

Praxis with children

The child and knowledge¹

Jacques-Alain Miller

The Institute of the Child was inaugurated today with this series of papers on children's fears. The choice of theme was justified, given that Freud's major work dedicated to the child, if not to the psychoanalysis of the child, is the analysis of a phobia, which as you know, takes on the character of a fear, an unreasonable fear of horses. This inaugurating Study Day can be considered then as a commemoration of this great text.

What will be the theme for the second Study Day, to be held in two years? What is the theme that can be coupled with 'Children's Fears' that can create an effect of meaning? Fear is of pathos, it is an affect.

So let's look for a term that is the polar opposite to it. It must be a term that belongs to the register of what we call the signifier. This is all the more justified in that a phobia, if it is experienced at the level of the affect, is analysed at the level of the signifier. To the point that, in the treatment of Little Hans, Lacan was able to define phobia as "a signifying crystal". A signifying crystal is a formation of the unconscious made up of a limited number of signifiers for which the child explores every possible permutation. A phobia is not a fear; it cannot in any way be reduced to a fear. A phobia, as it is revealed in a psychoanalytically oriented treatment, is an elaboration of knowledge about fear, or under fear, in that it is its signifying framework.

The choice I made for the theme of the next Study Day proceeds from this very simple reflection, it is 'The child and knowledge'. This theme in turn stirs other reflections, which I give you in order to open a field rather than closing it. In the two years that separate us from the next Study Day, those who refer themselves to this new Institute of the Child will have the time to explore this field. Once said, I find that child and knowledge are two words that go well together, because the child is, one might say: the readily designated victim of knowledge.

What is a child in fact? It's not too late to ask the question.

Child, is the name we give to the subject in as much as we hand him over to teaching, in the form of education. The child is the subject to educate, which means the subject to lead, to bring to, as confirmed by etymology, which refers us to the Latin *ducere*, a verb derived from the substantive *dux*, the leader.

¹ Presentation of the theme for the second Study Day of the Institute of the Child, pronounced on 19 March 2011, in conclusion to the first Study Day of the Institute of the Child (http://www.lacan-universite.fr/?page_id=1989)

Thus, the child is, *par excellence*, the subject given over to the Master's discourse by means of knowledge, that is, by the intervention of the pedagogue. Here also, etymology reminds us that 'pedagogue' was the name given to the slave in charge of leading the children. Thus, the knowledge in question can parade as master, but only in its capacity of semblant. The true master, the master that is the truth of this semblant, we don't see, which is what Lacan in his algebra translated by writing a bar beneath the signifier S2, and beneath that, S1: S2/S1. The master is hidden beneath the appearance of a knowledge-master, which is nothing other than the slave's knowledge of leading the children, who themselves are in a way the slaves of the slave. What Lacan called the University Discourse, can be considered as the general structure of all systems where knowledge is in the position of semblant and whose stakes are indeed, power. And the child, today, is a power issue and we have a say about where we stand in this spectacle.

In this way, the current controversies on education are political through and through. It is about nothing less than the production of subjects. It is always about reducing, compressing, mastering and manipulating the enjoyment [jouissance] of the one we call a child in order to extract a subject worthy of this name, that is, a subjugated subject.

And we witness an ever growing competition of knowledge, a rivalry of traditions, a wrestle over transmissions that compete to determine which knowledge will win over the other in the production of subjects, under which yoke the child will fall, in order to merit becoming what in certain domains of knowledge, we call a citizen. This is particularly perceptible when it's a question of teaching History.

What History, one asks. Should it be the History of the country of residence that is taught, that of Europe, or the world, that of the ethnic and/or religious culture of the child?

Let's simplify the question by laying out a triangle of domains of knowledge whose apexes are the State, the family and the media:

- The State, because we are in France and in this country there is a tradition we call republican that prescribes a certain order of knowledge to be transmitted, an order of knowledge whose foundations were set out during the Third Republic.
- The family, because it is also the ethnic and/or religious community; whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, the community wants subjects who perpetuate its practices and beliefs.
- The media, in as much as distractions also convey a knowledge that models the subject; and we question ourselves repeatedly on the impact the entertainment has on the subject to be educated, in particular and especially intensely concerning the show of violence, Michel Foucault forged the term "biopolitics" to designate the production of living beings as it has become a

power issue. Along this same line, why would we not speak of 'epistemo-politics', to designate the politics of the knowledge that concerns, that aims especially at the child and that seeks to confer upon him an identity, for example, the identity that some call 'national'? With regard to the child, when powers argue this way, the question is of knowing which master signifiers will mark him. In any case, for the subject to be able to receive an identifying mark, [*marque identitaire*] the child's enjoyment must be de-completed, undergo a loss, achieve an ablation. This is the major operation of the knowledge-semblant. No one doubts this when this operation is manifested in a practice like excision, but this practice only goes to show that all knowledge carries with it an excision, all domains of knowledge perform an ablation on the child, and demand that he consent to a loss,

The traditional image of teaching is that of nourishment, of feeding. It's what is so well expressed in the little Latin name given to the University that we find in Rabelais, but that the Romans used in other ways: Alma mater, the nourishing mother. We can already correct this image by thinking, as today's theme serves well to remind us, that this nourishing can easily turn into voracity and if, in the jaw of the mother crocodile, it seems one can lodge a small stick, one cannot lodge such a stick in the jaws of the school and university system, so that the child must make himself this small stick.

