

Roland Dumas

***Address on the Inauguration of the
Commemorative Plaque for Jacques
Lacan at 5, Rue de Lille on September
8, 1991 at 3:30 pm****

On this day September 8, we have assembled at 5, Rue de Lille to commemorate a date which all of us remember and which each of us will recall for the rest of our lives.

On September 9, 1981 Jacques Lacan died. Jacques Lacan left us. Each person felt that the loss touching them in the depths of their being was irreparable, and that they would be without Jacques Lacan for ever. That is why this date cannot be blotted out. For those closest to him, obviously--in the first place, his family his friends, his pupils, and his patients--but also for all those--too numerous to tell--who followed his Seminar. And for all those readers of his works who set their sights by his teaching.

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With the passing of Jacques Lacan, some lost a beloved person, others a respected person. And it our grief has been so profound it is because, in losing Jacques Lacan, each of us has experienced in this passing something of the order of an abandonment. Jacques Lacan was the one who was there. The one about whom we could

*In lieu of our customary Editorial, we present here a translation of the speech given by the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Monsieur Roland Dumas, on the occasion of the unveiling of a plaque to Jacques Lacan's memory on September 8, 1991, exactly ten years after his death. The ceremony took place before a packed audience in the courtyard of 5, Rue de Lille, the address at which Lacan practiced analysis for some forty years. As is clear from the speech, Dumas's grasp of Lacan's teaching is that of an informed initiate. We thank Mme. Judith Miller for her kindness in providing the text of the Minister's speech.

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rest assured that he would never give up, no matter what happened; the one on whom we knew we could call it worst came to worst: Jacques Lacan was the recourse--the ultimate recourse. He stood out on everyone's horizon, whether they knew it or not, as the "at-least-one" who guaranteed that, if the impass became absolute, there existed one last chance in life: to appeal to him, to Jacques Lacan. Hence the disarray into which his death plunged us. Each one of us found himself deprived of this absolute recourse.

We had to carry on living, of course, but now it would be different: without the presence of the one who, quite apart from any nearness in space, but by the mere fact of his ex-sistence, provided security an anchoring, and a specific kind of peacefulness.

Jacques Lacan the analyst, however much he was tied to his work, was always available; ready to lend the whole of his attention to whoever brought their problems to him, to listen to their suffering, and to situate it in its proper place. For sure, Jacques Lacan could turn down an appeal, and respond harshly--it would appear--to those pouring out their distress. This severity was the fruit of his knowledge. He knew how to distinguish between the subject who gives up and waits for someone else to take over responsibility for making him rest easier in his symptom,

and the subject who demands to know what he is saying in his symptom so as to be able to respond with some awareness of cause. For such a person, Jacques Lacan did not postpone till a blue moon, or even the following day, the appointment that he had requested.

Jacques Lacan was the analyst who could say: "Come along right away." The huge number of his analysands ensured that they always came to him by referral. He was never "a shrink out of the Yellow Pages" [*âne-à-liste/analyste*].

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In the presence of this unstinting generosity, a chart and compass was proffered to each analysand. Such a gift did not depend on charity but, rather, on a science of the particular, on a theory of the logic behind man's timing, on the structure of the speaking being, and his intrasubjective make-up.

I need not recall to his students or his readers the care with which Jacques Lacan emphasized the Freudian notion of "retroactivity" [*l'après-coup*], by virtue of which his science of the particular linked up with the account he took of temporal logic. And it is only retroactively that I can make the remarks which are mine today.

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And it is retroactively, indeed, that I said some five years ago at the Quai d'Orsay (where I had the pleasure of welcoming the participants of the Sixth International Meeting of the Foundation of the Freudian Field) that I had maybe undergone an analysis with Jacques Lacan "without even knowing it."

Actually I had come to see that the very fact of spending time in his company brought with it a trainee dimension. Now, I see that this time spent in his company is not the prerogative of those who knew him personally, but that Jacques Lacan has bequeathed to everyone capable of understanding him the instruments which can permit that person to know. This fits in with the title which he had chosen for the journal of his School: *Scilicet* ("It is permitted to you to know"): "I don't promise you anything. I'm neither forcing you, nor making suggestions to you. It is up to you to decide whether you do--or do not--want to know. Just realize that, if you want it, you can get it." That is the message Jacques Lacan delivered to all those he left behind. How often have I not made use of this message myself in my relations with the public?

