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Jean-Claude Milner

## Lacan and Modern Science(1)

Lacan has a theory of science. This requires no demonstration because such a theory has been expounded by Lacan himself in various texts and deployed by François Regnault(2). Granted that there is a theory of science in Lacan-and I maintain that it is complete and non-trivial-the question is “why is there one?” The answer to this question may partially depend on what the theory is. I will say something about the latter, but only in order to clarify the reasons for its existence.

One must begin with Freud, who also has a theory of science. The reason of existence of that theory is quite simple. It is based on what is commonly called Freud’s scientism(3), which is the assent he gives to the scientific ideal: only this ideal constitutes the “sufficient reason” for the desire that psychoanalysis be a science. I use the term “scientific ideal” because at issue is an ideal point-external or infinitely distant-towards which the straight lines of a plane tend, and which at the same time belongs to all of them, while found in none. It is not an ideal science that in varying ways “incarnates” the scientific ideal: the latter is a strictly imaginary determination, essential to the possibilities of representation(4).

It is true that representation is always necessary; it is particularly inevitable, when one appeals to the scientific ideal, as Freud does, to represent to oneself an ideal science, that is, what science ought to be. Generally its traits are borrowed from a science as constituted at the time at which one speaks, whereby the question becomes: “What must psychoanalysis be like in order for it to be considered to form a science?” This question transforms the traits into criteria. At the same time the way is paved for another kind of scientism: not the one of the scientific ideal but that of the ideal science. Freud gave himself over to it, taking up the physiognomy of the ideal science from others whom he believed to be more qualified than himself. In this context, we can cite Helmholtz and Mach, just to mention two of the greatest(5).

Obviously a transversal theory of science should be included here, reconstructible throughout the Freudian corpus, and accounting not only for what a science ought to be, but also allowing for a response to the question: “Why is there science rather than no science at all?” But such a theory remains dispersed, and it is not certain that Freud would have consented to reassemble it, as he did with his theory of religion.

On the question of the causes of science, Lacan simply takes up the aphorisms of Freud, which he sums up as follows: science is, at its inception, a sexual technique(6). In any case, his answer is a prudent one, just as he is prudent in answering the question: “Why is there psychoanalysis rather than no psychoanalysis at all?” No matter what, one will not find in these questions of origin an integrally constituted body of doctrine. The Lacanian theory of science concerns something quite different.

Although faithful to Freud on the preceding point, Lacan parts ways with him on the question of the scientific ideal: he doesn’t believe in it. More precisely, Lacan doesn’t believe in it for psychoanalysis. In relation to it, science does not play the role of an ideal point; it is not external to its field. On the contrary, science structures psychoanalysis from the inside. This is the meaning of the formulation: “the subject of psychoanalysis is the subject structured (Lacan says also debarred [forclos] or sutured [saturé]) by science”. But since it is not outside the realm delimited by psychoanalysis, or at an infinite distance from it, science

does not structure this subject as a regulation. Therefore, it makes no sense to ask under what conditions psychoanalysis would be a science. In other terms, because there is no scientific ideal as regards psychoanalysis, there is also no ideal science for it. Psychoanalysis will find in itself the foundation of its principles and its methods.

To demonstrate that science does not work as an ideal, Lacan makes use of a broad range of operators from homomorphous to historical ones: succession and discontinuity [coupure]. He bases himself on Koyré-as corrected by the highly historicizing Kojève-rather than Mach.

For the sake of clarity, it is preferable to adopt here the mores of geometers, who reason with axioms and theorems. Here are the most important ones:

Kojève's theorems:

1. There is a discontinuity between the ancient world and the modern universe;
2. This discontinuity stems from Christianity.

Clearly these two theorems rest on an axiom, that one can find under different forms in a number of authors, the most recent being Michel Foucault: "There are discontinuities."

Accepting the axiom does not entail necessarily accepting the theorems, as Foucault's work would demonstrate. In other words, one must give at least another axiom; I will not thematize it here.

Koyré's theorems:

1. There is a discontinuity between the ancient episteme and modern science;
2. Modern science is Galilean science, whose type is mathematical physics.

Lacan's hypothesis:

The theorems of Koyré are a particular case of the theorems of Kojève.

Lacan's lemmas:

1. Modern science constitutes itself through Christianity, inasmuch as it distinguishes itself from the ancient world.
2. Since the point of distinction between Christianity and the ancient world emerges from Judaism, modern science constitutes itself through the Jewish elements in Christianity(7).

This is how a vocabulary of periodization and of massive relations in Kojève's neo-Hegelian style gets deployed. Through this vocabulary, those clever enough will have no trouble articulating one of the possible answers to the question of why Lacan constructs a theory of science. They will say that it is not due to scientism, since Lacan does not believe in the scientific ideal. The reason will then be located in historicizing theses such as: "The emergence of Galilean science has made psychoanalysis possible", or "Psychoanalysis is inconceivable without the suturation operated by modern science with regard to the subject", or "Psychoanalysis could only deploy itself in the infinite Universe of science", etc. The problem is that these answers, as such, mean nothing; they merely reiterate the question in a different form.

