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## Psychosis and the Child in the Teachings of Jacques Lacan : Consequences for an Institution

I speak about Nonette under a variety of situations to very different audiences. I will distinguish three : firstly, I speak of Nonette at Nonette in our weekly meetings. The danger here lies in drifting into an autistic practice without any dimension of alterity, into a pluralistic autism -- *neither other, nor Other*.

Secondly, I speak about Nonette to others, in particular those which we call our «partners,» our alter-egos, for example, other institutions. In this situation, there is another slant, that of marketing, of selling a better product than the other. It is, however, a practice imposed by the political framework of profitability and non-concurrence in health and welfare districts. It is defined essentially in terms of rivalry -- *others, but no Other*.

The third case is to speak of Nonette in the Freudian Field. Here the difference is marked by the introduction of an Other which constitutes an address and which has the function of extracting the imaginary dimension from the rivalry with the others. In sum, its about articulating the signifier of Nonette to an Other signifier -- *others with the Other*.

What problematic questions do I try to pose in the quick of their occurrence at Nonette? They are of three orders. On the one hand is the question of infantile psychosis. This once had been a hotly debated question in the field one calls learning dysfunction (where Nonette is situated) when, in light of readings given by Lacan's students, certain of those who had been pinned with the labels of idiocy and mental retardation, were seen to have troubles stemming from the clinical structure of psychosis. I believe there are still lessons to be taken from the teaching Jacques Lacan advanced on this question, and I would say even the basic elements. I will try to respond to the following question: is there a structure of psychosis

particular to the child -- different, from a clinical point of view, to that of the more studied forms of psychosis such as paranoia or schizophrenia?

The second question concerns the institution. It's a thematic beloved to the field of learning disorders and it seems to me there are a certain number of elements and phenomena which, put into series, allow a qualification of what an institution is. Nonette has a certain experience with the question of what an institution is, having carried on a reflection on this question from the beginning of the 70's (twenty years now) under the influence of Francois Tosquelles, who gave Nonette an institutional psychotherapy orientation.

The third question is the relationship between an institution which, referring to psychoanalysis, receives psychotic patients with a view toward treatment and what I will call the social field -- other institutions such as the family, psychiatry, and public powers. What are the questions this relation poses? What difficulties do we meet with and what responses have we brought to this relation? I will approach these three points successively.

### *Psychosis and the child*

This subtitle is the result of an elaboration setting out from the fact that infantile psychosis is not a Lacanian concept. It isn't a term that one finds under his pen, nor in his seminars for the essential reason (and it's the first point I want to make) that there is no specific theory of infantile psychosis in the teaching of Lacan. There is psychosis in childhood insofar as the clinical form of psychosis as an unconscious structure can be triggered-off in childhood, but there is not an infantile psychosis because the structure itself is atemporal. On the contrary, there is an infantile neurosis because childhood is a time period in the neurosis. It is the child's accomplishment of a work which will give him the framework for his ultimate encounter with the Other sex. It is a time in the double-phased access to sexuality. The hiatus between the two forms «infantile psychosis» and «infantile neurosis» is upheld by the fact that, in the first case, the term infantile qualifies the structure -- which is a tautology -- while in the second it qualifies the clinical form or a period in this form. Infantile neurosis is a time in the neurosis; psychosis in the child is the very process of psychosis in a subject who is a child.

In this regard, I have found no mention of essential differences between psychosis in childhood and psychosis in adulthood in the indications that Lacan gives on this question. To the contrary, in the discussion of the wolfboy, little Robert, about whom Rosine Lefort came to speak

in Lacan's seminar of 1954, the outcome is that there is a unity of the field of psychosis, whether in child or adult, as to the observed phenomena such as the structure of the relation to speech and to language. One can note that in this lesson concerning a child subject, Lacan shows no reluctance to discuss very precisely the diagnostic, and he uses the nosographic categories of chronic, hallucinatory psychosis or schizophrenia, but at no moment does he invoke the infantile categories. In sum, for Lacan there is a structural unity of the field of psychosis in adulthood as in childhood.

