

Psychoanalysis, the City and Communities

Jacques-Alain Miller

This text was published in *Psychoanalytical Notebooks*, No. 24, *Subject Supposed to Know*, March 2012, pp. 9-27.

Symptom jams

Somewhere Lacan speaks of “a political incidence in which the psychoanalyst would have a place if he were capable of taking it”.¹ Here we have a challenge, let’s see if we are capable of responding to it.

The whole of Lacan is here. He threw down challenges to psychoanalysts and, more often than not, made psychoanalysts feel their shortcomings. He even delighted in making psychoanalysts feel their shortcomings by throwing down challenges that were difficult to overcome. Lacan was not one to flatter professional narcissism. On the contrary he had the idea that he had to get psychoanalysts out of their routine.

The psychoanalyst’s routine is therapeutic. His business is with the symptom as what has to be cured – as having to be cured [*devant être guéri*], as one used to say in bad Latin translations. Today, after Lacan, the psychoanalyst likes to give himself airs. He likes to be difficult. “Cure! Did you say cure!”

The fact that the psychoanalyst can question the notion of the cure changes nothing. He tackles the symptom, in his practice, as something that must be eliminated, got rid of, and that’s what people come for. If somebody goes to see a psychoanalyst for the sake of knowledge and not to get rid of a symptom it is not very certain that his demand can be received.

The psychoanalyst is thus authorised to consider the symptom as something to be eliminated by the subject, who has come to see him because he has been unable to free himself from it on his own. In fact, the symptom presents itself as an encumbrance, but this is neither its only, nor its most profound, aspect.

In his presentation of the symptom in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Freud begins by introducing the symptom through its opposition to what he calls the *ego*. He introduces it on the basis of conflict. He defines the symptom on the basis of everything that makes it an encumbrance for the personality. The symptom is what escapes the organisation of the ego and stays outside its power in an independent way. We consider a symptom to be well established when it presents this characteristic of extraterritoriality in relation to the so-called power of the ego – we can be satisfied with this denomination – or consciousness, the synthesis of personality – the whole of psychology can be slipped in here. The symptom thus first presents itself as an enclave in the synthetic empire of the ego. There is a symptom, properly speaking, in this sense when the subject says, or allows it to be understood that it has nothing to do with him and that it is something he wants to get rid of.

This aspect of the symptom as something of an encumbrance that one wants to get rid of, like a scruple (in the etymological sense, a little stone, like the one that gets into your shoe), is only a beginning for Freud. Besides, one of the results of psychoanalysis is that, at the end, you get people without any scruples. It is a little dangerous. You have to be very careful. This is only a beginning for Freud and, in contrast to the famous expression, one does not keep up the fight. This is exactly the progression outlined by Freud in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. “The ego now proceeds to behave as though it recognized that the symptom had come to stay and that the only thing to do was to accept the situation in good part and draw as much advantage from it as possible. It makes an adaptation to the symptom – to this piece of the internal world which is alien to it – just as it normally does to the real external world”.²

The symptom as a mode of jouissance

¹ Lacan, Jacques; Radiophonie [1970], *Autres Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p.443

² Freud, Sigmund; *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Section III, *SE* 20, p. 99

The second position taken by the ego with respect to the symptom is to get used to the situation, face up to misfortune and adopt the symptom. This is what Freud refers to as the ego's secondary adaptation to the symptom – he even speaks of the incorporation of the symptom into the ego. In a first moment, it is a horrible inconvenience. In a second moment, you invite the symptom into your ego sphere and it becomes part of you, to the point that eventually (it shows) it is what you love the most in yourself. It is here that one discovers the satisfaction that inhabits the symptom, which is normally hidden. Freud situates it as a substitutive satisfaction hidden under a symbolic disguise. The symptom can come to give you pleasure. He says it very precisely: the symptom, in this second movement, takes on “the significance of a satisfaction”, *die Bedeutung einer Befriedigung*.³ This is an absolutely crucial point which, more specifically, in the clinical elaboration that Freud develops in Chapter V of *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, concerns obsessional neurosis. Freud discovered the symptom as a message on the basis of hysteria, but it was through obsessional neurosis that he brought the symptom's character of *jouissance* to light, this second movement in which the subject no longer distinguishes himself from it. You thus have people, for example, with character traits that are repulsive for those around them, but who cling on to these as if they were essential to them. That's who they are. As far as they are concerned, there is no question of getting rid of them. This is the most precious thing that obsessional neurotics taught Freud.

This aspect is very different from the first, where the symptom is a burden, where it is an encumbrance and where one wants to be rid of it. The second aspect, which is a lot more important for the clinic, is the one where the subject doesn't want to be rid of it. The symptom clings to you like a tic to a dog – perhaps it is even you, yourself, who are the tic on the dog-symptom. It is from this perspective that the symptom presents itself as a mode of *jouissance*. And I would argue that, through the attentive reading of Chapters III and VI of *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, it could be said to be Freudian.

I will also add, without further demonstration, that every mode of *jouissance* is symptomatic. In any case, we only meet symptomatic forms of *jouissance* in our experience as analysts. Here, I am pushing at the limits of what Freud said, but with the intuition that speaking beings only enjoy symptomatically. Freud explains it. To say that it is a substitutive satisfaction is not to say that it is any less satisfying. What is amazing is that the *Ersatz* (the word that he uses for the substitute) is just as good as the original. It is not the same for Cartier watches! The fakes are not the same thing for Cartier, who take photographs of bulldozers crushing false watches. Here, the false watches are supposed to be a lot worse than the true ones. Freud shows that one does not distinguish between the substitutive satisfactions and those that are not. Lacan's idea is that, in the end, all satisfactions are substitutes for a satisfaction that does not exist, namely the one which, if it did exist, would give the truly genuine sexual relation.