In a more general sense, one must not be taken in too much by Lacan when he favors the set-up of massive relations. Of relevance here is the Lacanian "learned conversation" [conversation savante], a tradition that begins with Montaigne and La Mothe le Vayer, if not already with Aulus Gellus or Macrobius. This Lacan gleams with profound insights, with fulgurating comparisons and effects of truth, but is, nonetheless, not the Lacan of the matheme [mathème]. That the Lacanian matheme does not obscure the Lacanian learned conversation can easily be granted, but the converse also holds true.

Now, one must hold on to the proposition: “periodization” does not belong to mathemes but to conversations. Therefore it never constitutes the last word of any question. In this sense, “periodization” has a precise function: to show that the couple “scientific ideal”-“ideal science” has no pertinence in relation to psychoanalysis. What is in this regard more effective than the operators of succession and discontinuity, whose small change is a well-bred relativism and nominalism? I venture the following: Freud, in order to clear the way for psychoanalysis in a conjunction dominated by philosophical idealism, had to support himself on the scientism of the scientific ideal; the price to pay was nothing other than the scientism of the ideal science. Lacan, in order to clear the way for psychoanalysis in a conjunction where the psychoanalytical institutions had let themselves be dominated by the scientism of the ideal science, had to relativize and nominalize; the price to pay was the discourse of periodicity. Nevertheless, Lacan tried everything in order to purify the theory of discontinuity [la théorie de la coupure] of such ballasting. Such is the function of the theory of discourses: to reveal the properties of a discourse in general (discourse, in Lacan, is a social bond), and, in so doing, to show that heterogeneity and multiplicity belong intrinsically to it. They are not simply the discursive effects of periods and epochs which in themselves would be extrinsic to the discourses. In particular, they are not simply projected on the axis of successions. Through a doctrine of the plurality of places, of the plurality of terms, of the difference between properties of place and properties of terms, and of the mutability of the terms relative to the places, one obtains a non-chronological articulation of the concept of discontinuity [coupure]. No doubt that the emergence of a new discourse, the passage of one discourse to another (which Lacan calls “le quart de tour”, the quarter of a complete circle), the shift, can produce the event. Moreover, no doubt that each of these events is an object that historians try to capture in the form of chronology. But the events are not what the historians say they are. All history, in this regard, emerges from this fallacy and the first adulteration resides precisely in that serializing [sériation] time leading to a minimal homogeneization.

An appeal to the weapons of structuralism is useful here: granted that the theory of discourses makes literal places and terms, the discontinuity [coupure] is primarily the marking off of a literal impossibility. It is impossible that one system of letters be another one; it is impossible for a system of letters to pass without upheavals to another system of letters. In other words, there are no transformations from system to system without catastrophes.

But, at a deeper level, what intervenes is the logic of the disjunction between resemblance and identity: every discontinuity [coupure] can be articulated in terms of a theory of homonymy and of synonymy, formulated as follows:

- only homonymies exist between discourses on either side of a discontinuity, or
- there is no synonymy between discourses, or
- between different discourses, there is no other relation but that of discontinuity, or finally
- what historians understand as discontinuities are literal heterogeneities.

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Koyré’s theorem makes reference to a “Galilean science.” It thus presupposes the existence of a distinctive characterization of this science. Such is the object of what one may call the discriminant of Koyré: a science is Galilean when it combines two traits: empiricity and the mathematical letter.

Evidently the problem is to know what this means. Nothing is easier here than to miss the point. Especially because, in France at least, the discriminant of Koyré has become classical, that is, banal.

Yet Koyré’s essential gesture consists in bringing to light a very peculiar episode. Ancient science, the episteme, was accomplished only when it had explained that through which an object could not, in all necessity and for all eternity, be other than what it is. Still more precisely, the aspect of episteme in any

discourse was only the gathering of the necessary and the eternal in the object, as grasped by the discourse. From this it follows that an object lends itself more naturally to the episteme the more it allows for the uncovering of what in it makes it eternal and necessary, so that there is no science of what can be other than what it is, while the most accomplished science is the science of the most eternal and necessary object: theology is the horizon of the episteme. From there it also follows that science could find its support in man only in what related him to the eternal and the necessary, namely, in the soul. The latter was distinguished from the body, that is, from that instance in man, through which he is related to the fleeting and the contingent. Finally, from there, it follows that mathematics offers science the paradigm of choice.

