

IRONIC CLINIC

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I have posed for myself the problem, in all its generality, of the differential clinic of psychoses, and I thought that to begin with it would be clarifying to oppose a universal clinic of delusion to it.¹ I propose to ground the differential clinic of psychoses in a universal clinic of delusion. No less.

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I call universal clinic of delusion the one which takes the following for its point of departure: that all our discourses are but defences against the real.

To construct this clinical perspective, one should be able to reach the infernal irony of the schizophrenic, the one which he turns into a weapon, and which, as Lacan says, goes to the root of any social relation. The universal clinic of delusion can only be uttered, that is to say that it can only cease not to inscribe itself, from the point of view of the schizophrenic.

How are we going to define the schizophrenic here? For the moment I propose to define him, following Lacan, as the subject whose specificity lies in his not being caught in any discourse, in any social bond.² I add that this is the only subject not to defend himself against the real by means of the symbolic, which is what we all do when we are not schizophrenics. He does not defend himself against the real by means of language, because for him the symbolic is real.

What we are talking about is the irony of the schizophrenic, not his humour. Both irony and humour make us laugh but have distinct structures.

Freud says that humour is the comical side of the superego.³ The neurotic is not short of humour, the pervert is well capable of it, so is the philosopher of the universal maxim,⁴ and likewise the surrealist.⁵ Humour is inscribed in the perspective of the Other. The humorist statement [*dif*] is uttered *par excellence* in the locus of the Other. It grabs the subject in the misery of his impotence. Think of this famous Jewish humour which is cultivated in the ghetto, this social locus *par excellence*, since it is constituted by segregation, where the terrible God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob locks away his children.

Irony, on the contrary, is not of the Other but of the subject, and goes against the Other. What does irony say? It says that the Other does not exist, that the social bond is fundamentally a swindle, that there is no discourse that is not of *semblant* — the title of one of Lacan's Seminars.⁶ The true masochist sometimes arrives at irony, when he demonstrates that the Other, of whom he shows himself to be the slave, is but the puppet of his will, of him the masochist. It is no doubt in this way that irony befits the psychoanalyst, no less than the revolutionary. Lenin, like Socrates, shows irony even if he disguises it by means of the invective, and even if this irony fades when it concerns his cause.⁷ Knowing that the Other does not know, that is to say that the Other as Other of knowledge is nothing, takes on the comical form of irony. Whereas humour functions from the point of view of the subject-supposed-to-know, irony only functions where the decline of the subject-supposed-to-know has been consummated.

It is in this that, according to Lacan, psychoanalysis, the one that follows the path prescribed by Freud, restores irony in neurosis. It would be amazing indeed if one could cure neurosis with irony. If we managed to cure neurosis with irony, we would not need to keep it alive by means of psychoanalysis. We have not yet recovered from psychoanalysis, despite Lacan's irony, and, without any doubt, despite his wish that it be so.

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So, while awaiting our recovery from psychoanalysis, the wish I express is that our clinic be ironic.

The choice is a forced choice: either our clinic will be ironic, i.e. grounded on the inexistence of the Other as defence against the real — or our clinic will be no more than a rehash of the psychiatric clinic. The psychiatric clinic is readily humorist. It often mocks the madman, this poor madman who is outside discourse. But to mock the madman merely means that one constructs one's own clinic on the basis of established discourses. What I am saying here does not leave out the psychoanalytical clinic of psy-

chooses when the latter is content with assessing psychosis using the standard measure of the established discourse of the analyst — this meaning referring it to the Oedipal norm. I would not have pointed my finger in this direction had Lacan not gone beyond the Oedipal norm in his psychoanalytical clinic of psychoses. He is waiting for us to follow him there. This, of course, is humour.

In what I call the universal clinic of delusion, the schizophrenic occupies a place which one could call internal exclusion. In effect, if the schizophrenic is this subject for whom all the symbolic is real, it is truly from his subjective position that it can become apparent that the symbolic is but *semblant* for all the other subjects. The revolving circle of the four discourses singled out and formalised by Lacan, is truly designed to show that there is no discourse that is not of *semblant*.⁸ And this circle itself can only be conceived on the basis of the subject outside discourse.