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I can tell you this. I now understand better what Jacques Lacan's impatience was a response to. It was not a capricious impatience. It was founded on this knowledge of the temporal logic of the speaking being and his intrasubjective structure, which means that each of us does or does not have the courage to know, considering that it is given to him to do so. How could one not be impatient in the face of the instant fix, avoidance, running away: the closure against grasping what may be grasped? How could one not become incensed in the face of human stupidity, the sort that bases itself on an "I don't want to know anything about it. I don't dare. It's asking too much of me."

It is true that Lacan's message about what a human being is cannot be construed as a heartening one. And I believe that every analyst's experience teaches him or her how much this being can be cowardly or entangled in the "hammock of language"; how much people strive to

imprison themselves better in the defiles of the signifier, or with how much care they draw up "the blueprint of the walls of their house so as to bump into them better."

But also how rigorous this message is, how vigorous and, I should add, invigorating! It shows us that our mortal being makes life bearable for us, that it is possible for us to lift the veil of opacity from this life, so that light can be created; and that from this fact, the life--the history--of each person has its own weight, density,

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force, and inestimable price. This overdetermined history does not seal the decision. It results, needless to say, from a forced choice, but it carries with it a forcefulness, a place to uphold. Jacques Lacan, in the same way as Spinoza, invites us to feel joy, and persevere in our being, not to rob ourselves of life. Like Spinoza, he considers that behind sadness there is cowardice. Any life, however difficult it may be, can either be lived as a string of reactions, or else attuned to a key that is not insensitive, not inane, but lucid and decisive.

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I became acquainted with Jacques Lacan in my capacity as lawyer. This paradoxical position never led me, any more than it does today, to plead for Jacques Lacan--if pleading means speaking in someone else's place in order to defend them. I have never pleaded for him because I have never seen him on the defensive. Jacques Lacan was a fighting man, one who went forward, and, because of this, met obstacles, particularly those which arise from the inertia of human stupidity. It was to try and make sense of this particular stupidity that Jacques Lacan invited me to be his lawyer, not only for when I had to represent him in some personal matters, but also in so-called institutional problems. Of the first--personal matters--I cannot speak, since I too am bound by the same seal of confession as that observed by analysts. But I can bear witness to the second--institutional problem--, since they are a matter of public record.

Certain members of the School founded by Jacques Lacan tried to use legal means to profit from and usurp what they denounced as the "tyrannical power" of the one who had constructed the institutional and theoretical edifice to which they owed everything: their social, their professional existence, to say nothing of private life; their theoretical know-how and their practice.

I have seen the relentlessness with which they tried to take possession of the tool Jacques Lacan had forged, and which they deployed in a manner contrary to the aims for which Jacques Lacan had intended it: i.e., to reconquer the Freudian Field and ensure the training of analysts to act as safeguards for the Freudian cause. I saw them claim to appropriate this tool, claim to know its purpose better than he did, and claim to bring it about in his name and against his own will as well. In a word, to be Lacan without Lacan. I do not wish to revive this polemic today. I simply want to say here that it confirms what Jacques Lacan knew only too well: that his person functioned as a screen for his teaching.

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You will understand that I do not want to neglect this teaching

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today, but neither do I want, any more than yesterday, to see his person forgotten in the name of his teaching.

For ten years now, with retroactive hindsight, the pertinence, shrewdness, forcefulness, and demanding nature of his forecasts have once again become clear to me. I see these forecasts acting as guide to an ever-growing number of people. Why? Because 1) Jacques Lacan has bequeathed a compass to each individual, a tool by means of which he can pick out a course and stick to it, and 2) because a certain number stayed on as the "committed workers" that Jacques Lacan, from 1964 on, wanted in his School.

I say that the one who chooses another course than the one formulated by Jacques Lacan can only go astray, and that those who today continue to oppose openly what he explicitly expressed on such and such a point--as being his wish!--are working against the grain and will sooner or later be given the lie by the facts.

I said that the passing of the person of Jacques Lacan on September 9, 1981 plunged us into disarray, and I will add that Jacques Lacan anticipated his own passing. He knew how to bequeath to each of us, by his teaching taken in its entirety, the arms with which to surmount this disarray. Even beyond death, Jacques Lacan did not drop anyone. He did not even give up the fight which was his. This teaching, doubtless, leaves threads to be unraveled, but it leaves another kind of thread, "Ariadne's thread," as that other journal which he baptized *L'Ane* ["The Ass"] has so prettily entitled it.