For mathematics, as inherited from the Greeks, is a matter of the necessary and the eternal. Forms and Numbers cannot be other than what they are and, at the same time, for all eternity, cannot emerge into being or cease to be as they are. The necessity of demonstrations is valid only to the extent that it is conatural with necessity in itself. Just as the trajectories of celestial bodies crystallize for the corporal eye the most adequate figure of the eternal, so the path that leads from principles and axioms to conclusions crystallizes for the eyes of the soul the most adequate figure of necessity(8). Conversely, the empirical, in its diversity, incessantly emerges into Being and passes away [stops from Being], thus incessantly being other than what it is. The empirical is thus intrinsically anti-mathematical. If however mathematics can grasp something in this diversity, then this should be that which lets itself be recognized as identical to itself and as eternal. In short, mathematics is the gateway to every doctrine of the Same(9). Greek science is thus mathematical in the exact measure that neither science nor mathematics are empirical. In other words, Greek science is not mathematized (that is, not calculating the empirical as such).

By combining the mathematical and the empirical, the discriminant of Koyré accomplishes at least two operations. The first is that numbers no longer function as the Numbers, the golden keys to the ideas, but as letters, and, as such, they must grasp the diverse insofar as it is incessantly other: the empirical is made literal [litéralizable] as empirical. The letter does not elevate the object towards the heaven of the Ideas; “litéralization” is not idealization. In order to clarify the second operation, it is useful to appeal to an epistemology that is apparently quite far from that of Koyré, namely Popper’s epistemology. The latter claims that scientific propositions must be refutable; in so doing Popper defines, under the name of demarcation, what one can call the Discriminant of Popper: a proposition can be refutable only if its negation is neither senseless nor logically contradictory. Put otherwise, its reference must be capable- logically or materially- to be other than what it is: that is contingency. Only a contingent proposition is refutable and there is only a science of the contingent. The consequence is that science is no longer mathematical but mathematized. It calculates the empirical as such, without converting it into Forms and Numbers. The necessity of its reasonings does not share a conaturality with the necessity of the Ideas. It requires no soul, and, even if the soul exists, it demands nothing from it.

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Such is the conceptual machinery within which Lacan inscribes himself. The decisive middle term is the contingent. Through this, the chronological discriminant of Koyré and the structural discriminant of Popper can be combined(10). Anyway, apart from any reference to Popper (in whom he became interested only later and without passion), Lacan grasps the word contingent precisely in Kojève and Koyré, in spite of the fact that they do not actually proffer it: “the vault of heavens no longer exists, and all the celestial bodies [...] appear as if they could just as well not be there. Their reality [...] is essentially characterized by facticity; they are fundamentally contingent.(11)” Would it be illegitimate to evoke at this point Mallarmé? If one accepts that the proper character of the modern letter consists in grasping the contingent as contingent, the motto of the scientific age would then be: never will any letter abolish chance. And who would deny that the letter is a throw of the dice?

The letter is as it is, without any reason that makes it be as it is; likewise, there is no reason for the letter to be other than what it is. And if it were other than what it is, it would only be another letter. Actually, once a

letter is, it persists and does not change (“l’unique nombre qui ne peut être un autre” [“the only/unique number which cannot be another”]). A discourse can at most change its letter, but not change the letter. However, this turn can be misleading, for the letter ultimately assumes the traits of immutability, homomorphous to those of the eternal idea. Undoubtedly, the immutability of that which has no reason to be as it is, has nothing to do with the immutability of that which cannot, without violating reason, be other than what it is. But the imaginary homomorphy remains. From this it follows that the captation of the diverse by the letter gives it, insofar as the diverse can be other than what it is, the imaginary traits of that which cannot be other than what it is: this is what we call the necessity of the laws of science. It resembles in all aspects the necessity of the supreme Being, but it resembles it only insofar as it has nothing to do with it. The structure of modern science rests entirely on contingency. The material necessity that one recognizes to the laws is the scar marking this contingency itself. In the flash of an instant, each point of each referent of every proposition of science appears, from an infinity of points of view, as capable of being infinitely other than what it is. In the subsequent instant, the letter has fixed it as it is, and as not capable of being other than what it is, except by changing the letter, that is, changing the partie [match/side]. But the condition of the subsequent instant is the previous instant. To show that a point of the universe is as it is, requires a throw of dice of a possible universe, in which this point would be other than what it is(12). This doctrine has given a name to the interval of time in which the dice roll in the air before falling: emergence of the subject, who is not the thrower (the thrower does not exist), but the dice themselves insofar as they are suspended. In the vertigo of these mutually exclusive possibles, there finally bursts forth, in the subsequent instant when the dice fall, the flash of the impossible: it is impossible, once they have fallen, for the dice to bear a different number on their legible face. Here one sees that the impossible, instead of being separable from contingency, on the contrary constitutes its real nucleus.