Here, I call schizophrenic the subject who does not avoid the real. It is the speaking-being [*parlêtre*]⁹ for whom the symbolic is not used to avoid the real, because the symbolic itself is real. If there is no discourse that is not of *semblant*, there is a delusion which is of the real, and it is the one of the schizophrenic. It is from there that the universal of delusion can be constructed.

Let us note that the thesis of the universal of delusion is a Freudian thesis. For Freud, all is but dream. This is what Lacan says that Freud says. If all is but dream, everyone is mad, that is to say delusional.¹⁰ Such is the thesis I am proposing to place at the forefront of a differential clinic of psychoses: everyone is mad. It is then that it becomes interesting to draw distinctions.

Everyone is mad — that is to say delusional — is a truth which belongs to the differential clinic of humanity and animality. For animals are not mad, except for the donkey, the one that bears the Holy Sacrament, and this burden, the merit of which it attributes to itself, constitutes a delusion of presumption. And yet, animals can commit suicide, provided that domestication has made the cause of desire exist in the Other for them.

Let us simplify. Delusion is universal due to the fact that men speak, and that there is language for them. This is the ABC from which to start again: language has, as such, an effect of nihilation [*néantisation*].

In dialectical terms, one would say: the word is the murder of the thing. It is a proposition of Lacan's early teaching.¹¹ Everything is already said, for this implies that the symbolic separates itself from the real. In the schizophrenic perspective, the word is not the murder of the thing, it *is* the thing.

It is in this sense that, if the psychotic does not believe in the Other, he is nevertheless certain of the Thing. If you know how to recognise in this 'Thing', the Freudian *Das Ding* as punctuated by Lacan in his *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*,¹² "the word is the murder of the thing" means: *jouissance* is prohibited to him who speaks as such, or, further, that the Other, as locus of the signifier, is the platform cleansed of *jouissance*. For the paranoiac, the word is not sufficiently the murder of the Thing, since he must on occasions strike the Thing, the *kakon*,¹³ in the Other, in an act of aggression which may serve him all his life as a metaphor, a supplementation [*suppléance*], as one can see in the case of Aimée.¹⁴ As for the melancholic, it is against himself that he turns the mortifying effect of language, in the suicidal act in which he accomplishes his fate as *kakon*.

"The word is the murder of the Thing" means that the word is death. The 'death drive', so designated by Freud, is inherent to the speaking-being. No doubt the melancholic short-circuit is lengthened for the neurotic, whose desire is maybe less decided. Let us note that the letter is distinct from the word. Does the instance of the letter kill the Thing? Or rather, is the letter the Thing?¹⁵

What I have said in dialectical terms can be said in diacritical terms, moving on from Hegel to Saussure.¹⁶ There is no biunivocal correlation of the word and the thing: the word does not represent the thing, the word is articulated with the word. This structuralist axiom is not any less pathetic than the dialectic statement [*dif*]. It implies a passion. The mere fact, concerning language, of placing the function of articulation in the place of the function of representation — as structuralism does — has perfectly pathetic effects of delusion. To say that the signifier has no relation to the thing but to another signifier — one repeats it like a refrain — implies that the signifier has a function of derealisation. The signifier derealises the world.¹⁸

It is only when the relation of the signifier to the signifier is interrupted, when there is a broken chain, an interrupted phrase, that the symbol rejoins the real. But it does not rejoin the real under the form of representation. The signifier rejoins the real in a way which leaves no room for doubt — look at the interrupted phrases of President Schreber.¹⁹ In the interrupted phrase, the signifier does not in the

least represent the real, it irrupts in it. That is to say that a part of the symbolic becomes real. This is in what 'schizophrenia', such as it is redefined here, can be called the measure of psychosis.