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This teaching taken in its entirety, today, like yesterday, must be answered for by each person from the place where he or she is.

I am not an analyst. But from the place where I myself am, I know that analysts must unyieldingly press home the fight which Jacques Lacan led against stupidity, phoniness, and compromise, the monstrous three-headed Hydra around which he marshaled his attack. In my view, as we are constantly reminded by the Foundation of the Freudian Field, as well as those associations and, in particular, those Schools which have combined their efforts towards a reconquest of the Freudian Field (and, indeed, under whose aegis this Commemoration is taking place), it is obvious that yielding means, in the first place, believing it is possible to claim Lacan's teaching, all the while operating on it some selectivity under one or another, not always admissible, pretext: in other word--let's call a spade a spade!--putting it to the purge. For someone who is not an analyst, but knows the sense and value of a work, it is obvious that this

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selectivity can be nothing other than a form of moral and intellectual cowardice, precisely what Jacques Lacan put analysts on guard against. A sadness in the face of whose demands Jacques Lacan himself bent: those demands required by the cause of analysis, and by the maintenance of that particular social link which is called the analytic discourse. I learned from Jacques Lacan that this discourse is different from the three others he made known, viz., the discourse of the Master, the Academic, and the Hysteric.

The articulation of these four discourses is, doubtless, illustrative of Jacques Lacan's concern for the cause of analysis, but also for what differs from it to the point of being its underside, as evidenced by the discourse of the Master. Jacques Lacan laid bare its workings and mechanisms by showing that the place of the subject and those of the three other terms (without

which this subject cannot exist, viz., the master signifier, knowledge, surplus *jouissance*, and the object *a*) are there distributed in another wise than they are in the discourse of the Analyst.

As you know, it was twenty years ago that Jacques Lacan constructed this robust combinative. It is as striking by its simplicity, as by its inexhaustible fecundity. Jacques-Alain Miller has displayed his punctiliousness in passing along to me the text he established of the Seminar, "The Underside of Psychoanalysis" [*L'Envers de la psychanalyse*].¹ Today I wish to thank him for pursuing with care, tenacity and modesty and with what I can only designate by the term devotion, or even abnegation, the task entrusted to him by my friend Jacques Lacan, who had honored me by asking my professional advice on the subject.

I know that my friend did not underrate the weightiness of such a task; I also know that my friend felt a degree of comfort in having found someone to whom to entrust it. I know how oppressive he found it in the 1960s to realize how, over the course of time, his oral teaching was building up, and that it would doubtlessly become necessary "to do something about it," as he said; at the same time that he had to go on relentlessly ploughing a new furrow for his Seminar. Jacques Lacan wanted his teaching to circulate, but not just in any form whatever. He explained himself sufficiently on this matter, especially in the *Ecrits*. Jacques Lacan was precisely too sensitive to the *écrit* not to be concerned that a division be maintained between the written and the oral statement; just as between reading something and hearing it, or as between the perusal of a written text and that of a transcribed text which would be readable while keeping its oral character; that is to say, not

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improvised, but proffered forth. It was up to me, when the time was right, to call a halt to these abuses. I did it out of loyalty and by reflex of conscience.

I remember, to my initial astonishment, that Jacques Lacan (who invited me on more than one occasion to think all this over and put it into words so as not to find myself reduced to the brute silence of an animal) said that he delivered his Seminar, not in the register of the University discourse, but from the place of the analysand. He resolutely situated his Seminar after this fashion and refused to budge on it. It is the duty of all his friends and pupils not to forget it.

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I know the polemical character that my words could have. To recall one more time the quotation that Lacan borrowed from Pablo Picasso: "I do not seek [this polemic], I find it." And that should be no cause for surprise in me, or in you.

Because it is as a friend that I wanted to speak to you today. It is as a friend that I refuse to deliver a funeral oration, any more than a sermon or an academic eulogy. It is as a friend that I take the side of Enlightenment in taking sides with Jacques Lacan.

Because his teaching, all in all, concerns the future of psychoanalysis, and hence of this congeries called contemporary culture, and which I would prefer to designate by the term adopted by Jacques Lacan: the fight for today's Enlightenment.