Object-Jouissance

This is a definition of the symptom other than the first much more familiar one, a definition of the symptom on the basis of the drive, which I will not define otherwise than as the subject's way of being fundamentally happy. What Freud calls the drive, which is a myth, relates to the idea that the subject is always happy, without knowing it, even in his suffering. This defines the analytic position in its inhumanity, because, if it is governed by the idea that the subject is always happy, it cuts the analytic position off from compassion, pity and Samaritan aid. It's monstrous. The analytic position is monstrous according to the canons of humanity. One mustn't exaggerate this. If someone comes to you and bursts into tears, it is not advisable to burst out laughing, even if sometimes giving the hint of a smile can have positive effects when faced with the declaration of a great suffering. Done in the right way, this can allow a suffering subject to obtain a little shift in relation to his suffering. There is no recipe, one needs tact, for it can make the would-be patient never come back. You can obtain this result in certain cases, not in all.

³ *Ibid.*, Section V, p.112

“The subject is happy-go-lucky [*heureux*] (...) and any piece of luck is good as something to maintain him, insofar as it repeats itself”.⁴ It is a law that is in some sense absolute, which even orders the contingency of existence. Yes, of course contingency exists. But it feeds the subject’s repetition and the repetition of his happiness. It manufactures happiness.

This is the Freudian perspective on the drive. You make happiness out of whatever happens to you, including any misfortune that comes to you. The psychical apparatus is the little house of happiness. It is happy and it does not see it, in general, because of its attachment to ideals, to ideal images.

Generally speaking, psychoanalysis also has the effect of detaching the subject from his ideals, allowing him to acquire some distance, as much in relation to the place of the ideal ego (in other words the exalted image of his person and his power, which is possibly incarnated in an other) as in relation to the ego ideal and its signifiers, its values, which situate his position. The effect of a psychoanalysis, again generally speaking, is that it leads the subject to give preference to *jouissance* over the ideal.

This can be seen very clearly in cases where a homosexual comes to consult. When the choice is decided, we don’t think of reorienting his object choice. When he asks for a consultation, it is generally because the division between his mode of *jouissance* and his ideals is causing him suffering. More often than not, if the analysis goes well, it leads him to assume his *jouissance*. Sometimes this is what he comes for – to give preference to his *jouissance* over the ideal.

I < a

The result of an analysis, for a subject, is to give priority, preference, dominance to the *a* over the ideal. Everyone thinks that it is a question of giving priority to the Ideal. Not at all! It is the *a*. This amounts to a certain inversion: *a* is the object-*jouissance*. But, as Lacan shows, *jouissance* comes as an excess over equilibrium. He called the object-*jouissance* a surplus-enjoyment, an expression based on the surplus-value which Marx, if he did not coin the expression himself, at least set in motion in *Capital*.

This prevalence of *jouissance* over the ideal, which seems to me to be an effect of the analytic treatment, marks contemporary society. It is without doubt something that psychoanalysis has contributed to contemporary society. One can always argue about causality. In any case, it is in this respect that psychoanalysis is homogeneous with contemporary society. In *Television* Lacan translated it by saying that “our mode [of *jouissance*]” (with the collective pronoun he designates not only the individual subject, but also the state of society, the ‘we’ of contemporaries, who share the same time) “from now on takes its bearings from surplus-enjoyment”.⁵ For me, this means that our mode of *jouissance* no longer situates itself in relation to the ideal, but from surplus-enjoyment.

Irony

From this point of departure, what would be the political incidence through which the psychoanalyst should find his place?

As is well known, his place bears some relationship, for example, with that of Socrates in history. This was seen very clearly by those colleagues who presented the theme for the Colloquium on ‘Psychoanalysis and the City’, as it evokes the a-topical place of psychoanalysis in relation to the city. And, Socrates is the one who, par excellence, called himself and was called *atopos* in relation to the city. What’s more, in his time there really was one. For us, when

⁴ Lacan, J.; *Television*, trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, Norton, London, 1990, p.22.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 32, translation modified. [TN: There seems to be a problem with the English translation of *Television* at this point, as it translates “*plus-de-jourir*” with the phrase “the ideal of an overcoming”. It should read: “our mode, which from now on takes its bearing from surplus-enjoyment [*plus-de-jourir*]”, as given above.]

we speak of the city, it is a little outmoded. We can imagine our analytic community as a city, but the world that surrounds us no longer presents itself as a city.

This can help us qualify the analyst's position in relation to the ideals of the city, to social ideals, as an ironic position. Here, the psychoanalyst is not a combatant. Rather, he is like Socrates, making the ideals tremble and waver, sometimes simply by placing them in inverted commas, displacing the city's master-signifiers a little – liberty, property, homeland [*patrie*]. Socrates annoyed the generals by speaking about 'courage', the artists by speaking about 'beauty'... He made himself insupportable to all and sundry by simply putting what they held most dear in inverted commas. With his way of asking questions, and repeating them, of not understanding, of being stupid, the psychoanalyst takes up the position of ironist.

