

AN INTRODUCTION TO SEMINARS I AND II

Lacan's Orientation Prior to 1953 (I)



Jacques-Alain Miller

The lecturers for the “Lacan Seminar in English” have decided to focus on Lacan’s first two seminars: Books I and II. I feel that we shall have attained our objective if you go home having read at least one of them, or being able to do so with interest. While Lacan doesn’t always have a reputation for readability, I believe these two texts are readable. He himself said that his writings only became clear to people ten years after their publication; ten years is perhaps too short a timespan. But these seminars were held with French participants in 1953 and 1954, and I believe that in 1989 they are fairly accessible to many people. Only a few very recent books by American and English writers can, conceptually speaking, be considered contemporary with these thirty-five-year-old seminars.

Having reread these books, what I’d like to do tonight is introduce Lacan—Lacan in 1953—to get you acquainted with the context of his first seminars: who he was when he gave them, and how he came to offer this new reading of Freud. Who was Jacques Lacan in 1953? I can’t describe him at that time from personal experience as I only met him ten years later, in January of 1964, when he began his eleventh seminar, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. He was fifty-two in 1953, having been born in April 1901, not too far from here, I believe. As far as I know, his family lived near the Boulevard Raspail, and he attended the nearby Stanislas school. It was a Catholic school where students were taught by Jesuits, and it catered to the Parisian bourgeoisie. It was there

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Continuing in my attempt to present Lacan's orientation prior to Seminar I, I might mention that it has given me an opportunity to work out the theoretical chronology of Lacan's early work. Lacan left behind his psychiatric perspective for a psychoanalytic one, a moment we see at the end of his 1932 thesis on psychiatry; as I mentioned last week, he tried therein to establish a new category, "paranoia of self-punishment," built on the model of the "neurosis of self-punishment," that is, incorporating Freud's second topography, and in particular, the function of the superego, into the investigation of psychosis. Lacan entered analysis in 1932 when he finished his thesis, and we can trace his careful, systematic, and highly personal approach to psychoanalytic theory from that moment on.

In Seminar I, Lacan's main objective is clear, and it is perhaps the same objective at work in Lacan's teaching for thirty years thereafter: to change the way psychoanalysis is transmitted. In repeating over and over that he was addressing his fellow analysts, which sometimes seemed a bit exaggerated as there were many other people attending his classes as well, he thereby stressed the fact that the core of the Other he was addressing consisted of fellow analysts, and that his goal was to change the way psychoanalysis was practiced at the time. We no longer know very much about how it was practiced at that time—we have to reconstruct it from Lacan's critique. Ego psychology, for instance, is no longer in its prime, and we do not know exactly what ego psy-

that Lacan learned Latin and Greek and was instructed in religious matters. As you may know, Lacan was quite knowledgeable about religion. I've met Islamic scholars who've said they were sure Lacan had studied the Koran as they had found many echoes of it in the *Écrits*. And there are Marxists who believe that Lacan's work is primarily Marxist. Others think the Other is another name for God. Lacan is many things to many people, but I'll try to limit my attention to psychoanalysis tonight.

I won't provide a biographical account of Lacan's life, firstly because I do not have the material—sometimes I was curious and would ask him things about himself, but he wasn't interested in discussing biographical matters—and secondly, because he was very scornful of biographers. In the *Écrits* you'll find references to Jones that are so scornful that, for a Lacanian to become Lacan's biographer, he'd have to overcome that scorn—and I never did. As a matter of fact, in the 1970s, people offered to interview him concerning his life; the publishing house, Seuil, asked him to speak with a journalist who they wanted to do a book on his life, and he unhesitatingly refused.

In the *Écrits*, Lacan provides a clue as to his intellectual trajectory in saying that he considers that his work, the work associated with his name, began in 1952: what came before counted in his mind as his "antecedents." He doesn't thereby cancel out what came before, but stresses a cut in his own intellectual development that occurred around 1952–1953. The starting point of his teaching was "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," a paper written for a 1953 conference in Rome. Why was this text so significant to him—a landmark, in his opinion? The seminar you have before you, *Freud's Papers on Technique*, is the immediate sequel to "Function and Field." The paper was published in September, Lacan came back to Paris, and two months later this seminar began. The seminar and the paper must thus be thought together. The seminar could be said to be an application of "Function and Field" to psychoanalytic technique or practice. In some sense it answers the question, 'what psychoanalytic technique can be deduced from the thesis: the unconscious is structured like a language?' If we admit that the unconscious is so structured, how can we practice psychoanalysis?

The ethical point of view always takes precedence over technique. Therefore, the technique discussed here must be supplemented by the ethics of psychoanalysis, found in Seminar VII. You'll see that Seminar I is not a "How to Do Psychoanalysis According to Lacan"—it's not the *Complete Angler* of psychoanalysis. The book has to be read in conjunction with Freud's texts, and you'll see that Lacan's approach here is quite general. Two of Lacan's published articles are clearly related to this seminar for, as you know, it was simply an oral seminar that Lacan gave from notes; it was never written up, nor was it tape-recorded at the time, as the Japanese perhaps had not yet discovered the tape recorder. There was a stenographer who took shorthand and typed it up. Lacan

kept that version for many years until I began working on it in 1975. The stenographer's version circulated among a small number of students for years by photocopy, and then spread more and more. People at that time did not so often refer to the seminar as to his published articles based on certain ideas developed in the seminar. In the *Écrits*, you find "*Variantes de la cure-type*." It was part of an encyclopedia article, the first part of which, called "The Standard Treatment," was given to another analyst to write, Lacan—already considered to be some sort of deviant—being assigned "Variations on the Standard Treatment." He makes fun of the title right at the beginning of the article, and I believe this seminar was unfolding while he was researching the material for it. The part on Balint, for instance, was certainly inspired by the article, and there are many other interconnections.

In chapter 5 of Seminar I, one finds a presentation by Jean Hyppolite of Freud's *Die Verneinung*. Hyppolite was a philosopher and the first person to translate Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* into French; he was a student at the *École normale supérieure* at the same time as Sartre and a friend of Sartre's; he was interested in Lacan's work, and regularly attended his seminar then. Hyppolite was quite open-minded at a time when other French philosophers found Lacan too difficult to understand. In chapter 5 of Seminar I we find Hyppolite's talk on Freud's text, and Lacan's introduction and commentary. Lacan rewrote the introduction and reply as a separate text that appears in the *Écrits*, and there will no doubt be scholars who will compare the oral version that appears in the seminar with the careful rewriting thereof that appears in the *Écrits*. Thus "Variations on the Standard Treatment" and the "Introduction and Reply to Hyppolite" are two texts which are intimately related to Seminar I.

