at the new society's first congress, Lacan delivered a spoken communication, identified here as *Actes*, which, with the interventions of the other analysts present, was transcribed and published in *La Psychanalyse*, I (pp. 202-55). The full title of this volume is: *Travaux des années 1953-1955, dirigés par Jacques Lacan: De l'usage de la parole et des structures de langage dans la conduite et dans le champ de la psychanalyse.*

The *Discours* itself consisted of a Preface (apparently added for publication), an Introduction, and three sections entitled respectively: "Parole vide et parole pleine dans la réalisation psychanalytique du sujet"; "Symbole et langage comme structure et limite du champ psychanalytique"; and "Les résonances de l'interprétation et le temps du sujet dans la technique psychanalytique." Upon its republication in the *Ecrits* in 1966, the *Discours* was preceded by a further section of introductory material entitled "Du sujet enfin en question" (pp. 229-36).

The translation of Lacan must inevitably remain a more or less helpful aid to the comprehension of the original text. The translator has nevertheless tried, with what success the reader must judge for himself, to maintain a consistent and coherent approach to the French, being as careful as possible to translate key words in such a way that the reader may always remain aware of what lies behind them. The reader can with some assurance assume that when he sees "failure to recognize," for instance, it is always an equivalent—however inadequate in this case—for *méconnaissance*. It has further been necessary to establish certain conventions for this purpose (for example, "Word" for *parole*) which the reader will find elaborated in the notes and listed in the index.<sup>7</sup> I have also employed capitalization elsewhere to distinguish or emphasize certain words or concepts: "Language" for *langage* ("language" for *langue*); "Knowledge" for *savoir* ("knowledge" for *connaissance*); "Truth" for *vérité*; "the Symbolic," "the Imaginary," and "the Real" for *le symbolique*, *l'imaginaire*, and *le réel*. Because of its special meaning in Lacan, how-

<sup>7</sup> Some French terms have been retained either because of their ambiguity in a specific context (for example, *méconnaissance*) or because, like the *belle âme*, they represent accepted or sanctified expressions. In the latter case, for instance, the original German would be pointless, and the English "noble soul" lacks the French pre-Romantic connotations, Rousseau, for example.

ever, "Imaginary" is always capitalized, even as an adjective, whenever it is a question of the Imaginary order. Most of the other conventions of translation, the technical terminology, and psychoanalytical spelling—for example, "phantasy" for *fantasme*—follow those of the *Standard Edition* of Freud's works.

One or two expressions require preliminary comment, however. The word *parole* (as distinguished from *mot*) has connotations for which the convention "Word" is rather inadequate. Moreover, the use of "Word" in English tends to restrict the connotation to what in French would more commonly be the task of *verbe*. Outside its usage in French where we would employ "speech" or "speaking," "spoken word" or "faculty of speech," *parole* differs from *mot* in that it nearly always implies *somebody's* word or words, including the sense of one's word of honor. But it still remains synonymous in certain contexts with the use of *verbe* to mean *logos* (or the Logos)—the difference being one of value and evocation rather than of meaning. In linguistics, where Saussure was the initiator of the distinction between *parole* and *langue*, *parole* similarly combines the sense of the individual faculty of speech and the speaker's actual words. The distinction more commonly employed in linguistics now is that between "message" and "code" (terms derived from communication theory), but obviously the similarity between *parole* and "message" is a restricted one, as is that between "code" and *langue* (and *langage* is a wider category still). The message consists of spoken or written words (*paroles*), but not of *la parole*; the term "code" is purely methodological, since it describes neither the nature nor the function of language adequately, except at the most superficial level of communication. Moreover, "code" implies an objective or fixed reference which is again true only of the less profound levels of language.

There is a similar distinction between the subjective and the objective in the expressions *sens* ("meaning," "sense") and *signification* ("signification"). Just as *mot* primarily designates an objective entity (a collection of sounds or letters), *signification* tends to emphasize objective ostensive definition (pointing) or objective verbal definition (synonyms). And just as *parole* implies the subjective intentions of the speaker, *sens*, synonymous with "direction," often implies an intentionality of meaning—which is subjective in the sense that it is what the speaker wants to say (*ce qu'il veut dire*). *Parole* and *sens*, then, like the etymological origins of the English "meaning," imply both a speaker and a listener, whereas *mot*,

obviously, and *signification*, less clearly, do not. Thus Lacan defined *mot* in 1953 as characterized by the "combinatory substitution of the signifier" and *parole* as characterized by the "fundamental transsubjectivity of the signified" (*Actes*, p. 250), a distinction equivalent in English to that between "word" and "speech."

