

THE FLIRTATIOUS REMARK

jacques-alain miller

The title announced for this conference, the title I had the weakness of accepting, is "Psychoanalysis and Language." It is an issue that can be approached in many ways, and it is of essential concern in psychoanalysis in the spirit of Freud and Lacan. You will understand this readily by remembering Lacan's axiom: *the unconscious is structured like a language*.

Here, then, in little over an hour, how to begin to address this vast question? I could start from the point of view of the grammarian, the point of view of the philosopher, the point of view of the linguist, be it either transformationalist or structuralist. I could address it through the discourse of the professor, as I'm doing today. I could approach it from the angle of the materiality of the signifier which is registered by the microphones featuring in this hall and by those little cassettes which turn and record what I say.

But I have decided to follow another detour, for which I will ask some indulgence on your part, because this detour is not from my cultural area, but from yours. Thus, if I am wrong, you will be able to correct me or to provide me with the right data. It is something about which I have been thinking for the last three days.

I would like to attend to the question of language from the starting point of the *flirtatious remark (piropo)*, which, I am told, is an accepted and practiced activity in the streets of Caracas even today, although it seems that in Spain this tradition is on the decline. This issue enables one to see the superior vitality of Latin America as compared to her sister, her European parent.

I imagined the flirtatious remark to be a concrete, exemplary situation, to understand *in vivo* the function of language. A concrete situation, and actually quite an enigmatic one; because, what could the *jouissance* be that a man - since in this case the speaker is always a man - what could the *jouissance* be that a man finds in addressing an unknown woman, in directing a message to her, or even a witticism or a short poem to honor her charms? The flirtatious remark, so far as I understood it, presupposes that the speaker not aspire to retain that woman; and if there is an erotic message there, an erotic connotation, there is at the same time, singularly, a profound lack of interest which turns the flirtatious remark, when it reaches its excellence, into an aesthetic activity. In fact, the flirtatious remark shows us the gap between saying and doing. The flirtatious remark seems, I dare say, exemplary of the function not only of language

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but also of the relation between the sexes, even if only because it shows from the outset the dissymmetry between them.

I owe a large portion of my information to a book, that I recommend you to read, translated from German a few years ago: *Piropos*, by Werner Beinhauer, subtitled *The Humourism in Spoken Spanish*, published in the Romanic-Hispanic Library.

So, the successful flirtatious remark is a witticism. What does its excellence consist in? Like all witticisms it owes its excellence to a certain form of incongruity. A simple mannerism does not suffice for a flirtatious remark to be successful. What is necessary, for there to be a witticism, a joke, is for the message not to be featured in the code in an already firm and recognized manner. The wit is valid as such in so far as it implies a certain infraction of the code of decency. The message - that message - is valid because of the fact that it differs from the code. But for there to be a wit, an infraction of the code is not enough. It is also necessary - this is well known - that the other to whom it is addressed should want to smile or laugh. Therefore, what separates a sheer vulgarity from the most exquisite wit is the sanction of the Other to whom I address myself. Likewise, a flirtatious remark is truly accomplished only when the other to whom it is addressed - in this case the unknown woman - sanctions it, either with her amiable smile, or with the sense of being offended it produces in her.

You see here, incarnated in the woman, in any woman, the Other, the great Other of whom I told you already the last time; the Big Other, in this case the place of the fundamental code of language. If the flirtatious remark seems, to me, to be an exemplary situation, it is because in there the structural function of the Other - the Big Other - is sustained by the woman who represents, since time immemorial, the Other sex; and you can write Other with a capital letter, in a very different sense from that in which one could say that the man is the other sex to her. In a way, both sexes are, each one, the other's Other; but in a deeper sense it is the sex called feminine which is fundamentally Other. Its mystery has never ceased to keep men in its hold, even male psychoanalysts, and Freud was effectively the first one to say that he had not deciphered that mystery, the mystery of knowing what a woman wants. This is, I might say, a milestone in psychoanalysis.

Of particular interest in the flirtatious remark - at least in the forms which the German scholar found in the book I mentioned to you - is the fact that it always designates that to which it refers - but what does it refer to? - always designates it laterally. It does not carry a direct reference - to what? - to the sexual relation. On the contrary, it points, always a bit laterally, at lower ranking, secondary elements. For instance, there exist these forms to celebrate the beauty of the woman that crosses the man's path. The expression that the author of the flirtatious remark uses might very well be - ¡Olé, tu madre! (Olé, your mother!). Clearly, the case here is to point at the issue, but only by allusion. The allusion underscores even more the beauty, the radiance of the beauty that is being celebrated. There exists an entire range of possibilities for this purpose. It is possible to celebrate the father, the country, the region - I was fascinated by the lecture of this text.

