

FIRST LESSON



THE UNCONSCIOUS AND JOUISSANCE

I have chosen to present two fundamental principles of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory to you, one related to the unconscious, and the other to *jouissance*. The first principle states: "*The unconscious is structured like a language*"; and the second, "*There is no sexual relation.*" I would say that these two principles are the pillars which support the theoretical edifice of psychoanalysis, the premises from which everything flows and to which everything returns, and which found an ethics for the psychoanalyst. Indeed, if analysts recognize these propositions and test them in their practice, their listening will be uniquely transformed. To orient myself I will use a concept, that of the *symptom*, a concept that will lead us first to a principle relative to the unconscious and then to one relative to *jouissance*. Let us accept for the moment, the triad: symptom, unconscious, and *jouissance*, and immediately pose the question: What is a symptom for us?

The symptom, properly speaking, is an event in analysis; one of the forms in which the experience occurs. All analytic experiences are not symptoms, but any symptom manifested in the course of the cure constitutes an analytic experience. The experience is a punctual phenomenon, a uniquely privileged moment that marks and defines the path of an analysis. The experience is a series of moments anticipated by the psychoanalyst, fleeting moments, and quite ideal, as ideal as geometric points. And nevertheless the experience is not only an abstract geometric point. It has an empirical aspect as well, I would even say a sensible aspect, an aspect that is perceptible by the senses which is presented as *that moment when the patient speaks and does not know what he or she says*. It is the moment of a stutter, when the patient stammers, the moment when he or she hesitates and speech fails. It is said that Lacanian analysts are interested in language, and they are mistakenly classified as linguists. This is a mistake, because psychoanalysts are not linguists. Psychoanalysts are certainly interested in

language, but they are only interested in the limit where language fails. We are attentive to the moments at which language slips and speech goes astray. Let us consider a dream for example. We accord more importance to the way that the dream is recounted than to the dream itself; and not only to the way it is recounted but above all to the precise point of the narrative when the patient is not sure and says, "I don't know . . . I cannot remember any more . . . perhaps . . . maybe . . ." This is the point that we refer to as *experience*, the perceptible side of experience: a stutter, an uncertainty, a comment which escapes us.

This describes the empirical aspect of the experience. Now we come to the abstract aspect of analytic experience to complete our definition. I have said that the experience constitutes the limits of speech, the moment when speech fails. Now I would add that when speech fails, *jouissance* appears. We have changed, we are now operating in a radically different context. We leave the empirical order of sensibility to enter that of a theoretical elaboration. Analytic theory postulates that at the moment when the patient is exceeded by his or her speech, *jouissance* surges forth. Why? What is *jouissance*? Let us set this question aside for the moment in order to return to it when we address the second principle concerning the nonexistence of a sexual relation. We can consider for the moment the concept of the symptom and concern ourselves with the first principle which, as we will see, claims that the unconscious is a knowledge structured like a language.

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We can pose the question once again: What is a symptom? We know, generally, that the symptom is a disorder that causes suffering and manifests a pathological state of which it is the expression. But in psychoanalysis, the symptom appears to us differently than as a disorder that causes suffering, it is above all a malaise that is imposed on us, beyond us, and which challenges us. We describe this malaise with peculiar words and unexpected metaphors. But whether it is a suffering, or an odd word to describe the suffering, the symptom is above all an involuntary act produced apart from any intentionality and any conscious knowledge. It is an act which does not refer to a pathological state so much as to a process called the unconscious. The symptom is for us a manifestation of the unconscious.

A symptom has three characteristics (*figure 1*). First, it is the way in which the patient speaks of his or her suffering, the unexpected

details of the narrative, and in particular, the impromptu speech. I recall an analysand who, for example, shared her anxiety of crossing bridges with me, saying "It is very difficult for me to go there, I do not make it unless someone is with me. Sometimes I have been able to cross alone, when I could see the silhouette of a police officer or a uniformed guard on the other side of the bridge." Well, in this case, it is the detail of the man in uniform which interests me more than the phobic anxiety itself.

The second characteristic of the symptom is the theory that the analysand formulates in order to understand his or her malaise, for there is no suffering in analysis unless one wonders why one suffers. Freud noted the presence in children of an infantile sexual theory; likewise we note that the patient as well constructs his or her personal theory, they "throw in their two cents" to try to explain their suffering. The symptom is a painful event that is always accompanied by the patient's interpretation of the causes of their malaise. Now this is a crucial point. It is so crucial that if in an analysis, during the preliminary interview, for example, the subject is not awakened by his or her own questions, if he or she has no idea of the reason for their suffering, it is the psychoanalyst who will then have to encourage the emergence of a "theory" by leading the patient to question him or herself. But when in an analysis the patient interprets and explains his or her suffering, an essential phenomenon takes place: the analyst becomes, progressively and unnoticeably, the recipient of the symptom. The more I explain the cause of my suffering, the more the one who listens to me becomes the Other of my symptom. This is the third characteristic of the symptom: the symptom calls for and involves the presence of the psychoanalyst.

We can change the terms and put it another way. The principal characteristic of the symptom in analysis is that the analyst becomes included in it. In a cure already well underway, the symptom is so linked to the presence of the practitioner that when you think of one you think of the other—when I suffer I think of my analyst, and when I think of him or her it is the memory of my suffering that comes back to me. The psychoanalyst becomes, then, a part of the symptom. It is this third characteristic of the symptom that opens the door to what we call the analytic transference and differentiates psychoanalysis from psychotherapy. Precisely, if you ask me about the transference in psychoanalysis, one possible response would be to define it as the particular moment of the analytic relation when the analyst becomes a part of the patient's symptom. This is what Lacan calls the subject-

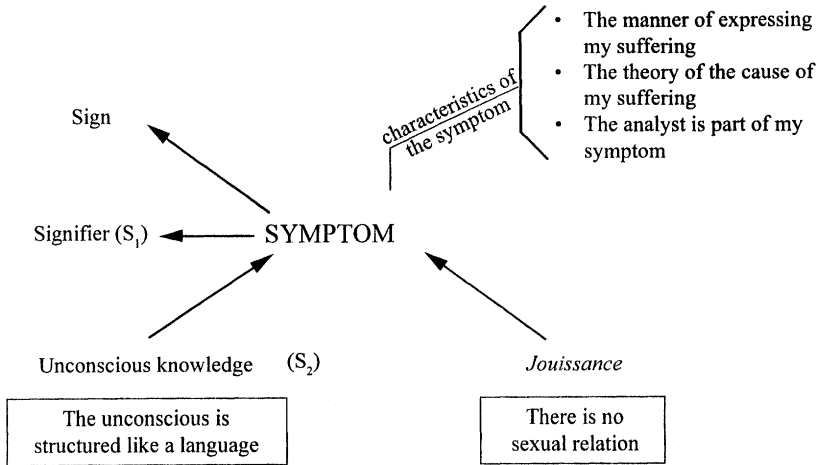
supposed-to-know. The expression "subject-supposed-to-know" does not simply mean that the analysand supposes that his or her analyst possesses knowledge about them. It is not just that the patient supposes that the analyst *knows*, but rather that the analyst is at the source of the patient's suffering or of any unexpected event. When I suffer or am faced with an event that surprises me, I recall my analyst to such an extent that I cannot avoid wondering if he or she were one of the causes. In an analysis that is in progress, for example, the patient declares, "Since I came here, I have the impression that everything that happens to me is related to the work that I am doing with you." The pregnant woman will say, "I am pregnant, but I am sure that my pregnancy is directly linked to my analysis." But what does "directly linked to my analysis" mean? That means that from a certain point of view the analyst is the spiritual father of the child, the cause of the event. To say that the analyst is a part of the symptom means that he or she is in the place of the cause of the symptom. Thus the Lacanian expression "subject-supposed-to-know" means that the analyst takes the place of the *recipient* of the symptom, and then in addition to that, means that they are the *cause* of it.