It is difficult to construct a linguistic theory of irony. Irony can be brought out by simply repeating something that has been said. Everything is in the manner, the gesture, the intonation and this does not easily lend itself to being captured by a linguistic analysis, even a structural one. In other words, thanks to his position, the psychoanalyst reveals social ideals for the semblants that they are in relation to a real of *jouissance*. All these big 'I's veil, hide the subject's attachment to his *jouissance*. Historically speaking, this position has a name. It is the position of the cynic, which consists of saying: Only *jouissance* is true. Between *only jouissance is true* and *it is real*, there is perhaps a small margin. It is for this reason that Diogenes's act of masturbation has been remembered: this public masturbation had a subversive value, namely that what counts is *jouissance* pure and simple. There is no better way of showing that the Other does not exist (in any case, I don't need to) than by demonstrating a non-copulatory use of the phallus.

It is the opposite of sublimation, which supposes that the Other appreciates, recognises and enjoys what you have presented him with as object, as production. Often, analysts are divided between those who see the end of analysis more on the cynical side and those who see it more on the side of sublimation. The sublimatory side supposes that one aims at the *jouissance* of the Other, while Diogenes demonstrates that the only thing that interests him, the only thing that is truthful, true or real for him is the *jouissance* of one's own body.

The political incidence in question for the psychoanalyst can, in certain respects, be defined as one that is subversive to social ideals. In any case, it is not progressivist. There is no better way. There is always a part that is lost. If one wins at one table, one loses at another. It is a subversion that is not positive. To say that its incidence would be subversive is to say that the psychoanalyst cannot propose projects. He can only poke fun at those of others. This also limits the scope of his declarations. The psychoanalyst does not have any grand designs. The ironist does not have any grand designs. He waits for the other to speak first and then he makes him tumble.

The psychoanalyst's neither-nor position

What could this political incidence be, a little beyond this negative presentation? Perhaps, a certain effect of awakening: an awakening in relation to what social ideals in the end concern, namely *jouissance* and the distribution of surplus-enjoyment. Surplus-enjoyment is formed on the basis of *surplus-value*. A certain relationship exists, which Lacan exploited, between psychoanalytic cynicism and popular Marxism. Lacan knew very well how to exploit these resonances in the 60s and 70s according to the spirit of the time. This does not go very far. The political incidence where the psychoanalyst would find his place would inscribe itself on the side of a demystification of ideals. It doesn't go much further than that. It is a sort of political wisdom, nothing more.

Lacan said something of the sort when, in one of his seminars, he posed the choice, and did not choose, between the position of the left and that of the right as that of the *fool* [English in the original] and that of the *knave* [English in the original].⁶ This is the choice of political engagement sketched out by Lacan. The *fool* is the one who speaks the truth, who says that values are semblants, that what it's really about is the distribution of surplus-*jouissance*. But he is the *fool* at the level of consequences, in other words he doesn't want to deal with them. Not

⁶ Lacan, J.; *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Denis Porter, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 182-184

dealing with the consequences is the only way of being consequent. The *fool* plays at being the angel. He stops at *it's not fair*, then he proposes to end the injustice, without considering the consistency of the set of choices. One by one, the choices are justified, but the consistency of the set is questionable. *Knave*, in English, translates as the *coquin* [the rascal] or the *valet* [knave]. One finds these terms used by Stendhal in order to qualify the emissaries of the July monarchy. They are Stendhalian words (reread *Lucien Leuwen*) for those who defend established interests, who dedicate themselves to defending the order of the world and of privilege. They mock the *fool* by showing him that in playing the angel he is playing the ass [*en faisant l'ange, il fait la bête*]. They prefer to play the ass directly. They are those who know that the more things change, the more they stay the same. So, it is not worth changing, or changing in order to produce the same. The knave's is a position that is non-noble – *ignoble* in the proper sense of the term.

These two positions only truly acquired their meaning after the French Revolution, after the dominance of the aristocracy had been done away with. The knowledge that one must protect semblants in order to continue enjoying, is on that side.

In this choice of alternatives that Lacan presents us with, what is the political incidence of psychoanalysis? It is ultimately located in a position of neither-nor, as was said in the time of the previous President, a sort of neutrality that is not kindly, an ill-disposed neutrality with respect to the political options delineated by political semblants.

No nostalgia

The chapter on Jacques Lacan's politics could be opened.

As is known, at one time, he was seduced by Action Française. *Lettres à Maurras* [*Letters to Maurras*⁷] from a certain number of letters has recently been published, in which Madame Léon Daudet says of Lacan, who was twenty three at the time: "There is a young man who is preparing to leave for Senegal to make his fortune. He is called Jacques Lacan. He is full of himself, full of self-confidence, and has very recently acquired our ideas. He really wants to meet you [Charles Maurras] before he leaves. So, put him in his place a little, because he really is far too big for his boots – but please receive him."

Seduced by Action Française. Evidently it didn't last. Nevertheless it does have some bearing on a certain number of Lacan's choices. There are many considerations of politics in Lacan, in the sense of politics in general, which inscribe themselves at the level of a romantic protest against the bourgeois spirit and even against the spirit of the Enlightenment itself, insofar as it was during the Enlightenment that the values of the *knave*, the values of commerce and exchange were promoted, right up to Guizot's famous '*enrichissez-vous*' [enrich yourselves],⁸ liberalism, laissez-faire and the cult of the market. All this is of a piece. There was a romantic protest against this tendency in the contemporary world.