The distinction between *sens* and *signification* is obviously more intuitive than methodological, since in ordinary speech the two terms (as well as the verbs *vouloir dire* and *signifier*) are often used as synonyms. Nor is the distinction necessarily a guide to Lacan's use of the terms *sens* and *signification*. The point is that in English the distinctions hardly exist at all. The word *discours* also escapes its English equivalent, which is much more the "learned word." The French word covers "talk," "conversation," "treatise," "speech," "oration," "parlance." It is in fact much closer to the German *Rede*, which overlaps *parole*, than is the English "discourse"—by which *Rede* is also commonly translated. Thus *Gerede* (Heidegger's "idle talk") may be translated by "discours commun" in French; *Rede* has been translated by commentators on Heidegger as "discursivité." Since Lacan, unlike Heidegger, rarely defines his terms, and since he tends to use words in a deliberately evocative fashion, the reader is well-advised to keep in mind the French and German equivalents of such terms as these when they are employed in significant contexts.

The reader will also note that Lacan sometimes employs terms like *discours* or *signifiant* (but not usually *parole*) outside the domain of language itself—that is, he sometimes uses these terms figuratively in the same way as they have been employed by anthropologists or semiologists under the all-inclusive heading "interhuman communication" (for example, the "matrimonial dialogue" of kinship systems). However, where the anthropologist will speak of kinship systems and use linguistic structures as analogies, Lacan most often concentrates on the discourse itself and uses kinship nominations and their combinatorial features as his analogy, under the general heading of what he calls *le symbolique*. These distinctions are taken up again from the point of view of the sign and the signifier in the essay following the translation.

The often-quoted and sometimes misused criterion of "readable English" has been only a secondary consideration in the English text. Where the English rendering of the French is particularly doubtful, or where the original is particularly idiosyncratic or poetic, I have given the French in a note. In general, etymology has been an important factor in the

choice of words; thus I hope the reader will forgive the Gallicisms that have either deliberately or unconsciously been retained. In sum, accuracy has always been preferred to elegance.

The reader will perhaps more readily appreciate my concern for coherence and accuracy over style if he reflects on the fate of Freud's works.

English-speaking readers of Freud long remained unaware of the special semantic resources of the German text as a result of English translations inevitably reflecting the epistemology of the translators, translations which, before the appearance of the *Standard Edition*, not only could not reproduce these ambiguities, but succeeded in obscuring them by ignoring them. The *Standard Edition* itself can be seen becoming more and more aware of certain terms as it progresses. It is not the unavoidable distortions of Freud's early translators which must be condemned, but rather their assumption that a key word like *Vorstellung*, for instance, was to be rendered by whatever English word seemed to fit the particular context, without the reader being advised of the semantic choice that had been made. The five-volume *Collected Papers* of Freud is particularly faulty in this respect. Thus, as late as 1954 (in *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*), *Wortvorstellung* ("word presentation") and *Sachvorstellung* ("thing presentation") were still obscured by the renderings "verbal idea" and "concrete idea"—repeating the translations of the 1920's—and the English-speaking reader was left with no sure way of correlating these terms in significant contexts with *Entstellung* (translated "distortion"), with *Darstellung* ("representation," "performance"), with *Darstellbarkeit* ("representability"), or with *Vorstellung* itself ("image," "thought," "idea"). Whether or not the distinction between external reality and psychic reality is consistently maintained in the text of Freud, I do not know, but *Wirklichkeit* and *Realität*—according to Lacan, the second usually refers to psychic reality—are still not distinguished in the English translations of Freud. Since these are terms constantly used in Freud's discussions of the representation of the unconscious, it is hardly surprising that the possibilities of exploitation revealed by Lacan's commentaries on the German text should have appeared to many people as somehow "un-Freudian," whereas in fact the central question was one of translation in every sense of the term—translation not simply from German to another language, but also translation in time.