You know as well as I do that Jacques Lacan led this fight with relentlessness, resolve and steadfastness. As we know, and see proof every day it is a fight which is never-ending. It is a dally battle, often shadowy confused, complex too, tortuous, risky sometimes, in which everyone may take part at his or her own level. I aspire to taking part at my own level, different from that of my friend Jacques Lacan, of course, but where I never forget, as I said five years ago, what I have learned from him.

Indeed, I evoke the memory of Jacques Lacan at many moments to guide me and to keep me at this place. I aspire to a style, and the one I would wish were mine is assuredly inspired by the one that belonged to Jacques Lacan alone and will always belong only to him.

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And even if I had not been the friend of Jacques Lacan, I would not have been able, in my position as Minister for Foreign Affairs, to miss a thousand opportunities to take note of him. The presence amongst us of numerous citizens from foreign countries attests to

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this, a presence which, back in 1986, had made up my mind about welcoming the thousand Congress participants of the Foundation of the Freudian Field at the Quai d'Orsay. How many times during those convivial moments that form part of my functions either abroad or in France, at international meetings or on national assignments, have I not had the pleasure, and sometimes the surprise, to hear an expression of the respect, admiration, even passionate interest of which Jacques Lacan's work is the object?

And with good reason. There is no one who does not know Jacques Lacan's name. He is situated in the first rank, and in a very privileged place among French thinkers. Basically even when it is ill understood, known by hearsay or at second hand, Jacques Lacan's work is recognized as the one which, in the lineage of Freud's discovery, uncompromisingly maintains the cutting edge, refuses to confuse the individual with the subject, devotes itself to preserving the singularity of desire (without letting it be swallowed up by established norms or by fluctuating ideals), as well as putting everyone back in charge of his or her own life, however forced their choices may be.

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I find an explanation for the particular notoriety of Lacan's thought (of which I am a happy witness) in comparing it to the notoriety of great artists, those with whom I have been friends or those with whom I have had no personal links.

When I say that the fight for Enlightenment is always an unfinished fight, I mean that it has to be reinvented each day. This permanent reinvention is that of history, in the sense that one can speak of the history of art. In this history, the cuts are indeed radical, certain of them irreversible. It is not for this reason that any or every creator may not be held up as the greatest. It is not for this reason that there is room for belief in the necessity, contingency or impossibility of some kind of progress. I've absorbed Jacques Lacan's lesson and, in the face of a certain "progressivism," the historical experience of our Soviet friends in particular indicates to me to what degree Lacan was right to alert us and to condemn the ravaging character of future-oriented ideologies that sing about better times a-coming, while in the here and now repressing, stifling or trying to wipe out desire and self-determination.

Permit me to say that Lacan *is* one of those creators of the first order. He is the artist of the history of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis, in truth, has no more advantage of being assured a radiant future than any other specialty. If someone has been bothered with

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it, then it is Lacan, who reinvented it. This invention, like Freud's or any great invention from which the subject has not been emptied out, can be betrayed, forgotten, or derailed. Jacques Lacan reinvented psychoanalysis and summons us to follow up on this reinvention in its specificity. The "progress" of Enlightenment promotes it, but no Fate guarantees it. The matter lies in our own hands.

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If I approved from the outset the idea that Jacques Lacan's analyst's office be preserved (the place where we have met today thanks to those who are concerned to continue the analytic discourse), it is precisely because it is, in my view, the studio of an artist, the artist of psychoanalysis, the greatest one after its inventor, Sigmund Freud.

I would also have been able to say that this artist's studio is the laboratory of a scholar, since it is the site of a practice which has been indefatigably there maintained, but simultaneously and constantly questioned as well, disputed, and illuminated for forty years by Jacques Lacan, in order to ensure its transmissibility as a science, as well as its transmission from one person to another.

Convinced as I am that the preservation of this site was part and parcel of the fight for Enlightenment, I am equally convinced that such preservation symbolically keeps intact the work of the practitioner, artist and scholar who was and remains Jacques Lacan. This "committed worker" proved that the cause of psychoanalysis was not that of magic, nor that of religion, nor that of suggestion, and cannot even be identified with that of science: far from suturing the subject, it makes the subject appear as such.

Today, it is with emotion, then, but not without Reason, that I inaugurate this plaque commemorating the reinvention of a new *rationalism*, put into practice and defined as a "renewal of the Freudian project from the underside" by Jacques Lacan.

Translated by Ellie Ragland-Sullivan & Henry W. Sullivan.

Endnotes

1) Cf. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire: Livre XVII: L'Envers de la psychanalyse*. Texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1991.