The locus of romantic protest is a very equivocal one. In France, it is a locus where the counter-revolutionary tradition, which defended aristocratic values (the side of Action Française) and opposed itself to commercialism, the rise of the bourgeoisie in the July Monarchy, *et cetera*, converged with the revolutionary tradition. The opposition to Guizot's '*enrichissez-vous*' (let's take that as a reference for the July Monarchy) came both from the left and the right, from legitimists, from those who were faithful to the old monarchy and those who were faithful to the protest of the people. There is thus a very special and equivocal locus in France, which I will call *romantic protest*, where the counter-revolutionary tradition and the revolutionary tradition, with its anti-bourgeois and even communist aspects, converge. You thus have, for example: Stendhal, who protests against the riff-raff of the July Monarchy and Péguy, with his diatribes against the power of money. Do not think that such things have only to do with times long-since past. This locus of convergence that dissolves the opposition

⁷ [TN: Charles Maurras, author, poet and critic, was the leading intellectual figure behind *Action Française*, a political organisation that was monarchist, anti-parliamentarist and counter-revolutionary.]

⁸ [TN: This is François Guizot's famous response to those without suffrage immediately prior to the French revolution when the right to vote was linked to property – if you want the vote then you'd better get rich and acquire some!]

between parties is what General De Gaulle brought into play, very clearly, with a dual attraction that could be exerted on the right and the left. Mitterrand's sensational success, as far as his elections are concerned, comes from a very cunning handling of this point of convergence.

Taking things up in this way, if you think in terms of the ideology of anti-globalisation, you have today – last week in fact – a party, which has majority support in France, made up of the National Front, the moral left and the social right, as surprising as it may seem. If you want to make the semblants tremble, make them tremble. All of them are fighting and tearing each other apart. But if you take the criteria of anti-globalisation, you are presented with a striking convergence, which has a majority in France. Consequently the foreign commentaries that I read don't understand anything about what's going on. Why? What are the French doing? How is this possible?

This refers to a romantic protest against the prose of liberalism, of *enrichissez-vous* and the disillusioned world produced by the French revolution. This also explains Heidegger, whose links with Nazism are undeniable, who is at the extreme end of counter-revolution, but who has also inspired the French intellectual left in its anti-liberal movement.

What distinguishes Lacan from this romantic protest is the no-to-nostalgia. There isn't the least thread of nostalgia in Lacan for lost traditions, for what might have been previously lost. He distinguishes himself from romantic protest by his adhesion to the Enlightenment spirit – he evokes it in the blurb for his *Écrits*. All his movement carries him against tradition and initiation and all the mummery of elected representatives.

Routine

What is it that distinguishes Lacan from the whole of that world? It is the compass that he takes from the discourse of science and the idea that the determining cut that separates the Modern world from the Old world is the discourse of science.

It is interesting to note that the first effect that the discourse of science had on society was the idea that it would be possible to create a social science, a science of society, to calculate and then rectify ideals with exactness in order to produce the best possible results. This gave us Saint-Simonianism, August Comte, the idea of the social engineer who could be employed to find the ideals that would make society work best and be most beneficial to humanity.

On the conservative side, Lacan all the same had the idea that ideals were semblants, but that these semblants were necessary. Not necessarily these semblants. Others would do. Semblants are, in a certain way, arbitrary – to use the word that Saussure used for signifiers. Master-signifier semblants are always contingent as far as scientific rationality is concerned. If you judge ideology from the perspective of science, you can always show that they are an aberration – that they don't stand up. But semblants are necessary. There is a moment when oh!, and all the old ideals come tumbling down with a single blow and this makes a hole that everyone can see and that everyone tries to fill as quickly as possible. The Albanian example is worth examining in detail, with the sudden emergence of modern finance and the effects of panic that ensued.

It is a position that also has its clinical value for Lacan. Several years ago, when I went to the Tavistock Clinic, someone said to me: “You are Lacanian. Good! You're going to give us an exposé on the father”. In England, they had the idea that Lacan was the psychoanalyst who extolled the place of the father. Of course not! Lacan was not at all blind to the social and historic decadence of the father and to the contemporary collapse of the father – we are now in the age of cloning. There has been a collapse of the father and of all ideals except, of course, the ideal that one must speak about ideals. Let's discuss it! It is referred to as the so-called end of ideology.

It is here, in the clinic, that Lacan rectifies things: Yes the father is a semblant and “one can do without [him]”. And he adds: “on condition that we make use of [him]”.⁹ This applies to all semblants. It goes for social semblants too. You can do without them. You will not be asked to adhere to them, but on condition that you make use of them. In the world of politics, this defines a certain cynicism in the style of Voltaire, when Voltaire was able, if not to state

⁹ Lacan, J.; *Le Séminaire, livre XXIII, Le sinthome* [1975-76], Seuil, Paris, 2005, p. 136.

openly, at least to let it be understood that God was an invention necessary for ensuring that men behave with a due sense of propriety.