Psychoanalysis would prompt us rather to substitute this oral model of knowledge transmission, with an anal reference. The transmission of knowledge always demands that the subject empty himself out, that he let go of what belongs to himself alone, that he purify himself of the waste he contains. And it's no coincidence that we have the testimony of the emotion of the first students of the University of Paris, when it was established in the thirteenth century, because we have the letters they wrote to their families; they testified that they were bored shitless [*s'emerdaient*].

The voice and the gaze are no less implicated in the child's relationship to knowledge. It is a voice that carries the knowledge. Psychologists who standardise school results, testify that it goes much better when the teacher's voice is present to support the signifier. Moreover, education aims to incorporate the gaze of the Other into the subject so that he watch himself, survey, control and direct himself as if it were this Other. The child must incorporate something of this Other, and what he must incorporate above all else is the Other's gaze. I set out here a relatively pathological portrait of schooling, but that renders clearly evident that what is called psychotherapy is in fact in the same register as pedagogy.

Psychotherapy is pedagogy, from the minute the accent is put on the curative aspect of education whereas I put the accent on the pathological or pathogenic aspect in it,

The Institute of the Child must unblock the function of the desire of the Other in education. It means to also question the enjoyment of the pedagogues, their infamous enjoyment for operating through the semblants of knowledge on the child's enjoyment. The virtue of the pedagogues is often only the dressing of an enjoyment

that, although not known, can be qualified as sadistic with the anxiety effects that ensue in the educated.

- It is up to the Institute of the Child to reconstitute the place of the child's knowledge, of what the children know. And they do know. They always know more than what adults suspect, who are already rendered moronic by their completed education: They already know more about language, by anticipation, as was noted by the linguist; naturally they know family secrets;
- they know their parent's desire, if only on account of being its symptom;
- they know the desire of the pedagogues;
- They make no mistake about the semblant nature of the knowledge imposed upon them, nor about the halo of ignorance that surrounds these domains of knowledge, in which they find their support. The child's knowledge, in the sense of the knowledge he has, does not belong to these knowledge-semblants, these insincere domains of knowledge, organised into a discourse on the same matrix as the University discourse. The child's knowledge is an authentic one, whether it be known or not known, and on account of this it belongs in the analytic discourse.

I will say the word 'respect': in the analytic discourse, the child's knowledge is respected.

The child comes into the analytic discourse as a being of knowledge, and not only as a being of enjoyment. His knowledge is respected as that of a fully fledged subject, because he is a fully fledged subject and not a "subject to come" as he is for pedagogy, and that's a knowledge respected in its connection to the enjoyment that envelopes him, animates him and that we can even say is confused with him.

The psychoanalytical treatment is not an education. Firstly, because we welcome into psychoanalysis subjects who are traumatised by the knowledge of the Other, by the Other's desire and enjoyment which have, for certain children, taken on the value of the real. For those children, yes, it is a question of leading them; but not to the dux, not to believing in the leader, but to lead them to the fact that the Other does not exist. In psychoanalysis, it is the child who is supposed to know, and it is rather the Other who is to be educated, it is the Other who is better taught how to handle himself. When this Other is incoherent and torn apart, when he leaves the subject with no compass and no identification, it is about elaborating with the child a knowledge to hand, custom made, one that he can make use of. When the Other suffocates the subject, it is about working with the child to take a step away from the Other, so that the child can get his breath.

In every case, the analyst is on the subject's side, and it is his job to bring the subject, the child, to play his hand with the cards he's been dealt. This is a challenge for the analyst who controls his exactitude, the veracity of his position as analyst, because he

can only work with the child on the condition that he be serf 10 no con form ism, and firstly to no psychoanalytical conformism, to no conformism of psychoanalytic knowledge. Today and over the past few years, we are watching, in a certain world of psychoanalysis, a transformation of the paternal metaphor into a standard, where the inherent supremacy of the function of the father over the mother's desire becomes the expression of a primary male chauvinism at the same time as castration presents itself as the norm.

The knowledge of the psychoanalyst is not that knowledge; it is one that is to be elaborated on the edge of the symptom, as close as possible to its beginning, the origin of the symptom. It's what Lacan called the sinthome; it's a circuit of repetitions, a cycle of knowledge-enjoyment [savoir- jouissance] set off by a body event, that is, the percussion of a body by a signifier.

For the one we call a child, we have the opportunity to intervene before the after effects of this percussion take the form of a definitively stabilised cycle, and even if it is, there remains a margin that still allows for the cycle of the sinthome to be oriented, so that the subject can find in it, custom made, an order and security.

The next Study Day of the Institute of the Child on 'The child and knowledge' is not about elaborating, or isolating the psychoanalysis of children as a specialty, but on the contrary, about contributing to the analytical discourse as such.

Transcription by **Daniel Roy** and **Herve Damase**, not re-read by the author. Translated from the French by **Julia Richards**