

By Jacques Lacan

TELEVISION

THE SEMINAR OF JACQUES LACAN BOOK I

THE SEMINAR OF JACQUES LACAN BOOK II

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THE SEMINAR OF JACQUES LACAN BOOK XI

ECRITS: A SELECTION

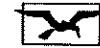
FEMININE SEXUALITY

THE SEMINAR OF
JACQUES LACAN

Edited by
JACQUES-ALAIN MILLER

Book XI
THE FOUR FUNDAMENTAL
CONCEPTS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Translated by
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PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE EDITION

When the space of a lapsus no longer carries any meaning (or interpretation), then only is one sure that one is in the unconscious. *One knows.*

But one has only to be aware of the fact to find oneself outside it. There is no friendship there, in that space that supports this unconscious.

All I can do is tell the truth. No, that isn't so—I have missed it. There is no truth that, in passing through awareness, does not lie.

But one runs after it all the same.

There is a way of sorting out this muddle that is satisfactory for other than formal reasons (symmetry, for example). Like satisfaction, it is acquired only with use, with the use of an individual—who, in psycho-analysis (psych = fiction of), is called an analysand. And, as a matter of simple fact, there is no shortage of analysands in our lands. That is a fact of human reality—what man calls reality.

It should be noted that psycho-analysis has, since it has existed, changed. Invented by a solitary, an incontestable theoretician of the unconscious (which is not what one imagines it to be—the unconscious, I would say, is real), it is now practised in couples. To be fair, the solitary was the first to set the example. Not without abusing his disciples (for they were disciples only because he knew not what he did).

This conveys the idea he had of psycho-analysis—a plague—except that it proved to be anodyne in the land where he brought it; the public adopted/adapted it quite painlessly.

Now, a little late in the day, I add my pinch of salt: a fact of history, or hysteria: that of my colleagues, as it happens, a case of no importance, but one in which I happened to find myself implicated for concerning myself with someone who introduced me to them as having imposed on myself Freud, the Beloved of Mathesis.

The Unconscious and Repetition

THE FREUDIAN UNCONSCIOUS AND OURS

*Pensée sauvage · There is cause only in something that doesn't work ·
Gap, obstacle, discovery, loss · Discontinuity · Signorelli*

Because I am beginning on time today, I will start by reading a poem which, in actual fact, has no relation to what I am about to say, but which is related to what I said last year, in my seminar, about the mysterious object, the most concealed object, that of the scopic drive.

It is a short poem to be found on page 73 of *Fou d'Elsa*, which Aragon entitles 'Contre-chant'.

*Vainement ton image arrive à ma rencontre
Et ne m'entre où je suis qui seulement la montre
Toi te tournant vers moi tu ne saurais trouver
Au mur de mon regard que ton ombre rêvée*

*Je suis ce malheureux comparable aux miroirs
Qui peuvent réfléchir mais ne peuvent pas voir
Comme eux mon œil est vide et comme eux habité
De l'absence de toi qui fait sa cécité*

In vain your image comes to meet me
And does not enter me where I am who only shows it
Turning towards me you can find
On the wall of my gaze only your dreamt-of shadow.

I am that wretch comparable with mirrors
That can reflect but cannot see
Like them my eye is empty and like them inhabited
By your absence which makes them blind.

I dedicate this poem to the nostalgia that some of you may feel for that interrupted seminar in which I developed the theme of anxiety and the function of the *objet petit a*.

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They will appreciate, I think, those who were with me last year—I apologize for being so allusive—they will appreciate the fact that Aragon—in this admirable work in which I am proud to find an echo of the tastes of our generation, so much so that I am forced to turn to friends of my own age if I am to make myself understood about this poem—follows his poem with this enigmatic line—*Thus said An-Nadji once, as he was invited to a circumcision.*

This is the point at which those who heard my seminar last year will find a correspondence between the various forms of the *objet a* and the central symbolic function of the *minus-phi* [$(- \phi)$]—evoked here by the strange reference, which is certainly no accident, that Aragon confers on the historical connotation, if I may put it this way, of the propagation by his character, the mad poet, of this 'counter-song'.