There is a political theory that says that society is held together by semblants; which is also to say that there is no society without repression, no society without identifications and above all no society without routine. Routine is essential. The fundamental thesis that founds Lacan's politics is the disjunction between the signifier and the signified. Nobody would know what anything meant if there were no community, with its routines, to show us more or less the way to go. Lacan stated it: "What remains at the centre is the fine routine that is such that the signified always retains the same meaning in the final analysis".¹⁰ It is to be taken very seriously. Or again when he says that we feed on our prejudices and that they sustain us.¹¹

This disjunction between signifier and signified is truly what this practice of psychoanalysis rests upon. You don't have the least idea what is truly meant for a subject by what you hear him say. To truly reconstruct a signifier's signified a whole analysis is needed – a routine that has established itself in an analysis is needed. It is in analysis that one is able to see what a word can truly mean for someone. What is retained from a lecture is something astonishing. Sometimes it is a single word, an example or a slip of the lecturer that is caught hold of and illuminates the general impression you are left with.

Everything is Semblance

No direct reference. This is a fundamental thesis of Lacan. The idea that objects are pointed to by signifiers, well, that's not how it happens. It passes through the mediation of discourse. The signifier only refers to a mode of functioning, to a use of language as bond. Discourse itself, as Lacan defined it, is the discourse that utters a signifier in view of its bonding-effect. The first bond effect is that of obedience, of submission – the submission denounced by Montaigne's friend, La Boétie, in his beautiful little book called *Anti-Dictator [Discours de la servitude volontaire / Discourse on Voluntary Servitude]*.

From this perspective, Lacan inscribes himself in a very French tradition, that of Montaigne or Voltaire, in other words of those wise ones who certainly perceived that semblants are semblants. There is no doubt about it. Independent of his belief, Montaigne's scepticism remained because he saw that semblants are semblants. He did not take them for things in themselves. But, since there are semblants, let's choose the best ones to live and let live by. A tolerance and the idea of *live and let live*, as the English say. Or to say it with Virgil: "*Trahit sua quemque voluptas*, each man is led by his own taste". Choose the semblants that allow each person to enjoy in the way that suits them, without overly disturbing their neighbours. Although sometimes, someone's *jouissance* leads them precisely to disturb their neighbour. The case of a woman whose *jouissance* leads her to regularly deceive the man she is living with by having an affair with her neighbour was reported to me in supervision. This is why Lacan cannot be Montaigne and Voltaire, of course, because someone's *jouissance* is always linked to the other. If there was an ideal, it would be rather to let each person have his *jouissance*, a sort of liberalism of *jouissance*.

What is the primary state of the subject according to Freud and Lacan?

According to Freud, it is perversion. He said that the child is a polymorphous pervert – *jouissance* at any cost and in every possible way.

As for Lacan, he has more often placed hysteria as the first state of the subject. He even made his barred subject, \$, the hysteric subject *par excellence*, in other words based instead on the state of being unsatisfied. There is never enough *jouissance*. As soon as one is no longer a polymorphous pervert, one becomes a hysteric. One becomes unsatisfied. In a certain way, Lacan also makes obsessional neurosis the first state of the subject, in so far as the obsessional neurotic is determined by the too-much-of-*jouissance*, which leads it to pass to the symptom. The enjoying [*jouissif*] status of the symptom refers to obsessional neurosis. But on the other hand, one could say that for Lacan, the first state of the subject is psychosis – rather

¹⁰ Lacan, J.; Seminar XX, *Encore*, trans. Bruce Fink, Norton, New York, 1998, p. 48.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

schizophrenia, in other words the position of the subject that reveals precisely that everything is semblance. Lacan defined schizophrenia by its infernal irony.

I have seen this. I had to make a patient presentation in Argentina. An acknowledged schizophrenic, knowing that it would be a Frenchman - who spoke Spanish well but, all the same, not as his mother tongue - who would interview him in public, appeared and said to me: "Doctor Miller, I have brought you a present". He took out a tiny French-Spanish dictionary. There had been a hesitation of diagnosis a little before this, but, here I said to myself: he's a schizophrenic. The infernal irony is there in this little dictionary. This was verified by other traits.

Lacan expressed this schizophrenic perspective on the world by saying "Everyone is delusional" [*Tout le monde délire*]. It is his last teaching, where he takes up his previous teaching and reverses it. Everyone is delusional means that everyone interprets and comments upon things that don't exist, that are semblants, endlessly, and that the whole world is taken by these semblants. This relativises the master-signifier. There is not just the Name-of-the-Father. One could invent something else to keep one's world together. This relativises the Name-of-the-Father, it relativises the Oedipus. It is for this reason that Lacan was able to aim beyond the Oedipus, beyond the oedipal semblant, of which he had, besides, already long since said, even in his classic period, that the Oedipus would not be running for much longer – running in terms of a theatre run, a make-believe [*semblant*] – in our contemporary society. A master-signifier is needed in order to make a knot between the signifier, the signified and the referent, without which each would be left on their own side. A quilting point is needed, but it is not necessarily this one. For it to hold, it is necessary that there be a network of semblants and that this network of semblants determines a surplus-enjoyment. If there is this combination of a network of semblants which holds up and which determines a surplus enjoyment, the subject holds up too.

A conversation

In the clinic, it is very useful not simply to be there with neurosis and psychosis, and perversion in a corner – which doesn't allow one to do very much. The idea that what holds a subject together is a combination, an articulation, between a set of semblants and a surplus enjoyment allows for greater flexibility. This is finally what Lacan called the *sinthome*. I hope that I've just about got the definition across.

