

Jacques-Alain Miller

**Closing remarks at the Rally of the Impossible Professions,
Against the False Promises of Security, London, 20 Sept 2008.**

I enjoy speaking to tired people, they are usually very receptive - it lowers their defences.

I notice that today's presentations have been remarkably convergent. And in my opinion, the gist of the matter lies in the question: do you believe or not in the existence of the Unconscious? Do you believe in something more or less like what Freud called the Unconscious?

Positivism, cognitivism, and the contemporary ideology of the beginning of the 21st century, this dominant ideology which we have addressed today from various viewpoints, obviously disbelieve that the Unconscious exists. Conversely they believe it is an outdated concept, an illusion without a future, a relic from the last century: They consider that they have got the better of Freud, and overcome the Unconscious. Yet here *belief* might not be quite the appropriate word, perhaps should I say *knowledge* of the Unconscious. "Knowledge and Belief" as in the title of a book by Hintikka the famous logician. "Knowledge and Belief": he believed in a clear-cut division between them. Lacan, as for himself, was not so sure there was a clear-cut division.

Yet, at the root of all knowledge lies a belief - an act of faith. In the beginning axioms are needed, something supposedly self-evident that won't be questioned, and wherefrom one can proceed to make deductions. But at the origin one has to trust, one has to accept.

Cardinal Newman, the distinguished Englishman (whose name appeared in the news recently, though he died many years ago) - wrote a book called the *Grammar of Assent* in which he tried to show that in order to say " $2 + 2 = 4$ " an act of faith is necessary. That was his way of introducing God into the matter.

For Wittgenstein, at the root of all knowledge there was a practice, a way of living, a life style. And for Lacan, at the root of the Unconscious there was a supposition. He called the Unconscious a "subject supposed to know". Freud himself had claimed that the Unconscious had only the value of a hypothesis. And thereon he managed to convey corroborative evidence without crucial proof. For him the Unconscious remained at the level of a hypothesis that cannot be disproved, which, according to Karl Popper constituted the central weakness of psychoanalysis. It is true that interpretation, in psychoanalysis cannot be disproved. And indeed it is a weakness. Yet there is a great distance between the *existence* of something or somebody and the *proof*.

In analysis we meet people who need proof of their own existence. People who eventually don't feel they exist at all in spite of being, living, working, sleeping, loving - but they have no reliable *proof* that they exist. Some of them would say: "I don't feel I exist at all", or "I don't exist for someone", or "I don't exist for the others", or "I don't exist as a woman, in spite of being a woman", and eventually "I don't exist as a woman ... in spite of being a man". Which means that existence can be linked to some failure to

provide an evidence. But leading an evidence-based life is hard work. Making a self-audit is a difficult endeavour. So one may eventually want to meet an analyst in order to get a self-audit. This would be a way to produce psychoanalysis by way of evidence-based psychoanalysis, a way of re-engineering psychoanalysis as evidence-based psychoanalysis.

But, as a matter of fact, the Unconscious is not an objective entity. It takes place in a gap and one can only have access to some testimony of its existence through parapraxis, through slips of the tongue, through some failure of one's behaviour. So, it is only in a gap, that the Unconscious can be not *captured* but caught in a *glimpse*. And this gap may happen to be filled up. The Unconscious existed for sure long before psychoanalysis but nobody paid attention, it was erased or deified or used for other purposes.

Freud said that the Unconscious opens up and then closes down. It doesn't speak permanently. It speaks and then goes back to silence. The dominant ideology at the beginning of the 21st century, of our democracy, of developed countries, tries to *silence* the Unconscious. The false promises of security, in my opinion, are part and parcel of this effort to silence the Unconscious.

Since the Freudian Unconscious depends on the listener; if the listener is not there ... as an example, let's take psychosis – interpretative psychosis – at the onset everything begins to become significant for the person. Everything begins to make sense. Generally it is a menacing sense, so the person starts reading even the contingency of the world: "it's not by chance that this man is passing in the street", "it's not by chance that I was looked at like that by this person", and so the world begins to make sense, a delirious sense. When the person is cured, or at least appeased, nothing is left to read, things just happen like for the ordinary man. The world stops speaking.

With Freud we have learned to read the Unconscious and to read symptoms, to see symptoms as a text with sub-texts and sub-sub-texts. For the Unconscious to speak, someone who listens to it is a necessity. One needs an audit in an etymological sense (as Michael Power noted in his conversation with Roger Litten). But if you suppress the listener, you silence the Unconscious. To be more precise, you don't suppress *it*. On the contrary, you nourish it. By silencing it, I would say, you intensify or exacerbate the drives. You exacerbate the death drive and the repetition. Instead of being spoken out, it becomes acted out. This constitutes the common ground of those ideologies of security, as I understand it, they work at suppressing psychoanalysis. They keep yelling: "death to the psychoanalyst!". This is, I believe, the core desire of the cognitivists.

If I had more time, I would draw Lacan's diagram of the analytic discourse. He meant to convey by writing out this diagram, that one cannot control the Unconscious. After you have been analysed you do not achieve any mastery of the Unconscious. There is no such thing as a master of the universe, as the famous traders call themselves! And we were able to see this week how they have been surprised by the Unconscious of the economy; an unknown combination of factors that resulted in a surprise.

Having been analysed, does not keep you safe from surprises. Let's say instead that you are enlightened; you are supposed to be able to read your dreams and parapraxes. It is difficult to speak of the Unconscious of an analysed person. It is not the same as that of an un-analysed person. It is in

some way depleted. In some ways, what makes it depleted also is the fact that generally when you finish your analysis, you are older as well, sometimes much older, so you don't know if it is the effect of age or of analysis. Nonetheless the Unconscious is simplified, it speaks more clearly, you can read it. You read some messages. I, for example, put great trust in the ideas that surge when I wake up - I happen to grasp two or three ideas and I believe I have to trust those ideas. In such a way that is not a matter of acquiring self-control - not the kind of self-control taught in the schools (which is nothing but an *inserted* self-control that intensifies the death drive).