The second point is that the question of psychosis and the child accompanies the progression of Lacan's teachings. When Lacan promoted the imaginary register in the 30's and 40's, he related psychosis to the stasis in the constitution of imagos in the child. In *Les Complexes familiaux* [Familial Complexes], Lacan even correlates the particular clinical forms with points of arrestation in the constitution of the personality in the three complexes. If Lacan relates the clinical forms to archaic stages, the complex of severing or intrusion, and especially for the hallucinatory forms, it must be noted that he already doesn't deny the psychotic an introduction into the Oedipian problematic. In other words, he doesn't situate all the psychoses short of the Oedipus complex, but at its term. And delusions, in particular, are credited to an arrestation in the constitution of the ego and reality during the Oedipian phase itself. The extreme limit is situated precisely at the passage from the Oedipian object to the sublime object, the one distinguishing itself from the other in that it cannot be situated, nor realized under any external form.

In the 50's when he structures the analytic experience and the psyche around the symbolic primate (in speech and language) Lacan accounts for psychosis with the foreclosure of the signifier of paternity, the Name-of-the-father. How does one approach the question of psychosis in infancy from this point of view? Lacan gives a precious indication on this subject in his seminar *The Psychoses*: «Let's suppose that this situation entails for the subject the impossibility of assuming the realization of the signifier *father* at the symbolic level. What's he left with? He's left with the image the paternal function is reduced to.»<sup>1</sup> The default of the symbolic is compensated by an alienation in the image of the father. The imaginary here makes up for the default of the symbolic, but in a mode in which «The alienation here is radical, it isn't bound to a nihilating [sic] signified...but to a nihilation [sic] of the signifier.»<sup>2</sup> It's a question of a mode of relation, of the knotting particular to the symbolic and the imaginary which hasn't the same functions in psychosis, nor the same relations as in neurosis. The symbolic is affected by the deficiency of the Name-of-the-father and the imaginary, reduced to pure alienation, comes to compensate at the point of default.

Lacan points out at least two periods in psychosis: a first period in which the *Verwerfung* is compensated by what he calls «imaginary crutches,»<sup>3</sup> and a second period in which this compensation by identification no longer holds up in its function, the moment of the triggering off. Lacan points out a moment of rupture without situating it in time. The general movement of the text allows one to think that he speaks more about psychosis triggered-off in adulthood, but at no moment does he evoke a difference to mark what, in psychosis, would be specific to the child from that of the adult. Keeping in mind the logic of the process -- foreclosure, imaginary compensation, triggering-off -- we won't advance any chronological or genetic hypothesis on the age of the subject at such and such a phase. But does this logic admit that the time of imaginary compensation could fall into default, that no image would come to fulfill the function which gives the «subject a fastening point and enables him to apprehend himself on the imaginary plane.»<sup>4</sup> Then, it's a question of the most precocious forms of psychosis or of autism in childhood.

In the 60's, when Lacan makes the object *a* the principle of causality as real, psychosis is defined by the psychotic's relation to jouissance. In his *Notes @ Jenny Aubry*, Lacan specifies that «The child realizes the presence of that which J. Lacan designates as the object *a* in the phantasm.»<sup>5</sup> In his forward to the memoirs of D.P. Schreber, Lacan would define the psychotic, and more precisely the paranoiac, as «identifying jouissance to the place of the Other as such.»<sup>6</sup> In this way, in our overview of the three periods in Lacan's teaching, the question of psychosis and childhood participates in the movement of Lacan's theories.

The third point, still concerning this first question, is the considers a tension between determination and decision in Lacan's teachings. What determines the subject and what makes up the object of his decision? The subject receives a determination from the structure of the signifier; as effect of signification he proceeds from the structure of language. The nature, the conditions of the Other determines him as subject according to three modes: psychotic, neurotic or perverse. The decision takes effect in the framework defined by the Other, in what concerns the relation of the subject to the object, his particular mode of jouissance. Considering the irreversibility of the structure, what I will call the margin of manoeuvre for the subject must be specified. Don't we find it in the relation to the object? It is what motivates psychoanalysis, including that undertaken with a psychotic child, to be an ethical experience. A psychoanalysis doesn't aim to modify the structure -- what the subject owes to the Other -- but aims at that which can be gone through and attained in the subject's relation to his jouissance. «The value of psychoanalysis is that it operates on the phantasm,» Lacan remarked.<sup>7</sup> We find the presence, the conjunction of these two vectors -- determination and decision -- throughout Lacan's

teachings, under diverse modalities according to the paradigm which defines the psyche and psychoanalysis.