Today, in a certain way, the big Other of the social has been shattered into a thousand pieces. It is relative, if you want, it is underway. But it no longer has anything to do with the society in which it held up. The big Other has shattered into fragments, as has its guiding principle, which was the semblant of the father. The father has to be exhausted. What remains, is the common practice of language in a community. It is the Wittgenstein of the second period. The Other has shattered. The practice of language, a community in which one can be understood, a community of well meaning interpretive intentions, where one credits the other and tries to understand him. For example, when I say object *a*, big Other, you don't show me the door, you take me in good part. If I didn't say anything about Freud or Lacan or about any of these little signals that I'm emitting, you would ask yourselves what I'm doing here. We are a little language community with a certain principle of tolerance – one doesn't understand everything, but one tells oneself that it is possible, that it means something.

This idea is, for example, that of the American, Rorty. The whole of human history is, in the last resort, a conversation. People decide to listen, to take an interest when somebody else speaks, and then, at a given moment, they stop being interested in it. It is also a way of grasping transference. He goes as far as saying that science is a conversation, a conversation between scientists, and then, at a given moment, there is a paradigm shift and one stops up one's ears and doesn't want to listen anymore. This does not satisfy us.

The presentation of science in this way annoys a lot of scientists. This explains why this guy, called Sokal, succeeded in pulling off a cretinous hoax in America. It relates to France insofar as Lacan is placed in the same lot, among those who are supposed to be badly informed. Lacan obviously has nothing to do with that. This relativism annoys scientists because it dissolves the real. It reduces science to being a conversation among others. It is not Lacan's

point of view at all, but it goes in the sense of the contemporary dissolution of the real, which has been mentioned in the presentation for the Colloquium.

Today, American philosophers are rediscovering the order of fictions, the necessity of semblants. For example, this year I have been commenting at length upon John Searle's book, *The Social Construction of Reality*, where he rediscovers what Bentham calls fiction.¹² One rediscovers that the social order is an agreement that has been reached about semblants.

An effect of the discourse of science

At the start of the century, Paul Valéry had already grasped the idea perfectly. As he wrote: "A society rises out of brutality to order. As barbarism is the era of fact, so the era of order must necessarily be the empire of *fictions*". It is the same word that Barthes uses when speaking of Japan, "the empire of signs", and that Lacan corrected as the empire of semblants.¹³ Paul Valéry says very well that "order therefore demands the action of the presence of absent things and results from the equilibrium of instincts by ideals". The spirit of the Enlightenment consisted in making semblants appear as semblants in the clear light of day. This was very funny to start with, and then it excited so many people that at the end of the century it led to a revolution where people really went for it. From whence arises the idea that it is sometimes necessary to leave the foundations in the dark, the spirit of obscurity, which is the counter-revolutionary spirit as opposed to the spirit of Enlightenment.

The French Revolution is an effect of the discourse of science, in other words, it expresses the wish that semblants be founded on reason. Descartes, at the start of the discourse of science, was more prudent. He asked that the discourse of science not be extended to the state, to politics, to social semblants – all that should be left to tradition or custom. This is what Cicero called the *mos majorum*, the custom of the ancients – which, for Lacan, is the fine routine. Descartes limited his discourse of science to the realm of the stars, to geometry. Don't touch the big semblants, which were still very much in place in the seventeenth century. Besides, the English reactionary Edmund Burke's whole reflection on the French Revolution (which was, back then, the beginning of the whole contemporary critique of constructivism) was: "Obscurantism is necessary for social order". There are questions that one should not ask. If you turn the social tortoise on its back, you will never get it back on its feet again.

In his way, Valéry expressed the view that society is not made for scientific facts very clearly: "Society rests (...) on the Vague Things". Moreover, in his preface to Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* he explains what the world of the Regency was like when the semblants were weakened but still held. On the basis of this text by Valéry, it is possible to understand what took hold of the Duke of Saint-Simon, who is undoubtedly one of the greatest writers. The ten volumes of the *Memoirs of Saint-Simon* in the Pléiade are only a small part of his writings. He was a relentless graphomaniac. I greatly enjoyed what was published last year, *Les traits politiques*, in La Pléiade. He was a complete graphomaniac. He scribbled like a madman until the middle of the eighteenth century, driven to despair at the sight of the semblants of the monarchy disintegrating. It was an extreme suffering to see the semblants in the process of falling and then falling even further. He is much more explicit about this than Montesquieu. Everything is important. If I was to let myself go, I would never stop.

Take the letter on the *affaire du bonnet*. When you went to Parliament, there were those who were obliged to raise their hat when speaking to the other person, and the *premier président* who passed from one side to the other, who keeps his bonnet on in one instance, but does not keep it on before the peer, the president, etc. He wrote a hundred pages on the persecution of dukes and peers by the bonnet. When today we say, *opiner du bonnet* [to give one's consent], it's that bonnet that we are referring to. He wrote about it in a rage because the semblant of the bonnet had not been respected. And then, when there was a Court of Justice in the parliament,

¹² Searle, John R.; *The Social Construction of Reality* (London: Penguin, 1996); Cf. J.-A. Miller and E. Laurent, *L'Autre qui n'estiste pas et ses comités d'éthique* (1997-98), lesson of 15 January 1997.

¹³ Barthes, Roland; *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (Hill and Wang, 1983); Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre XVIII, D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, 1970-71, (Paris: Seuil, 2007), p. 125-126 and "Lituraterre" (1971), *Autres écrits, op. cit.*, p.19-20.

there was the place of the king, he was sitting in a certain way and the presidents of the parliament were seated closer to him than the peers. How do you expect a state to hold in place? He was right. If consent had been given by doffing one's bonnet in the correct way, if people were placed at precisely the right distance from the king, the French Revolution would never have happened. When you start by no longer respecting the semblants, then you begin to laugh at them, you show that they are just semblants, and you end up with the guillotine.