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If I recommend this ironic perspective on language it is because one can see where it leads to take things in this reversed perspective, for example to the theory known as that of descriptions which owes its name to Bertrand Russell.²⁰

Russell started this theory in 1905, at the same time as Freud was writing his *Three Essays on Sexuality*. It would not be excessive to say that the whole of the contemporary Anglo-Saxon philosophy follows from it. Today it develops under the slightly ridiculous term of 'formal ontology' — it concerns at the same time a legacy of the medieval theory of suppositions,²¹ which Lacan himself echoes with his subject-supposed-to-know.²²

The theory of descriptions deals with the supposed referent of discourse or, in order to call it by the name given to it by Frege, *Bedeutung*.²³ What does it concern? What worries Russell and others is that one can speak of that which does not exist as if it existed. It is the same question that Plato raises in his *Sophist* — that to speak of non-being is to make it in some way exist.²⁴ The theory of descriptions would like to reduce truth to exactness — that one speak only of that which is and, therefore, that discourse describe the real. This theory would like to track down the discourse that says what is not. The primary example given by Bertrand Russell is "The king of France is bald".²⁵ In 1905, and for an Englishman who is not a French royalist, there is no king of France. "The king of France is bald" is a delusion. Of course there are many connotations surrounding this "king of France is bald". It is an echo of the Anglo-French feud, it is not without evoking "the king is naked".

What eludes Bertrand Russell is not that one can speak of that which does not exist, but that that which is, by the sheer fact that one speaks of it, becomes fiction. Were the king of France to exist in the guise of a crown-bearing character, he would nonetheless be a fiction. What is significantised is by the same token 'semblantified' [*semblantifié*]. It does not exist *because* one speaks of it. Then one must be silent, as Wittgenstein²⁶ says — that which one wants to exist must not be spoken of. And this is what a psychoanalyst does in his practice. The theory of descriptions is vain, not only because the king of France does not exist, nor because speech makes that which is not exist, but because language strips of existence [*inexister*] that of which it speaks.

Lacan's axiom that truth has a structure of fiction implies that speech has an effect of fiction.²⁷ The secret of the universal clinic of delusion is that the referent is always void. If there is truth, it is not of the order of an adequation of the word and the thing. The truth is internal to the 'saying' [*le dire*], that is to say, to the articulation. In this sense the signifier, insofar as it is articulated to the signifier, implies that the referent is empty, and this is what constitutes the symbolic as an order, the symbolic order as Lacan named it. It is the very movement that we observe in Freud when he goes from factual seduction to the fantasmatic one, from fact to fantasy,²⁸ from the search for exactness to the scansion of truth, from the unconscious as referential knowledge to the unconscious as textual knowledge.

How to incarnate the empty referent? Nothing is simpler if we remember that the Freudian clinic entirely revolves around an object that does not exist, namely the mother's penis. The king of France who is bald, this is the mother's penis. It is a fact that Freud started out with the dream, that he presented the interpretation of dreams as the royal road of psychoanalysis, and that he took the dream as a signifying articulation without reference. It is in this that Freud considered the dream as a form of delusion. And it is also why Lacan indexes his whole clinic to a 'there is no', whether it be by writing it (-φ) or by stating that 'there is no sexual relation'.

'Let us start by discarding all the facts', said Jean-Jacques, superbly.²⁹ This is how an analysis begins. Until that point, there are only preliminary encounters. "Associate freely, say the truth, go for it, omit nothing," means "join a signifier to a signifier without preoccupying yourself with the referent, with formal ontology". Lacan reintroduces the terms, which should be proscribed, of representation and referent, but they change sense. There is representation, but only in so far as the signifier represents a non-existent referent. This referent as void is inscribed as castration (-φ), or as that which is made from castration, namely the subject, \$. Lacan's subject is in effect a non-existing entity, that which motivates and haunts the theory of descriptions.

So far, we are still in the Freudian space. The idea of a negative referent accounts, on the basis of the structure of language, for the pivotal importance of the Freudian castration. But what is introduced

by Lacan, properly speaking, is a new type of referent, which springs from the articulation itself. It is not a referent which would be already there, and which could be represented, or of which one could say 'there is no'. This new type of referent, born from articulation, is what Lacan called 'the object *a*'.