For the practitioner who must direct the cure, it is important to understand how, imperceptibly, through the sessions, this phenomenon of the supposition ends by including them in the symptom of the analysand. I am thinking particularly of an analyst undergoing supervision who reported his difficulties with a patient to me whom he had worked with for two years and who seemed trapped in an obsessional neurosis. I responded to him in the following way: "If after two years of analysis you think that your patient has an obsessional neurosis, you should tell yourself that when you listen to him or her that the symptoms of his or her neurosis involve you. Yes, try to listen to your analysand, while saying to yourself that you are a part of the obsession from which he or she suffers." We can note that it is in this engaged kind of listening that the great difference between the psychiatric diagnosis and the psychoanalytic understanding of a neurosis can be found. When the analyst diagnoses the patient's neurosis, he or she knows that they are a part of the symptom that they diagnose. In sum, the phenomenon of the supposition accompanies every event in an analysis. Thus there is no painful event which is not "interpreted" by the patient whose words, suffering, and beliefs gradually envelop the practitioner.

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FIGURE 1

The triad: symptom, knowledge and jouissance



In truth, the characteristics of the symptom can be considered from another conceptual angle, by distinguishing two aspects of the symptom: on the one hand as a sign, and on the other hand as a signifier. The sign is directly linked to the phenomenon of the supposition which we just mentioned. This aspect of the symptom as a sign entails the following: a painful and surprising event occurs, the patient explains it, and immediately places the analyst in the role of being both the Other of the symptom, and the cause of the symptom. This is the definition of the sign proposed by Lacan: a sign is that which represents something for someone. In fact it is the definition established by the American logician Charles Sanders Peirce.¹ Any symptom represents something for the one who suffers and at times for the one who listens. Pregnancy, for example, for that young woman, represents the fruit of her work in analysis and for the practitioner, one of the therapeutic effects of treatment. This then is the aspect of the symptom that is a sign. It is the factor that encourages the establishment and development of the transference.

Now we will discuss the symptom as signifier. Of the two, this is the most important for us, because it makes us understand that in which the structure of the unconscious consists. As signifier, the

symptom tells us: this suffering that is imposed upon me against my will is *One* event among other events that are rigorously linked to it, an event which, unlike the sign, has no meaning. But what is a signifying event, and more generally, what is a signifier?

The signifier is a formal rather than a descriptive category. What it designates hardly matters: for example, we have chosen the example of the symptom, but a signifier could just as well be a slip of the tongue, a dream, the narrative of a dream, a detail in this narrative, even a gesture, a sound, a silence, or the analyst's interpretation. All these manifestations can be legitimately called signifying events on the condition that three criteria are taken into account—three criteria that are nonlinguistic in nature, in spite of the fact that the term signifier is of linguistic origin.

First, the signifier is always the involuntary expression of a speaking being. Any gesture will be a signifier only if it is a clumsy and unexpected gesture, accomplished apart from any intentionality or conscious knowledge.

Second, a signifier is devoid of meaning, it signifies nothing and is neither explicable nor inexplicable. As a signifying event, a symptom calls for neither a supposition of the analysand, nor a construction of the psychoanalyst. In a word, the signifier is, and nothing more.

Third, the signifier *is*, yes, if it remains attached to a totality of other signifiers. It is *One* among others with which it is articulated. Although the *One* signifier can be perceived by the analysand or the analyst, the others to which it is connected are not. Those are virtual signifiers, formerly actualized or, as of yet, not actualized. The articulation between *One* and the others is so essential that when one thinks of the signifier, one can never imagine it by itself. A Lacanian aphorism summarizes this relation quite well: a signifier is only a signifier for other signifiers.² This formal articulation has practical implications: a signifier is a signifier neither for the psychoanalyst, nor for the analysand, nor for anyone, but only for other signifiers. What can this mean if not that as soon as the signifier occurs, it recalls other signifiers that are already past and announces the inevitable arrival of the next signifier. I can, for instance, be surprised by a symptom that exceeds my intention as a "saying" that I say without knowing it, I can as well bear it as a painful event, I can even interpret it, think it, give it meaning, and nevertheless all my suppositions will not change the fact

that in three days, or one year, it can reappear again or in the guise of another sudden and uncontrollable event. This is when I ask, "But how is it possible? What is there within me that causes the symptom to reappear as insurmountable, repeating itself so mercilessly?" We are faced here with the problem of repetition to which we will return often, particularly in the second lesson. For the moment we will bear in mind the essential idea: one thing is the concrete and individual reality of a symptom—a phobia of bridges, for example—another is the signifying status of the same symptom, the same phobia but considered from the perspective of the three criteria that define the signifier. From the point of view of their individual reality, all symptoms are distinct and never repeat themselves identically. Yet, from the point of view of their formal signifying value, all symptoms are identical because they all appear one by one in the place of the *One*. Here, then, is the essential idea at the heart of the Lacanian concept of repetition: all the events which occupy the place of the *One* repeat themselves identically in a formal sense, irrespective of their different material realities. We will return to this.

As we can see, the signifying side of the symptom is an involuntary event, devoid of meaning and ready to be repeated. In short, the symptom is a signifier if we take it as a event of which I am the master of neither the cause, the meaning, nor the repetition.

Lacan represented the signifying event with the notation S_1 . The number 1 marks that this is a unique event—a symptom is always of the order of the *One*—and the letter S notes the word signifier. To consider then that the symptom has a signifying aspect indicates that it is *One*, that this *One* surprises and imposes itself on the patient without their knowledge, and repeats itself. This means that there will be another *One*, and then another *One*, etc.

But to claim that the symptom is a signifier underlines not only that it is *One* that is imposed on us, escapes us, and is ready to repeat itself, but above all, that it occurs at the right moment to question us. As a signifier, the symptom is not a suffering to which we submit passively. No, it is a suffering that questions, and that question is always pertinent. It is pertinent as a message that teaches us facts of our history that have been ignored, and tells us what we had not, until then, been aware of. Another example of the signifier is a witticism: the witticism considered as a spontaneous reply that one says without knowing it, but with such an appropriateness and accuracy that everyone laughs. Now the symptom can have the same virtue. It can

manifest itself in the life of the subject in a way that is so opportune that, in spite of its distressing character, it appears as a missing piece of a puzzle which once put in its place, puts our life in a new light, without however, completing the puzzle.