I

There are some of you here, I know, who are being introduced to my teaching for the first time. They are being introduced to it through writings that are already dated. I would like them to know that one of the indispensable co-ordinates in appreciating the meaning of this first teaching must be found in the fact that they cannot, from their present position, imagine to what degree of contempt for, or simply *méconnaissance* of, the instrument of their work the practitioners of psycho-analysis can attain. They should know that for some years all my effort has been required in a struggle to bring to the attention of these practitioners the true value of this instrument, *speech*—to give it back its dignity, so that it does not always represent for them those words, devalued in advance, that force them to fix their gaze elsewhere, in order to find their guarantor.

Thus, for a time at least, I was thought to be obsessed with some kind of philosophy of language, even a Heideggerian one, whereas only a *propaedeutic* reference was involved. The fact that I am speaking here will not make me speak more philosophically.

But let me turn to something else, which indeed I will find easier to specify here. I am referring to something that I can only call the refusal of the concept. That is why, as I announced at the end of my first seminar, I will try to introduce you today

THE FREUDIAN UNCONSCIOUS AND OURS

to the major Freudian concepts—I have isolated four that seem to come within this category.

The few words on the blackboard under the heading Freudian concepts are the first two—the unconscious and repetition. The transference—I hope to approach it next time—will introduce us directly to the algorithms that I thought necessary to set out in practice, especially with a view to the implementation of the analytic technique as such. Lastly, the drive is still so difficult to approach—so neglected, one should say—that I do not think I can do more this year than touch upon it after we have dealt with the transference.

We shall see, therefore, only the essence of analysis—especially that which is profoundly problematic, though at the same time crucial, about it, namely, the function of the training analysis. It is only by going through this exposition that we may, at the end of the year—without wishing myself in any way to minimize the shifting, not to say scabrous, side of the approach to this concept—begin our examination of the drive. In this respect, our approach will provide a contrast with those who boldly venture into this terrain with incomplete and flimsy references.

The two small arrows that you see indicated on the blackboard after *The unconscious* and *Repetition* point towards the question-mark that follows. This question-mark indicates that our conception of the concept implies that the concept is always established in an approach that is not unrelated to that which is imposed on us, as a form, by infinitesimal calculus. Indeed, if the concept is modelled on an approach to the reality that the concept has been created to apprehend, it is only by a leap, a passage to the limit, that it manages to realize itself. We are then required to say in what respect—under what form of finite quantity, I would say—the conceptual elaboration known as the unconscious may be carried out. The same goes for repetition.

It is in relation to the other two terms written on the blackboard at the end of the line, *The subject* and *The real* that we will be led to give form to the question posed last time—can psycho-analysis, with all its paradoxical, odd, aporic qualities, be regarded, among us, as constituting a science, a potential science?

I shall take first the concept of the unconscious.

Most of you will have some idea of what I mean when I say — *the unconscious is structured like a language*. This statement refers to a field that is much more accessible to us today than at the time of Freud. I will illustrate it by something that is materialized, at what is certainly a scientific level, by the field that is explored, structured, elaborated by Claude Lévi-Strauss, and which he has pinpointed in the title of his book, *La Pensée Sauvage*.

Before any experience, before any individual deduction, even before those collective experiences that may be related only to social needs are inscribed in it, something organizes this field, inscribes its initial lines of force. This is the function that Claude Lévi-Strauss shows us to be the truth of the totemic function, and which reduces its appearance—the primary classificatory function.

Before strictly human relations are established, certain relations have already been determined. They are taken from whatever nature may offer as supports, supports that are arranged in themes of opposition. Nature provides—I must use the word—signifiers, and these signifiers organize human relations in a creative way, providing them with structures and shaping them.