But there are others as well, and I will mention at least two of them. The second part of this seminar concerns the imaginary, centering around chapter 11 where we find the distinction between "ideal ego" and "ego ideal" and a complicated mirror structure. Lacan didn't write anything based on this part of the seminar until 1960; in other words, he waited seven years before giving a definitive formulation of what he tried to pinpoint therein. In the *Écrits*, that formulation appears in the "Remarks on Daniel Lagache," complete with a definitive mirror schema. The stenographer did not copy Lacan's schemas at the time of the seminar, and thus it was very difficult to check them—Lacan didn't remember exactly how he'd drawn them in 1953, that is, exactly what stage they were at. I went through the notes of some of his students, and then he and I eventually compromised on something.

Yet another instance can be found in chapter 21, where truth is said to emerge from mistakes, for Lacan refers directly to the same notion in 1968 in a short and rather difficult article: "*La méprise du sujet supposé savoir*" ("The Mistaking of the Subject Supposed to Know"). In a word, we find echoes of Seminar I in all the rest of Lacan's teaching.

In the overture itself (page 2, paragraph 4), Lacan stresses the importance of symbols for scientific reflection: when he mentions that Lavoisier introduced an appropriate concept of the symbol at the same time as his phlogistics, we can already see an anticipation of Lacan's emphasis on mathemes, that is, the symbolism he invented for thinking psychoanalytic experience. While stressing the importance of symbols for science, we see that Lacan himself is beginning to forge a special symbolism for psychoanalytic experience, though he has not yet invented object *a* or the rest of the symbolism that grows out of his work.

Another historical note: while *Freud's Papers on Technique* is considered Book I of the seminar, Lacan had in fact already begun his seminar two years prior to that. In 1951–1952, he gave a seminar on the Dora case, echoes of which can be found in “Intervention on Transference” in the *Écrits*; in 1952–1953, he gave another on the Wolf Man, some of which is reflected in “Function and Field.” For the first two years, the seminar was given in his living room at home; there were perhaps fewer people attending then than are here tonight, I don't know. No stenographer was there to take shorthand, and there are but a few, not altogether reliable, notes. Only in 1953 did he start giving his seminar at Sainte-Anne Hospital with a stenographer present. But as you can see, the first lesson of the seminar is nevertheless missing, and further on there's another gap as well.

From 1953 to 1963, Lacan was reading Freud in his seminars, at the rate of one or two texts per year. For twelve years he presented himself as but a careful reader of Freud; Seminar I concerned Freud's technical writings, just as the year before had been devoted to a case history, and Seminar II was devoted to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *The Ego and the Id*. Lacan advocated a return to Freud's texts at a time when Freud's texts were less often read in the United States and England than those of other analytic writers. I suspect Freud's texts are now more widely read, largely as a result of Lacan's advocacy. Future historians will confirm or refute that point, but that is my sense.

Four years ago, at Columbia Institute, just prior to the “elimination” of certain members, I spoke with the president of the United Psychoanalytic Association, Dr. Cooper. He told me that “we've made progress since Freud”; when you hear such views, you understand why in 1953 already, people in America were saying that Freud was old-fashioned. They figured they knew better than Freud what it was all about, and clearly considered his early work to be naive and archaic. In 1963, for example, a book by Arlow and Brenner sought to demonstrate that Freud's second topography—the id, ego, and superego—completely supersedes the first topography, that is, the distinction between conscious, pre-conscious, and unconscious; in so doing, they discarded more than half of Freud's work as utterly antiquated. Thus, while I haven't checked with historians, I suspect that we can take Lacan at his word when he says that people were neglecting to read Freud.

Now what led Lacan in 1953 to believe he was really beginning to grasp the functioning and essence of psychoanalysis? That's not a biographical question—it's a theoretical one. What did 1953 represent in that sense? He was of course already at odds with the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA), and was obliged to teach in order to maintain some sort of professional existence among peers and friends; but I won't go into that. The theoretical moment is best characterized by the fact that Lacan managed to locate a point of convergence between phenomenology and structuralism. From the very beginning of his work in psychiatry—for Lacan was a psychiatrist, not a philosopher or an academic—he was phenomenologically oriented. By phenomenology, I mean Husserlian phenomenology, for it was Husserl's version thereof which was incorporated into psychiatry by Karl Jaspers.

I believe Lacan may be deemed an existentialist up until 1953. Which is going a bit too far, as he was certainly not Sartrean, but I would nevertheless accept his being qualified thusly. Nineteen fifty-three was not the year he abandoned existentialism/phenomenology for structuralism, but rather the year he blended the two: "Function and Field" is a blending of the two. Lacan's theory of speech at that time is, in a sense, existentialist and phenomenological, while his theory of language is structuralist.

He refers to Husserl (and in the background Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty) and Hegel, on the one hand, and Saussure, Jakobson, and Lévi-Strauss on the other. As a philosophy student in 1963, I remember how entranced I was the first time I read "Function and Field." I was fascinated to see how everything being hotly debated in the early 1960s, and above all the widespread movement to discard existentialism and flock to a popular form of structuralism, had been discussed by Lacan ten years earlier when he was blending the two.

I'm trying to give you a compendium of Lacan's theoretical itinerary, a sort of "Pilgrim's Progress" starring Lacan. It would be fun to present it as a kind of "Pilgrim's Progress." Though a very serious psychiatrist by the 1930s, I have the sense that Lacan may have had some other vocation before that. The dates don't work out quite right, between the end of his secondary schooling, college, and medical school, and I suspect he spent some two years doing something else—but it's just a conjecture. Whatever the case may be, let us keep in mind that Lacan was a psychiatrist, and the colleague of someone who was, for nearly half a century, the dominant force in French psychiatry: Henri Ey. In the *Écrits*, you will find an article written in 1945 that discusses Henri Ey's main ideas.