The signifying scope of the symptom resides precisely in its ability to appear at just the right moment, as an indispensable piece that produces, in the patient and often in the analyst, a new question—a question that provides access to the unconscious considered as knowledge: “But how is it possible that the symptom reappears so opportunely such that irrespective of the fact that I suffer, it casts my life in a new light? What is this combinatory thing, which, beyond my will, organizes the repetition of my symptoms and assures that one of them emerges at the right time for me to learn that my misfortune is only due to my desire?” This question is very different from the one that raised the problem of the cause of the symptom and instituted the subject-supposed-to-know. In this case, the subject no longer interrogates the symptom as a sign, for it is not the “why” with which it is concerned, but the “how.” How is the sequence of events ordered? What is the order of the repetition? These questions are appropriate because they lead to the hypothesis that the unconscious is structured. In order to be clear about this, I would like to return to the distinction between the sign and the signifier.

Let us be clear now. To approach the suffering of the symptom in terms of a cause, is to treat it as a sign; whereas to find myself subjected to the same misfortune at a propitious moment, as if it was imposed by a knowledge that I do not possess, is to recognize it as a signifier. Let us reconsider the question of the astonished analysand, a question that opens onto the unconscious: “Who knew? Who knew that the word that makes me laugh or the symptom that enlightens, had to occur at such a precise moment in order that I finally understand it?” The response of analytic theory is as follows: “The one who knew how to place the symptom or the witticism so wisely so as to surprise and make us understand is not a subject but rather an unconscious knowledge.” Yes, indeed, the unconscious is the order of a knowledge that subject carries with it, but of which it is unaware. But the unconscious is not only a knowledge that leads the subject to say the right word at the right moment, without however knowing what it says—it is also the knowledge which orders the repetition of that same word later and elsewhere. In sum, the unconscious is a knowledge not only because *it knows* how to place the right word in the right moment but because it

also guarantees what is proper to repetition. We can state it in the following sentence: The unconscious is the knowledge of repetition.

But what is repetition? Let us recall the principal point. The fact that the signifier is repeated identically means that there is always an event that occupies the formal locus of the *One*, while other absent and virtual events are ready to occupy it. We are, I insist, dealing with two agencies: the first is the agency of the *One* which corresponds to the event that has actually occurred, and the second is the agency of all the other past or future events that have or will occupy the locus of the *One*. To suggest that the unconscious is knowledge of repetition means that it is not only a knowledge that can use the right word at the right moment, but also that it causes the carousel of past or future elements that have or will occupy the locus of the *One* to turn, that is to say, the place of the manifest signifier. The unconscious is the movement which permits the repetition, or rather that permits the recurrent occupation of the place of the *One*. In short, what do we wish to clarify with this formalist vision of the dynamic of unconscious knowledge? We wish to say that the unconscious is a constantly active process that exteriorizes itself incessantly through acts, events, or speech that meet the conditions that define a signifier, namely, to be an involuntary expression, opportune, devoid of meaning, and identifiable as an event in connection with other absent or virtual events.

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But I must introduce an important clarification in order to clearly delineate the place of the unconscious in the cure. Let us imagine that I am now manifesting a symptom, for instance, a slip-of-the-tongue. No doubt this symptom appears first in me, and later it can be repeated not only in me but elsewhere as well, in the speech of another subject with whom I have a transferential bond. Thus the signifier is repeated by occupying the locus of the *One*, a place that can be found in one person or the other, indifferently. The signifier bounces from one subject to another, in such a way that the repetitive sequence, the chain of signifiers, I mean to say, the circle formed by elements already repeated or to be repeated, that is, this procession, this structure, belongs to no one. There is no individual structure and there is no individual unconscious. Let us take the example of the psychoanalyst's interpretation. No doubt a privileged moment in the process of the cure occurs when the analyst gives an interpretation. But what is an interpretation in the strict sense of the word if not an expression of the

unconscious of the analyst and not his or her knowledge? I want to emphasize here that if we apply the thesis of the repetition of the signifier—ricocheting from one subject to the other—in order to understand how the interpretation comes to the practitioner, then we must change our formulation. Instead of stating, “The interpretation expresses the unconscious of the psychoanalyst,” we must correct this and suggest, “The interpretation repeats today, in the words of the analyst, a symptom that was manifested yesterday in the words of the analysand.” Or perhaps, “The interpretation manifested by the analyst actualizes the unconscious of the analysand.” Or, still better, “The interpretation puts the *unconscious of the analysis* into play.” This was, we recall, the successive appearance, disappearance, and reappearance of the same signifying element, in times and places in different subjects, a process that only operates if a transference relation is well established.

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The argument that founds this first principle defining the unconscious as a knowledge having the structure of a language, and the corollary which ensues, can be summarized as follows:

The unconscious is the web woven by the work of signifying repetition, more exactly, the unconscious is a virtual chain of events or of “sayings” that *knows* how to actualize in an opportune “statement,” what the subject says without knowing what it is saying.

This word that the subject “says” without its knowledge and which actualizes the unconscious chain of sayings, can emerge in either of the analytic partners. When the “word” erupts in the analysand, we call it, among other things, a symptom, a lapse, or a witticism, and when it erupts in the psychoanalyst, we call it an interpretation. As you can see, the unconscious connects and binds human beings. In my view, this is one of Lacan’s fundamental ideas. The unconscious is a language that connects the analytic partners: language links whereas the body separates, the unconscious binds whereas *jouissance* separates. We will return to the problem of the body and of *jouissance*, but the thesis of the structured unconscious already permits us to deduce a crucial corollary for our work with our patients. If the unconscious is a structure of repetitive signifiers that are actualized in a “word” enunciated by either one of the analytic partners, it follows that the unconscious cannot be individually attached to each of them and that consequently we can no longer assign an unconscious that is proper to

the analyst or to the analysand. The unconscious is neither individual nor collective but is produced in the place of the in-between, a unique entity that crosses and surrounds each of the actors in the analysis.

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We have thus been able to account for the first fundamental principal: "The unconscious is structured like a language." In light of our reflections we can reconsider Lacan's saying and now propose: "the unconscious is a *knowledge* structured like a language," or even more simply, "a structured knowledge." When Lacan proposed this formula for the first time he conceived of the unconscious chain of sayings according to the linguistic categories of metaphor and metonymy. Then, to establish the laws that rule the linguistic structure of the unconscious more rigorously, Lacan used the conceptual apparatus of formal logic. We will have the occasion no doubt, during these lessons, to return to the functioning of the structure of the unconscious. For the moment we will move on and satisfy ourselves with the initial statement of the first principal: the unconscious chain of sayings is structured like a language, or perhaps, "The unconscious is a knowledge that is structured as a language."

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The second fundamental principle concerns *jouissance* and asserts: "There is no sexual relation" [*Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*]. Now in order to understand the Lacanian concept of *jouissance* and to establish this second principle we must locate our guiding thread again, that of the symptom, and come back to the trails blazed by Freud.

In order to justify the first principle with respect to the unconscious, we had characterized the symptom by its empirical aspect as a discordance in the narrative, by its status as a sign that induces suppositions from the patient and even the analyst, and finally by its status as a signifier that surprises, imposes itself, and repeats itself, apart from any intentionality. Nevertheless, we have not brought out the most obvious aspect of the symptom, the one that is most tangible for the one who suffers from it, namely, the very fact of suffering, the painful feelings provoked by psychological disorder.³ Symptoms are indeed painful manifestations, apparently useless acts, that one performs with a deep aversion.