In June, 1966, on the occasion of preparing his *Ecrits*, Lacan made a number of revisions to the *Discours*. All of these revisions, the more im-

portant of which are indicated by notes added by Lacan and dated (1966), have been incorporated into the present translation. Minor stylistic changes have been incorporated without mention, but where the change was of a more substantial nature (and not indicated by Lacan), it has been indicated by a footnote or an asterisk. An asterisk following a word indicates that only that word was changed; at the end of a sentence, that the sentence was changed; at the end of a paragraph, that the paragraph was changed. The original text before the change has not been reproduced, except in one instance.

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#### NOTE

I have taken the opportunity of another printing to correct minor errors in the text.

I have also corrected a serious mistake on page 63. Here a wrongly translated sentence about Lacan's theory of language came to light when a reviewer quoted it in 1978. In previous printings, the sentence read: "For the function of Language is not to inform but to evoke." The original French contains an "y" referring to the topic of the preceding paragraph: the role of redundancy in language, communication, and psychoanalysis. The correct rendering is: "Here the function of Language is not to inform but to evoke"—the "here" referring to the echoes of redundancy in the patient's discourse.

Readers interested in the further analysis and critique of Lacan and Freud hinted at in the last twenty pages of this book should consult the revised and updated edition of *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* (London: Tavistock; and New York: Methuen, 1981), which deals with the imaginary and the symbolic in structuralism and systems theory, and *The Imaginary Canadian* (Vancouver, Pulp Press, 1980), which deals with the imaginary and the real in colonization.

Vancouver, Canada, 1982



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## Prefatory Note

*En particulier, il ne faudra pas oublier que la séparation en embryologie, anatomie, physiologie, psychologie, sociologie, clinique n'existe pas dans la nature et qu'il n'y a qu'une discipline: la neurobiologie à laquelle l'observation nous oblige d'ajouter l'épithète d'humaine en ce qui nous concerne.<sup>1</sup>*

(Quotation chosen as the motto of an Institute of Psychoanalysis in 1952.)

When the *Discours de Rome* was finally published in 1956, it included a Preface outlining the circumstances under which it had been delivered, and the above epigraph. Since this Preface was concerned primarily with the internecine battle within the French psychoanalytical movement in 1952, it is now rather more a matter of anecdote than of history. Consequently it has seemed best simply to summarize it, rather than to reproduce it in its entirety here.

The Congrès des psychanalystes de langue française was to take place at the Psychological Institute of the University of Rome in September, 1953. Lacan, as a leading member of the Société psychanalytique de Paris (founded in 1925), had been asked to deliver the usual theoretical report at the Congress. In the meantime, however, serious disagreements, partly technical but also personal, had arisen within the Society over the founding of the Institute whose motto Lacan quotes with such disdain. The result was a secession from the Paris society of a number of analysts and of about half the students undergoing their didactic analysis at the time. The secession was led by Lacan and Daniel Lagache; the eventual meeting in Rome of the fledgling Société française de psychanalyse, unrecognized by the International Association, also included Serge Leclaire, W. Granoff, Françoise Dolto, and Didier Anzieu.

The Paris society was or had been represented by Marie Bonaparte, Raymond de Saussure, R. Loewenstein (since allied with Ernst Kris and

<sup>1</sup> "In particular, it must not be forgotten that the separation into embryology, anatomy, physiology, psychology, and clinical practice does not exist in nature and that there is only one discipline: *neurobiology*, to which observation obliges us to add the epithet *human* in what concerns us."