In order to see this, one would have to pass continually from the anterior to the ulterior. But this is not possible because one would also have to return continually from the ulterior to the anterior. In any case, science does not permit this; once the letter fixes itself, what remains is only necessity which imposes the oblivion of the contingency that authorized it. Lacan terms suture the inopportunity [untimeliness] of this return. He terms foreclosure [forclusion] the radicality of the oblivion. Since the subject is what emerges in the step from one instant to the other, suture and foreclosure are necessarily those of the subject(13).

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To admit that a contingent and empirical proposition is, inasmuch as it is empirical and contingent, mathematizable, implies, within the horizon of the letter, the tearing apart and the weaving together in an entirely new way-incessantly precarious and re-established-of the immutable and the fleeting. The integral set of points, to which the propositions of science refer, is usually called the Universe. Since each of these points must be understood as an oscillation and an infinite variation, since, furthermore, it is sufficient that a single variation affects one point for two possible universes to be distinct, since, moreover, due to this fact, the possible universes are of an infinite number, and finally, since the Universe does not exist for science otherwise than through the detour of these possible universes, then the Universe necessarily is infinite and would not cease being so, even if the points constituting it happened to be actually of a finite number. One could say that this is a qualitative infinity rather than a quantitative one.

But it is through contingency alone that this infinity comes to the Universe and comes to it from its inside. This fact, once again, overwhelms the customary relations which all too easily connect the infinite to an exterior place transcending the Universe. The Universe, as object of science and as contingent object, is intrinsically infinite(14); the marks of its infinity are to be found not outside but within. The modern thesis par excellence will thus read:

There is no finitude in the Universe.

Then, the modern thesis also reads:

There is nothing outside the Universe [hors-Univers](15).

This turns out to be difficult to imagine. Hence the recurrence, in representations, of the figures of what is outside-the-Universe [hors-Univers]. One attributes to God, or Man, some specific property that makes Him an exception to the Universe, which, as such, constitutes this Universe as a Whole. This property of exception receives different names; for a long time philosophy appealed to the soul, that instance in man relating him to God. But one knows that the soul is linked to the episteme. When the latter gave way to modern science, the soul gradually had also to give way. Then came consciousness. It is, precisely, here that psychoanalysis intervenes. It takes up once more the problem of the Universe and resolves it as follows: the unconscious is the concept that there is only one Universe from which nothing is excepted, not even Man, it is what says “No” to consciousness.

The name of the “unconscious” becomes thereby clear: if consciousness, and more particularly self-consciousness, collects under its name the privileges of Man, as the exception to the Whole, the negation with which Freud affects consciousness has only one function: to render obsolete these privileges. In truth, in the same movement one concludes that consciousness itself is not very important; what is important are the privileges for which “consciousness” became, for a time, the label. Through consciousness are further attained all other possible labels: the soul, as much as consciousness. The above renders particularly clear the effort Lacan, taking a step further than Freud, did to gash the soul(16). The program is double: science sans conscience (science without consciousness) and, consequently, ruin of the soul.

It is true, as Freud asserted, that psychoanalysis wounds narcissism, and that herein lies its affinity with Copernicus, that is, with modern science. But to understand this point, one must add that narcissism always boils down to a demand for self-exception-and reciprocally. The hypothesis of the unconscious is nothing but a different way to affirm the non-existence of such exceptions; for this very reason, it is nothing more and nothing less than an affirmation of the Universe of science. Not only does the unconscious accomplish the program that Rabelais feared, but it also turns out to assume very precisely the functions of the infinite. And just as formerly the support of the infinite was looked for outside of the Universe, in God, one now sees that God is unconscious, in the sense that one says (but with opposite effects): God is love. On these points, I refer the reader to François Regnault.

Further, the two words exhibit the same structure: one says Unbewusst [unconscious] like one says Unendlich [infinite]. The infinite is what says “No” to the exception of finitude; the unconscious is what says “No” to self-consciousness as privilege. Undoubtedly Lacan has often commented unfavorably on the negative character of the word Unbewusst. One can recognize in it the Cartesian doctrine: the infinite is primary and positive, the finite is secondary and obtained, in a certain sense, through withdrawal; likewise, the unconscious explains the conscious, and not conversely. The unconscious is shorthand for an affirmation and not a limitation. Nonetheless, the bar of negation has its virtues. What is more, the German language adds some more to all this. The prefix un- is not always as flatly negative as the Latin prefix in-; it is not always just the delimitation of the complementary of the domain signified by the positive. Thus, the Unmensch is not a non-human, but a failed man, a monster; the Unkraut is an herb (Kraut), but a bad and parasitical herb; the unheimlich is not the inverse of the familiar, but the familiar that is haunted by something that disperses it. Likewise, we can say that, in the modern universe, there is no distinction in domains between the finite and the infinite, but that the infinite is incessantly parasitical to the finite. This is so in the sense that every finite, inasmuch as science can grasp it, posits itself first and foremost as having had the capacity of being infinitely otherwise. In any case, this is not far from Descartes as the theoretician of eternal truths. Similarly, in psychoanalysis the unconscious is incessantly parasitical to the conscious; it manifests the conscious as capable of being otherwise than it is, and only at this prize does it establish the respects in which the conscious cannot be other than what it is. The negative prefix would be simply the seal

of this parasitism.