This can be taken even further, up to one example which seemed especially significant to me. This particular flirtatious remark consists of saying “¡Viva la Virgen de la Esperanza mía!” (Hail the Virgin of the Hope of mine!). Here we are, in fact, in the absolute indirect. Secretly in this witticism, an identification is made between the woman to whom one talks and the essence of that hope qualified as “mine.” Indeed, the motor of the flirtatious remark is the hope: that that woman might ever be - but she will never be - his. It is only by means of an abuse that a man can imagine a woman to be his. Men invented marriage in order to be able to imagine it.

The book of the German scholar is subtitled “*Improvised Spontaneous Creations.*” They are indeed poetic spontaneous creations. Let us not hesitate in applying the qualification of poetic for this humble and daily activity, for poetry is nothing but the operation of a certain modification of the daily code. Sometimes this operation is not the reproduction of what exists in reality, but it is, strictly speaking, a creation of sense. One has to be as far removed from reality as a logico-positivist to imagine that the essential function of language should be to describe reality in an exact manner. Only a very particular operation, and a very recent one too, has made it possible to innovate, at the level of language, instruments which one expects will be able to describe reality exactly. But the language-object, as for instance Bertrand Russell calls it, the language with which one can simply say “*there is cheese in the store-room,*” is a completely special and artificial region in the sphere of language.

The most remarkable feature, perhaps, of the flirtatious remark and its indirect character, is that it does not vacillate in trifling with nonsense in its relation to signification; and that this nonsense, curiously, attracts significations much wider and fresher than a pure and simple description could ever provide. This is a paradox for you to become familiar with, that nonsense is precisely the creator of signification. Take, for instance, the hyperbolic nonsense in which the man who flirts does not stop at the comparison of the woman’s breasts with lemons, two lemons, but says, according to the compilation by the scholar Beinhauer, “*tiene usted más limones que el camino de la Caleta*” (you’ve got more lemons than the road to the Bay). Now, this nonsense, this absurdity which does not describe anything objective, is nevertheless especially evocative and capable of creating significations well beyond the accepted meanings. Thus there is, in the flirtatious remark - like in all witticisms - a play that on the one hand implies the treasure (this is a Lacanian term), the treasure of the ideas and expressions accepted in language, and on the other hand, the infraction which

the subject commits regarding the Other, the Big Other of language, while requiring, at the same time, the Other's backing. The scholar - who is no Lacanian - points it out: *no flirter creates out of nothing; the central element of his art consists in the graphic and timely manipulation of a rich resource of poetic themes which are public domain.* The expression "public domain" reveals precisely the values of the Big Other in Lacan's sense. This Big Other is also the Other of the Law; the Other, one might say, who represents decency - in so far as decency consists of prohibitions and inhibitions. This is also what Freud tried to indicate by the name of superego, which must be placed fundamentally at the level of language; and if there is an ontogenetic, a philogenetic inheritance in the superego, it is in the first place the inheritance of language. The flirter, that unhappy man who always sees, passing in front of him, the unknown woman whom he tries to retain for an instant - the time necessary for her to admit that he exists; this flirter is the man who has not yet renounced his attempts to make himself be heard by the Other, incarnated in the woman.

Obviously, some spirit is required, which Baltasar Gracián in his language calls acuteness. I would advise, to those wishing to understand more profoundly the theory of Lacan, to read first the short treatise by Freud called *Jokes and their Relations to the Unconscious* - a text forgotten by psychoanalysts until Lacan comments on it - and to collect, in the superb Spanish literary tradition, the literature of conceptism, and in particular the excellent treatise by Gracián on acuteness.

There is an achievement, a joy pertaining to the wit, because one sees the linguistic order vacillate at once, and the nonsense is instantly discovered as capable of casting doubt upon even the most established significations of the Law, which is not just a political law, though it can also be. We have here a subversive power that goes beyond the establishing of a new order. As you should note, in the wit, as in the lapsus, the subject is surpassed by his own creation. In Freud, the lapsus and the wit have the same structure; often the response of the Other alone is what transforms a lapsus into a wit. There is an entirely undefined area related, in the first place, to the addressing to and the reception by the Other. In this sense, Lacan can say that in human communication the receptor sends a message to whom will later emit it. He sends it because he decides fundamentally its sense. Talking to the other implies in no way knowing what one says. The Other alone can show it to us, and this is why we talk to each other; not just to communicate essential information, but to learn from the Other who we are. And when the daily chit-chat is not enough, we go in search of a psychoanalyst, who even by being silent gives you the hope of learning: who am I?