As a reference point, let us take Lacan's thesis: *On Paranoid Psychosis in Relationship to Personality*. Published in 1932, and republished in 1975,¹ it was by no means his first publication. But it helps us understand what Lacan was looking for between 1932 and 1953. The thesis is on paranoia, a very specific psychiatric category that was classically described by Kraepelin and gener-

ally accepted by French psychiatry. It contains three chapters, the second of which is entirely devoted to a single case history—rather original at a time when most theses compared a great many cases, covering each of them in very little detail. Lacan states that he has drawers full of case studies but prefers to develop just one at length to get to the heart of the matter. His first chapter provides a review of all psychiatric work on paranoia. The third chapter offers some perspectives arising from the lengthy case study, and refers to Freud. Thus, it is in this psychiatric study of psychosis that Freud is first mentioned in Lacan's work, and we know that Lacan entered analysis just after completing it. I would say he was driven to psychoanalysis chiefly because of his work on psychosis—not on hysteria.

Now what does Lacan do in his thesis? He invents a new category—"psychosis of self-punishment"—which is symmetrical to Freud's "neurosis of self-punishment." While Freud was elaborating the concept of the superego and demonstrating the importance of guilt in neurosis, Lacan was attempting to transfer the Freudian superego into the field of psychosis and demonstrate its similar functioning therein. He takes the case of a young woman who, in a delirious paranoid state, attacked a well-known actress with a knife. The event was mentioned in all the newspapers at the time, and the young woman was brought to Sainte-Anne Hospital where Lacan was practicing. Lacan notes that shortly after her incarceration, that is, shortly after the onset of punishment, her delusions abated dramatically. Caught by the police and imprisoned on the high-security ward of Sainte-Anne, her delirious state subsided. Lacan concludes that, to some extent, she seems to have wanted to be punished, and construes it as a case of "psychosis of self-punishment."

Still more important is the fact that Lacan's interest in psychoanalysis stems from Freud's concept of the superego. Which already tells us something about the Lacanian "self": it is intimately related to self-punishment. In other words, it has nothing to do with unity, harmony, equilibrium, or enjoyment. Rather, it is already a divided self. There's a problem with the term "superego": you get the sense of there being something above and something else below. But "superego" simply means that the supposed self doesn't want that which is conducive to its own good. When Freud says that it is the superego that organizes symptoms, he thereby qualifies the internal division of a self that doesn't want what is conducive to its own good. It wants, on the contrary, punishment, suffering, and displeasure. The supposed Lacanian self thus works against itself, not for its own good—as if in pursuit of unhappiness, if I may be permitted to reverse the famous phrase in the American constitution. "Superego" means that the self pursues unhappiness.

There is a connection between the division of the self and the fundamentally masochistic status of the self: the fact of finding satisfaction in displeasure. The concept of unconscious self-punishment found in Freud's work means that

the supposed self finds satisfaction in displeasure, pleasure in pain. That spells masochism. Up until the end of his teaching, and ever more clearly, to Lacan's mind the subject was fundamentally masochistic. This already gives us a clue as to why Lacan was interested in the mirror stage, for—as a description and analysis of the relation between a subject's own body (the self's own body) and its image—the mirror stage is based upon a divided self: it is a commentary on the divided self, a way of approximating the division of the self in another way. That is the most predominant topic in Lacan, even more predominant than language.

It is important to grasp Lacan's perspective in his work on the case study included in his thesis. It is that of phenomenological psychiatry. It won't be easy to give you a compendium of Husserl's phenomenology in the space of a few short minutes, but I'll give it a try nonetheless.

Let us compare it with Descartes' views. What is the truth of what we see and feel? What we see and feel as the outside world is not matter but rather extension, according to Descartes. It is through extension that he pinpoints the difference between cogito and thought. He distinguishes two realities: that of thought and that of extension. By extension he means that the truth of perception is given by scientific geometry. If we see our finger as bigger than the moon, it's simply corporeal illusion. Perceptual truth is given by science: astronomy and geometry provide truth about the outside world. Descartes takes an objective point of view of the world, the truth being God's viewpoint, that is, science. Science dictates the form for everyone from above, in other words, from a vantage point that no one can attain.

Now what does Husserl say? He takes it quite seriously that when I look from one specific point in space, I see one person seated just before me, and behind that person another whom I can see only in part, etc. We may adopt God's point of view and state where each person present is seated, or we can map it out, and *that* would be the truth. But I, nevertheless, am here, and have a perspective of my own: perspective is a fundamental concept of phenomenology. You cannot nullify your own perspective and you may thus philosophize about your own perspective. An axiom of true everyday life is that you cannot but perceive things one beside the other or with one thing blocking your perception of another. There is no *actual* perception without perspective. We can formulate that as a law.

We can now precisely simulate perspective: we are developing a science of perspective (in fact we are redeveloping it, as there was in the past a science of perspective). As a matter of fact, we might say that phenomenology opened up a field of philosophy concerning one's own body. As there is no such thing as a mind without a body, so we cannot think of the various objects in the world as being mere parts of God's extension: there is something objective that is always present—my own body—and I have a relationship with it that is different

from the relationship I have with any and every other object. Let us philosophize about that.

This view had a seminal influence on the twentieth century. The popular worship of what is lived and felt, related to the idea of the importance of one's own body, stems from Husserl. It is so widespread now that no one any longer knows where it is grounded. Running counter to science's objective point of view, phenomenology strove to develop a rigorous philosophy of subjectivity. It agreed that there were natural sciences wherein objective causal explanations could be found, but stipulated that when it comes to man as a being of perspective and a speaking subject, something else has to be taken into account: meaning.

Dilthey stated that even before Husserl, but it wasn't until Jaspers that meaning was brought into psychiatry. Jaspers opposed the psychiatrists who said, 'You have a mental illness? Let us find the objective, biological causes and constitutional makeup that explain it, just as we would explain any physical illness.' Jaspers brought to psychiatry an interest in the meaning of madness, taking into account the language spoken by the subject, and so on. Lacan explicitly refers to Jaspers in his thesis.

Heidegger's work stemmed from Husserl's. Heidegger defined what he called—not man—but rather *man's being-in-the-world*. It is not pure consciousness: it is always in a worldly context with a certain perspective, that is, there are always things he does not see but which are nevertheless around him. As a being-in-the-world, man has a project, that is, a sense of the future, something he wants to do. Thus, he projects his life from the point he is at into the future. Heidegger originated the very important existentialist concept of the "project." I am *here* physically, but I *project* myself into the future, and I conceive of what I want to do. It is on the basis of what I want to do that I can experience difficulties and obstacles. Sartre developed this point at length: things are not obstacles in and of themselves, they are only obstacles if you want something. It is because you want something to happen further along that retroactively things are experienced as obstacles. You find the same idea in another guise in Lacan's work.