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Psychoanalysis is at its core a doctrine of the infinite and contingent Universe. But philosophies apparently tend to resist the infinite contingency. The relations that psychoanalysis assumes to the different philosophies must be interpreted from this perspective. Let us consider, for example, the doctrine of death. One cannot ignore that in the eyes of most people, death is the mark itself of finitude. But the modern lemma holds that finitude does not exist, and psychoanalysis follows this lemma. It even gives a specific version of it:

inasmuch as it is a mark of finitude, death is nothing in analysis; or:  
death counts in analysis only insofar as it is a mark of infinity.

Such is the foundation of the concept of the death-drive. One will conclude that the term death is a seat of homonymies between finite and infinite. But what about those philosophies in which death counts as a mark of finitude only because of the opposite reason? They are intrinsically non-modern, and since psychoanalysis is intrinsically modern, no doctrine of psychoanalysis can be reconciled with such philosophies. If Heidegger belongs to them, if being-towards-death is being toward finitude, then, in spite of all epistolary exchanges and private visits, in spite of the weight that one must grant, as concerns the doctrine of the cure, to a definition of truth as unconcealment, Lacan's doctrine, as the doctrine of psychoanalysis, is antinomical with the philosophy of Heidegger-and reciprocally. This will remain thus, unless it so happens that one can or must eliminate the radical and infinite contingency from the Lacanian doctrine. In this case, there would still remain Lacan philosopher, but he would have to be dissociated from Lacan theoretician and practitioner of psychoanalysis. Hercules at the crossroads: one sees what is at stake.

At this point one must evoke Kant. On the one hand because critical philosophy, such as Lacan considers psychoanalysis to be, encounters science as an internal determination of its own field, and, on the other, because in encountering science, critical philosophy tries to resist the infinite contingency on which science founds itself. To this end, critical philosophy is not satisfied with the diverse outside-the-Universe [hors-Univers]; rather, it constructs a strategy that is far more sophisticated and effective, called the transcendental strategy: to take away from an object its properties, to do it in the most systematic manner and, nonetheless, to discover that, in spite of this deprivation, the object, just before it ceases to become thinkable, reveals itself to be neither completely empty nor without a structure. Its residual properties cannot be other than they are because if they were to be other, the object would cease to be thinkable. They are not affected by the diverse, since they are obtained by the elimination of the diverse. However, by allowing one to grasp that minimum through which an object is thinkable, they also allow one to grasp that through which the diverse is thinkable.

In this way the impossible prodigy is accomplished: within the limits of the universe of science, and without renouncing anything of this universe, one saves the Greek search for the Same, at the very moment when science has become empirical, that is, non-Greek.

Let us now consider the theory of the signifier within the Lacanian doctrine. If one admits that the transcendental method consists in the observation that, once the object is systematically deprived of its empirical and contingent properties, it still has some properties, then the theory of the signifier seems to share the character of this method: it establishes the properties of any signifier whatsoever, only insofar as these properties are specifiable, and are so a priori(17). This is, in any case, what separates the theory of the signifier from structural linguistics; in the latter, one invokes the so-called structural (or systemic, etc.) phenomena, but there is no determinate answer to the question: "What are the general properties of a structural phenomenon in general?" When the question is posed, one is content with indeterminate notions of the sort: "A structure (or a system, etc.) is a totality." But more often than not the question is not posed, which, in any case, is better: one treats the notion of structure (or of system) as a primitive term. In Lacan,

on the contrary, it is legitimate to ask: “What are the general properties of a signifying system in general?”, and it is also legitimate to give an answer. One obtains in this way a general theory of systems. Furthermore, as the signifier is in itself that without which nothing would be distinguished, the properties that one attributes to it are only the properties of the distinguishable as such. As the primary property of any thought whatsoever is not just to be distinct from another, but also to grasp that through which its object is distinct from every other, the theory of the signifier is a theory of the thinkable as such: a transcendental logic, or what takes the place of such a logic. As the property of any being whatsoever is to be distinguishable from any other being, the theory of the signifier is also a transcendental ontology, or what takes the place of such an ontology.

We can be more precise. Albert the Great called *transcendentia* the properties that apply to every object, as opposed to the “ordinary” properties that apply always to a subset of objects. Actually, a property P is not well defined unless it permits to distinguish between objects that have this property and objects that do not. Transcendental properties are an exception to this rule. Albert the Great recognized three such properties: the property of being a *unum*, the property of being a *verum*, and the property of being a *bonum*(18). Therefore, a theory is transcendental if it takes as its object any of these properties. The Kantian philosophy is clearly transcendental in this strict sense.