A thesis of Lacan, to which I hope you have become a bit accustomed, is that the signifier and the signified are not parallel, not homologous, and not isomorphic. In the second place, it is wrong to think that the signifier is there at the service of the signified so that one can say the things that one has in mind just like one wants to say them. Lacan's thesis is that the signified is an effect of the signifier, and that the effects of the signified are created by the permutations, the plays of the signifier. The sense appears fundamentally from the substitution of a signifier by another. I will try to describe to you, by writing it on the blackboard, the small formula Lacan sometimes employs to say it:

$$f\left(\frac{S_1}{S_2}\right) \equiv S(+s)$$

by which one must understand that the S_2 plus (+) results from the substitution of a signifier S_2 by a signifier S_1 , and that the (+) emerges above the bar, as what we call simply the signified or sense (s). If you read the small book by Beinhauer, you will notice that - even without him being a Lacanian - he explains the same thing, because he approaches language from the right angle. The emergence of a new sense effectively requires the apprehension of the right opportunity, and the flirter is excellent in that: in his appropriation, given the case - and one must understand case etymologically, *casus* as that which falls - of the results of either his lapsus or his wit.

What is language made of? When one follows etymology, language is made only of witticisms. Language is an alluvial accumulation of wits. Open any etymological dictionary and you will realize that the signified never stops gliding (*glissement*) in its relation with the signifier. Somebody who I think was for a long time a professor at this University, and is one of its glories, and whom I find fascinating since the last three days - I refer to Angel Rosenblat, whose compilation in four volumes, which is called *Good and Bad Words in the Spanish of Venezuela* I found upon my arrival at Caracas - I must say that I found there a profound sentiment of language which I intend to communicate to you, despite my not being an etymologist. Language is by no means what some tried to create as Esperanto. Esperanto is based upon the idea that language would rest upon an univocal relation between the signifier and the signified. That is why Esperanto is a language that nobody wants to speak. You can also see why it is wrong to speak of an animal language. The fundamental difference between human and animal language is that the so-called animal language is never equivocal, whereas that equivocality is constitutive as much of French as it is of Spanish and every language in which a people condense the individual experiences, one might say, in which they have been interested. It is a difficult idea, but one I would like you to become familiar with, that all the words, all the expressions, all the mannerisms of a language have emerged from a subjective experience. In Rosenblat's works I have read with pleasure that he has also this impression. There is a very beautiful article by him about the name of Venezuela, and even if it is a fiction - which I don't think it is - even if it is a fiction, it is beautiful: in the origin of the name Venezuela - little Venice - lies the nos-

talgia for the lost Europe. Also, who amongst you know the origin of the “*vale*” (*yeah, all right*), which is the scansion of the appeal to the Other in the Spanish of Venezuela? In the four volumes by Rosenblat one can see all these strata, all these allusions, the elements of a language which is truly notable for its vitality. To a logico-positivist there are always too many words in language, but language is made precisely and always of a plethora. In language there are always too many words, and, singularly, there are, at the same time, never enough to say what one wants to say.

Rosenblat, for instance, distinguishes three vectors of linguistic creation in Venezuela: a first one which he calls *machismo*, a second one which he calls *play*, and in between these two a third one, *gibberish*. Thus, in a magnificent way, there emerges an extraordinary redundancy, which to the information theorist appears as a fundamental luxury and excess; but the *jouissance* of language lies precisely in this excess. In 1950, Rosenblat says, there were about thirty expressions to name “disorder”; recently an extra forty have been found. I continue - I am fascinated, dazzled by this labyrinth of language. French is somewhat inferior to Spanish in this aspect, though there is a French argot which to some extent could be compared with Rosenblat’s argument.

Now, what one inconveniently calls the code of language - inconveniently because there is no univocal relation between signifier and signified - is the accumulation of formations of the signifier in their function of creation of the signified. Communication specialists cannot elucidate this. Those who *can* inform us are writers, poets, and also spontaneous poets - persons making flirtatious remarks as well as analysands, those carrying out their analyses when no one prevents them, in the name of a pre-established theory, from giving free course to these signifying inventions which, I would dare to say, are the only things capable of curing.

In a language, people try to catch their own *jouissance*. Is it possible to speak of the life of language? Philosophers usually stop at this point. It is not certain; there is, to be sure, transformation. But one must not forget that the vehicle of language is, rather, death. Without language we could not anticipate that which distinguishes us from animals and other living beings: the knowledge that we are mortal. It is necessary to make an articulation between this desperate *jouissance* of language and the knowledge that it permits us, that we are mortal. Evidently, there are things which are common to animals and people; but language is not one of them. This marks the limits of psychology, and, intelligent as it may be, Skinner’s rat does not have at its disposal seventy expressions to name “disorder.”