Heinz Hartmann in New York), Bénassy, Nacht, and others, most of whom are mercilessly criticized in the *Discours* or elsewhere in Lacan's writings. Unfortunately, when the matter of recognizing the new society came up for discussion at the Eighteenth Congress of the International Association, Anna Freud herself castigated the rebels, and Hartmann's committee report at the Nineteenth Congress excluded the new society for good, mainly on the grounds that its teaching was inadequate.<sup>2</sup>

Lacan has never been personally reconciled with the International Association, whereas the other members of the Société française de psychanalyse have since rejoined it under a new affiliation. Lacan has recently moved to the position of director of the Ecole freudienne de Paris. After many years of teaching at the Hôpital Saint-Anne, he now holds no officially recognized position, but was permitted until recently to use an auditorium at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. He was at one time associated with the Cercle d'épistémologie de l'E.N.S., which was concerned with epistemological problems related to mathematics, psychoanalysis, logic, and language. The journal *La Psychanalyse* has been defunct since 1963; Lacan has recently published (1966) in the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* put out by the Cercle; he is listed as the editor of *Scilicet* and the privately circulated *Lettres de l'Ecole freudienne*; his more recent seminars are now (1972) being published in about a dozen small volumes.

Epistemology for us is defined as the history and the theory of the discourse of *science* (its birth justifies the singular).

By discourse, we mean a process of language which compels and constrains truth. . . .

We call analytic any discourse insofar as it can be reduced to the putting into place of unities which produce and repeat themselves, whatever may be the principle it assigns to the transformations at work in its system. Analysis, then, properly so-called, as the theory which treats of concepts of element and combination as such.<sup>3</sup>

Lacan's Preface, the first half-dozen pages of the *Discours*, is thus concerned with the polemics of an old quarrel which had the fertile and auspicious result of sparking Lacan to attempt a more or less systematic

<sup>2</sup> See the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, XXXV (1954), 267-78; XXXVII (1956), 122. See also a fuller account of the dispute by Jan Miel: "Jacques Lacan and the Structure of the Unconscious," *Yale French Studies*, No. 36-37 (1967), pp. 104ff.

<sup>3</sup> "Avertissement," in *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, No. 1 ("La Verité"), Cercle d'épistémologie de l'E.N.S. (January, 1966).

elucidation of his revolt against the "orthodoxy" of the Paris society. Like so many psychoanalytical societies since the medical profession set out to monopolize them, the Paris society was top-heavy with the medical superiority of therapists, largely unaware of the extent to which they themselves were mystified by the cult of the expert which bedevils society in so many other areas as well.

Behind the dispute lay an important theoretical difference: the question of the training or *formation* of the analyst in his dialectic with the Other in the *unendliche* didactic analysis, and thus the question of transference and countertransference. But above all, Lacan has always been concerned with the question of the status of human discourse in analysis (inseparable from the discourse in general), in opposition to tendencies to reduce analysis to a study of behavior, or to a quasi-biological theory of instincts, or to a medical therapy inclined to reduce the subject's psychical life to a series of symptoms to be interpreted by the (all-knowing) analyst in the way that a doctor interprets the symptoms of physiological disease. (It should be noted that the level of sophistication in analysis at the period Lacan was writing, especially in France, was considerably less than it is now, fifteen years later. If the French situation has changed, it is because of Lacan.) To speak of the status of the discourse is to put the status of the subject in question, which is surely Freud's central concern. Secondary to this central question, which has occupied philosophers and other interpreters of the discourse—literary critics, for instance—with increasing intensity and concern since the Cartesian discovery of the subject (but in no century more intensely than our own), was that of the "orthodox" length of the analytic session, long set at fifty or fifty-five minutes, and which Lacan wished to shorten or lengthen according to the requirements of the situation of any particular patient on any particular day.<sup>4</sup>

Lacan's report was somewhat of a surprise to his auditors in the sense that it departed entirely from the usual balance sheet presented at these affairs. For the reader who has available to him a copy of the now out-

<sup>4</sup> Lacan's initiative here is of course in keeping with the effects of transference in the discourse of analysis, since breaking off or continuing a session may well bring the subject to recognize something which he will reject if he is simply told about it. But the apparently typical objection recently made by an American analyst seems to carry considerable weight: in the first place, he said, his didactic analysis consisted of fifty-minute hours, and, in the second, changing the length of the session would make it difficult for the doctor to organize his day.

of-print Volume I of *La Psychanalyse*, a perusal of the discussion following the presentation of the *Discours* will reveal that Lacan met with both puzzlement and objections as well as enthusiasm on the part of those present. Some of these objections recurred in the debate following the publication of the *Ecrits* in 1966.<sup>5</sup>

Lacan accused those who had sought to prevent him from speaking at Rome of a thoroughgoing authoritarian disregard of the subjective autonomy of their students and of confusing teaching with tutelage. He criticized the discussion of the "case" of the new group at the International Congress, pointing out that it was generally admitted among analysts that the theoretical basis of most of the principles of psychoanalysis was far from a matter of universal agreement. The following are the concluding paragraphs of the original Preface.