How, and under what conditions, does the signifying articulation produce a referent? Once upon a time, a referent was born from the articulation... In a certain way there is a double referent. The first one is negative, it is absence. It is $(-\phi)$, it is $\$$. There is also another referent, and it is *a*. It is that which explains that, in the economy of Freud's discourse, the fantasy can come in the place of fact. This implies that the object *a*, if it is a being, is a being of fiction that depends upon the articulation of the signifier. The object *a* is a semblant.³⁰ If it is a being, it is a being which depends upon the signifying chain and, precisely, on the consistency of the chain. This is why Lacan calls the object *a* a logical consistency. The object *a* is that which takes on consistency alongside the progressive nihilation [*néantisation*] which takes place when one speaks. Therefore it is also a remainder, in the sense of *remaining to say*. But it is not the same when the signifying chain is developed than at its beginning.

If *a* depends on the signifying articulation, the only formal ontology is that of the object *a*. Why 'ontology'? Because in its analytical co-ordinates, the object *a* appears as a being. It is there in particular that it is paramount not to confuse it with the real. The object *a* as such is a semblant of being. And the very term of consistency indicates its affinities with the imaginary.

Doubtless when the object *a* finds its place in the fantasy, the latter occupies the place of the real for the subject. This does not mean, for all that, that it is real. The very term axiom³¹ that Lacan employs concerning the fantasy truly indicates that he places it in a logical system and confirms that the object is dependent on the signifying articulation.

That is why the object *a* as semblant finds its place between the symbolic and the real. It is a logical consistency which pretends to exist [*fait semblant d'être*], and which is only what one encounters when going from the symbolic to the real. The object *a* is a symbolic elaboration of the real which in the fantasy occupies the place of the real, but this elaboration is only a veil. Its specific function is to complement the negative referent of the subject. The object *a*, as logical consistency, can incarnate what the subject lacks. It is the semblant of being that the subjective lack-of-being calls for. This is why the object *a* as logical consistency is able to give its place to the forbidden *jouissance*, to the lost object.

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This allows us to give a new sense to what we call psychosis. This is where Lacan leads us. Psychosis is the clinical structure in which the object is not lost, where the subject has it at its disposal. It is in this respect that Lacan could say that the madman is a free man.³²

By the same token, in psychosis, the Other is not separated from *jouissance*. The paranoiac fantasy implies the identification of *jouissance* in the place of the Other. In the manner of a short-circuit, we can highlight the difference between paranoia and schizophrenia — insofar as the schizophrenic does not have another Other than language — and, at the same time, the difference between the Other in paranoia and in neurosis. There is the Other in paranoia and this Other is real, that is to say that in effect, the Other of paranoia exists, and even, that it is greedy for the object *a*.

The paternal metaphor and its failure in psychosis are often mentioned. To take it up again from another angle, should we not conclude from the failure of the paternal metaphor that the desire of the Other, of the mother, is not symbolised in psychosis, and that this is why this desire is in the real? I say: the desire of the Other in the real, and the Other with it, and the signifying chain, the desire of the Other as will of *jouissance* without limits. This is the way to understand the fundamental connection between psychosis and anxiety, and also the connection between psychosis and the erotomania aroused in the Other.

There is the Other in neurosis also, except that there the best proof that it is not real is that one has to make it exist, for example by loving it. This is what is verified in the first steps of the analytic experience: transference means that what is at stake is to make the Other exist, and this in order to be able to transfer the burden of the logical consistency of the object *a* to it. This is what Lacan called the subject-supposed-to-know. To make the Other exist in order to hand the object *a* over to him turns this object into the cause of desire. By the same token, the handing over of the object to the Other turns this object into the lost object, and installs demand at the heart of neurosis — whether it consist in demanding from the Other the object it harbours, or in making oneself asked by the Other for the payment of the debt

which is owed to it. The Other of neurosis demands, at the very least, that the subject should justify himself. This also touches on the pervert when he brings the non-justifiable of his *jouissance* to analysis. Finally, this is where is situated what, in categories other than ours, one calls a *borderline*.

To demand from the Other the object that it harbours, to make oneself asked by the Other to pay the debt, this amounts to, in every case, situating logical consistency in the field of the Other — this is the foundation of every discourse, the very principle of the social bond.