But if for the ego, the symptom essentially signifies suffering from the signifier, for the unconscious, on the other hand, it signifies the achievement of a satisfaction. Yes, an achievement of a satisfaction, because the symptom is both suffering and relief, suffering for the ego and relief for the unconscious. But why relief? How can one claim that a symptom soothes and frees? From what oppression does it free us? Now, it is precisely the soothing and liberating effect of the symptom that we take to be one of the major aspects of *jouissance*.

However, let us pause for a moment and ask ourselves a more general question: What is *jouissance* and what different forms does it take? The theory of *jouissance* proposed by Lacan is a complex construction delineating three modes of *jouissance*. We will often have the chance in these lessons to treat of the problem of *jouissance*, but for the moment, I would like to cover the most important aspects. First, permit me a terminological clarification. No doubt, the word *jouissance* spontaneously evokes the idea of a sensual or sexual pleasure. But as is frequently the case, a word in analytic vocabulary remains so determined by its ordinary sense that the theoretician's work of elaboration is often reduced to differentiating the psychoanalytic meaning from the common meaning. This is exactly the work that we must undertake here with respect to the word "*jouissance*," by separating it carefully from the idea of orgasm. I would ask you then, each time you hear me say the word "*jouissance*," to forget any reference to orgasmic pleasure.

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This having been said, we now approach the concept of *jouissance* itself. In order to take account of the Lacanian theory of *jouissance*, I must first recall the Freudian thesis of psychical energy, such as I have understood it. At the outset, we will set forth a premise. According to Freud, human beings are inhabited by an aspiration—always constant and never realized—to attain an impossible goal, that of absolute happiness, a happiness that takes different forms, including a hypothetical absolute sexual pleasure experienced in incest. This aspiration known as desire, that *élan* born in the erogenous zones of the body, generates a painful state of psychical tension, a tension that is increasingly exacerbated as the *élan* of desire is stopped by the dam of repression. The more repression is intransigent, the more the tension is augmented. Faced with the wall of repression, the thrust of desire finds itself constrained to take, simultaneously, two opposing paths: the path

of a discharge through which the energy is freed and dissipated, and the path of retention in which the energy is conserved and accumulated as a residual energy. One part overcomes repression and is discharged outside as an energetic expenditure that accompanies each of the manifestations of the unconscious (a dream, a slip of the tongue, or a symptom). It is precisely that incomplete discharge that gives the relief we spoke of with respect to the symptom. The other part that does not succeed in crossing the barrier of repression and remains confined within the psychical system is an excess of energy which, in turn, overstimulates the erogenous zones and constantly overactivates the level of internal tension. To say that this excess of energy always maintains an elevated level of tension, means that the erogenous zone, a source of desire, is constantly stimulated. One could imagine a third fate of psychic energy, a third possibility that is absolutely hypothetical and ideal since it is never realized by desire, namely, a total discharge of energy—a discharge that is accomplished without the interference of repression or any other limit. This last fate remains as hypothetical as the absolute sexual pleasure of which Freud spoke, a state that is never attained.

Very well, I propose to you the following connection that we will refine later: psychical energy, with its three fates, would correspond, in my view, to what Lacan designates by the term *jouissance*, the three states of *jouissance*: *phallic jouissance*, *surplus-of-jouissance*, and *jouissance of the Other*. *Phallic jouissance* corresponds to the dissipated energy at the time of the partial discharge and has the effect of a relative relief, an incomplete relief of unconscious tension. This category of *jouissance* is called phallic because the limit that opens and closes access to the discharge is the phallus (Freud would have said: repression). Basically, the phallus functions as a barrier which regulates the part of *jouissance* that leaves (discharges) and that which remains in the unconscious system (residual excess). I cannot elaborate here upon what led Lacan to conceive of the phallus as a barrier to *jouissance*. I will speak of it a few pages further on, and would only ask that you remember that the main function of the phallus is to open and close the access of *jouissance* to the outside. What outside? That of unexpected events, speech, fantasies, and the totality of external productions of the unconscious, one of which is the symptom.

The other category, *surplus-of-jouissance*, corresponds to the *jouissance* that on the contrary remains confined within the psychical system and whose exit is prevented by the phallus. The term "*surplus*" [*plus*] indicates that part of the energy that is not discharged, the

residual *jouissance*, a surplus that constantly increases the intensity of the internal tension. We note as well that the residual *jouissance* of which we speak remains profoundly anchored in the erogenous zones and orifices of the body—the mouth, the anus, the vagina, the penile opening, etc. The pressure of desire emerges in these zones and in turn the surplus-of-*jouissance* constantly stimulates these zones and keeps them in a permanently erogenous state. We will return often to this category of the surplus-of-*jouissance*, when we study the Lacanian concept of object *a*, and consider its position in the relation between the analyst and the patient.

Finally, we arrive at the third category, the *jouissance* of the Other, a fundamentally hypothetical state which corresponds to the ideal case in which the tension would have been totally discharged without the impediment of any limit. This is the *jouissance* that subject supposes of the Other, the Other that is also for it a supposed-being. This ideal state, this point on the horizon of an absolute and impossible happiness, takes different forms according to the perspective from which one sees it. For an obsessional neurotic, for example, the unattainable yet always-present horizon is death, while for a hysterical neurotic, the same horizon is an oceanic madness. If we then consider the same horizon in terms of the desire of a child in an oedipal phase, it takes on, we know, the mythical figure of incest, incest considered as desire's most fulfilled realization of desire, the supreme *jouissance*. But whether ideally desire is accomplished by a total cessation of tension, as in the case of death, or on the contrary, by a maximal intensification of the same tension, as in the case of the perfect *jouissance* of the incestuous act, it nevertheless remains that all these excessive and absolute forms are fictions, bewitching and deceptive mirages that fan the flames of desire.

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Now, psychoanalysis privileges only one of these mirages and elevates it to the rank of the unknowable, of the unknown real in the face of which all theory fails. There, where the human being is subjugated by the mirage, psychoanalysis recognizes the limit of its knowledge. But which mirage is it? It is the lure that fascinates and deceives the eyes of the oedipal child by leading it to believe that absolute *jouissance* exists and that it could be experienced in an incestuous sexual relation, which is entirely possible. It is indeed for this reason that whatever its form may be, *jouissance* is always a sexual

jouissance. It is sexual not in the genital sense, but insofar as it is marked by its mythical destiny of needing to be consumed in the incestuous act, to be the *jouissance* experience by the Other in the form of an absolute sexual pleasure. The Other can be any mythical character, whether God, the mother, or the subject itself in a fantasy of all-powerfulness. We can specify that the incest of which we speak is a mythical figure with no relation to the concrete and morbid reality of the pitiful violation of the daughter by her father or the impure fondling of a son by his mother.