Certainly, Lacan would not have accepted without prior examination the list of the Scholastic theologians. Nonetheless, inasmuch as it treats the signifier in general, the theory of the signifier treats the properties of every signifier, and is thus transcendental only in a limited sense. However, the notion of the signifier itself is capable of collecting in one all transcendental properties; it would be easy to demonstrate that starting from it one could derive the three properties recognized by Albert the Great, that is to say, to show their secondary, if not fallacious, character. But the Lacanian turnaround lies in the fact that Lacan is irreducible to Scholasticism not because he rejected the existence of transcendental properties, but rather because he wanted to procure a theory of these properties themselves. In short, the theory of the signifier is transcendental in a radical sense: it is the transcendental theory par excellence.

What is valid for the theory of the signifier extends to the theory of the subject, since the subject is included in the very definition of the signifier. The theory of the subject is thus itself a transcendental theory, inasmuch as it presupposes that no matter how far one pushes the reduction of properties, one always finds the subject with some properties (eclipse, fulguration, etc.).

If the theories of the signifier and of the subject were to constitute the doctrinal whole of psychoanalysis, the latter would not risk to take up from modern science or would take up from it only in the sense that the Kantian philosophy takes up from it: as a resistance. Properly speaking, Lacanian psychoanalysis would emerge as a transcendental metaphysics, which would distinguish itself from Kant not by its method, but by taking into consideration not only phenomena that Kant had ignored: the Freudian phenomena (dream, slips, etc.)-something which goes without saying-but also the new figures of modern science. In this context, one could say that to the royal road of Newton others have been added: sciences that are more literal than quantitative, molecular biology, mathematical theory of communication, logic, structural linguistics. As a consequence, the Kantian text has by now become insufficient, and an even more radical Kantism is needed. This would link two essential and related programs: on the one hand, to characterize and ground the literal judgment, which is to be distinguished from analytical or synthetic judgments, be they a priori or a posteriori; on the other hand, to problematize the Je (“I”) and the accompaniment that it proposes to representation.

The “Rome Discourse” is open to such a reading. Whoever would pursue it to its end would conclude that Lacan has offered the elements of a Critique of Consciousness, comparable in status to the Critique of Reason. In any case, such a project would be nothing short of esteemable. It is possible that Frege proposed, *mutatis mutandis*, an analogous project: to rewrite transcendental philosophy, while renouncing only the thesis that arithmetical judgments are synthetical a priori in favor of the thesis that arithmetical judgments are analytical. The relation of Lacan with Frege would then not be fortuitous but structural. In a more



general way, it is true that the Kantian philosophy encounters science not only as an ideal external to it, but also as a point belonging to its own frame. From this point of view, a structural analogy gives it an affinity to certain propositions of Lacan. Therefore this is a seductive presentation, perhaps even helpful, but certainly completely false. For the Lacanian program is not such, at least if one considers it in its entirety. The obstacle does not lie with the clinical; the latter exists. But the clinical has never hindered metaphysics, on the contrary. Just as the real of belief has never hindered religious phantasmagoria; on the contrary! The obstacle lies in the theory itself, where one must perceive the incessant return of the infinitely contingent, without which the whole [dispositif] would slide into the bare transcendental.

It remains only to determine the content of this instance of contingency. The problem, in fact, is to discover that which could always be otherwise. Perhaps this is not the understanding as the locus of thoughts. The doctrine of the signifier, in fact, brings back the thinkable to its minimal conditions and these conditions, inasmuch as they are minimal, cannot be other than what they are without thereby dissipating the possibility of thought as such. In this regard, the Lacanian unconscious, taken in its positive functioning, is indeed an “it thinks”, a thinking submitted to its minimal laws which, albeit on “this-side” [“en-deça”] of the laws of calculation and judgment(19), but which do not cease being laws of the thinkable as such, that are presupposed by other laws and do not themselves presuppose these other laws. Metaphor and metonymy, as operations, are the only operations that are logically possible on a signifying sequence; such is the status that Roman Jakobson had granted them, and which Lacan conserved, even by reinforcing it with reciprocity: every sequence in which one can identify the operations of metaphor and metonymy is a signifying sequence. Here, one finds oneself in a logic of a priori deduction.

Let us then suppose that the instance of contingency is the body or at least something coming from the body. Sexuality is nothing but the place of the infinite contingency in the body. The fact that there is sexuation, rather than not, is contingent; that there be two sexes rather than one or many, is contingent; that one is on one side or the other, is contingent. Nonetheless, it does not cease being “literalizable”. It is known that, in Lacan, the sexual literalization [littéralisation sexuée], is intrinsically constituted [en épel] by the infinite.