Fundamentally, the signifier leaves a trace in the Real and gives rise to the signified. The original aspect is the substitution of signifiers. One word instead of another is enough for sense to appear, and if one does not invent new words, then one should not expect to have new ideas. Lacan is certainly a great creator of words, a great creator of signifiers. That may be the initial difficulty of his language, but it is also what allows his discourse to persevere for more than thirty years without having become banal, by resisting its integration in the Other of the pre-established ideas. Certainly, as one exposes it here, where one tries to comprehend it - like I do - one works at the same

time towards its progressive reabsorption in the Other of the pre-established ideas. But this is the way of all things in the world.

The subject, the speaking subject, is not the owner and master of what he says. No sooner than he speaks and imagines he is using language, that language is using him: he says more than he wants, and at the same time he says something else. This is why metaphor and metonymy never cease in traversing each other throughout a discourse, and why, when we talk, we are carried beyond ourselves. It is even quite offensive to take someone literally; one should rather listen to him beyond what he says, for the sense lies always beyond. When somebody making a flirtatious remark says "*Oh mother!*," the sense is obviously somewhere else, though it plays a part. As soon as we want to say something, and professors are persons who always want to say something, then incidents occur; things never go right. Therefore it is better not to be too serious a professor; when one tries to be too serious a professor, one ends up provoking laughter. It is better to possess some humor, the humor of the signifier.

As soon as one speaks, one is in fact spoken by language. Freud's discovery of the unconscious is nothing but this. When the psychoanalyst invites the subject to speak, the subject discovers himself spoken by language, as he has always been. It would be good to realize that the difference between man and animal is that man is a speaking being. The reason why this should be good is that one would then avoid the extrapolation of results obtained in animal psychology onto human individuality. Perhaps one would also avoid thinking that one is scientific only when one extracts from man results comparable to those obtained from animals. Naturally, there are functions that can be compared. But when one avoids these differences, it is because one thinks that language is just a characteristic among others, a secondary characteristic; while psychoanalysis' discovery is that language transforms the human individual even bodily, down to the deepest stratum of his being; it transforms his necessities, it transforms his affects. Obviously, one can also transform animals through language; all laboratory animals are transformed in this way, they are crazy, just like domestic animals are also somewhat neurotic, because they are immersed in our bath of language - a thesis which, I think, not even Konrad Lorenz would deny; he readily admits that this is the fundamental difference between domestic and wild animals. Domestication occurs through language. We are domesticated from the outset; this is why we are so good at obeying throughout our lives and we occupy the roles which we are expected to fit. This is why we can spend hours either speaking to others or listening to others

speak. Thus it would be well to realize that man is a speaking being.

We have to take another small step and realize that man is also a spoken being; this is why Lacan invented this signifier that maybe will pass on to French language. I will write it on the blackboard: "*parlêtre*," the speaking-being; but is not as nice as in French. Then, the speaking-being always says something different than what he wants to say, and at the same time he requires being understood beyond what he says. This is called interpretation. It consists in hearing, understanding the subject not about what he imagines he says, for instance, rationally, but about the desire that flows through the signifier he emits.

Finally, the tragic aspect of the flirtatious remark is that, in its extreme form, it can be reduced to an interpellation of the Other, to a simple vocative. It is the attempt, profoundly desperate, to establish contact with the object of desire, this unknown and therefore absolute woman. The limit, minimal flirtatious remark, which one is it? It might be simply "*Girl!*" or "*olé!*" It could not be poorer; yet it remains poetic in its situation. In this compilation I found one even more reduced; it is touching, because it is a way to substitute the lack that separates the subject from the Other, yet at the same time this thrills him. It is about a young man from Seville who every time looks at a different woman passing by; because she is unknown to him, it can be said that she is always the same one. He sees her passing by and he exclaims in a tone - according to the book - between soft and profound: "*Aye!*" Despite its brevity, one can feel that life's most profound significations are mobilized. At once, we find here Camus' absurdity, Racine's tragedy and existentialist despair. Everything is there, in that signifier which is simply a sigh, a sigh very hard for a Frenchman to utter because it is an onomatopoeia based upon the phonematic matrix of Spanish. A translated onomatopoeia would be very different; in French one would say something like "*oh la la!*" This shows that language actually elaborates even the particular sounds we are capable of uttering. It has been proved, in a way that satisfies psychologists, that the vocal capabilities of very young children are very extensive, but a few months later these assume the style of a particular language. Incidentally, this shows that a human being's capture by language starts earlier than we usually imagine.