As a doctrine that attempts to delineate the limits of its knowledge as best it can, psychoanalysis has understood that this very place where the sexual relation would be possible for the oedipal child, is where it proves to be impossible. At the very place where the mythical child supposes the *jouissance* of the Other—the ideal voluptuous pleasure of the incestuous sexual relation—psychoanalysis knows that the Other does not exist and that this relation is impossible to realize by the subject or impossible to formalize in a theory. It knows this because it has learned from clinical experience that human beings necessarily encounter all sorts of obstacles such as language, signifiers, and in particular, the phallus: all limits that shatter the ideal trajectory toward the full realization of desire, that is to say, toward *jouissance*.

Now, that place we call “*jouissance* of the Other” in reference to the child who lusts after it or is afraid of it is not only the place of impossible incest, it is also for psychoanalysts the place of impossible knowledge. Not only is the subject’s realization of the sexual relation impossible, but also it is impossible to formally conceptualize it in theory, and impossible to write it with signs or letters that would speak of the nature of *jouissance* if that relation could be consummated. In a word, *jouissance* is in the unconscious, and in theory, a place that is empty of signifiers. It is in this sense that Lacan proposed a sentence that was scandal: “There is no sexual relation.” At first, one understands this as the absence of a genital union between a man and a woman, but this is an error of interpretation. The sentence means that there is no *symbolic* relation between a supposed signifier of masculine *jouissance* and a supposed signifier of feminine *jouissance*. Why? Precisely because in the unconscious there are no signifiers that signify the *jouissance* of either one if that *jouissance* is imagined to be absolute. This is also because the analytic experience teaches us that *jouissance*, in its infinite form, is a place without signifiers and without any

individuating features. From this the second principle is derived: "There is no sexual relation."

To better understand Lacan's sentence we can complete it by writing, "There is no sexual relation . . . that is absolute"; that is to say, we do not know absolute *jouissance*, there are no signifiers that signify it, and consequently there can be no relation between two absent signifiers. Certainly, we admit that there is no absolute sexual relation because there is no signifier that signifies absolute *jouissance*, but can one claim that there would be a relative sexual relation? Strictly speaking, we must answer that there is no relative sexual relation either because neither is there a signifier which can signify the nature of a relative and limited *jouissance*. If the word relation means a relation between two signifiers which would signify *jouissance*, there would be no relation whatsoever, whether absolute or relative, whether limited or unlimited *jouissance*.

There is, then, no sexual relation, even if relative. Nonetheless, a question remains. How can we conceive of the ordinary sexual encounter between a man and a woman? We will say for the moment that in terms of *jouissance*, this encounter does not concern two persons, but rather partial places of the body. It is the encounter between my body and a part of the body of my partner, between different thresholds of local *jouissance*.

I insist that we do not know what absolute *jouissance* is, but neither do we know what *jouissance* really is in its local expression. Of course, there are no signifiers that represent unlimited *jouissance*—but one can just as well say that neither are there any signifiers that represent partial *jouissance* attached to the erogenous places of the body (phallic *jouissance* and surplus-of-*jouissance*). That being said, the signifier can nevertheless approach, delineate, and circumscribe the local zones where the body undergoes *jouissance*. When we say that *jouissance* is delineated by the signifiers we mean that as the thrust of desire it is delineated by the edges of the erogenous orifices. The signifier is to be understood in terms of the corporal edge. In sum, psychoanalysis does not know the nature of *jouissance*, the very essence of psychical energy, whether global—"of the Other"—or local—"phallic" or "residual"; psychoanalysis only knows the signifying borders which delimit the regions of the body which are the source of *jouissance*. When psychoanalysis locates *jouissance* it is always a local *jouissance* that is in question.

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Now we must take account of the concept of the phallus, a concept that is closely related to that of *jouissance*.

In Lacanian theory, the word phallus does not designate the male genital organ. It is the name of a quite specific signifier that is different from all other signifiers. It has the function of signifying everything that pertains intimately or indifferently to the sexual dimension. The phallus is not the signifier of *jouissance* because, as we have already said, *jouissance* resists any representation. No, the phallus does not signify the very nature of *jouissance*, but it marks the trajectory of *jouissance*—if we think of the flux of the energy that circulates—or it marks the trajectory of desire—if we think of that same flux oriented toward a goal. In other words, the phallus is the signifier that marks and signifies each of the stages of that trajectory. It marks the origin of *jouissance* materialized by the erogenous orifices; it marks the obstacle encountered by *jouissance* (repression); it marks the externalizations of *jouissance* as symptom, fantasy, or action; and finally the phallus is the threshold beyond which the mythical world of the *jouissance* of the other opens.

But by what privilege do we call this signifier the phallus? Why choose a reference to the masculine sex? Why “phallus”? The answer to this question lies in the primacy that psychoanalysis accords to the trial of castration in the development of human sexuality, a trial in which the phallus is pivotal.⁴

Before concluding this part devoted to *jouissance*, I must establish an important point. We had mentioned a readjustment of the connection established between energy and *jouissance*. Concerning this comparison, Lacan was quite clear. He did not take *jouissance* to be an energetic entity, because it does not correspond to the physical definition of energy as a numerical constant. “Energy is not a substance,” recalled Lacan, “it is a numerical constant that the physicist has to find in his or her calculations.” And later: “Any physicist knows full well . . . that energy is nothing but the numerical value of a constant.” Precisely in this sense *jouissance* “is not energy and cannot be inscribed as such.”⁵ One sees that for Lacan *jouissance* cannot be rendered mathematically by a combinatory calculus, and therefore cannot be energy. Nevertheless, in spite of the extreme rigor of the

Lacanian position, I have chosen to discuss and define *jouissance* by making use of the energetic metaphor—the one that was employed so often by Freud—because it seems the most appropriate one to account for the dynamic and clinical aspect of *jouissance*.

This summarizes the arguments that invalidate or justify the connection between energy and *jouissance*.

Jouissance is certainly not an energy if, following Lacan, we contrast it with the sense view that is provided by physics. From the point of view of physics, then, *jouissance* cannot be considered as energy.

But, *jouissance* would be an “energy” if, following the Freudian metaphor, we would consider it as a thrust that, emerging in the erogenous zone of the body, tends toward a goal, encounters obstacles, manages to open paths and accumulate. But there is still another argument that confers the status of energy upon *jouissance*, namely its quality as the permanent force of the work of the unconscious. *Jouissance* is unconscious energy when the unconscious works, that is to say, when the unconscious is active—and it is in this state constantly—insuring repetition and externalizing itself constantly in psychical productions (S_1) such as the symptom or any other signifying event. In this sense I would like to paraphrase Lacan from *Encore*: “the unconscious, means that the human being, by speaking, undergoes *jouissance*.”⁶ Similarly I will define *jouissance* in the following way: *jouissance* means that the human being, by committing a blunder, activates the unconscious. These say the same thing from two different angles: the work of the unconscious involves *jouissance*, and *jouissance* is the energy unleashed when the unconscious works.

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These then are the two principles on the basis of which I wanted to conclude and that seem to me today to be fundamental. One concerns the unconscious: “The unconscious is a knowledge structured like a language.” The other concerns *jouissance*: “There is no sexual relation.” These two principles seem fundamental to me because they define an entire way of conceiving of psychoanalysis. To the extent that I accept the idea of the structured unconscious, I would then conceive of, for example, interpretation as being a manifestation,

in the psychoanalyst, of the unconscious of his or her analysand. And to the extent that I accept the idea that there is no sexual relation, I will conceive, for example, that residual *jouissance*, that of the surplus-of-*jouissance*, is the driving force of the analytic cure, the center governing the analytic process. And finally I will recognize that at the horizon of the cure and of the punctual moments of experience which mark it, the dimension of the real spreads as an obscure place of unthinkable *jouissance*.