For example, in *Les Complexes familiaux*, Lacan recalls, «Still elsewhere we have indicated that it is in some biological defect of the libido that one would have to search for the cause of this stagnation of sublimation in which we see the essence of psychosis.»<sup>8</sup> From the viewpoint of causality, psychosis is related to a real cause -- biological or in reality -- when Lacan correlates psychosis with the actual decompletion of the familial group and especially with the absence of the father. But at the same time, he introduced the participation of the subject: «If some defect is detectable in the psyche before the psychosis, it's at the very sources of the subject's vitality in its utmost radicality, but also in the most secret of his fervor and his aversions.»<sup>9</sup>

In his *Rome Discourse* of 1958, Lacan indicates: «...the problem is that of the relations between speech and language in the subject. Three paradoxes in these relations present themselves in our domain.»<sup>10</sup> The indicated paradoxes correspond to three subjects. We will cite two of them and detail the third case: the neurotic subject, the subject of scientific civilisation and the psychotic subject. Lacan continues:

In madness, of whatever nature, we must recognize on the one hand the negative freedom of speech that has given up trying to make itself recognized, or what we call an obstacle to transference, and, on the other hand, we must recognize the singular formation of a delusion which -- fabulous, fantastic, or cosmological; interpretative, demanding or idealist -- objectifies the subject in a language without dialectic.<sup>11</sup>

Two elements here are principle to psychosis: firstly, «a negative freedom of speech which has given up trying to make itself recognized.» The essential point is that it concerns speech that has given up on entering into the dialectic of desire or in the intersubjective game. Desire is founded on the recognition of the desire of the other. What is notable here is the balanced character of the relation between freedom and giving up. Giving up implies a mental movement in which the ethical causality is again manifest. Giving up trying to make itself recognized constitutes the manifestation of a choice, a liberty, but it is negative insofar as (and this is the second term of the definition) it determines «the singular formation of a delusion which...objectifies the subject in a language without dialectic.» This objectification of the subject is the «negative» brought to bear on liberty. The subject manifests a liberty in the choice, but the very choice deprives him of liberty by making him an object in language. Here the tension is found between a determination of the subject by speech and language, and the decision, in the exercise of liberty, to give up on liberty.

In the *Notes @ Jenny Aubray*, we find a third mode of the presence of these two vectors: one goes from the mother to the child and leaves the latter open to all sorts of phantasmatic traps, the other goes from the child to the mother, for whom «...he saturates in substituting himself for this object the mode of the specific lack by which her desire is specified.»<sup>12</sup> Thus, if it is in the mother's phantasm that the child finds himself taken as object, Lacan's use of the active form supposes his participation; the child realizes, he saturates, he alienates in himself, the child gives to the mother. But it is participation in «...the bigger bribe of the phantasm.»<sup>13</sup>

### *From Orthopedagogy to Psychoanalysis in Institution*

What consequences can we, in an institution which receives psychotic children, draw from Lacan's teaching on psychosis and the child? I would like to examine this more closely through an example.

Nonette is the name of a village situated near Issoire in the Puy-de-Dome. This establishment had been under the direction of the CCAS (Comite Central d'Entreprise) which is more or less the board of directors of Electricity and Gas of France (EDF-GDF). For 22 years, Nonette had been charged with the care of the children of EDF-GDF employees: in the beginning, diagnosed as retarded, then as psychotic and autistic. Thus, we have a tradition of national recruitment which goes well beyond the Puy-de-Dome and the Auvergne region. In 1987, when the number of children of employees at Nonette dropped, the CCAS no longer wanted to be involved in the direction of the institution. The future looked dark, the public powers not having recognized in their acts -- which is to say, given a per-day price -- the treatment and care of psychotic children and adolescents. The CCAS had decided to close the institution over the next two years, promising to research solutions of transferring the patients, solutions which were indeed hypothetical at this time. It would take about a year before, in 1988, arrangements were made not only to keep the institution open, but to augment the per-day price by 50% and create, under the auspices of an Occupational Halfway House, a second establishment receiving psychotic or autistic young adults. During this time, the national and departmental social services voted unanimously in support of the extension of activities of what then became the Therapeutic and Research Center of Nonette. In a few months, the situation reversed and where an institution caring for psychotics and autists was to be closed, a new and larger structure was erected to house and treat psychosis among children, adolescents and young adults.