Freud's initial discovery, which left an indelible imprint, consisted in the integration, to science, of language and all the negative phenomena of sense: lapsus, mistakes, displacements of attention. Freud did not believe that to reason about language it would be necessary to take a lecturing academic as model. He thought that the most significant moments for the subject were precisely those moments when his discourse could faint, dissolve, fall; where there could be an error, a fault, something forgotten; he re-established the positivity of these negatives.

I like positivists very much. I would even say that I read them a lot; and I take them very seriously when they are serious, but I don't when they are not, that is, when they imagine they are teaching us the essence of language. Thus I consider Chomsky just moderately serious, even though transformational linguistics has ended up covering the planet. The difference between Chomsky's and Jakobson's linguistics is that Jakobson was interested in poets. I am convinced that he would

even be interested in flirtatious remarks. Chomsky is an idealist philosopher who repeats Descartes in a very amusing way. This year, he came to Paris to play his game with us; and with all due respect for his discovery, it was quite amusing from that point of view. In reality, Chomsky does not conceal his game: he introduces the ideal locutor-auditor as the basis of his linguistics. The ideal locutor-auditor, that is somebody who is pure fiction, who belongs to a perfectly homogeneous linguistic community, and who knows his language without any vacillation whatsoever. One should see to what extent this idea of a complete knowledge of language is a fiction. I am persuaded that there are many people here who speak Venezuela's Spanish very well, without having read Rosenblat's works with due attention. But Chomsky's locutor is never distracted, he never has displacements of attention, I am quoting here exactly his book *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. In fact, everything is made clear through employing a single term: locutor-auditor. On the contrary, the value of the flirtatious remark is to show us that language attains its excellence with the separation of locutor and auditor. In Chomsky's model, the one who talks is the same as the one who listens. Doubtless, this makes possible a linguistics applied to a computer; but this is not the linguistics of a language of a man talking to a woman. It is certainly clear that Chomsky's Other, the ideal Other to whom both man and woman try to approach, is the computer. That means that Chomsky's linguistics, however scientific, exclude the relation between the sexes. The analytic operation, on the contrary, consists in reintroducing it at the center. Indeed, what goes by the name of transference in the analytic experience is a sort of flirtatious remark the analyst addresses to the analyst. And if it is necessary for this love to remain suspended, this is only so that this love might return to the light of the day - that love discourse which human beings never cease to address to the Other from their arrival into the world. In fact, Chomsky's ideal locutor-auditor is what Lacan calls elsewhere the subject-supposed-to-know (*sujet-supposé-savoir*); the subject supposed to completely know the language, the subject supposed always to know what he says. This personage, unique, invariable, impeccable, of whom one may dream, does not exist.

Then, there would be progress in the scientific consideration of language if one would depart from a point which Lacan formulates very simply, and which is a kind of primary truth - it takes time to say it but it is a primary truth - that the essence of communication is the misunderstanding. The mistake made by a number of sciences is to imagine that the essence of communication is that which is well understood. It has become a tradition in the logical consideration

of language, which is very different from the logic of mathematics, to imagine that the function of language is to grasp a reference in an exact manner. The logic of mathematics is a very interesting science, very respectable, which Lacan tries to apply to the structure of the terms of the analytic experience. But theoreticians of logic, or at least some of them, go well beyond the limits of their discipline and apply it to the general consideration of language. Last year we had in Paris the visit of Mr. Quine, who is the most important contemporaneous American philosopher, even though Chomsky is catching up with him. Then Quine, who has made excellent expositions of propositional logic and quantification logic - I love to read what he writes in these fields - imagined a projection of this to describe the genesis of language in the child, who would miraculously follow his treatise of logic. Thus, just as one might admire his treatise of logic when the purpose is to teach it to students, it seems to me a phantasmagoria to imagine that the real development of language in the child would follow the titles of the chapters and the paragraphs of his propositional logic. I must say that this is a projection, an illusion, of which Piaget gave, in his way, the first example. While this logic is a very elaborate and recent cultural product, one needs to make an absolutely non-scientific effort to believe one would find its origin in the poor child who cannot defend himself.