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Question: *How can one connect the two fundamental principles that you just presented, the unconscious and jouissance?*

If you allow that the unconscious is a chain of signifiers in action, I would then ask you to accept that in this chain there is an element missing. Specifically, the one that should have to represent *jouissance*. In the unconscious, *jouissance* does not have a specific signifying representation, but it has a place, that of the hole; a hole within the signifying system, always covered by the veil of fantasies and symptoms. In the same way that analytic theory recognizes its incapacity to precisely signify the nature of *jouissance*, so one can say that the unconscious lacks the signifier that represents *jouissance*. In its place, there are only a hole and its veil. In order to complete my response, I must add that the place of *jouissance* in the unconscious is different according to whether we consider one or the other of its major forms: local (surplus-of-*jouissance* and phallic) or global (of the Other). If we consider the two examples of local *jouissance*, their place in the unconscious is that of a hole bordered by a limit, an image that corresponds exactly to the hole of the erogenous orifices of the body. If on the contrary, we consider the immeasurable *jouissance* of the Other, we must imagine it as an open point on the horizon with neither border nor limit, and as diffuse, without attachment to any particular system. I mean that the *jouissance* of the Other is not localized in a specific part of a system, but rather that it is located in a confused way by the subject—remember what we had said about the neurotic—as something like a mirage.

Freud always reminds us that the individual seeks happiness. Then the individual creates obstacles so as not to be able to reach it. What does he define in the end? . . .

... A limited happiness. In fact, psychoanalysis discovers that we, speaking beings, are content in the end with very little. You know, genuine happiness, I mean happiness that is actually found, is in fact an extremely limited satisfaction that one obtains without much effort. Any other satisfaction beyond that limit is what Lacanian psychoanalysis calls the *jouissance* of the Other. From an ethical point of view, the psychoanalytic position is subversive because, in contrast to certain philosophical schools that recognize in man the search for happiness as a search for the supreme good, psychoanalysis states: we agree that human beings aspire to the supreme good, if we accept that as soon as one begins to pursue the ideal they transform it into a concrete reality of a satisfaction that is drastically scaled-down. "But"—you will reply—"if we recognize that the mirage of absolute happiness quickly dissipates in order to give way to a relative happiness, it remains no less true that the fiction of an absolute remains a goal that is always sought after!" Psychoanalysis would respond "No. The speaking being does not want *jouissance* without measure, it refuses *jouissance* and it neither wants nor is able to undergo *jouissance*."

We find the best illustration of this in the clinical domain, for if you ask me what a neurotic is, I would not hesitate to define him or her as one who does everything necessary in order not to undergo absolute *jouissance*; and clearly, a way of not undergoing absolute *jouissance*, yet of course, one way of undergoing *jouissance* is to settle for a limited *jouissance*, that is to say of only partially realizing one's desire. There are two ways thanks to which the neurotic undergoes partial *jouissance* in order to avoid undergoing a maximal *jouissance* (*jouissance* of the Other): the symptom (phallic *jouissance*) and the fantasy (surplus-of-*jouissance*). The symptom and the fantasy are in effect used by the neurotic in order to oppose immeasurable *jouissance* and to resist it. The best example of this is hysteria. Hysterics are those who create a reality from scratch, their own reality; that is to say, they stage a fantasy in which the most desired *jouissance* constantly evades them. This is why Lacan has characterized hysterical desire, and for that matter, any desire, as fundamentally unsatisfied, since it is never fully realized, but is realized through fantasies and symptoms. It seems important to emphasize this aspect of desire that is never satisfied, for one could believe that desire is a Good that one must cherish as an ideal. This is precisely what was understood at one time as a result of the erroneous interpretation of the well-known Lacanian maxim: "do not give up on your desire" [*ne pas céder sur son désir*]; as if it was a slogan to encourage desire and reach *jouissance*. Now this is an error in interpretation because this maxim is

not a courageous proclamation that aims at singing the praises of desire on the way to supreme *jouissance*, but rather a prudent reminder not to abandon desire, which is the only defense against *jouissance*. For certainly one must never stop desiring if one wishes to resist *jouissance*. By being satisfied in this partial and limited way with symptoms and fantasies, we insure that we will never encounter the full power of maximal *jouissance*. In short, in order not to attain the *jouissance* of the Other, however we may desire it, the best thing is to constantly desire and to content oneself with substitutes and illusions, symptoms and fantasies. I expect that you would want to ask at this point: "But why would one want to avoid *jouissance* of the Other when elsewhere you refer to it as impossible to attain. If it is beyond attainment why should one need to work so unrelentingly to avoid it since no matter what happens there is no risk of its attainment." The answer to such a question lies in the neurotic and quite complicated way in which the neurotic addresses his or her ideals. Thus, the *jouissance* of the Other is a paradiselike dream which presents itself to the neurotic in contradictory and various ways: first, it is a dream that is dear to them and to which they aspire, second, it is a dream that they know they cannot realize, chimerical and beyond reach; and finally, they know that it is also, and above all, a dream that if by "misfortune" or "good luck" were someday realized, would endanger their being. They fear the extreme risk of seeing their being disappear. You see the flagrant contradiction that clinical experience confirms everyday: they *want* the *jouissance* of the Other, they *know they cannot* attain it, and simultaneously, they *do not want* that *jouissance*. They love it, and it is impossible for them, but they are afraid of it just the same. Of course, all of these levels blend and are conflated when we hear our analysands grapple with their dreams and their fears.

How is the formula: "there, where speech fails, jouissance appears," to be understood?

I could have begun my lecture with a general statement and propose: the body is subjected to language; or perhaps, I could just as well have reconsidered another general formula: we are speaking beings. This is a proposition which would have been easily accepted since everyone accepts that we speak and that in analysis speech matters. We could add: we are not only speaking beings, we are beings inhabited by language. We could have taken moreover a supplementary step and said: we are not only beings inhabited by language but above all beings that are exceeded by language, carriers of a speech that comes towards us, knocks us down and affects us.

We would be dealing then with a matter of degrees. The first degree is that we are speaking beings; it is an empirical degree that does not correspond to analytic thinking. Analysis goes further and asserts that beyond that we are inhabited by language and remain vulnerable to its actions. The second degree, then, situates us as being vulnerable to language, and even penetrated by it. This is where the third degree comes in. When language, or better yet, when a signifier takes the form of a "saying" which is said beyond me, without my knowing, a supplementary element is added: the body is affected. The psychoanalytic conception of the subject's relation to language finds its value and force, if we think not only that the subject speaks without knowing what it says, but above all that when the subject is taken over by speech, the body is affected as well. But what body? The body as *jouissance*; the body defined not as an organism but as pure *jouissance*, pure psychical energy, of which the organic body is only the resonance chamber.