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The Other does not exist as real. To say that the Other is the locus of truth amounts to saying that the Other is a locus which has the status of fiction. To say that the Other is the locus of knowledge amounts to saying that it has the status of a supposition. Neurosis amounts to making the Other exist at the cost, for the subject, of consenting to efface himself before the object. It is there that the notion that desire is a defence, a defence against the real of *jouissance*, takes its sense. Let us go further, and say that neurosis is the clinical structure where defence is named desire, whilst perversion is the clinical structure where defence is called disavowal.

Lacan proposed the following expression as a definition of the psychoanalytic clinic: ‘the real as the impossible to bear’.³³ This goes to show that clinical forms were for him nothing other than as many modes of defences against the real, including the limit-case called schizophrenia, where the subject appears defenceless before the impossible to bear.

The mechanism of foreclosure was distinguished for psychosis. Why not give the same pathogenic status to the Freudian *Bejahung*, the affirmation or consent? One could then grasp that in neurosis, defence takes the form of a significantisation of *jouissance*. This is radical in phobia; where the signifier serves as a wall against the empty referent, the mother’s lack of penis. One could then perceive that in perversion, defence takes the form of a fetishisation of *jouissance*. The Other separates the pervert, just like the neurotic, from his *jouissance*. The neurotic admits to it, whilst the pervert disavows it.

The term ‘disavowal’ takes on its value owing to its opposition to the avowal of the neurotic. No doubt, like the neurotic, the pervert makes the Other exist. He pretends to be the object *a* of the Other in order to anguish him — in that, he succeeds where the neurotic fails. The hysteric would like to turn her lack-of-being into the cause of the Other’s desire, in other words to give her lack-of-being the value of the truth of desire, but the lack remains on her side, while the pervert tips it over to the Other. And as a result, for the pervert, the demand does not function as an object in his fantasy, but instead the imperative, the order, the command does...

Let us also note that what one calls mania in the psychiatric clinic is the case where the object *a* does not function, in other words it is a case of logical inconsistency, and which goes hand in hand with the glimpsed inexistence of the Other — since what is at stake here is a statement [*dit*] which does not pose as truth. And why not oppose to it, as the formula of depression, the a-logical consistency of the object, an object which is then no longer cause of the Other’s desire? There, the lack-of-being of the subject is only being-superfluous [*être-en-trop*]. As to the melancholic, if his sudden suicide does not constitute a call to the Other, not even to its lack, it translates the brutal conversion of the subjective lack-of-being into *a*. But it is to die a physical death which is merely the support of the second death.³⁴

Why did Lacan evoke mania and depression concerning the pass, at the point at which the Other is discovered as non-existent? Maybe in order to indicate that to the one who goes that far, the Freudian cause is required as safeguard.³⁵

Lacan’s last clinic³⁶ indicates that the symbolic father is in no case a satisfactory solution to the impossible to bear. The symbolic father is the father of the madman. In Lacan, there is only the ideal father, the one that would want our good. Lacan has done nothing to remain among us as an ideal father.

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When inaugurating the first psychiatric service named after Jacques Lacan, I happened to give a little elementary *vade-mecum* to practitioners.³⁷ I will add here a supplementary piece of advice: “before the madman, before the delusional, do not forget that you are, or were, an analysand, and that you, too, spoke of what does not exist”.

