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What is the proof of the unconscious? It just so happens that I muse over this question, that I abandon myself to it. And to tell the truth, it is a kind of bemusement, it is abandon. But the next patient is always already there to pull me out of my own doubt, for this patient — who speaks to me, who is going to speak to me, who is going to address himself to me, who comes right in and doesn't just pass by my window — is quite real, and I don't take pleasure in doubting his existence. But is this patient before me the proof of the unconscious? Does he prove the existence of the unconscious? No. He only proves the existence of psychoanalysis, not that of the unconscious. If I am a psychoanalyst, if I rise to the challenge when someone asks to do an analysis with me, if I undertake therefore to accept this predicate of "psychoanalyst" and to inscribe myself in this function, then hadn't I better identify myself as such? That is, hadn't I better be in the place where I am thus called to function without thinking of advantage, and hadn't I better do what I have to do? I never have to doubt the unconscious as long as I accept the psychoanalytic act. Musing has no place in it.

The psychoanalytic act, which is the act of the psychoanalyst, arises, like all acts worthy of the name, *ex nihilo*. This means that any act worthy of the name isn't deduced; it isn't a deliberation, neither a calculation nor a compromise. Even if a careful consideration of the pros and cons precedes it, one recognizes an act as that which exceeds its reasons. That's why the act is foundational, primordial, creative. Every act worthy of the name creates a new truth, which isn't by virtue of that fact eternal, but which has a chance to be unforgettable for the subject supported by this act. Thus the act creates a truth eternized in the subject, who changes because of it. The act is an absolute beginning, quasi-divine, which means that in the order of the signifier, it is an axiom, and in relation to the subject, it is certitude. And it installs the first signifier from which is constituted the subject of a new knowledge — a knowledge that is guaranteed by that act. But then you'll ask, what guarantees the act? Nothing. The act is never of the order of guarantee, but of the order of risk. This means that it isn't its own guarantee. Even God wouldn't know how to be his own guarantee. We can only say that God is authorized only by himself. I can think about it as much as I want, but I only accede to the act by passing through the moment — we could even say the defile — of an "I don't think." To be in the act, it is necessary not to think. If the act is so difficult for the obsessional, and if he nevertheless dreams about it a lot, if he desires it, if he invests it with a value beyond measure and absolute, it's precisely to that extent that the obsessional thinks and that he is still a thinking-being. In that regard, obsession is nothing other than the pathology of thought by which the fundamental indetermination of thought is burdened with all the weight of doubt. And the same goes for unconscious thought. It is the act, as determination with all the force of certitude, that's decisive. Thus a disjunction: act or unconscious.

Properly speaking, the act is the rejection of the unconscious — which also means that insofar as I am the support of an act, I don't have an unconscious. I'm no longer hooked up to the unconscious (*Je suis désabonné à l'inconscient*). Insofar as I am the support of an act, I am not a subject. What I just referred to as risk, I could also call fraud (*imposture*) since the premise of the act goes beyond what I think, beyond what I know.

It's a fraud because as unconscious, I am one who knows not what I do. In this respect, every act is a fraud since in the act I am acting as if I knew what I was doing even though I don't know anything about it. Correction: every act is a fraud except that I don't have anything to do with it and that a true act isn't the subject's because there is no subject of the act.

So, as a psychoanalyst, I don't have to doubt the unconscious. I don't have to doubt that I know in a certain way of the existence of the unconscious. As a psychoanalyst, I lay the foundation for the unconscious, insofar as I induce the one who addresses me to speak in the dimension of the unconscious. I lay the foundation for the unconscious, and at first it's at the patient's risk, and even at the patient's expense. Nevertheless, my question — "What is the proof of the unconscious?" — remains in spite of this pragmatic resolution. I say that it's a pragmatic solution because even without having an answer, I continue to do what I have to do as a psychoanalyst, and for the best reasons in the world. So it's a pragmatic resolution, not a theoretical one. Certainly I don't have, like Descartes, the leisure to meditate on certainty and existence. And besides, does the unconscious demand that we prove its existence? It isn't even certain that God demands that. God, when he existed, demanded that we love him, not that we that we prove him. In fact, by proving him, we love him less, even not at all. The death of God began with his proof. It's not just that proofs wear out the truth, they kill it. So why do I trouble myself with the question of what proves the unconscious? Even though Descartes is all alone in his hermitage, sitting by his fire with his ball of wax, I'm not alone, insofar as the psychoanalyst isn't alone, since his ball of wax lives, and talks, and thinks. The analyst doesn't have anything to do with the "I think, therefore I am" because he restricts himself to the "I don't think" from which he derives his being, leaving the lack-in-being (*manque-à-être*) to the one who thinks on the couch.