The important thing, for us, is that we are seeking here —before any formation of the subject, of a subject who thinks, who situates himself in it—the level at which there is counting, things are counted, and in this counting he who counts is already included. It is only later that the subject has to recognize himself as such, recognize himself as he who counts. Remember the naïve failure of the simpleton's delighted attempt to grasp the little fellow who declares—*I have three brothers, Paul, Ernest and me*. But it is quite natural—first the three brothers, Paul, Ernest and I are counted, and then there is I at the level at which I am to reflect the first I, that is to say, the I who counts.

In our time, in the historical period that has seen the formation of a science that may be termed human, but which must be distinguished from any kind of psycho-sociology, namely, linguistics, whose model is the combinatory operation, functioning spontaneously, of itself, in a presubjective way

—it is this linguistic structure that gives its status to the unconscious. It is this structure, in any case, that assures us that there is, beneath the term unconscious, something definable, accessible and objectifiable. But when I urge psycho-analysts not to ignore this field, which provides them with a solid support for their labours, does this mean that I hope to include the concepts introduced historically by Freud under the term unconscious? No, I don't think so. The unconscious, the Freudian concept, is something different, which I would like to try to get you to grasp today.

It is certainly not enough to say that the unconscious is a dynamic concept, since this would be to substitute the most common kind of mystery for a particular mystery—in general, force is used to designate a locus of opacity. It is to the function of cause that I will refer today.

I am well aware that I am entering here on a terrain which, from the point of view of philosophical criticism, suggests a whole world of references, so many, in fact, as to make me hesitate among them—but let's take our pick. Some of you at least will remain unsatisfied if I simply point out that, in his *An attempt to introduce the concept of negative quantities into philosophy*, we can see how closely Kant comes to understanding the gap that the function of cause has always presented to any conceptual apprehension. In that essay, it is more or less stated that cause is a concept that, in the last resort, is unanalysable—impossible to understand by reason—if indeed the rule of reason, the *Vernunftsregel*, is always some *Vergleichung*, or equivalent—and that there remains essentially in the function of cause a certain *gap*, a term used by Kant in the *Prolegomena*.

I will not go so far as to remark that the problem of cause has always been an embarrassment to philosophers, and that it is not as simple as might be thought when, in Aristotle, one sees the four causes balancing one another—for I am not philosophizing here, and would not claim to carry out so heavy an undertaking with so few references. However, these references are enough to bring out the meaning of what I am insisting on. For me, cause—any modality, even if Kant inscribes it in the categories of pure reason—to be more precise, he inscribes it in the table of relations, between inherence and community—cause is not any the more rationalized for this.

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Cause is to be distinguished from that which is determinate in a chain, in other words the *law*. By way of example, think of what is pictured in the law of action and reaction. There is here, one might say, a single principle. One does not go without the other. The mass of a body that is crushed on the ground is not the cause of that which it receives in return for its vital force—its mass is integrated in this force that comes back to it in order to dissolve its coherence by a return effect. There is no gap here, except perhaps at the end.

Whenever we speak of cause, on the other hand, there is always something anti-conceptual, something indefinite. The phases of the moon are the cause of tides—we know this from experience, we know that the word cause is correctly used here. Or again, miasmas are the cause of fever—that doesn't mean anything either, there is a hole, and something that oscillates in the interval. In short, there is cause only in something that doesn't work.

Well! It is at this point that I am trying to make you see by approximation that the Freudian unconscious is situated at that point, where, between cause and that which it affects, there is always something wrong. The important thing is not that the unconscious determines neurosis—of that one Freud can quite happily, like Pontius Pilot, wash his hands. Sooner or later, something would have been found, humoral determinates, for example—for Freud, it would be quite immaterial. For what the unconscious does is to show us the gap through which neurosis recreates a harmony with a real—a real that may well not be determined.