This is what matters. I could reconsider our formula and declare that for us, the beings who undergo *jouissance*, our bodies are symbolically marked, or I could declare quite simply: our bodies are subjected to language. You will understand now when we affirm that "the body is affected by a speech that exceeds us," means that the body undergoes *jouissance*. To say that the body undergoes *jouissance* means that apart from any sensation of pain or pleasure that is consciously felt by the subject, a twofold energetic phenomenon takes place at the moment of the manifestation of the unconscious: on the one hand, the energy is discharged (phallic *jouissance*), and on the other hand, and simultaneously, the internal psychical tension is reactivated (surplus-of-*jouissance*).

But why say that desire is never satisfied, as if psychoanalysis had a pessimistic vision with respect to human aspirations?

I can appreciate your reservations. I will answer you by saying that in that place where desire does not attain its goal, I mean where it fails, a positive creation emerges, a creative act takes place. If that is the case, you would wonder, why must desire necessarily fail? Desire will never be satisfied for the simple reason that we speak. Inasmuch as we speak, inasmuch as we are immersed in the symbolic world, inasmuch as we belong to that universe where everything has a thousand-and-one meanings, we will never achieve a complete satisfaction of desire, for from here to the full satisfaction of desire, an infinite field constituted by a thousand-and-one labyrinths, spreads out. Since I speak, it

is sufficient that on the path of my desire I advance a saying or posit an act, including the most authentic, to immediately encounter a host of equivocations at the source of every possible misunderstanding. Acts can then be creative, but the purest act or the most accurate word could never avoid the appearance of another act or another word that will divert me from the shortest path to the satisfaction of desire. Once the word is uttered and the act is posited the path toward the satisfaction opens once again. One approaches the goal, one posits an act in life, and yet another path opens. This line of desire exactly reproduces the trajectory of an analysis. It is a path which is not traced in advance but is opened with each experience. The analytic experience takes place, it is inscribed as a point, and it opens from this point to a new section. We pass through it to another point, beginning a new passage. Considered as the trajectory of a cure, analysis is an expanding path, because once the limit is reached, it moves up one notch. The exact formulation would be: analysis is a limited but infinite path. Limited because it always faces a limit that stops it. And infinite because once reached the limit advances infinitely always further. This is precisely the same logic of displacement that we are able to use to understand both the trajectory of desire and the trajectory of an analysis.

According to the set theory proposed by Cantor, this expanding movement is ruled by a principle called the principle of passing to the limit.⁷ For Cantor, the passage to the limit signifies that arriving at the limit generates an infinite set. And if we return to our terminology, we say that one reaches the threshold, and right away, an additional sequence opens up onto infinity.

You have spoken of jouissance but not of pleasure. Are pleasure and jouissance equivalent notions or do they refer to two different worlds?

In a quite general way, I will answer you by treating *jouissance* and pleasure as two distinct forms of the expression of psychic energy. But again, how do we define energy? As we know it is not easy. If you ask physicists to define energy, they would have the same difficulty as psychoanalysts would in giving an account of the nature of *jouissance* or pleasure. Scientists would be constrained to define energy by first situating it in a context. They would describe solar energy, mechanical energy, thermal energy, with any mode of energy defined according to the milieu in which it is expended. Additionally, physicists will produce, as we have seen, an algebraic formula, a numerical constant in order to be able to work on the basis of an exact calculus of energy.

We do not have an algebraic formula for our work to calculate pleasure or *jouissance*. Neither pleasure nor *jouissance* is strictly definable in itself. One can only situate them in their context: with respect to pleasure, we will consider consciousness, feelings, and the lowering of tension; with respect to *jouissance*, we will consider the fact that it is unconscious, that it coincides with the augmentation of tension and that it does not necessarily involve feelings.

Pleasure is the conscious or preconscious figure of energy, which is always felt, while *jouissance*—I am thinking here above all in terms of local *jouissance*—is the unconscious figure of energy and is never immediately felt. But the conscious/unconscious distinction is only one very general criterion to distinguish between pleasure and *jouissance*. From the economical point of view, I mean the point of view of the variation of the intensity of the energy; pleasure is above all the agreeable sensation that is felt by the ego when tension is reduced. In pleasure, as Freud showed, there is a diminution of psychical tension in the sense of rest and relaxation. *Jouissance*, on the other hand, involves maintaining or dramatically increasing the tension. It is not immediately felt, but is manifested indirectly during the maximal experiences that the body and the *psyche*—the whole subject—must go through. *Jouissance* is a word that designates the experience of feeling an intolerable tension, a mixture of intoxication and uncanniness. *Jouissance* is the energetic state that we experience, in limit-situations, in situations of rupture, at the moment when one is about to cross a threshold, assume a challenge, or face an exceptional, often painful crisis.

Let us take the example of the child's game: there is *jouissance* in that child who, surrounded by friends, climbs on a steep roof, and is intoxicated by the risk of falling. This qualifies as a challenge. He undergoes *jouissance* not only from challenging his friends, but from the fact of testing his own limits. Pleasure is quite different. Suppose the same child, now relaxed, is soothed by the comforting movement of a swing. He is completely relaxed and at rest. But if by swinging, he is taken suddenly by the urge to know the limit he could reach before taking the risk of falling, it is then that *jouissance* surges again. Similarly, in the experience of analysis, one can feel the pleasure of coming to a session, and of being comforted by talking, but one can also experience moments of extreme tension and even pain, in which *jouissance* prevails.

Schematically, I would tell you therefore that pleasure amounts to the reduction of tension, while *jouissance* amounts to the increase of

tension to its highest point. *Jouissance* is the maximal state in which the body is brought to its limits. Perhaps the best example in which the body is brought to its limits is the unconscious pain that is often manifested in impulsive actions. I would even say that pain is one of the main figures of the surplus-of-*jouissance*, or as I had the occasion of showing in my seminar, the paradigm of object *a*.⁸

Now, if *jouissance* is not directly felt, you will ask me: how can one speak of *jouissance*, or of pain, if I do not suffer from it? How can we juxtapose two terms as antinomial as "pain" and "unconscious"? In the same vein, you could even ask: if *jouissance* is a tension that is not felt, from what is it to be inferred?

Should we not rather say that on the contrary one does feel jouissance, but one only feels it after the fact [après coup]?

Indeed, you are correct. It would be better to say that *jouissance* is never felt immediately at its peak but only after the fact. Let us take the example of the man who, in a suicidal impulse, driving his car, takes the highway and drives in a daze, almost causing an accident. The difficult moment passed, he stops and gathers himself while reflecting on his acting out. . . . We can deduce from that moment, when the subject oscillated between life and death, that there was *jouissance*. The man had lived in the grip of a murderous tension, in a passing impulse of self-destruction. This is an indirect expression of the impact of *jouissance*. He did not experience any defined or precise sensation, except the vague feeling of a force that drove him to the action. From that momentary paroxysm, one can deduce that this man had lived under the grip, not of alcohol, but a drug that is a thousand times more powerful and that operates in every human being, I mean, the power of a silent and dominating *jouissance*.

It is as if in jouissance the body takes on everything.