Basically, the psychoanalyst can restrict himself to practicing psychoanalysis. Let's say that that's the pragmatic form of his infatuation, to take up a term that was recently invoked. That's already a lot. But if he also wants to think about psychoanalysis, how could a psychoanalyst avoid the question, "What is the proof of the unconscious?" There is a convenient response. Transference proves the unconscious, that is — let's put it this way — the love of the unconscious. But love and signs of love are not proofs, if we admit at the very least that since the advent of the scientific discourse, the requirements of a proof have overruled and disqualified the testimony of love. And that's why the question of what proves the unconscious persists. It imposes itself on the analyst as soon as he thinks, and even as soon as he addresses himself to those who don't recognize themselves in it. Obviously, the analyst could address only those who do see themselves in it, to analysts, that is, to what is there for all to see. But it's for those who don't see themselves in this question that I speak today, and not for my colleagues. That's the *hic* that's there for all to see. For what are the criteria of a proof? There's only a proof if the Other consents to it. In this sense, logic is only an extreme form of rhetoric. A proof for one isn't necessarily a proof for the Other. One even sees this in mathematics, where there isn't the least agreement among mathematicians on the criteria for the proof of existence when infinity is at issue. Thus, it isn't certain that the question of what proves the unconscious is collectivizable. Perhaps it can only be posed to each person one by one: what proof do you have of the existence of the unconscious? In any case, that's a question that the analyst can't evade, unless he makes his act a fraud. This is the question that undoes the infatuation: what is it, for you, that proves the existence of the unconscious other than being an analyst? The answer, if there is

one, comes first of all from one's own analysis. That's why an analysis always begins with an act of faith. Because the proofs, if they come, only come along later.

Nobody begins an analysis in certainty. Certainty, in the ideal case, at any rate, comes at the end of analysis, with the handing over of the psychoanalytic act. If certainty is on the side of the act, why not say that it's never on the side of the unconscious? The formations of the unconscious, the narration of dreams, the slip, the mistake, and their interpretation, to my mind don't in any way prove the existence of the unconscious. They don't in any way exclude the possibility that the unconscious is imaginary. In fact, the unconscious is imaginary if one means by that not only the register of the image, insofar as it's different from the real, but also the register of meaning as different from the real.

If we accept that meaning is imaginary, if we put it in this register, then we must also posit that the unconscious is imaginary. The formations of the unconscious and their interpretation by the analyst don't go any farther than demonstrating that there is some meaning there where we could discern none before — before Freud and before one tries it for oneself. Meaning, all right, as much meaning as you want! But that doesn't mean it's there to demonstrate the existence of the unconscious. That only demonstrates its elaboration, which only ever remains in the order of the possible. Look at analysts, even the best, when they try to define the calculus of interpretation. They only succeed in pointing out what phrase they used to complete a sentence of their analysand. They succeed in determining which signifier 2 is joined to the signifier 1 that their patient offered them. Thus they conclude upon the probable effect of signification that follows from it, and they can present it to you in all likelihood. But that doesn't get beyond the imaginary of meaning. A gap is maintained between the effect of signification — as probable as it may be — and the response of the real that seems to accompany it.