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Concerning reference, the whole problem of language is that it can never designate it; as soon as one wants to designate a reference, one remains captured between metaphor and metonymy; the references shift. Quine has criticized very well what would supposedly be the ultimate level of indication: one points at something and says "that." But this is already too ambiguous; if I say "that," what am I indicating? the table? its color? the person sitting on it? the paper? Even in the indication it is very difficult to know the reference, and in the use of language the reference vanishes no less. Strictly speaking, there is not an adequate word to say something, and one always says a word in relation to other signifiers. Therefore, the minimal matrix of language, as Lacan describes it, is first a signifier, then another. The minimum amount of signifiers is two, S_1 and S_2 ; in modern mathematical theory this is called an ordinate pair. Amusingly, Quine also knows this in his good moments; and somewhere he says very clearly that when one tries to define something, one can only define it through something else. He does not realize that he is evoking the essential displacement of the signifier, but he says it very well: *the general answer to the question "what is A" is always that "it is B."* This is a kind of a witticism by the logic, which might be signed by Lacan. The language-object is an illusion. There is no production of language, strictly speaking, without the effect of subject being already there. In the same way, Lacan says *there is no metalanguage*. Certainly, there are logical metalanguages, etc. But in the end, there is something which cannot be surpassed even when one creates formal languages, and that is the so-called vulgar language, which is always necessary to introduce even the most sophisticated formal signifiers. There is an unsurpassable limit there, and I found this in a quotation by Emile Borel, a great French mathematician of the turn-of-the-century, who wrote a book about the theory of functions which made science in its time. He

said: *the pretended entirely logical systems always rest upon the postulate of the existence of vulgar language. That language, common to millions of persons who use it to more or less understand each other - you can see that Borel was not far from knowing that misunderstanding is the essence of communication - that common language is a given fact that would imply a great number of loopholes if it had to be created ex-nihilo.* I think this is an important quotation, coming from, precisely, a great mathematician.

If I liked the idea and I dared to talk to you about the flirtatious remark, it is because that situation seemed to me exemplary of the separation between the speaking subject and the Other - the Other who is there fundamentally out of reach, lost. The Other emphasizes the separation of the sexes which no sexual relation can ever bridge; and that language, in its function of poetic or spontaneous creation, occupies the very place where this separation emerges. Hence Lacan formulated a proposition that may appear difficult to you, but of which the flirtatious remark offers an image. Lacan formulates that *there is no sexual relation* - I hope the translator has found a word other than "relationship" for "rapport." Indeed, there are as many sexual relations as one could think of; but there is not a fixed and invariable relation, a proportion between the sexes, contrarily to what can be observed in animals at the instinctual level, when they have not been driven too crazy. There is no sexual relation, no sexual proportion at the level of the signifier. In the latest issue of the magazine *Ornicar?* (which has not yet been published but I hope to find after my return to France) I gave, as an example of sexual relation, the habits of crabs. The male possesses an enormous claw, larger than the entire rest of its body, behind which it can hide. It moves this claw in a particular manner (which differs with each species of crab). Darwin developed a great interest in this phenomenon; he thought that the female crabs would race towards the male with the largest claw. But he eventually discovered that the female crab identified the male of its species through the type of sign it made with its claw. In other terms, there is an invariable, semaphoric sexual relation there. One may seek to find a sexual relation of this type in humans; the attempts are useless. There are many discourses attempting to order what emerges precisely as the fundamental disorder of human creation. Men have been busy with this since time immemorial. For instance, Dionysus of Halicarnasus said *men always attempted to restore order to that by which children come to this world.* But while in animals this issue is always in harmony, we always need more or less elaborate creations in order to mimic the sexual relation which does not exist. We need, in particular, churches, which

occupy that place, the place of the lack. And if the church is so powerful in resisting the changes of the modern world, it is perhaps because it knows how to be docile to the structure, it knows the structure and sometimes exploits it. If it succeeds in moderating sexual guilt at the same time as provoking it, it is because the church has understood very well the mechanisms of the unconscious, though it certainly uses those mechanisms for a very different purpose than psychoanalysis does. Freud said that priests and doctors threaten psychoanalysis the most, because it attracts them.

The woman to whom the man making a flirtatious remark addresses himself is obviously a fiction; she is all women in one, and that does not exist. "All men in one" might perhaps exist - at least in psychoanalysis it sometimes appears as if it did; but all women in one, that is a fundamental dream, existing only as a fiction. For a man making a flirtatious remark, that woman has the exact value of his own castration; she has the emblematic value of a phallus which is fundamentally lost. This is the news of psychoanalysis, and it cannot be said that it is good news; psychoanalysis is not a Gospel. Psychoanalysis promises no harmony, no achievement, no success, and no fulfillment of any lack, which is, on the contrary, structural. The flirtatious remark, despite its praise, is also an aggression - occasionally a hyperbolic aggression. Its exuberant eloquence towards the woman is the correlative of the destitution of her condition. This is why it can be uttered as an offence: there is an undecided area between compliment and offence. I think of a flirtatious remark from Beinhauer's compilation, in which a man calls the woman *thief*. We find there something which is obviously between injury and praise. We also find it in the flirtatious remarks which are based upon the disintegration of the woman's body, where the praise of particular parts of her body acquires a symbolic value which effectively presupposes the remark not to be addressed to the person, but to the fetishistic value of parts of her body. In this sense we must admit that human sexuality - different than the rat's when it is left alone - is fundamentally perverse.