Thus, the Freudian unconscious, to the extent that it is sexual, is the unconscious insofar as it could be other than it is; to the extent that it is “structured”, it is the unconscious insofar as it is as it is, and of which, once it is as it is, the letter enunciates that from now on it cannot be other than it is. But, on the other hand, the unconscious is the infinity. In its place cross, as they should, the infinite and the contingent. But the infinite is parasitical to sexuality itself; sexuality is open to this parasitism by virtue of the death-drive, of “jouissance”, of the twists and turns of the Whole, etc. Thus the reversibility is complete: the unconscious is the take of the infinite Universe on the speaking being, but as such, it cannot be other than sexual; sexuality is also the take of the infinite Universe on the speaking being, but as such, it cannot be other than unconscious.

At this point one encounters modern science; psychoanalysis can do so only on condition that it supports itself on sexuation as phenomenon, and on sexuality as the region where the phenomenon accomplishes itself.

It should now be clear why a theory of science is necessary to Lacan. It alone permits to determine exactly the status of the major concepts of psychoanalysis and to understand the point of intervention of psychoanalysis: the passage from the antecedent instant, when the speaking being could be infinitely other than what it is-in its body and thought-to the subsequent instant when the speaking being, due to its very contingency, has become similar to an eternal necessity. For, in the end, psychoanalysis speaks only about this: the conversion of each subjective singularity into a law just as necessary as the laws of nature, just as contingent and just as absolute as they are. It is true that philosophy has not ceased to deal with this instant. In a sense, one could even maintain that it invented it. But in order to describe it, philosophy has generally taken the roads of the outside-the-Universe. It is only to avoid this, out of intuition and doctrine, that Lacan chose science and, on occasion, anti-philosophy, which stands to philosophy as the Antichrist does to Christ, that is, as a discourse which requires that with which it has nothing to do, which it resembles absolutely,

which speaks of the same things, and the same terms as it does, and all this just because it has no relation with it.

*Translated from the French by Miguel E. Vatter*

## Notes:

- 1) Published in French as “Lacan et la science moderne” in Collège International de Philosophie, ed., Lacan et les philosophes (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991), pp. 333-351.
- 2) See François Regnault, Dieu est inconscient (Paris: Navarin, 1985).
- 3) Someone should explain what manipulations of this word have given it its insulting connotation. It carries this connotation no less than the words materialism, atheism, or irreligion (I cite them at random). It is a fact that Lacan refers Freud to scientism (see in particular “La science et la vérité,” *Ecrits* [Paris: Seuil, 1966], p.857-858), but even if he thereby wanted to differentiate himself from Freud, it is unlikely that he meant to belittle the person to whom he wanted to return.
- 4) The disjunction-conjunction of the scientific ideal and the ideal science is clearly conformable with the disjunction-conjunction of the Ego Ideal [Idéal du Moi] and the ideal Ego [Moi idéal], such as Lacan articulates it, starting from Daniel Lagache, in his “Remarque sur le rapport de Daniel Lagache, Psychanalyse et structure de la personnalité” (*Ecrits*, cit., p.647-684; see in particular p.671-683). From such a structural analogy one can easily elicit the mirages produced by the name of science; they exist and they must be dissipated, but science is not reducible to them.
- 5) One fact among others: Freud had signed in 1911 a manifesto calling for the creation of a society to develop and spread a positivist philosophy. Among the signers one finds Ernst Mach, David Hilbert, Felix Klein, and Albert Einstein. The indication is double: the fact that Freud gave his signature says something about his positions in a moment when he was publishing the third edition of the *Traumdeutung*, and was founding the International and the *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse*. Furthermore, and given the screening that usually accompanies this kind of operation, the fact that Freud’s name was accepted, if not solicited, permits to measure his social success amidst the German-speaking positivist circles. See on this point the important historical introduction by Antonia Soulez to the collection *Manifeste du cercle de Vienne et autres écrits* (Paris: PUF, 1985), p.32.
- 6) *Séminaire XI* (Paris: Seuil, 1973, p. 139); Engl. transl. by Alan Sheridan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Hogarth Press & Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1977), p. 151.
- 7) See *Séminaire VII* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), p.147; Engl.transl. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, transl. by Dennis Porter (London: Routledge 1992), p. 122: “...modern science, the kind that was born with Galileo, could only have developed out of biblical or Judaic ideology, and not out of ancient philosophy or the Aristotelian tradition.”
- 8) Aristotle defines “syllogism”-which is the general name for reasoning before becoming the technical name of a particular form of reasoning-as “a discourse where, once having posed certain things, a different thing... necessarily follows [ex anankes]”. It is Plato of the *Timaeus* who connects regulated thought to the motion of celestial bodies: “God invented and gave us sight to the end that we might behold the courses of intelligence in the heaven, and apply them to the courses of our own intelligence which are akin to them, the unperturbed to the perturbed, and that we, learning them and partaking of the natural truth of reason, might imitate the absolutely unerring courses of God and regulate our own vagaries.” (*Timaeus*, 47b-c) In these two cases both Plato and Aristotle are the founders of the ancient episteme. The necessity in the logoi, insofar as it is necessity, constitutes the point in science, where the resemblance between the necessary being of the entity and the necessary being of the knower is accomplished. Conversely, science is nothing if not the accomplishment of this resemblance which, by way of the purified soul, unites man, endowed with a body, to the supreme Being which is incorporeal.
- 9) Clearly my own assertions come under the rubric of conversation rather than that of the matheme. The historical facts are more complex: we can cite Archimedes and Lucretius, who complicate the device, as well