Even in Heidegger's writings one comes upon the idea that man—being connected to the environment and to the future—is always projecting himself outside himself. What Heidegger called *Dasein* is not an interiority. He defines the existence of man not as interiority, an inner something like ideas or feelings, but rather as a constant projecting outside. Heidegger himself invented the notion of ex-sistence—*stare* outside—that Lacan took up; Heidegger himself invented the distinction between ex-sistence and insistence. Having no interiority, one projects outside, and this repeats itself; Lacan's wordplay on "*L'instance de la lettre*" ("The *Instance* [meaning "agency" or "insistence"] of the Letter") stems in reality from Heidegger.

Sartre radicalized Heidegger's point of view by saying that, fundamentally speaking, consciousness is nothing. If we take Heidegger seriously when he

says that man is always outside himself, we can simplify it by saying that consciousness is nothing—nothing more than a movement of intentionality towards the outside. That's *Being and Nothingness* in a nutshell. Sartre goes so far as to define consciousness as nothing, yet connected to intentionality. In defining consciousness, Sartre himself used the expression "lack of being" (*le manque d'être*) that Lacan recast as the *manque-à-être*. It's difficult to translate into English, but Lacan translated it as "want-to-be," rendering thereby the impact of desire.

The problematic from Husserl to Sartre can be stated as follows: if meaning is given to the world by man's project, we may still ask what gives meaning to a person's individual world. The project is one's perspective, not at the level of pure perception, but rather at that of history: an individual's perspective at the historical level. We may therefore ask someone, 'Why did you rebel?', and he may reply, 'I rebelled because something was intolerable.' Let's suppose your project is to defend democracy; you feel the resistance of bureaucracy, and thus experience some sort of obstacle in your path; you try to overthrow it, but at times the obstacle gets the better of you, as happened very recently in China. The obstacle is defined by a project which is a perspective; a subject takes on history, and gives it a meaning. If any of you happen to be members of the American Communist Party, you might, for example, view the recent events in China as indicative that class warfare will prevail, attributing thereby a certain meaning to the events. Consequently, you see the connection between projects, meaning as based on projects, and lack of being. I apologize for going so quickly—it's half a century of philosophy.

Phenomenology was of capital importance to Lacan as it introduced anti-objectivism. Lacan, in a sense, transferred many phenomenological considerations to the unconscious. It was essential to him that the unconscious not be taken as an interiority or container in which some drives are found over on one side and a few identifications over on the other—associated with the belief that a little analysis helps clean up the container. He took the unconscious not as a container, but rather as something ex-sistent—outside itself—that is connected to a subject who is a lack of being.

Just after the war an essayist/sociologist, Jules Monroe, wrote a book entitled *Social Facts Are Not Things*, which criticized Durkheim. Monroe used a phenomenological point of view to explain that social facts have meaning to people, and if you want to understand sociology you have to return to the meanings people give things. Things are not things in and of themselves. In Seminar I and "Function and Field," Lacan develops the idea that while psychical facts are not things, they can be reconstructed. Lacan forces us to ask ourselves how meaning is given to certain things by neurotics, psychotics, and perverts. He recounts the story of a child who, when slapped, asked whether it was meant kindly or as punishment. If the slapper said it was intended as punishment, the

child cried, whereas if he said it was meant kindly, the child did not cry. The child realized that a great deal hinged on the meaning attributed to the slap. Lacan asserts that the same is true of so-called instinctual developments that biology tries to pass off as objective. According to Freud, all events involving "instinctual development" are *meaningful* events; with a patient, one must reconstruct the meaningful events of his life, analyzing why he chose certain meanings and not others, and how certain meanings came to be attributed to certain events.

What distinguished Lacan from phenomenologists right from the outset in his thesis—I don't have the time here to comment upon it in detail—was that whereas he took meaning to be fundamental in psychiatry and psychoanalysis, he also stressed the importance of seeking the laws of meaning. He didn't consider meaning to be some kind of dainty thing floating in the air here and there which alights on something, gives it meaning, and then disappears. The fact that meaning is grounded in the subject—the fact that meaning is not a thing—does not imply that there are no laws of meaning. In 1932, Lacan was already studying linguistics to discover the laws of meaning. And, true to himself, in the overture of Seminar I, he stressed it anew: "Our task, here, is to reintroduce the register of meaning, a register that must itself be reintegrated on its own level" (p. 1)—in other words, his standpoint was still an existentialist/phenomenological one. In 1932, he was explicitly Jaspersian. In "*Propos sur la causalité psychique*" (*Écrits* 1966), within the context of his debate with Henri Ey, he was an existentialist; but at the same time he was preoccupied with logical time. Why so? There is objective time, as measured by clocks, and subjective time: time of maintained interest, time to end—which we are rapidly nearing—and so on. From a phenomenological point of view, you may distinguish between objective and subjective time. But Lacan doesn't approach subjective time through a description of feelings which cannot be narrated, attempting to grasp the inner feeling of temporality (as found in poetry, for example); he tries to find the logic of subjective time. His work on the mirror stage lies in the interim between his thesis and his debate with Henri Ey, but we'll skip that here to proceed to the moment where structuralism connects with existentialism.

Lacan probably read Lévi-Strauss, Jakobson, and Saussure in 1949 (and thus cannot be considered a founder of post-structuralism, a movement which began in the late sixties). He found what he was looking for therein: the laws of meaning. Certain aspects of existentialism and phenomenology were completely at odds with structuralism, but he managed to reconcile others. Structuralism taught him that the Husserlian attempt to describe one's immediate intuition of the world—feeling one's own body or being in a perspective—is illusory because language is always already there. Lacan thus rejected the phenomenological illusion of immediacy, and realized that the question of the origin of language was not a scientific one, the notion of structure undercutting the search for ori-

gins. In some sense there is no origin of structure: we cannot think unless language is already there. Language is an order (a reference to Saussure's idea of the symbolic order), that is, a whole composed of interrelated elements. A differential order must be conceived of as a whole, the different component elements being interrelated; none of the elements is absolute. What is the minimum number of elements in such an order? The minimal order consists of two related elements. After a great deal of thought, Lacan adopts S_1 and S_2 as the constituent elements of the minimum structural order.

Hence, we see that Lacan is not concerned with consciousness, but rather with the subject of meaning. He adopts Hegel's notion that the subject of meaning is always related to an other; in order to be myself, I must recognize another person who recognizes me. This clues us in as to how Lacan understands the relationship of the subject to the Other. The points embodied in Schema L crop up throughout Seminar I, as Lacan distinguishes the relationship between the subject (as subject of meaning) and the Other from the mirror stage relations between the subject and his own image (*Écrits*, p. 193). Lacan's primary emphasis in this seminar, though unfortunately I have no time to go into it now, is to distinguish, when tackling any psychoanalytic question, the level of language and symbols from the level of the imaginary. The imaginary/symbolic distinction is the main thrust of this seminar.