You say "the body takes on everything," and I translate this by "action." *Jouissance* causes words and thoughts to fail, and is only expressed in action. Indeed, one of the most typical manifestations of *jouissance* as we define it—as high psychological tension that is not actually felt—is acting out, and in general all actions whether dangerous or not, that exceed us. When *jouissance* prevails, words disappear and action dominates. The sister of *jouissance* is action while that of pleasure is the image. Pleasure is always dependent on the coming and going of

images that appear to me. Pleasure is a sensation perceived and experienced by the ego. On the contrary, *jouissance* is expression through blind action, whether productive actions as when a painter creates outside of himself, his canvas, or destructive actions as in the case of a driver who had a brush with death. But in any case, these are actions in which the subject is only body, or as you say, in which the body takes on everything. The subject neither speaks nor thinks. Lacan, inspired by the cogito of Descartes, located the position of the subject in the state of *jouissance* by stating, "I am there where I do not think."

Can we say then that would be a subject of jouissance, a subject that undergoes jouissance?

No. There is no subject of *jouissance* in the same way that there is a subject of the unconscious. The difference is essential. The subject of the unconscious is always represented by a signifier, its presence is necessarily marked in by a representation that indicates and signifies it. In the case of *jouissance*, I have already emphasized the absence of a representative signifier. In Lacanian theory, the subject is always accompanied by a signifier; for Lacan there is no signifier without a subject and reciprocally there is no subject without a signifier. Consequently, we will say: there is no subject of *jouissance* because there are no signifiers able to represent it. Then your question is indeed relevant. When there is *jouissance*, who undergoes it? I would answer that no one undergoes *jouissance*; that we do not undergo *jouissance* with something, but that something undergoes *jouissance* within us, without us.

There is another aspect of the pleasure/jouissance distinction that is related to time. With respect to temporality, what relation holds between pleasure and jouissance?

I would answer by saying that pleasure is quite transitory while *jouissance* is so radically permanent that it becomes atemporal. Pleasure passes and disappears while *jouissance* is a tension that belongs to life itself. As long as there is *jouissance* there is life, because *jouissance* is none other than the force that insures repetition, the ineluctable succession of vital events. If I had to establish a connection between the Lacanian concept of *jouissance* and the Freudian concept of repetition, I would conclude by identifying *jouissance* with what Freud called "repetition compulsion." If there is a Freudian concept that is similar to *jouissance*—conceived of as a force that insures repetition—it is certainly

that of repetition compulsion, understood as the irreducible human tendency to live no doubt toward the future, but to do so by trying to complete the acts begun in the past. The entire force of life lies in this movement.

From the psychopathological point of view, what is the relation of perversion to jouissance?

I will be very brief, because we will return to the *jouissance* of the pervert. We can say that of the three clinical types—neurosis, psychosis, and perversion—the one that is closest to *jouissance*, but in a *false sense*, is perversion. For if the neurotic avoids and opposes the *jouissance* of the Other, as we have shown, the pervert not only seeks it but mimics it and feigns it. The pervert is the one who imitates the gesture of *jouissance*.

What is the place of jouissance in the analytic cure?

This is a question that will be present throughout these lessons because it is essential for understanding what animates an analysis. For the moment I will limit myself to two remarks that best summarize all the comments that I could make on the place of *jouissance* in the cure. First and above all, *jouissance*, and in particular its modality of the surplus-of-*jouissance*, that is of the surplus that constantly maintains the high level of internal tension. This is the motor force of the cure, the core around which the analytic experience gravitates. That which is dominant in analysis is not what one would mistakenly expect, that is to say, speech, but rather the dominating and attracting pole of *jouissance*. Still in the context of this first remark, I would clarify again, and we will return to this frequently, that the pole of *jouissance* is not purely abstract but takes diverse corporal forms in the cure, such as the breast, feces, the gaze, etc. All figurative representations of *jouissance* take their place in the different fantasies that are consciously or unconsciously constructed by the analysand within the transferential relation. The other remark concerns the function of the psychoanalyst because of all the positions that he or she is led to occupy, the one in which the analyst identifies with *jouissance* (surplus-of-*jouissance*) is the most favorable for appropriate action.⁹

You have defined jouissance with the Freudian metaphor of psychical energy and you just distinguished it from pleasure by again referring to energy. How is it that the concept of energy is privileged in this way?

The connection between Freud's and Lacan's terms that I have suggested to you—and for which I assume complete responsibility—shows that the Lacanian concept of *jouissance* can be considered as a creative renewal of Freudian metapsychology. It is as if Lacan, while respecting Freud's dynamics and threefold division of psychical energy (discharged energy, conserved energy, and its impossible ideal goal), extricated himself with the word *jouissance* from a mechanistic and economical account of the psychical operation. While Lacan—as we have seen in this lesson—had opposed energy and *jouissance*, it has struck me that the *jouissance*-energy connection remains the best way that I have found to take account of the Lacanian theory of different kinds of *jouissance*. Once this clarification is made, I can now make use of the Freudian notion of energy—while fully realizing its limits—in order to show the Lacanian concept of *jouissance*.

But what is gained by substituting the word jouissance for the word energy? What exactly accounts for the richness of Lacan's revision of Freudian metapsychology?

With the word *jouissance*, Lacan introduced two fundamental concepts: that of the “phallus” and that of the “impossible sexual relation.” The first functions as the limit that allows or blocks access to the discharge of energy. The second functions as the ideal goal that is never attained. But whether it is the phallus as limit or the impossible sexual relation as a mirage of the absolute, with the word *jouissance* Lacan resolved a major problem of psychoanalytic theory. This is a problem for which the concept of energy was not a solution, namely, the problem of the nature of the subject which experiences the pain of unconscious tension when the energy is blocked by repression, and when the subject experiences a relative and conscious peace when that same energy is discharged. In fact, it is difficult to grasp the logic of Lacanian thought, for Lacan undertakes a contradictory move in the articulation of the subject with *jouissance*. In my view, he first introduces the word *jouissance* in part in order to subjectivize psychic energy, as if to show the phenomenon that Freud intuited in 1938 when he spoke of the “self-perceptions of the id.”¹⁰ According to Freud, the variations of energetic tension in the Id are perceived by the Id itself. Instead of saying, as Freud did, that the Id (the reservoir of the drive) self-perceives its own variations of energy, Lacan suggests that the unconscious *works*, and by working, that is to say by insuring repetition, the unconscious undergoes *jouissance*. To state that the unconscious undergoes *jouissance* is first to subjectivize the unconscious, to

anthropomorphize it, to suppose it to be a subject, to institute one of the figures of the subject-supposed-to-know. But immediately Lacan retracts any reference to subjectivity and on the contrary advances that if the unconscious undergoes *jouissance*, this does not mean that there is a subject that undergoes *jouissance*. In short, with the word *jouissance*, Lacan introduces the subject only to withdraw it.

In our next lesson, we will address the principle that the unconscious is structured like a language in more detail.



THE UNCONSCIOUS ONLY EXISTS WITHIN THE FIELD OF ANALYSIS
THERE IS NO UNCONSCIOUS THAT IS PROPER TO EACH ONE OF US

LALANGUE

WHAT IS A STRUCTURE?

THE FEAR OF BLUSHING

THE SIGNIFIER LEAPS FROM SUBJECT TO SUBJECT

NO SIGNIFIER WITHOUT SUBJECT

THE BIRTH OF THE SUBJECT