1. Opening conference, Vth International Encounter of the Freudian Field, Buenos Aires (1988).
2. J. Lacan, *L'Étourdit* in *Scilicet* No 4, Paris, Seuil, 1972, p. 31.
3. S. Freud, *Humour*, 1927, SE Vol. 21.
4. Kant develops the universal maxim in the *Grounds of the Metaphysics of Morals* (first two sections). Then, starting from this postulate, he founds the existence of the moral law in his *Critique of Practical Reason*. Lacan often returns to the universal maxim in his teaching, and, starting from Freud, he proposes a new reading of it in his *Kant avec Sade*.
5. A. Breton, *Anthologie de l'Humour Noir*, Pauvert, Paris, 1966.
6. J. Lacan, *Le séminaire XVIII: D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, 1970-1, unpublished.
7. By Lenin, one can consult *One Step forward, two Steps back*, Complete Works. As to the irony of Socrates, it is always present, in particular in Plato's first dialogues.
8. J. Lacan, *Le séminaire XVII: L'envers de la psychanalyse*, 1969-1970, Paris, Seuil, 1991.
9. *Ser hablante*, in Spanish, does not exactly correspond to the use of *parlêtre* in French.
10. S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, SE Vol. 4 and *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, SE Vol. 23, chapter 9.
11. J. Lacan, *Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* in *Ecrits*, trans. A. Sheridan, Routledge, London, 1977, and *Seminar I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, trans. J. Forrester, Norton, London & New York, 1988.
12. J. Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Porter, Routledge, London, 1992, chapters 2-4.
13. Lacan takes up P. Giraud's idea in his thesis, and then in his *Propos sur la causalité psychique*, *Ecrits*, Seuil, Paris, 1966, p. 175.
14. J. Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*, Seuil, Paris, 1975.
15. J. Lacan, *The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud*, *Ecrits*, *op. cit.*
16. Hegel's dialectics, or Hegelian logic, is first developed in the *Science of Logic* — also called Greater Logic. It is taken up again in the first part of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* — also called Lesser Logic.
17. One can quote here, amongst other works, C. Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969, and R. Jakobson, *Essais de Linguistique Générale*, Minuit, Paris, 1963.
18. Lacan's attention is drawn to derealisation from his paper concerning crime, *Introduction théorique aux fonctions de la psychanalyse en criminologie*. He will return to this function of derealisation of the signifier concerning the phallus in his *Signification of the phallus*. It is possible to follow this construction through *The Agency of the Letter* and *La métaphore du sujet* (Cf. *Ecrits*, *op. cit.*).
19. D. P. Schreber, *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness*, Harvard University Press, London, 1988, notably chapter XV. The question of interrupted sentences is taken up by Lacan in two of his *Ecrits*: *On a question préliminaire...* and *Subversion of the Subject*.
20. B. Russell, *On Denoting*, 1905, collected in *Logic and Knowledge*, London, 1956.
21. See for example Duns Scotus and the medieval theory of suppositions.
22. The subject-supposed-to-know appears for the first time in the Seminar *Le Transfert*. It becomes a concept in the *Proposition of 9 October 1967 on the Psychoanalyst of the School* in *Analysis* No 6, 1995.
23. G. Frege, *Sinn und Bedeutung*, 1892.
24. Plato, *The Sophist*.
25. *op. cit.*
26. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Routledge, London, 1961, Proposition 7.
27. Cf. *Seminar XVIII (op. cit.)* and the contemporary pieces, *Radiophonie* and *Television*, London & New-York: Norton (1990).
28. S. Freud, Letter to Fliess (21/09/1897), and *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, SE Vol. 1: "I no longer believe in my *neurotica*..."

29. J.-J. Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité entre les hommes*, *Œuvres complètes*, Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris.
30. Cf. J.-A. Miller, *La nature des semblants*, Cours 1991-2, unpublished.
31. J. Lacan, account of the Seminar *La logique du fantasme* in *Ornicar?* No 29, Navarin, Paris, 1984, p. 16.
32. J.-A. Miller, *Sur la leçon des psychoses*, *Actes de l'Ecole de la Cause freudienne*, XIII, Paris, 1987.
33. J. Lacan, *Ouverture de la Section Clinique* in *Ornicar?* No 9, 1977.
34. The second death is the object of a long development in *Seminar VII*, *op. cit.*
35. J. Lacan, *Proposition*, *op. cit.*
36. The schizophrenic does not have the signifier of lack, but nothing stops us from trying to help him to obtain it in the real. This is the lesson I drew from the case of Robert and Rosine Lefort.
37. J.-A. Miller, *Allocution*, *De près montré*, *Revue de clinique psychanalytique*, Paris: Juin 1988, Editions Borromée. *El Servicio*, Jacques Lacan, *Malentendido*, No 23, Buenos Aires, Juin 1988.

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