In this gap, something happens. Once this gap has been filled, is the neurosis cured? After all, the question remains open. But the neurosis becomes something else, sometimes a mere illness, a *scar*, as Freud said—the scar, not of the neurosis, but of the unconscious. I am not handling this topology very skilfully, because I do not have time—I have simply jumped into the deep end—but I think you will be able to feel guided by the terms that I have introduced when you come to read Freud's own works. Observe the point from which he sets out—*The Aetiology of the Neuroses*—and what does he find in the hole, in the split, in the gap so characteristic of cause? Something of the order of the *non-realized*.

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One uses the term refusal. This is rather hasty—indeed, for some time now, one has no longer been sure what the term refusal means. At first, the unconscious is manifested to us as something that holds itself in suspense in the area, I would say, of the *unborn*. That repression should discharge something into this area is not surprising. It is the abortionist's relation to limbo.

Certainly, this dimension should be evoked in a register that has nothing unreal, or dereistic, about it, but is rather unrealized. It is always dangerous to disturb anything in that zone of shades, and perhaps it is part of the analyst's role, if the analyst is performing it properly, to be besieged—I mean *really*—by those in whom he has invoked this world of shades, without always being able to bring them up to the light of day. One can never be sure that what one says on this matter will have no harmful effect—even what I have been able to say about it over the last ten years owes some of its impact to this fact. It is not without effect that, even in a public speech, one directs one's attention at subjects, touching them at what Freud calls the navel—the *navel of the dreams*, he writes, to designate their ultimately unknown centre—which is simply, like the same anatomical navel that represents it, that gap of which I have already spoken.

There is a danger in public discourse, precisely in so far as it is addressed to those nearest—Nietzsche knew this, a certain type of discourse can be addressed only to those furthest away.

In actual fact, this dimension of the unconscious that I am evoking *had been forgotten*, as Freud had quite clearly foreseen. The unconscious had closed itself up against his message thanks to those active practitioners of orthopaedics that the analysts of the second and third generation became, busying themselves, by psychologizing analytic theory, in stitching up this gap.

Believe me, I myself never re-open it without great care.

3

Now, of course, at this stage in my life, I am in a position to introduce into the domain of cause the law of the signifier, in the locus in which this gap is produced. Nevertheless, we must, if we are to understand what it means in psycho-analysis, go back and trace the concept of the unconscious through the

THE UNCONSCIOUS AND REPETITION

various stages of the process in which Freud elaborated it—since we can complete that process only by carrying it to its limits.

The Freudian unconscious has nothing to do with the so-called forms of the unconscious that preceded it, not to say accompanied it, and which still surround it today. To understand what I mean, open the Lalande dictionary. Or read the delightful list provided by Dwelshauvers in a book published some forty years ago. In it he lists ten or so forms of the unconscious that will tell nobody anything that he did not already know, and which simply designate the non-conscious, the more or less conscious, etc.—in the ever-expanding field of psychology, one finds hundreds of additional varieties.

Freud's unconscious is not at all the romantic unconscious of imaginative creation. It is not the locus of the divinities of night. This locus is no doubt not entirely unrelated to the locus towards which Freud turns his gaze—but the fact that Jung, who provides a link with the terms of the romantic unconscious, should have been repudiated by Freud, is sufficient indication that psycho-analysis is introducing something other. Similarly, we can say that the hold-all, heteroclitic unconscious that Edward von Hartmann spent his life elaborating is not Freud's unconscious, but we should not be over-hasty, for Freud, in the seventh chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, himself referred to it in a footnote—that is to say, we must look more closely at it if we are to discover in what way Freud's unconscious is to be distinguished from it.

To all these forms of unconscious, ever more or less linked to some obscure will regarded as primordial, to something pre-conscious, what Freud opposes is the revelation that at the level of the unconscious there is something at all points homologous with what occurs at the level of the subject—this thing speaks and functions in a way quite as elaborate as at the level of the conscious, which thus loses what seemed to be its privilege. I am well aware of the resistances that this simple remark can still provoke, though it is evident in everything that Freud wrote. Read, for example, the paragraph of that seventh chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, called 'Forgetting in Dreams', concerning which Freud merely refers to the play of the signifier.