On the contrary, in an analytical session you relax the stringent exigencies of self-control. You may say what you please; you must say what occurs to you. The very thing that is forbidden in usual life becomes allowed in analysis; you are invited to speak your unspeakable desire, and if you don't, your dreams will speak for you.

So – and this is addressed to the criminologists who have presented a paper today – according to Freud every one is a criminal in the Unconscious. Everyone is a criminal: and this is the very meaning of the Œdipus complex. There is some permissiveness in analysis and in that sense psychoanalysis is anti-social. It is just an anti-social part of society. So you will not get self-control out of it, but you will obtain what I could define as a capacity to dialogue with your Unconscious, to put it at use, to work with it. That would be the “true promises of psychoanalysis”.

Choosing “The false promises of *security*” as a title for this meeting – has been a smart election: Lacan would have called this framing a master signifier, and it is indeed a master word of the ideology of the beginning of the 21st century. I do not mean to say *the* master word, but it is certainly to be placed among a cluster of master words for our times.

In some way I consider that *security* as a master word is a transposition of what *certainty* stands for in mathematical logic. I also purport that the imperative of security is at one with the imperative of health. They are looked upon as supreme value these days: “we shall make you secure and healthy because we shall protect life, and eventually we are going to make your life miserable in order to protect it”. Freud did not call it *discontents*, but *Unbehagen*, the unease: Not the well-being but the “bad-being” within civilisation. That is why the key-word and furthermore the injunction is: “we will assure your well-being”. Paradoxically, may be, that is to be taken as a proof of the adequacy of Freud's title. And indeed if the sloganeering keeps on uttering “we will assure your well-being” it is precisely because there is an *Unbehagen* in civilisation.

What is health? According to an ancient definition, it is nothing more than “the silence of the organs”; health is attested to by “the body that will not speak”. Thus desire, considered from the perspective of health is clearly a disease. Today's cult for security and health, not only entails a declaration of war against the death drive, but is aimed at transforming us into the soldiers, the crusaders of the well-being: as a result it exacerbates the death drive.

How is Intimacy then to be considered: At the very inside of the protected space where one believes to be protected, at the very *inside* lies an exteriority. This responds to the very status of all of the Freudian phenomena: they strike from within. Where one believes to be assured of one's will, someone unrecognized happens to be speaking there inside. You receive the

messages without understanding them – it is most clear in psychosis where it is *materialised*. In France, we call it mental automatism - when the patient hears voices in his head, at the most intimate part of his being - he finds that others are present. This is *extimacy* at its most intrusive.

Lacan spoke of extimacy only once, but I made a fundamental concept out of it because it gives a status to this presence from within. We, at the beginning of the 21st century, try to hunt it down, this enemy within, by all possible means. But in doing so, we just intensify the phenomena because we don't understand the logic of it.

As far as analysis is concerned, and I will not expand much about it today, the fundamental insecurity is sexual insecurity. For sociological reasons, sexual insecurity is certainly exacerbated at the beginning of the 21st century.

To conclude, it is necessary to say something about evaluation, which is at the service of the ideology of security. Should I have had more time I would have presented it by developing three items: Digit, Brain, and Box.

Digit refers to the general digitalisation of the world. There has been an ontological shift in what it is *to be*, and we have seen this shift happening in our lifetime. In today's world, *to be* is nothing else than to be measured, *to be* is to be digitalised – it stands as a criterion *to be*.

Brain: all emotions, meanings, ideas, even the ideas of God are nowadays systematically linked to a cerebral quantity. Fluids, blood, neurotransmitters, electricity, any emotion, love, meanings, God: if you associate it with a given quantity then you can measure it and decide that they are of the same nature - as Professor Gombrich said in his talk earlier today. Nothing resists this ideology: all human life is supposedly quantifiable by this magical trick – it is nothing more than that.

A question was raised in the interviews made by Roger Litten: what to do with our protest. As a matter of fact, protest is inefficient, and I wouldn't advise us to specialise in impotent rage. I believe unease is going to grow and as a result psychoanalysis can grow also. That is if we are able to take the correct position in front of it. I believe that CBT will be unbearable in the medium term and I don't advise for any defeatism in front of it.

Box: it refers to the questionnaire we spoke of, where by ticking the box one can quantify anything. You give a scale from 1-5 and ask the person just to tick the box. With that act you begin to mathematise the world and may go on to write a treatise. All just based on ticking the box! All the literature and all the rest is then purported to be based on a complete magical trick - nothing more complicated than that.

Evaluation will not disappear. It's false, it's a magical trick, but it will not disappear. It responds to an ontological shift and will not disappear overnight. So we need some cunning to deal with evaluation. I believe that as unease is going to grow the psychoanalytic offer is to be maintained, and as addictions are going to multiply irresistibly in the context of universal digitalisation then let us say that psychoanalysis is the best of all possible addictions.

More seriously, the 450 guidelines that are to be decided by the Health Professions Council constitute a deadly menace for psychoanalysis, especially in Great Britain. Beyond that, it offers a very bad example for Europe and the rest of the world.

As a consequence, my proposal for a new step would be to ask the London Society to organise another conference with our friends and also with colleagues from other analytical groups just to try to stop this stupid but deadly menace of the 450 guidelines. I hope our stand will prevail. We are prevailing in France just now since the beginning of last July - and we have a good chance to prevail in the future, so why not try to prevail in Great Britain also.

Transcribed by Janet Low, edited by Pierre-Gilles Guéguen.