Question: You talked briefly about Heidegger as a sort of subtext at certain points in Lacan's work. How did Heidegger influence Lacan? Seminar VII, for example, pretty much ends with being-unto-death.

Miller: You think Heidegger is very present in Seminar VII?

Question: Towards the end, at any rate, Lacan uses the term "being-unto-death."

Miller: I think Lacan very much admired Heidegger, but I don't think his influence was as great as one might imagine. It was certainly far more pronounced at the beginning of Lacan's teaching than later on. An American Heideggerian came to see me some ten years ago, convinced that Lacan was a follower of Heidegger's. I disappointed him a great deal in saying that in some sense Lacan agreed with Heidegger—which was perhaps an excessive way of putting it—but nevertheless was not Heideggerian. I tried, on the contrary, to point out his phenomenological streak, situating him on the fringes of French psychiatry, objectivism, and biologically oriented psychoanalysis. Lacan had already adopted the perspective of meaning before taking up psychoanalysis. In 1932, he stressed the need to seek meaning in madness itself, that is, the inner logic of the patient's discourse. In that sense he considered himself to be Jaspersian. His path was diametrically opposed to that of researchers trying to detect the part of the brain affected in madness. Lacan, like Freud, was truly listening to what

his patients said. There were French psychiatrists who, while believing madness to be biologically determined, were nevertheless good listeners. Lacan claimed to have learned more from his biologically oriented professor of psychiatry than from any of the others. From the outset, he adopted a concern for meaning derived from phenomenology: he was looking for the laws of meaning and seeking to account for the emergence of meaning.

Structuralism led him to believe that he had to start building on the basis of Saussure's distinction between the signifier and the signified. Saussure stressed the existence of structure at the level of the materiality of language, asserting the existence of a symmetrical structure for the signifier which he himself never developed. Lacan modified that in stating that a certain signified, that is, a certain signification or meaning, is produced by a specific combination of signifiers. He sought out a law such that meaning would appear as a function of signifiers. In the end he isolated two fundamental combinations of signifiers: metaphor and metonymy. In the latter you have a combination of two signifiers which produces a certain effect of meaning, a certain signified (let's call it elision); in metaphor, you have another type of combination, which produces a positive effect of meaning.

Notes

1. [*De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité, suivi de premiers écrits sur la paranoïa*, Paris: Seuil, 1975.]

chology practice was like when it was in full bloom. By the way, I read in the newspaper yesterday a quote by someone claiming that there were never any French ego psychologists, an astounding pronouncement to say the least. In any case, Lacan was not interested in changing psychoanalysis for the sake of changing it, but to know how it works. Lacan again and again returned to the question 'how does analysis work?'

It may come as some surprise to you that Lacan's goal at that time was simplicity. On page after page of the seminar you find very simple conceptualizations of how analysis works, and you can trace the development of his views. His ideal of simplicity was similar to Freud's. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud states that science aims at simplification, that is, at finding concepts that may seem abstract, but which enable you to grasp what is going on in what Lacan at one point spoke of as "analytic experience." That expression is perhaps more widely employed nowadays, but Lacan seems to have been the first to use it in 1938.

Returning to the question of chronology, we know that Lacan entered analysis in 1932 after finishing his thesis. He gave his first public psychoanalytic presentation on the "Mirror Stage" in 1936 at the Marienbad Convention. Just after that convention, he wrote his first article on psychoanalysis, which is not very well known as we only have the first half of it; he never completed the second half. I want to focus first on this very early perspective that Lacan adopted regarding analytic experience while still in analysis, after having undergone four years of it. From August to October 1936, he wrote an article called "Beyond the 'Reality Principle'" which you can find in the French version of the *Écrits*. It is a very surprising article which is not often read because it contains a number of somewhat vague ideas about reality and Einstein, and about reality and science—all of which seems a bit irrelevant to most readers. Lacan was clearly trying to emulate Freud: Freud had written *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and thus Lacan, at age thirty-five, wrote "Beyond the 'Reality Principle.'" It is not very clear in the article, which is unfinished, exactly what he wanted to say, except that reality is much more complicated than we think and that Einstein's notion of relativity has something to do with it.

I will focus here on what Lacan offered as a first theoretical take on what he called analytic experience. The subtitle of his article, "Beyond the 'Reality Principle'," was "A Phenomenological Description of Analytic Experience." He was thus a phenomenologist when he was a psychiatrist, and he remained a phenomenologist when he was an analyst trying to present what he referred to as analytic experience. A phenomenological description entails trying to present what is going on without any preconceptions. Some of you might want to state that in a more complex fashion, but in any case it involves the suspension of all preconceived notions and theoretical constructs: you are simply to describe the phenomena. In adopting this perspective, what Lacan found to be the funda-

mental datum of analytic experience was language. It is striking to see that in 1936, when Lacan was just leaving psychiatry behind and starting to work on psychoanalysis. He only really began to develop this idea in 1953, when he wrote "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" (*Écrits*), and continued to develop it in Seminar I. But it was already there in 1936. We can see how he built on that idea from 1936 onward.

This notion was not in the forefront at the outset. Lacan simply stated that what seems specific to Freudian practice, when compared to psychiatric practice, is that in psychoanalysis you work on the basis of what the patient says. In other words, you do not try to replace what he says with some objective description of his symptom as you do in psychiatry; rather, you listen to the patient's own testimony about his symptom. As simple as this point may seem, it is constitutive of a whole new approach. It is the Archimedean point of Lacan's teaching. It cannot be explicitly found in Freud's writings, but it stems from Freud's description of analytic experience. It implies that in psychoanalysis proper, you do not refer anything that is said to what is. You do not verify what the patient says. Freud began by doing that and was still doing it even in the case of the Wolf Man; but after that he stopped. Asking the patient or his or her family for proof in order to ascertain the veracity of what he or she says is not analysis. Lacan's standpoint here is that references to reality are replaced by the notion of the internal coherence of the patient's discourse, that is, of what he or she says. You do not compare what he or she says to something that can be found in reality; you simply check whether his or her discourse is consistent. You look for discrepancies within the discourse itself, not for cross checks in reality.