In a discipline which owes its only value as a science to the theoretic concepts which Freud forged in the process of his own experience, it would seem premature to me to break with the traditional terminology of these concepts—concepts which, precisely because they have as yet been ineptly assessed and thus have retained the ambiguity of everyday speech, continue to profit from these echoes, although not without running into confusions.

But it does seem to me that these terms can only become that much more clear if their equivalence to the Language of contemporary anthropology is established, or even to the latest problems of philosophy, where psychoanalysis has often only to take back its own.

In any event what appears most urgent to me is the task of disengaging the meaning of certain concepts from the deadening effect of routine usage, a meaning which they will recover as much by a return to their history as by a reflection on their subjective grounding.

This is unquestionably the function of the teacher, on which all the other functions depend, and it is in this function that the value of experience is most apparent.

Let this function be neglected, and the sense of an activity that owes its effects only to sense becomes obliterated; and technical rules, by being

<sup>5</sup> See in particular the illuminating comments of Didier Anzieu in *La Quinzaine*, No. 20 (January 15–31, 1967), pp. 14–15. Anzieu had criticized Lacan's promotion of the linguistic domain in similar terms at Rome in 1953 (*La Psychanalyse*, I [1956], pp. 228–31).

reduced to recipes, deprive the psychoanalytic experience of the value of knowledge and even of all criterion of reality.

For nobody is less demanding than a psychoanalyst about what might give a definite status to an activity which he himself is not far from considering purely magical, since he does not know where to situate it in a theoretical conception of his field which he hardly ever dreams of conferring on his practice of analysis.

The epigraph which I used to ornament this preface is a pretty fine example of this.

In fact, this activity would seem to fall in line with a conception of the formation of the analyst that might be that of a driving school which, not content to claim the singular privilege of granting driving licenses, imagined itself to be in a position to control the automobile industry as well. . . .

Perhaps psychoanalysis, method of Truth and of the demystification of subjective camouflages, would not be manifesting an overweening ambition if it were to apply its own principles to its own body politic: whether to the conception that psychoanalysts form of their role in relation to the patient, or to their notion of their place in intellectual society, or to their idea of their relationship with their peers, or to that of their mission as teachers.

Perhaps as a result of reopening a few windows to the full daylight of Freud's thought, this exposé may alleviate for some the anguish engendered by a symbolic action when it becomes lost in its own opacity.

However all this may be, in evoking the circumstances surrounding this address, I do not intend to excuse its all too obvious insufficiencies by the haste which circumstances imposed on it, since it is from the same haste that it takes on its meaning with its form.

As a matter of fact, in an exemplary sophism concerning intersubjective time,<sup>6</sup> I have demonstrated the function of haste in the logical precipitation in which Truth finds its unsurpassable condition.

Nothing truly created appears except in urgency, nothing created in urgency which does not engender its own surpassing in the Word.

But there is also nothing which does not become contingent to the Word when the moment of creation comes for man, the moment when

<sup>6</sup> Lacan's note: "See: 'Le Temps logique ou l'assertion de certitude anticipée,' *Cahiers d'Art* (1945)." (See note 47 in the text.)

he is able to see the identity of the side he takes and the disorder he denounces within a single reason, in order to comprehend their coherence in the Real and to anticipate by his certitude on the action which puts them in balance.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Rien de créé qui n'apparaisse dans l'urgence, rien dans l'urgence qui n'engendre son dépassement dans la parole. Mais rien aussi qui n'y devienne contingent quand le moment y vient pour l'homme, où il peut identifier en une seule raison le parti qu'il choisit et le désordre qu'il dénonce, pour en comprendre la cohérence dans le réel et anticiper par sa certitude sur l'action qui les met en balance."

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