And in fact, on what side should we look for this response of the real? We always look for it on the side of the symptom. We can demonstrate as much as we want of the effects of signification, but our standard of measure is to know if anything changes with the symptom. Basically, we already recognize that what makes the unconscious ex-ist is the symptom (*c'est le symptôme qui fait ex-istence de l'inconscient*), and not the formations of the unconscious. It's in this sense that the symptom isn't to be placed on the same level as the formations of the unconscious. Granted, it is one of them, insofar as we recognize formations of the unconscious as those formations for which we can suppose an intentional signification. We can suppose in a dream, a slip, a joke, and a symptomatic mistake a certain "that means." And it's from this supposed meaning that we can infer any signifying intention, a supposed knowledge, which the response of the supposed subject of knowledge (*sujet-supposé-savoir*) then encapsulates. But supposition isn't existence. It's even the opposite (*contraire*) of existence. But even if the supposed meaning insists, and thus demonstrates the coherence of the knowledge that I infer from it, it doesn't, for all that, make it ex-ist.

To speak of the ex-istence of the unconscious is to say something more, and even something entirely different from speaking about its insistence. Even though both are repetition, they aren't the same. Let's admit that the symptom — insofar as it is interpretable, insofar as we can find a meaning in it and from this meaning infer a knowledge — belongs to the register of the formations of the unconscious. The

symptom nevertheless is distinguished from the others by, if I may put it this way, its objectivity. First of all because the symptom endures while a formation of the unconscious is in essence a transitory being, evasive, elusive. We can always say about a dream — and this happens even to psychoanalysts — that it's only a dream, but we never say about a symptom that it's only a symptom. That's what Freud butted up against, the resistance of the symptom.

The symptom reaches the unconscious; its *jouissance* exists, objectively ex-ists, for the symptom always includes a reference to the master. That's why it's objective. I'll even say, to simplify, that the symptom is always social. We see this in the selection of psychiatric patients where it's the social that determines the symptom, and things vary according to the apparatuses of mastery. But even in analytic experience, where selection, we think, is personal and subjective, the symptom announces itself fundamentally through some flaw in the subject's mastery.

There is no symptom except where there is some subjective flaw of mastery and thus a reference to mastering. That's why from the first, the symptom has always been led to resubmit itself to its master so that it remasters you. The doctor in particular has been the agent of this function, and let's note that he doesn't shy away from identifying the subject with the symptom. For him, if you have the symptom, you are the symptom, and that's how you're designated. You aren't John or Jack anymore, but a pleurisy or an abscess. In that regard, the reduction of the subject to a symptom — not the reification, but the symptomification or the becoming-a-symptom — is realized in a short circuit starting at this level. Because of the symptom, the analyst is called to the place of the master; but he is called to hold that place in a new way, a way that isn't therapeutic as such. For there is no therapy that isn't done in the name of the discourse of the master. The therapist is a priest who offers the symptom as a sacrifice to the master.

We analysts are exactly like company doctors: given the current coordinates of the discourse of the master, it's necessarily as a pathology of labor that the symptom presents itself. This is what undermines the discourse of the master, hinders its functioning and throws work into disarray. It's not only "I'm not able to work," but "I'm not able to stop myself from working." What counts, as far as the symptom is concerned, is the "I'm not able," which is a formula for stopping, but at the same time a formula for repetition tied to stopping. It's basically an "I'm not able to stop myself." And it's only insofar as the discourse of the master defines the feeling of reality and the criteria of existence that the failures and resistances that the discourse of the master encounters in the name of the subjective symptom count as existence. Symptoms count as ex-istence because of the discourse of the master. It's on account of the fact that the unconscious in the symptom, and even in the social symptom, is made to ex-ist that it is susceptible to demonstration to everyone. The response of the body in hysteria and the response of thought in obsession could serve well enough as proof for the subject, but for everyone, the proof would be by the response of the social body or of social thought. From this results the fact that the perverse symptom or the psychotic symptom always includes a sweeping conviction that is happily refused to the neurotic. Thus the symptom is to be defined not as formation of the unconscious, but as function of the unconscious — a function that carries a formation of the unconscious into the real. It is simplest to say that the symptom carries an effect of signification into the real and that through the symptom, an effect of signification becomes equivalent to a response of the real. The annoying thing is that this formula doesn't meet scientific standards. Science, in effect,