I have promised not to speak for too long, in order to enable you to ask me questions. I stop now, in the hope that in the twenty minutes we have left we can keep our conversation together.

X: *My question is the following. You have chosen the flirtatious remark, like Freud chose the wit or the lapsus, to point at a global characteristic of language, namely, that the signifier and the signified are not necessarily equal, that they usually never are, and that the sense of language is the misunderstanding. This is obviously the case with the flirtatious remark. But is it also the case with other discourses? yours, for instance? I tend to share your point of view. You attack Chomsky. But there are different styles and languages. There is a daily language, banal, familiar, of which the flirtatious remark is a part. There are others more solemn. Were it not so, there would be few chances of believing the scientific reality of your discourse. What is the difference between both of them?*

J. A. Miller: There is indeed a problem here, because I am the Lacanian, that is, I defend the thesis of the ambiguity and fundamental equivocity of language, while Dr. Lacan mobilizes and dem-

onstrates all rhetoric resources in his own discourse. On the contrary, I try to approach as much as possible an ideal univocity, and I would say that the univocity is my Other. But I would also say the separation of signifier and signified is a general truth in so-called vulgar language, that there is no possible univocity once one uses the maternal language. The need to create artificial languages demonstrates this clearly, but nobody speaks these languages; they only exist at the level of writing, in order to obtain univocity.

Obviously, when one writes "p" for predicate, "x" for variable, and when one defines a certain number of rules, one obtains a so-called formal language, which is at once univocal and polyvalent; but this is a place of pure writing. This has drawn Dr. Lacan's attention, because he fills his own discourse with writing. In a sense, Lacan's discourse is rhetoric and plays with the displacements of the signifier, but at the same time it is filled with formal markings, with formal points of reference of which one might say they have only one sense, but in reality they have no sense at all. Written languages function only because they kill signification, they empty the sense. I believe there is a very important difference between the opportunities writing offers language and the modality of the word, the languages which can be spoken.

Prof. J.M. Cadenas: *I believe Professor Miller has made an extraordinary exposition, of great poetic content, to convey to us what appears to be the Lacanian point of view. My question is - since the logico-positivists, the Chomskians, the behaviorists to whom you alluded not very kindly, they are all absent; my question is the following: if the universe of language is the universe of ambiguity, what place does the scientist's activity occupy? Should the scientist not strive towards the establishment of an order of comprehension of that universe? The effort - I am not Chomskian - the effort by Chomsky towards finding structures in the complexity of language, is it not an attempt to explain something extremely complex? The effort by Piaget to discover structures underlying thought, is it not an attempt to introduce order in something very complex? The way Professor Miller proposes would seem to lead to the impossibility of knowledge.*

J.A. Miller: By no means do I believe that it would lead to the impossibility of knowledge. In my third conference I shall speak of "savoir" and "science," which in English are marked as knowledge and science. These have different value to Lacan. Like Professor Cadenas, I think that the idea is to dis-

cover the structural laws of an order, but one should not place the order of one dimension in another dimension. In the first place, science - at least at the level of physics, though not of mathematics - is something very recent. The scientific certainty dates back to the XVII century and rests upon an act of faith. The faith in the regularity of nature requires an extraordinary conceptual elaboration. I mean that science rests upon the conviction that there is an Other, a Big Other who does not deceive. Whereas in earlier centuries it seemed by no means impossible that there would be an Other, who would be the Deceiver of the world. Thus we agree about the scientific ambition, which was Freud's ambition, in contrast with that of the mystic-obscurantist schools. Freud always emphasized the relation between psychoanalysis and science, and Lacan certainly differs from many other psychoanalysts in his constant elaboration of scientific disciplines such as linguistics, logic, etc. But the problem lies in the validity of transporting elaborations which are valid in one field, on to another field. Propositional logic is a powerful instrument, and so is quantification logic. These are very elaborate products. But it is a non-scientific displacement to imagine that the child would follow the phases of those constructions in the course of his development, and I consider that it has not been scientifically demonstrated. I say this for those who extrapolate the behavior of the rat onto the behavior of man; and not only do they extrapolate, but in the end they would like not to extrapolate. In their phantasms, they would subject people to the same treatments to which they submit the rats. But for as long as they may not do that, they keep making an extrapolation. Of course one ends up obtaining interesting results, even with rats, precisely when they are driven to insanity, when they are deranged enough; at that moment the rats can become somewhat like man. When Skinner, in his famous experiment, stimulates the rat's pleasure centers and leads it to discover that by leaning its paw on a handle it can obtain one or another pleasure, what do we observe? That the rat is so captured by that pleasure that it sacrifices even its vital interests. I mean that it becomes so mad with pleasure that it ends up dying of pleasure. At that moment we are far from pleasure as a simple regulator of the living individual. What has been introduced in the rat is effectively a *jouissance*, a deadly *jouissance* that it can only repeat without end. I mean to say that through this experiment, the rat has been humanized. That is, it has been driven to commit suicide.