Thus, Lacan's point of departure is that language is the main datum of analytic experience. Now if that's true, and phenomenologically speaking it is true, then psychoanalysis functions through language and a problem arises: What is language? From 1936 to 1953 and afterward, you see a progressive enrichment of the concept of language in Lacan's work. He finds his way, in some sense, when he encounters structural linguistics. But he had been awaiting that encounter since 1936, and even since his thesis in 1932. In 1936, Lacan considered language to amount to signs. Even this simplistic view of language allowed him to present some kind of alternative. A sign signifies something when you take the sign to refer to something in reality or in your mind: you connect the sign with that something that is referred to. Lacan says that in psychoanalysis what is important is rather that the sign signifies *to someone*. In this very simple analysis of the sign, something essential is being presented. Prior to signifying something, a sign signifies to someone. Lacan thereby emphasized the fact that a patient speaks *to someone*. He shifted from language to communication: what appeared to be most important in the structure of language was communication, or "interlocution" as he called it. He stressed the social function of language—language as a social link. In the 1970s, Lacan presented his notion of

discourse as fundamentally a social link, but it was already there in embryonic form much earlier. It is not so much the thing referred to that is important but the other to whom one speaks. The discussion, granted but one page in the 1930s, nonetheless presents what Lacan spent years developing.

Even if you do not understand what a patient is saying, even if in analysis you do not question the credibility of what he is saying, the fact remains that he wants to speak—he wants to say something, and thus the “want to say”¹ can already be isolated. Lacan later talks about it in terms of desire, but it is already clear here that the analysand wants an answer. What kind of answer does the analyst provide? And what kind of other is the analyst in this very unusual kind of interlocution constitutive of psychoanalytic experience? What kind of other is an analyst?

Lacan’s answer at that time was very simple: an other who tries to be as anonymous as possible: an other without qualities (to paraphrase the title of Robert Musil’s book) who makes himself invisible, rarely answers, and consequently enables the patient to project images onto him which are of fundamental importance to the patient. We already have here a conceptualization: The analyst is to be seen as the Other of language;² he is “imaginarized” by the speaking subject because he is an unusual kind of other.

On the basis of this point of departure you can already provide a new foundation for the dependency that arises in analytic experience, which has always been difficult to account for. Why does a person who enters analysis generally, in a very short space of time, begin to feel so emotionally dependent on the analyst, thereby initiating regression and transference? Lacan’s first answer is that *dependency arises out of the “dissymmetrization” of the structure of psychoanalytic communication*. In normal communication situations between speaking subjects, we are speakers and listeners in turn. A type of equalization or egalitarianism is produced thereby. In this lecturing situation, the more I talk, the more dependent upon you I become. In psychoanalysis, we deliberately “dissymmetrize” communication. One person is chiefly the speaker, and the other the listener. Dependency can be directly deduced therefrom, for if you admit that a speaker is dependent upon a listener, regression, repetition, and transference follow, assuming that the listener remains anonymous. The speaker invents this listener on the model of the people who have listened to him call out and cry out his whole life long.

Lacan continually worked on the structure of communication, trying to be more and more precise—and twenty years later, his account was more sophisticated—but he always held to the thesis that psychoanalytic experience makes an unusual use of the general structure of communication. For instance, in “Variations on the Standard Treatment” you find the same emphasis on uncommon communication. It is always the listener as such who is master of the truce, that is, it is he who says yes or no, accepts or rejects, decides to take at face value

or literally what I say, or decides to understand what I'm alluding to. Everything depends on the listener's reaction, and while that may shift in the course of a conversation, it is still always the listener who is in the position of master: the master of meaning. Whatever I say, the other may take it as a cry for help or as a rejection of some kind. It is always interpreted at the place of the listener. This property of communication is greatly multiplied in the analytic situation. Lacan says as much in that paper published in 1956, but he was working from the very same foundation he laid down in 1936; the later version was far more developed and lively, but was nevertheless fundamentally the same. At the end of that article he says that, in his discussion of the structure of communication, he has tried to formulate something that is already clear in Freud's doctrine.

Now we are going to tackle his libido theory. Lacan very early on divided Freud's work and the psychoanalytic field as a whole into that which is based on communication and language, on the one hand, and the libido theory, that is, metapsychology, on the other. If you approach psychoanalysis from the vantage point of language and meaning alone, you can't account for everything. The theory of sexual development, with its various stages, drives, etc., escapes your grasp. By 1936, Lacan was already separating Freud's theory of language from his theory of libido. A fundamental problem in teaching Lacan is to always try to reformulate the theory of the drives and the libido in terms of the theory of language. In speaking of the relationship between signifiers and *jouissance*, as we now do, we continue to grapple with this division. In 1953, in "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," you can see that the very terms "speech" and "language" indicate a disentangling of techniques for deciphering the unconscious from the theory of instincts or drives. Meaning, deciphering, and interpretation are set apart from instincts and drives.

Lacan seemed to be asking himself whether there are in fact two different directions implicit in Freud's work and thus in psychoanalysis as a whole, or whether they are reducible to a common core; and, if so, at what cost? In what sense can drives be reduced to or inscribed within the structure of language? Lacan essentially answered with object (a). He invented it to try to integrate drives into the structure of language. In so doing, he paid a price; for in the structure of language, you have signifiers and meanings, but he was obliged to invent something which is neither, but rather something else altogether. That may seem a bit abstract, but it will serve as a compass in finding our way in Lacan's opus.

Now to add a little flesh to this bare-bones framework. If we accept the notion that speaking *to* someone is more important than speaking *about* something, that is, if we stress the social character of language, its character of constituting a connection with others, then we have a problem with the things which appear in Freud to be biological functions. If you view analytic experience as a communication experience of an unusual kind, you stress the social

character of the experience and of language. But what do you do with Freud's seemingly biological functions?

Lacan sets out to prove that the drives are completely embedded in language, and that they are structured like a language, which is easy enough to prove in Freud's work. Drives are part of the mythology of psychoanalysis. They are not as natural as all that. The theory of drives is metapsychological. Drives are presented by Freud through grammatical transformations: seeing—being seen; he uses all the verb tenses in analyzing drives. If you refer to his article on "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," you'll see this. There is necessarily a problem between the social and the biological, between language and libido.