Before examining why this reversal happened, a few words must be said about Nonette's history. I will use the three periods proposed by Jean-Robert Rabanel, Nonette's therapeutic director.

**1966-1971** Nonette was a classical establishment applying methods of education, re-education and special education to learning disabled children. The organizational structure of the establishment was, at the time, very hierarchical and based on the division of labor and respect of professional status.

In 1971 two events changed the course of Nonette. First, the CCAS hired Doctor Francois Tosquelles. Tosquelles, along with people like Jean Oury -- all students of Jacques Lacan -- had been one of the initiators and promoters of institutional psychotherapy which had been, as is often overlooked today, the origin of many mutations in the concept of institutions. Read in this light, the new texts coming out of the sector on so-called handicapped children show how much this movement had made the field evolve. The second determining element for Nonette was the admission of the first psychotic child. This admission under classical terms of a medico-pedagogic institute would provoke a crisis which resulted in the exclusion of the child in question. But it wasn't without consequences, because soon after, other psychotic children were admitted, and the institution would put to work its reference to psychotherapy.

It was during this second period, **1971 to the early 80's**, that many psychologists and psychiatrists who still work at Nonette and, as analysts, are members of the Ecole de la Cause Freudienne, were hired. I would characterize this period of institutional psychotherapy as the reign of speech. Speak-up meetings were organized throughout the day, the week, for everyone (children's meetings: in-patient, in the classroom; staff meetings called institutional meetings. And the whole of this collective) care-givers and cared-for, everyone was submitted to and structured by the imperative, «It must be spoken.» This according to an ideal that could be formulated in this way: «Each cared-for, everyone (givers and receivers of care), all the time.» The effects were, at first, very positive, but came to an impasse, a major crisis toward the end of the 70's. We can determine the coordinates of this crisis from two elements. On the one hand, this imperative at work in the collective resulted in the fact that nobody spoke about anything except the team itself, the tensions, the crises, the feelings that crossed the team, with the reinforcement that the display of pathos generates. It was the obscurity of the groups' imaginary that found itself deployed. On the other hand, insofar as the number of psychotic and autistic children grew, the limited nature of a strict reference to speaking was demonstrated. The childrens' meetings no longer held up: the massive, non-dialectical nature of the symptoms couldn't be absorbed in the treatment by speaking. Finally, the manifest effect of pacification obtained by the subjects housed at Nonette stems from their presence at Nonette.

It seems to me that the response to these two points of impasse best accounts for the passage to the third period, **early 80's to today**. During this period, the reference to Lacan's teachings, to psychoanalysis for the treatment of psychosis, progressively took on more and more importance until, in 1988, it was announced as such, first in the institution, then to the public powers, the legal and financial authorities who, in 1988, gave their accord to a project of psychoanalytic treatment of psychoses according to Lacan's teachings. It is due to this recognition by the public powers that we conduct our actions.

The change of 1988 radically modified our relation to psychoanalysis. Until then, psychoanalysis was an unattainable ideal ( $--> S_1$ ) in the place of which, poor practitioners of the misery of the world, we had set psychotherapy, an horizon closer at hand. The moment that it was written and recognized by the Other, psychoanalysis would take the place of that which pushed us to work, not as ideal or as master ( $S_1-->S_2$ ), but as cause of the very division ( $a-->$ ), the division which would give the true status of the encounter with the psychotic as that of the encounter of a subject with its jouissance ( $<>a$ ). At this encounter, one may present oneself as master ( $S_1$ ), as educator ( $S_2$ ), but it is as subject ( $()$ ) that one is called. And a subject doesn't especially present itself in good condition, but rather in bad condition, divided. It is precisely this position that psychoanalysis accounts for, as opposed to psychotherapy which has the aim to remedy. At Nonette, the transference to the work of psychoanalysis, or rather the double interest of an engagement in the contribution to knowledge, is necessary to support this encounter. It is a paradoxical support which doesn't aim at suturing the division, but at keeping the gap clear. Psychoanalysis allows this division which is at stake in the encounter with the psychotic. It is something else all together than an attempt to reduce the division by speak-out meetings. That is how psychoanalysis allowed us to get around the first impasse that I indicated above, that of the group. To do this, the meetings were changed. Shortened, multiplied, bringing into play writing, they have for principle not the question of the institution, but the question of the clinic, the clinic of cases where one accounts for one's work with *one*.