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I will not content myself with this portentous reference. I have spelt out to you point by point the functioning of what was first produced for us by Freud as the phenomenon of the unconscious. In the dream, in parapraxis, in the flash of wit—what is it that strikes one first? It is the sense of impediment to be found in all of them.

Impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence something stumbles. Freud is attracted by these phenomena, and it is there that he seeks the unconscious. There, something other demands to be realized—which appears as intentional, of course, but of a strange temporality. What occurs, what is *produced*, in this gap, is presented as *the discovery*. It is in this way that the Freudian exploration first encounters what occurs in the unconscious.

This discovery is, at the same time, a solution—not necessarily a complete one, but, however incomplete it may be, it has that indefinable something that touches us, that peculiar accent that Theodor Reik has brought out so admirably—only brought out, for Freud certainly noted it before him—namely, *surprise*, that by which the subject feels himself overcome, by which he finds both more and less than he expected—but, in any case, it is, in relation to what he expected, of exceptional value.

Now, as soon as it is presented, this discovery becomes a rediscovery and, furthermore, it is always ready to steal away again, thus establishing the dimension of loss.

To resort to a metaphor, drawn from mythology, we have, in Eurydice twice lost, the most potent image we can find of the relation between Orpheus the analyst and the unconscious.

In this respect, if you will allow me to add a touch of irony, the unconscious finds itself, strictly speaking, on the opposite side to love, which, as everyone knows, is always unique; the expression 'one lost, ten to be found again' finds its best application here.

Discontinuity, then, is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon—discontinuity, in which something is manifested as a vacillation. Now, if this discontinuity has this absolute, inaugural character, in the development of Freud's discovery, must we place it—as was later the tendency with analysts—against the background of a totality?

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Is the *one* anterior to discontinuity? I do not think so, and everything that I have taught in recent years has tended to exclude this need for a closed *one*—a mirage to which is attached the reference to the enveloping psyche, a sort of double of the organism in which this false unity is thought to reside. You will grant me that the *one* that is introduced by the experience of the unconscious is the *one* of the split, of the stroke, of rupture.

At this point, there springs up a misunderstood form of the *un*, the *Un* of the *Unbewusste*. Let us say that the limit of the *Unbewusste* is the *Unbegriff*—not the non-concept, but the concept of lack.¹

Where is the background? Is it absent? No. Rupture, split, the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge—just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence.

If you keep hold of this initial structure, you will avoid giving yourself up to some partial aspect of the question of the unconscious—as, for example, that it is the subject, *qua* alienated in his history, at the level at which the syncope of discourse is joined with his desire. You will see that, more radically, it is in the dimension of a synchrony that you must situate the unconscious—at the level of a being, but in the sense that it can spread over everything, that is to say, at the level of the subject of the enunciation, in so far as, according to the sentences, according to the modes, it loses itself as much as it finds itself again, and in the sense that, in an interjection, in an imperative, in an invocation, even in a hesitation, it is always the unconscious that presents you with its enigma, and speaks—in short, at the level at which everything that blossoms in the unconscious spreads, like mycelium, as Freud says about the dream, around a central point. It is always a question of the subject *qua* indeterminate.

Oblivium is *lēvis* with the long *e*—smooth. *Oblivium* is that which effaces—effaces what? The signifier as such. Here we find again the basic structure that makes it possible, in an operatory way, for something to take on the function of barring,

¹ Lacan is playing on the French *un* (one) and the German negative prefix *un*, moving from 'oneness' to 'negation'. The *Unbewusste* is Freud's 'unconscious'. Lacan's gloss, on *Unbegriff* shifts the notion of 'negation' into one of 'lack' [Translator's note].

THE FREUDIAN UNCONSCIOUS AND OURS

striking out another thing. This is a more primordial level, structurally speaking, than repression, of which we shall speak later. Well, this operatory element of effacement is what Freud designates, from the outset, in the function of the censor.