I won't go into it here, but his 1938 text on *Family Complexes*,³ a general clinical presentation centered on the family, contains nothing on analysis as such; but it is clear that when he talks about Freud, he never simply repeats Freud—he tries to find his own path within Freud's work, seeking his own perspective. In *Family Complexes* he invents his own concept of complexes, or generalizes Freud's concept. He considers that the main defect in Freud's theory is its neglect of structure, privileging instead a dynamic approach. It neglects fixed form. In 1938, Lacan was, extraordinarily enough, already using the word structure, and already looking to reformulate Freud's work in terms of structure. When he began reading Lévi-Strauss and Jakobson in the late 1940s, it was something he had been looking for for a long time.

What he stresses in *Family Complexes* is the autonomy of forms. Freud was too much of an atomistic thinker for Lacan, and even the term "free association" stems from the atomist tradition. Lacan tries to formulate what he calls "complexes" as fixed forms in which a behavior or emotion is typified. He rewrites Freud's developmental stages as structures, which he calls complexes. Thus, he takes the word "complex" from the Oedipus and castration complexes, and makes it equivalent to the word "structure." It's as if he said to himself 'Freud thought he could ground his concept of complexes in instinct, and I'm going to do just the opposite. I'm going to take the concept of complex as primary, and clarify the concept of instinct on its basis.' Now if you do that, instinct in humans appears to be dependent on structure as social; already in *Family Complexes* Lacan tries to show that instincts in human beings have nothing to do with instincts in animals. What we call instincts in human beings are open to manipulation and differentiation. There is clearly an unsatisfied appetite in man which cannot be reduced to simple instinct. It hardly seems to require any proof, it's so obvious. Consider advertising: Imagine dogs watching TV, desiring and identifying with a man or a dog in a commercial. That can happen with domestic animals. As Lacan said, animals living in a sea of language are always a bit neurotic and always develop some kind of disorder.

Complexes are always cultural. Lacan opposed instincts and nature to complexes and culture, and showed that, in man, social structure—language—goes

to the farthest reaches of the organism. It may seem that drives are purely organic, but they are not.

Let us skip what Lacan wrote during World War II because he didn't publish anything; he didn't want to publish while France was occupied by Germany. There was a wonderful intellectual life in Paris during the German occupation; many leftist intellectuals obtained authorization from the Nazis to publish and put on plays. Lacan was not a leftist intellectual, but it is worth mentioning that he had the decency not to publish anything during the occupation. It was only in 1945, upon France's liberation, that he gave an article to a small unknown artistic journal, a short logical piece called "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty."⁴ That was written in 1944 and published in 1945. Then came his article "Remarks on Psychical Causality" (*Écrits* 1966) written in 1946, which I will also leave aside, in order to proceed directly to an article that is really the sequel to "Beyond the 'Reality Principle'": "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis" (*Écrits*), written in 1948. Here, Lacan refines his conception of language, the sign, the other, etc. You can understand why he took up the subject of aggression in 1948, because at that time it was a popular topic in psychoanalysis; it was what the ego psychology psychoanalysts considered acceptable in Freud's notion of the death instinct, that is, in his notion that there is not only libido, but also the death drive. After World War II, which seemed to have demonstrated the existence of some kind of death drive, after five years of world war, concentration camps, the atom bomb, etc., the idea that there might be such a thing as a death drive in humanity didn't seem so far-fetched. So, it was a timely topic.

As you perhaps already know, Lacan's view of aggressivity grows out of what he says about the mirror stage: the imaginary relationship is a perpetual war against the other due to the fact that the other usurps my place. That enables Lacan to account for aggression at the imaginary level at that time: aggression is always grounded in narcissism. But correlatively, how does that relate to the phenomena of analytic experience? In analytic experience, on the contrary, we have dialogue—Lacan adopted that term at the time though it's a bit too symmetrical—and dialogue as such is a renunciation of aggression. Thus, you see how he built upon this already developed position. The imaginary level is fundamentally characterized by aggression, so we have to distinguish the level of language, where understanding and dialogue are possible, from the level of the imaginary. Hence the distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic. The imaginary is war; the symbolic level of speech is language, and its fundamental phenomenon appears to be peace.

In this article from 1948, Lacan expands upon his mirror stage article using phenomenological vocabulary, conceptualizing analytic experience as intersubjectivity. He provides a still more precise definition when he says that what is essential in verbal communication is meaning, not reference. His two axioms,

which define the intersubjectivity of meaning, are that only a subject can understand a meaning (which is the first definition of the subject in Lacan's work: the subject is the agency that understands meaning, the agency correlated with meaning) and every meaningful phenomenon implies a subject. If you find meaning somewhere, you have a subject. It is here that Lacan first begins to introduce the notion of a subject in psychoanalysis: the subject of meaning. You can take it as a formal definition, like that of a triangle as such and such. We call "subject" that instance or agency which understands meanings or is correlated thereto, such that there is no meaning without a subject.

We could perhaps establish a more complex relationship between the subject and meaning, but if we say correlation it is sufficiently general. It allows us to distinguish between the individual and the subject, the former, according to Aristotle's definition, implying a body, a soul, etc. When it comes to the subject, we are not concerned with the individual—that is true in psychoanalysis as well. I was surprised to hear today that my son—who is trying to get into the main engineering and math school in France, the *École Polytechnique*—is obliged, in addition to the usual examinations in math, physics, English, Spanish, and French, to pass a swimming test as well. And tomorrow he has to run. He is not taken, in such a case, as the subject of knowledge or as a subject of meaning who has to explain something. He must be accepted as a body as well. It changed my view of the school: my literary/philosophical sense was that one should be able to get into the school as a pure self, a pure subject of meaning and knowledge, without having to run. Next thing you know, one will have to be able to repair cars!

What Lacan says about psychoanalysis is that you enter as a subject of meaning. 'Let no one enter here who is not a subject of meaning.' Even after having seen a patient for a very long time, you may not know whether or not he can swim. You may very well not know his capacities at the individual level. As Lacan said, you will not know the intensity of his tastes; there is a great deal of data you will not know, even after years of analysis of the subject—the subject of meaning—and that is a very radical definition of what may enter into the artificial setting of analysis.