In the *Memoirs*, this is hidden. It is all about personages, they are like this, like that. In his *Traité des politiques*, you only have the rage, the desperate and pathetic cry of someone who sees the semblants disappearing and who enjoyed them. As Lacan said, man only enjoys fictions [*l'homme ne jouit que des fictions*]. The Duke of Saint-Simon is the greatest example of this. It is in his 'Memorandum of Prerogatives that the Dukes have Lost' that he speaks of the "weight of things destructive to their dignity". He is pathetic in his effort to save the semblants as the essence of the social order. All these semblants, distance, etc, concerns the symbolic, it is a knowledge, the knowledge of precedence. Saint-Simon was a specialist. When there was a problem at the Court of Louis the XIV, even if he was not in a good mood, he would be sent for in order to know whether someone should pass before or after someone else, according to the genealogy of precedence.

Leo Strauss's Lesson

At a certain moment in France, this knowledge became a symptom, in the sense that it was found to be out of tune with the rest of society. Not enough people continued to derive enjoyment from it (though, of course, it remained the Duke of Saint-Simon's essential jouissance) and when not enough people enjoy it, well, in the contemporary world, you lose elections, for example. On the other hand, what got a whole world excited, or at least the majority, was the idea of the equality of condition, *to put an end to all those semblants*. You could sit where you wanted; you could keep your hat on; you no longer had to say Sir... This new jouissance of the universal was inspired by the discourse of science, because there it was possible to say that one was worth the same as another one. The universalist passion, the egalitarian passion is a product of the discourse of science. It is obviously very dangerous to bring the requirements of scientific reason to bear upon the social order.

I would willingly develop the example of Leo Strauss's reading of Plato's *Republic*. It is wonderful. Leo Strauss, who is one of Lacan's references in "The Instance of the Letter", wrote *Persecution and the art of Writing*, demonstrating that all writers, all political thinkers had to learn to write metonymically, because they could not express their opinions openly because of political censure.¹⁴ Leo Strauss extended this idea to the whole of philosophy. All the great philosophical treaties have to be deciphered. They contain a sort of secret message. No one could understand how this could hold up for Plato's *Republic*. Plato was an Athenian aristocrat. How could this be the case? He presents the ideal City! It's hyper-communist, with equality between the sexes (unthinkable) and communism; it's the city that takes the children away from their families and brings them up. What is this world? How is it compatible with Plato?

Leo Strauss's answer was that the *Republic* is a demonstration by the absurd that a truly just city, in which men and women would be equal and where full communism would exist, is impossible. The just city is unnatural and it cannot exert any attraction on anyone, except for those who are mad for justice, those who love justice, to the point of destroying the family and all the most sacred things or the things that are most precious and intimate to people. It is quite a brilliant reading. He presents Plato's *Republic* as a refutation of idealism in politics, namely that one must not bring the exigencies of reason to bear upon the social order. The nature of the social order is a nature of its own and it must not be judged through the abstract exigency of reason. He says: "Socrates never went in that direction. He never did anything to go in this direction. He lived his whole life in Athens, in Athenian democracy. He fought for Athenian

¹⁴ Strauss, Leo; *Persecution of the Art of Writing* (Free Press, 1952); Cf. Jacques Lacan, "Instance of the Letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud", *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, Norton, New York & London, 2006, p.423.

democracy. He even accepted to die by the laws of the city of Athens, in obeying its laws, and he gave a sort of lesson in conservatism". In any case, this is the lesson that Leo Strauss draws from Plato's *Republic*.

A subject supposed to know of the market

I would like to correct something from the presentation given for the Colloquium on *Psychoanalysis and the City*, the question: "Can one belong to the city as a psychoanalyst?" The problem is that the city doesn't exist anymore. There is the market, which is completely opposed to the city. When one says *the market rules*, we refer to a society which is no longer ordered by the ideal, a society that no longer has the form of a city, an a-centred society, without centre, which is made up of multiple networks which interlink and, in such a society, the law is no longer the dominant function. This is why the law, the father and all that, has taken a blow, and is now a little decrepit. We are even haunted by the idea that society could become depoliticised. Besides, it is becoming partly depoliticised. One only has to remember what politics in France was during the war in Algeria in comparison with the absolutely *sweet* and sugary politics that we have now. "*You won, I lost, let's embrace each other, Madville*". It is said that this is what the French want. While it is still not long ago that we went at things more bluntly. When Le Pen threw himself at his adversary (it must be said that she was a frail woman too) in order to punch her, *et cetera*, saying, "I feel young again", he was immediately marched off to the police station in order to make a statement. The father, finished. Monsieur Le Pen's youth, finished. It is a society of consumers, a society which extends consumption and, as Lacan says, at the same time extends the insatiable production of the want-to-enjoy [*manqué-à-jouir*] precisely through the very ineptitude (I find this word very beautiful) of production "in procuring a jouissance that would allow it to slow down".¹⁵ He wrote that in the 60s. Now everyone demands the growth that everyone complained about in the 70s. It is a small shift.