doesn't allow that effects of signification can be the equivalent of the response of the real. To be sure, science investigates the real under the Galilean supposition that nature speaks the language of mathematics, that the real responds in mathematical signifiers. When the real is investigated by science as it is symbolically elaborated, it responds directly in the symbolic. But response of the real that we analysts investigate — let's call it the real of *jouissance* — is made of meaning. We bear witness to this ourselves by our interpretations. And even if we suppose, in conformity with the scientific hypothesis, that the real is written in letters, it's necessary for us to account for what the letters signify, that is, it's necessary for us to add to the real an effect of signification. That is to say, if the symptom is a function that goes from the symbolic to the real, there is, for us no direct path that leads us from the real to the symbolic and that we need as an imaginary mediation — one of meaning. But what to do about it? To be able to make this mediation happen, that's Lacan's dream. I'll end by indicating what all this changes in the status of the Other, which is for Lacan the cornerstone of psychoanalysis. Is the Other already constituted in the symbolic? What could make us believe it are precisely the formations of the unconscious, insofar as they are messages that are susceptible to interpretation. And we can use them to demonstrate that in a formation of the unconscious is an appeal to the Other that it conceals — the other interprets and the other guarantees the meaning that it includes. On the other hand, if we approach the unconscious not through its formations, but through the symptom, then we begin to suspect that perhaps this Other is only constituted in the imaginary, and in that sense, this Other, unlike the symptom, doesn't exist.

What is the partner of the subject? Is it the Other, the big Other, in which he is constituted as such, and where he is spoken of to the point of being spoken? Or is it rather the little *a* by which he enjoys himself. If we approach the unconscious through its formations, we could say that the partner of the subject is the Other. But if we approach it through the symptom, its partner is the little *a*. This would mean that, from this point of view, the Other is supported by the *objet a*. The question then becomes one of knowing how the Other comes to be substituted for *objet a*, that is, how it is turned into a metaphor, not the metaphor of the subject, but how rather being comes to be substituted for the letter; how it is that for the letter fundamentally without *A* there comes to be substituted the signifier that returns to the Other; how it could happen that we could respond to the subject from place where its only partner was solitude in the *jouissance* of the symptom. The poet tells us how — from Beatrice, his Beatrice, the divine Other was born, and also his own idea of beatitude. He shows us that the creation of the big Other starts with the *jouissance* of the subject. But it's not from just any *jouissance* that an Other can be born; this only happens if the Other is already in the symptom, if there's already a breach in the automatism of *jouissance*.

How is the other present in the repetition of the symptom? Always as (1). You can see it in obsession, which makes of the "minus one" a temporal instance — in the sense that we say, "that was a close one" (*il était moins une*). In that very haste, which is *jouissance*, the Other of expectation is created, and so, in excavating the place of the "minus one," the place of the Other is prepared. Look at hysteria, in which the subject subtracts a letter, the letter, so as to become fundamentally, if I may say, a want-to-be (*manque-à-être*). From this we will in analysis know how to grasp not only the metaphors of the subject, but also the metaphors of *jouissance*. With the obsessional this will be his petrification, his "turning to stone," which already indicates the drive, and this petrification doesn't contradict what occasionally complements it, namely, agitation or

activism. With the hysteric we find not fixation, but "fiction," that is absentification, which establishes her presence and which the subject must then take to the extreme that we call histrionics, but which is in fact hysterical presentness (*présentisme*), continually eaten away by absentification. For the pervert, I won't claim petrification, in spite of Man Ray's portrait of Sade; instead, I'd say knowledgification (*savoirification*). For the psychotic, without developing the point, I would invoke his "hatification" (*haïfication*).

I'll conclude by talking about the implications of conceiving of the symptom as a function of ex-istence. There is no promise here that we overrule its absolute remainder and its rantings and ravings. The symptom as interpretable, even supposing that it had disappeared, leaves an unelaborated kernel. We could call this kernel incurable. After that, what else remains to be done but to assume it — not just the assumption of castration, but the assumption of the symptom? This assumption — doubtless with some immodesty — goes as far as an "I am what I am." That's why I wanted to begin to pose the question that remains — what is the proof of the unconscious?

Translated by Daniel Collins

Notes

* Actes E C F, *L'acte et la répétition*, 1987

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