as the phenomenon, of Greek optics, as it has been reconstructed by Gérard Simon, *Le Regard, l'Être et l'Apparence* (Paris: Seuil, 1988). We can also cite, following Eugenio Garin, the example of learned astrology [astrologie savante] with its claim to grasp the accidents of a destiny in its most individual aspects by means of the configuration of eternal stars and the calculations of number. Whence the scandal that it provoked in certain ancient philosophers (well summed up in the discourse of Favorinus, reported by Aulus Gellus, *Ancient Nights*, XIV,1) and the insistence on its “foreign” (Chaldean) character. Still, this doctrine took root in the Greek-Latin configuration.

Garin goes as far as to claim that the combination of mathematics and the empirical, which characterizes modern science, was made possible by the return of learned astrology starting in the XII century and flourishing in the XV and XVI centuries. This process parallels that of magic which, conceived as action on the world regulated by knowable principles, gives the first elements of the modern relation that connects science, as theory of technology, to technology, as practice and application of science. See Eugenio Garin, *Moyen-Age et Renaissance* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p.121-150.

10) In this regard one can consult the works of Thomas Kuhn, and in particular his collection, *The Essential Tension* (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), which is more explicit about the confrontation with Popper than *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1970).

11) Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire VII* (Paris: Seuil, 1986), p. 147; Eng. tr., cit., p. 122.

12) One can find the articulation of the letter, of the possible universe and of the throw of the die in Saul A. Kripke. See in particular *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972). Clearly we will not take into account the horror that a comparison to Mallarmé or Lacan would inspire in Kripke, supposing that he knew of what we are speaking.

13) Put otherwise, the doctrine of the letter rests on a logic with two phases. The reader can verify that the formula of Lacan  $S1(S1(S1(S1 \rightarrow S2)))$ -which one finds in *Séminaire XX. Encore* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p.130-is nothing but the literalization of this logic.

14) What sort of infinite is this? In the last instance, it is the “literalizable” infinite of the mathematicians, that is of Cantor. But he was a latecomer. At the origin of Galilean science, there exists the paradox that the moment this science declares itself mathematized and refers the universe to the infinite, there is no mathematics of the infinite. Against the background of such [hystérésis] is structured the oscillation between positive infinity and negative indefinite, of which Descartes is the first to sign.

15) Those who are familiar with Lacanian formulas will recognize here the formula of the feminine. They will easily draw from this the prediction that science has something to do with psychosis and its effects of “pousse-à-la-femme” [“pushing-towards-the-woman”]. They will be reminded of certain points of the positivist religion.

16) See *Télévision* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p.16-17; Engl.transl. by Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, “Television”, in *October*, 40, Spring 1987, p.10.

17) To suppose further that these a priori properties can be partially grasped through the means of mathematized logic is what transforms the theory of the signifier into a logic of the signifier. *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* proposed (among other things) to constitute in a positive manner such a logic, different from the mathematized logic, but based on it.

18) St. Thomas Aquinas sums it up by saying: “Omne ens est unum, verum, bonum”. See on all the above Heinrich Scholz, “Einführung in die kantische Philosophie”, *Mathesis Universalis* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), p.172.

19) From this derives the importance that Lacan attributes to Freud's proposition: “The dream-work does not think, or calculate [or] judge” (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, VI, S.E., 4, 1900 [*L'Interprétation des rêves*, VI, Paris: PUF, 1967, p. 432]). See *Télévision*, cit. (p.26; see also p.49), where the unconscious is defined as “a knowledge that does not think, or calculate, or judge” (Engl.transl., *Television*, cit., p. 18, see also p. 32). There is no contradiction between the proposition “the unconscious does not think” and the famous definition of the unconscious as a “ça pense où je ne suis pas”; one must understand that the thinking refused to the unconscious is the imaginized thinking [pensée imaginarisée] and that the thinking accorded to the unconscious is thinking reduced to its minimal laws, that is, de-imaginized thinking.