We must also differentiate between the subject and the ego. That is a fundamental distinction in Lacan's work from 1948 on. He gives a definition of the ego, similar to the definition Sartre provided in a seminal text, prior to *Being and Nothingness*, entitled *Transcendence of the Ego*,⁵ in which Sartre radicalized certain of Husserl's notions, defining consciousness as nothingness and the ego as an object in the world—in your supposedly inner world, but an object nevertheless. Self-consciousness is by definition transparent, and thus the ego seems to be opaque as an object; you do not know what is inside: it is like an object in the world. That inspired Lacan to define the ego as the core of given consciousness, but as opaque to reflection; fundamentally, he defines the ego at

the level of the imaginary. The subject, on the other hand, is defined at the level of the symbolic. When defined as the subject of meaning, it is on the side of the signified, not of the signifier. If you understand the notion of the subject of meaning, you see that the concept of the subject in Lacan is situated at the symbolic level, while the ego is at the imaginary level. At this early stage, he situates the subject on the side of the signified; later, however, he situates the subject on the side of the signifier. Thus, he shifts from the signified to the signifier.

If we speak of the subject of meaning, and we consider that meaning changes as you speak, understanding also changes. The concept of the subject takes on new meaning for you as I continue to talk about it. The meaning of what I say changes constantly as I add to it. On the one hand, we have the problematic of continuously changing meaning and the subject that goes with it, and on the other we have an imaginary relationship characterized by inertia. Hence, we have two relationships: the imaginary relationship which is fixed and involves aggressivity, and the relationship between the subject and the Other at the symbolic level (see Schema L, *Écrits*, p. 193; p. 127 below) where meaning is constantly shifting—inertia on the one hand, and change on the other. This is found at the end of Seminar II and in Seminar III, but you can find it in Seminar I as well. The symbolic is the axis of the subject as such.

A fundamental opposition between subject and ego is as follows: If you take the subject as a subject of meaning, it is constantly emerging, as meaning is constantly emerging; the subject is not a fixed point: it is mobile. The ego, on the other hand, has a certain inertia and fixity. That is why Lacan characterizes analytic experience as a “realization of the subject.” The subject, which upon entry into analysis is nothing—that’s Sartre’s nothingness—realizes him or herself through changing meanings and becomes something. Thus, there is an opposition between the value of inertia on the side of the ego, and the value of mobility and self-realization on the side of the subject. There is a constant movement back and forth between the two, which brings up the question of transference.

As long as Lacan defined transference as imaginary, it remained a moment of inertia in psychoanalytic experience. For example, in his 1951 article, “Intervention on Transference” (*Écrits* 1966), he says that transference becomes obvious in analytic experience at the moment of stagnation. When the patient stops talking, the analyst can always interpret: the patient is thinking about me. That can also be found in Seminar I. Transference appears when the subject reverts to silence, thereby establishing an imaginary relationship with the analyst.

His theory of transference changes when he tries to offer a *symbolic* definition of transference. He provides such a definition when he proposes the expression “the subject supposed to know.” The subject supposed to know is the pivotal point of transference; and this definition has nothing to do with emotion, projection, or inertia.

Consider what happens in analytic work with obsessive neurotics. An obsessive patient seems to speak more to himself than to another person, so much so that when you interpret something for him, he is disturbed by your intrusion and wants to continue his own train of thought. It seems that the subject wants to talk to himself: he asks questions but wants to provide his own answers. That is why Lacan speaks of the “intrasubjectivity” of obsessive patients.

On the contrary, you might say that it is really the hysterical patient who solicits an answer from the other. Hysterical patients cannot bear the analyst’s silence and anonymity. They want the analyst to be someone with a face, someone they can touch and feel as a living body, whereas the analyst’s body appears dead to the hysterical patient. That is why, for instance, if you insist on strict respect for the rules of the analytic setting, many hysterical patients feel rejected, and you wind up rejecting schizophrenics as well, because you do not understand that part and parcel of the hysteric’s question is “is this other dead or alive?”

In psychosis, the Other clearly speaks to the subject in his or her own head. In some sense, the concept of the Other stems from Lacan’s work as a psychiatrist and from the notion of mental automatism (Clérambault isolated the phenomenon of someone speaking inside the patient’s own head). The Other as agency or instance is present in the very structure of communication. In some sense, psychotics are simply more lucid than we are: they know better than we do that we are spoken. The paranoid subject who complains of being talked about behind his back, people saying bad things about him, is far more lucid about his situation than we are, because we are fundamentally talked about, even before we are born. There is a discourse which precedes and conditions our appearance in the world.

Lacan differentiated clinical categories according to the different fundamental questions posed by different subjects. The subject of meaning is, in and of itself, a question. The subject is a question mark. He or she doesn’t know, nor do we know, what he or she will in the future reveal about the past, because of the retroaction I spoke of last time.

Question: I have a question about Darwin. I think it’s at the very beginning of the second seminar that Lacan talks about a Copernican revolution, and he occasionally compares the behavior of human beings to that of animals. One of the interesting things about Darwin and about Freud is that they both demote human beings. Darwin showed the continuity between human beings and non-human animals; Freud continued that same sort of debasement. What is interesting here is that, once you dispense with the need for the centrality of instincts in Freud’s theory, psychoanalysis no longer appears to continue the series of Copernican revolutions brought about by Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud.

Miller: Yes, that could give one the impression that Lacan was on the side of sublimation, rejuvenating the narcissism of human beings. In the 1950s, you sometimes sense some sort of exaltation, but even then pure instinct is minimized by Lacan. But man's homogeneity with animals is conserved and extended by Lacan on the imaginary level. He shows, at that level, that we find the same things in human psychology as in ethology. He constantly refers in his early work to the animal kingdom. In his early seminars, he constantly takes examples from ethology to demonstrate the material importance of images. In 1946, for example, he explains that some pigeons cannot mature if they cannot see other pigeons like themselves. He uses that to show that images have a material efficiency. They are not mere illusions, but have materiality. It is a given in Lacan's work for years that human psychology is animal psychology, but that there is another level that intersects the animal level: that of the realization of the subject. At times, Lacan seems very enthusiastic about the power of the symbolic; in 1953, he's really changing things—he is free of all the fretting of the IPA. But soon thereafter he adopts a more Freudian pessimism. To many, it was horrifying to see how sarcastic he was about the existence of human beings. If you are looking for a debasement of humanity, read Lacan.

Notes

1. [Cf. the French expression *vouloir dire*: to mean (literally, to want to say).]
2. [*l'Autre du langage*: linguistic Other, Other as language, the Other that language is.]
3. [*Les complexes familiaux*, Paris: Seuil, 1984.]
4. [The English translation by Bruce Fink and Marc Silver can be found in *Newsletter of the Freudian Field*, 2, 1988, pp. 4-22.]
5. [Written in 1936 and published in *Recherches philosophiques*, VI, 1936-1937, pp. 85-123; for the English translation see *Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick. New York: Noonday Press, 1957.]