clinic

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institution



For one of our meetings, we called this the «Clinic Relation». It's a formula I owe to Pierre Bruno, which plays on the double meaning of relation: to relate the relationship.

The reference to psychoanalysis also permitted us to research an issue (the second point of impasse which I indicated above, the limits of the speaking treatment of psychosis) by teaching us what this issue is fundamentally about: the status of language in psychosis.

Lacan's thesis of the foreclosure of the signifier for the Name-of-the-father, being the placing out of reach of the father as signifier, its irreducible exclusion, forces us to draw some conclusions. As we know, the father, in his speech, in the exercise of his signifier, is what founds the Law. Moreover, he hasn't even need to speak for his signifier to be brought into play. When the mother says to the child, «Just wait 'til your father hears about this one.» or when she says to the father, «You could say something, you know!» this Law forbidding jouissance founds the symbolic system and gives the subject his base. This father/pacifier is, for Freud the father of the Oedipus, the one that, as ideal figure, constitutes the Ideal-Ego. But there is another father for Freud, the father/jouisseur who submits the subject to a strict imperative and gives the SuperEgo its form and structure. We say that the Father-of-the-signifier, the first one I mentioned, has the function of moderating, because he can't stand the Father-of-jouissance anymore. And this has effects. This is the case of those institutions or collectivities which admit the so-called handicapped. The call to the Father-of-the-law, the one supported by speech, produces his limited but certain effect there. But it must be taken into consideration that in psychosis we are deprived of this recourse, and that the call to the Father-of-the-law, which is foreclosed in this case, is brought back to the Father-of-jouissance. In brief, when one calls on the father with a psychotic subject, one believes one is addressing oneself to the Father-of-the-signifier but it's the Father-of-jouissance who responds with the imperative that Lacan said is that of the SuperEgo: «Take pleasure!»

From the logical consequences of this, one can orient one's activities with psychotic subjects. With Lacan, we consider two slants which deliver the structure: that of the signifier and that of the object. If it isn't a call upon the signifier which is our recourse, we must examine the relation to the object. It is at this point that one can try to respond to what, at first, presents itself as an impasse. Rather than the relation to speaking and the signifier, it is the relation to jouissance that must be considered, the particular relation to jouissance of each subject which will permit us to base our action and give this subject an adequate framework. If the principle

of the Law is that it applies to everyone in the same way -- its universal characteristic -- the mode by which each subject has his *jouissance* is particular.

particular

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universal

This means that each time, one by one, each particular case has to be constructed, and this is what happens in our meetings at Nonette. This certainly gives us a bizarre work style, a little bit out of sync, because to adapt one's presentation to each subject makes for an heteroclitic ensemble if you will. Meals, for example, have this characteristic. One wouldn't dare say, «You Must sit at the table and finish your plate!» to the young girl who identifies imaginarily to a mouse and can only eat by going back and forth between her plate and the corner of the room, snacking and, what's more important to her, leaving the marks of her incisors in her food. This would be to expose her *in the real* to what comes down on her: the spring of an imaginary mousetrap for which food is the bait. To the young man identified to the food itself, one could not make him leave the table by ordering him to do it. Have you ever seen the left-overs get up and leave the table?

To sum up, taking into consideration the simple things, but the things which take a lot of work to construct, to adjust, is adapting our action to a reality, the *reality of the jouissance of a subject*. This is an example of the very pragmatic and concrete incidence of our reference to psychoanalysis in the treatment of infantile psychosis.

### *The Lacanian Orientation*

I come to the third part of my presentation in trying to answer the question I posed at the start: What permitted Nonette to pursue, to extend its activity and make known its orientation?