It is the censorship by scissors, the Russian censorship, or again the German censorship, see Heinrich Heine, at the beginning of the *Book of Germany*. *Herr and Frau Such-and-such have pleasure in announcing the birth of a child as beautiful as liberty*—and Dr Hoffmann, the censor, strikes out the word *liberty*. Certainly one may ask oneself what effect this word can have as a result of this strictly material censorship, but that is another problem. But it is certainly here that the dynamism of the unconscious operates in the most efficient way.

Let us turn again to an example that has never been sufficiently exploited, the first used by Freud to demonstrate his theory, namely, his forgetting, his inability to remember the word *Signorelli* after his visit to the paintings at Orvieto. Is it possible not to see emerging from the text itself, and establishing itself, not metaphor, but the reality of the disappearance, of the suppression, of the *Unterdrückung*, the passing underneath? The term *Signor, Herr*, passes underneath—the absolute master, I once said, which is in fact death, has disappeared there. Furthermore, do we not see, behind this, the emergence of that which forced Freud to find in the myths of the death of the father the regulation of his desire? After all, it is to be found in Nietzsche, who declares, in his own myth, that God is dead. And it is perhaps against the background of the same reasons. For the myth of the *God is dead*—which, personally, I feel much less sure about, as a myth of course, than most contemporary intellectuals, which is in no sense a declaration of theism, nor of faith in the resurrection—perhaps this myth is simply a shelter against the threat of castration.

If you know how to read them, you will see this threat in the apocalyptic frescos of Orvieto cathedral. If not, read Freud's conversation in the train—where only the end of sexual potency is referred to. Freud's interlocutor, a doctor—the same interlocutor in fact before whom he is unable to remember the name *Signorelli*—is describing to Freud the dramatic character that a loss of potency usually has for his patients.

THE UNCONSCIOUS AND REPETITION

Thus the unconscious is always manifested as that which vacillates in a split in the subject, from which emerges a discovery that Freud compares with desire—a desire that we will temporarily situate in the denuded metonymy of the discourse in question, where the subject surprises himself in some unexpected way.

As far as Freud and his relation to the father are concerned, let us not forget that, despite all his efforts to understand, he was forced to admit, to a woman of his acquaintance, that, for him, the question—*What does a woman want?*—remained unanswered. He never resolved this question, as we can see from what was in fact his relations with women, his uxorious character, as Jones rather delicately puts it. I would say that Freud would certainly have made a perfect impassioned idealist had he not devoted himself to the other, in the form of the hysteric.

I have decided to stop my seminar always at a particular time, at twenty-to-two. As you see, I have not managed today to deal fully with the function of the unconscious.

(Questions and answers are missing.)

22 January 1964

3

OF THE SUBJECT OF CERTAINTY

Neither being, nor non-being · Finitude of desire · The elusive · The status of the unconscious is ethical · That all theory has to be revised · Freud, Cartesian · The desire of the hysteric

Last week, my introduction of the unconscious through the structure of a gap provided an opportunity for one of my listeners, Jacques-Alain Miller, to give an excellent outline of what he recognized, in my previous writings, as the structuring function of a lack, and by an audacious arch he linked this up with what, speaking of the function of desire, I have designated as *manque-à-être*, a 'want-to-be'.

Having made this synopsis, which has certainly not been without its uses, at least for those who already had some idea of my teaching, he questioned me as to my ontology.

I was able to answer him only within the limits imposed on dialogue by the time-table, and I ought to have obtained from him to begin with a more specific definition of what he means by the term ontology. Nevertheless, I hope he did not think that I found the question at all inappropriate. I would go further. It came at a particularly good point, in that when speaking of this gap one is dealing with an ontological function, by which I thought I had to introduce, it being the most essential, the function of the unconscious.

I

The gap of the unconscious may be said to be *pre-ontological*. I have stressed that all too often forgotten characteristic—forgotten in a way that is not without significance—of the first emergence of the unconscious, namely, that it does not lend itself to ontology. Indeed, what became apparent at first to Freud, to the discoverers, to those who made the first steps,