But I would not like to leave the impression - which you formulated so vigorously at the end of your intervention - that I advocate the impossibility to know. On the contrary, Lacan's own ambition, like Freud's, is the scientific study of realms hitherto abandoned to speculation and phantasmagoria. Everything concerning the properly human relation between the sexes has always been left to charlatanism, to the exploiters of beliefs. On the contrary, the psychoanalytic effort is to elaborate this dimension as scientifically as possible. Evidently, no one can believe what is being said when one speaks of the relation between the sexes while having, as a reference, animals. Effectively, a whole field is left open, into which only poets, writers and

persons making flirtatious remarks have ever ventured. The issue is for science also to venture in this field. It is not the issue of sexology; nor is it of the disciplines which apprehend sexuality at the level of genes; we will never obtain a fact such as the flirtatious remark from their approaches. This is precisely what Lacan emphasizes when he says that there is no sexual relation. That invariable relation exists at the level of the animal, the soma, or the germ; but at the level of the signifier, the sexual relation does not exist. And I believe we can affirm that this is a scientific truth.

X: *I would like you to clarify what you said about the woman, that the women cannot make one.*

J. A. Miller: I opened the way to that difficult formula of Lacan's, which should be approached with care, "the woman does not exist," from the starting point of the flirtatious remark. What *does* exist are women, a woman, another woman and yet another. Obviously this is difficult. Lacan explained this once in Italy, I believe, and the newspapers' headlines said "Dr. Lacan Says that Women Do Not Exist," which worried the Italians very much.

I will simply try to show you this issue from the basis of the woman who is the object of a flirtatious remark. In herself she is also quite enigmatic, since she is every time a different woman, and yet the same one; in a sense, she is all women in one.

Why did I say, too quickly perhaps, that in the case of man there exists all men in one, but not in the case of woman? We would have to make a long excursion into Freud's theory of sexuality, and of the difference between masculine and feminine sexuality - I cannot explain this now in detail. For both sexes there is only one signifier of reference, which is phallic. This has always scandalized feminists, the idea that there would not be a feminine signifier. But, as I mentioned to the group of psychoanalysts that I met after my arrival, the feminists are very wrong if they believe that it is of any advantage for men to possess the real correspondent of that signifier. To Lacan, I believe, it is rather a nuisance which makes men, much more than women, slaves of the superego and of duty. The woman has always been a mystery to Freud, who said - I do not know if I should say it, but in the end I am going to say it - that he had the impression that women do not have the same superego than men, that women are much more free with respect to the superego than men, that they do not have that limit which

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we observe in the conduct and the activity of men. In this sense, one should not imagine, as feminists do, that Freud was anti-feminist. The woman was simply a mystery to him. The issue is to explain, from this point, how is it possible that men are so much more likely to confine themselves to specific social roles, while there is a dimension, in the woman, that most certainly exceeds the limits of male routine. This is clear, for instance, in the difference between masculine and feminine *jouissance*, in the localization of the former and the boundlessness in the latter. This is not to say that the woman would mention this; but men have always been attracted by the unlimited character of feminine *jouissance*. Take, for instance, the myth of Tiresias, who wanted to know what the *jouissance* of the woman was. He obtained, from Zeus, the opportunity of being transformed into a woman - Tiresias the transsexual. He came back saying that if there were ten parts of *jouissance* in the world, nine would be the woman's and only one the man's. The idea, which I can only mention here very quickly, is that if the man is One and the woman is always the Other - this is what the flirtatious remark evokes in relation to Freud's assertions concerning the lack of superego in the woman - she occupies, within the setting of the flirtatious remark, the place of the superego's Other. This can be observed, for example, in the name given to the woman in popular French, "la bourgeoise" - she is in charge of the purse. The woman does not exist, but that does not stop men from dreaming of her. It is precisely because she cannot be found at the level of the signifier, that her phantasm does not cease to be fomented, her photograph does not cease to be multiplied, and the attempts to apprehend her essence never cease - attempts concerning a being about whom the universal folly (which always contains a grain of truth) has always doubted it had any essence. On the one hand, this could lead to her devaluation; but on the other, not to have an essence seems to me a relief, which makes women much more interesting than men.

FIVE CONFERENCES ABOUT LACAN
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translation from transcript: andres zlotzky