There are certainly other non-negligible reasons -- in particular, the fact of having treated psychotics for 15 years. But beyond this, it seems to me that there is a more fundamental reason which touches on the evolution

of the treatment of psychosis in the field of public health. In fact, the scientification of psychiatry, its ever-increasing reference to neuroscience, as much from the point of view of research as from that of the therapeutic, has had successive effects. The first was the progressive and then accelerated eradication of the clinic. P. Bercherie's book *Les fondements de la clinique* (The Foundations of the Clinic) makes the state of the clinic appear by default today. The second effect is, it seems to me, more recent. This is the abandoning of the function of asylum, shelter, protection which psychiatric establishments had fulfilled since their creation. The cause of this is surely double: the scientification of psychiatry and the introduction of the laws of the marketplace into the field, the profitability of the politics of public health. This later is also motivated by today's interest in curability, for those who seek care. And in this framework, psychotics, with their unbearable tenacity, are rather displaced. We know the signs of this general movement: suppression of hospital beds, reduction or even halt in the training of new psychiatrists, programmed suppression of the psychiatric nursing diploma, the so-called «generalization» of psychosis movement.

Should we cry or laugh? We must at least act and draw the consequences. Nonette, the pursuit of its activity, and its extension are one. For in the final count, the real of the clinic, that of the symptom in its radical expression, always remains the same. It isn't because we suppress hospital beds that psychosis disappears. The Italian experience shows us this. Thus, these psychotics need to find asylum, shelter. That's what gives the question of the integration or insertion of psychotics its acuity and currency. While it is always to be hoped for, it bounces up against limits. I would like to remark that, first of all, it is a discourse that is going to grow in the measure that the practice of segregation increases. Secondly, this question must be situated in its activity. In brief, to secularize the psychotics and make them enter the century requires that one first defines the century. I will qualify this, as a reader of Lacan, as the conjunction of the capitalist discourse and the discourse of science. And it is in relation to this conjunction that one must approach the question. Into what, then, must the psychotic be integrated? Into the discourse of science? But what place can the psychotic take in this discourse? Is it not that of pure real if the psychotic submits to it, or that of reject if he doesn't, a reject who doesn't take his assigned place and who is then a fact of exclusion, of segregation. The second term of the conjunction is the capitalist discourse. Must the psychotic be integrated into this discourse? What place can he take there? We know at the very least how problematic the relation to the production of value is for the psychotic. Can he take the place of the consumer king? But then it's in relation to an unmediated jouissance the he finds himself placed, finding his foundation in a submission to the image, the televised image in particular. Will the psychotic be joined to those who are excluded from this capitalist discourse, in the cohort of the rejects? Certainly, there remains for the

psychotic a third path, that of religion, of sects in particular, prompt to welcome those left out of other discourses.

### *Conclusion*

Jacques Lacan's teaching on psychosis in childhood has brought us to consider the structure of what returns from the Other, we say the conditions that the Other puts on the subject, and what comes from the subject, his relation to *jouissance*. And we learn that from this consideration there are consequences to be drawn.

I have indicated how it is grace to a certain disaffection in psychiatry for the housing and treatment of psychotics that Nonette has been able to, can still, develop its activity. Its existence arises from services rendered: recuperate the rejects of the discourse of science to modify their status and place in raising them to the dignity of subjects. There is a grassroots movement which gives us the occasion to transform, to transmute what is in the scientific and educative field into the Freudian field. It's not a given; it's up to debate, combat even, but it up to those who can perceive the advantages to open and make this transmutation.

<sup>1</sup> Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses (1955 - 56)*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. R. Grigg, Routledge, 1993; p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 205.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> Lacan, Jacques. «Notes @ Jenny Aubry». *Ornicar?* #37, 1986; pp. 13 - 14.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Lacan. «Discours de cloture des Journees sur l'enfance alienee.» *Recherches*. Paris, 1969; p. 302.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Lacan. *Les complexes familiaux*. Navarin: Paris, 1984; p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Lacan. «The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis.» *Ecrits: A Selection*. trans. A. Sheridan. Norton, 1977; p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Op. Cit.*; p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*