The idea that *laissez faire, let it happen, everything will work out for the best*, Adam Smith's idea of the empire of the invisible hand which sorts everything out, has made a new subject supposed to know appear, the subject supposed to know of the market, who is undecipherable, unpredictable in its detail, except insofar as it is supposed, in the end, to do us good. It is the new contemporary providence and everyone's actions are determined by their belief or not in this new providence. Americans are outraged because the French don't believe enough in this new providence. After the elections, the first page of the *International Herald Tribune* was a cry of rage, the French do not believe in the same providence as the Americans.

I will not dwell on the efforts that are being made to re-establish the Other, the contemporary Kantian efforts (Habermas, Taylor...), the efforts to re-establish an ethic of discussion that would be as good as the Other which does not exist.

I will not dwell on what I would like to say about the formalisation of the world. I will rapidly note that from this stem the current attempts to establish little communities. What cannot be done on a large scale, one tries to recuperate on the small scale, the micro-societies that the presentation for the Colloquium spoke of, the fashion for sects. I would also have wanted to speak of the sinister parody of community that Georges Bataille developed with his secret society, Acéphale, which was constructed around a project of conspiracy to sacrifice. He and his associates met in the area around Paris, at the foot of a tree that had been struck by lightning. In this community, the plan was to convince one of its (feminine) members to become the voluntary victim of a cruel ritual. Bataille entangled a certain number of people in his perverse fantasies. Blanchot produced a small book on this subject, which I would like to dwell on a little, *The Unavowable Community*. It is quite coherent. In the era of the market, at the moment when the market started to produce de-structuring effects, people gathered together around a murder. Not the murder of the father, but the murder of *The* woman – who, Lacan says later, has the same value as the father.

When all is said and done, this is the Sadean idea, when Sade founded the Society of the Friends of Crime. Any society is a Society of the Friends of Crime. It is what Freud said when he spoke about the murder of the father. One must not say it, but the society that is truly

¹⁵ Lacan, J.; Radiophonie, *op. cit.*, p.435.

the Society of the Friends of Crime is French society. It is the French who guillotined the symbolic father of the nation, and all the ills that followed came because of that. At least this is what a little sect says, which still marks the 21st of January each year. France is the Society of the Friends of Crime. Besides, it is very coherent with the Lacanian formulas of sexuation on the male side. If you read what Saint-Just says at the Convention to demonstrate the necessity of eliminating the King, well, he demonstrates it with Lacan's mathemes.

Analytic Community

In this context, we can understand why Lacan should have qualified his School as a refuge against the discontents of civilisation. It is a little communitarian re-territorialisation (to use Deleuze's word) in order to allow the words of the analytic tribe to function among ourselves.

Freud already situated himself in this context. In *Civilisation and its Discontents* one can hear the protest of the Old world against the New. There was a chapter in *Civilisation and its Discontents* that ended with a kind of questioning: What will America bring us? Democratic levelling. Democratic levelling is all very well, but it cannot replace the eroticism of the exception.¹⁶ Tensions are put into play by the exceptional position of the father. They awaken the intellect, stimulate and produce rebellion at the same time (occasionally one chops his head off), but there is a specific eroticism of the exception. When one does not support the exception, well, it comes crashing down, it is crushed. One can see this in the political life of our country.

This analytic community is gathered around a professional practice but, in relation to other professional communities, it has the capacity to form its own members. Its members are not united by being hired in the same way or by being given the same diploma by a University. It is a self-managing community, which forms its own members.

I would like to underline its heterogeneous character. It includes non-analysts, in the sense taken up by Lacan, in other words non-titular members, those who are not Analysts of the School. This heterogeneous character is very different from that of classical societies in that the School, the Lacanian inspired community, explores what it is to be an analyst, while as for a society, it knows what it is. The traditional society can divide subjects according to the pre-elaborated knowledge that they have about what an analyst is. It was very important for Lacan that the School should be heterogeneous, because it is ultimately about pursuing the question of what an analyst is. There is no essence of the analyst. It is judged case by case. The Pass is not an insert linked to the construction of the community, even if Lacan did introduce the mechanism three years after the founding of the School. The Pass is a constitutive element of this community.

I wanted to make a few remarks on the paradoxical character of the analyst predicate; on the fact that in this respect there is also the paradox of what a community is that is constructed around a non-knowledge that is called precisely the School.

I wanted to put in question the assumption that the Pass is only the traversal of the fantasy.¹⁷

I wanted to mark the inconvenience, which will reveal itself sooner or later, of having a School assembled around the teachings of a dead father. It is rather convenient. It no longer grumbles. The dead father has the advantage of leaving you in peace. Besides, it allows people to dress him up with all the virtues. Fortunately, it is not like that for Lacan, but it happened with Freud, and the stick returned a few years later (this happened in the United States). Luckily Lacan took care to leave a few sins out in the open, of a kind that ensured that this will not happen to him, as it did to Freud. This convenience has also another side to the coin. It is possible that certain of the initial virtues of the École de la Cause freudienne, its virtues of regularity, discipline, of rotation, has in the present period just about reached their point of reversal. Perhaps this system, which has been developed, is a little tiring. It is a question. I have no response.

¹⁶ Freud, S.; *Civilisation and its Discontents*, SE 21, Chapter V.

¹⁷ Cf. Miller, Jacques-Alain; *La théorie du partenaire*, *op. cit.*

Translated from the French by Philip Dravers

Copyright © by the Author. This text from the website of the London Society of the New Lacanian School, at <http://www.londonsociety-nls.org.uk>. Permission to circulate material from this site must be sought from the LSNLS. All rights reserved. Please include this portion of the text in any printed version of this paper.