

Jacques Lacan

The insistence of the letter in the unconscious

Of Children in Swaddling Clothes

O cities of the sea, I behold in you your citizens, women as well as men tightly bound with stout bonds around their arms and legs by folk who will have no understanding of our speech; and you will only be able to give vent to your griefs and sense of loss of liberty by making tearful complaints, and sighs, and lamentations one to another; for those who bind you will not have understanding of your speech nor will you understand them.

— Leonardo da Vinci

If the nature of this contribution has been set by the theme of this volume of *La Psychanalyse*, I yet owe to what will be found in it to insert it at a point somewhere between the written and spoken word — it will be halfway between the two.

A written piece is in fact distinguished by a prevalence of the “text” in the sense which that factor of speech will be seen to take on in this essay, a factor which makes possible the kind of tightening up that I like in order to leave the reader no other way out than the way in, which I prefer to be difficult. In that sense, then, this will not be a written work.

The priority I accord to the nourishing of my seminars each time with something new has until now prevented my drawing on such a text, with one exception, not outstanding in the context of the series, and I refer to it at all only for the general level of its argument.

For the urgency which I now take as a pretext for leaving aside such an aim only masks the difficulty that, in trying to maintain this discourse on the level at which I ought in these writings to present my teaching, I might push it too far from the spoken word which, with its own measures, differs from writing and is essential to the instructive effect I am seeking.

That is why I have taken the expedient offered me by the invitation to lecture to the philosophy group of the union of humanities students¹ to produce an adaptation suitable to my talk; its necessary generality having to accommodate itself to the exceptional character

¹The lecture took place on 9th May 1957 in the Descartes Amphitheatre of the Sorbonne.

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of the audience, but its sole object encountering the collusion of their common preparation, a literary one, to which my title pays homage.

How should we forget in effect that until the end of his life Freud constantly maintained that such a preparation was the first requisite in the formation of analysts, and that he designated the eternal *universitas litterarum* as the ideal place for its institution.²

And thus my recourse to the movement of this speech, feverishly restored, by showing whom I meant it for, marks even more clearly those for whom it is not meant. I mean that it is not meant for those who for any reason, psychoanalytic or other, allow their discipline to parade under a false identity; a fault of habit, but its effect on the mind is such that the true identity may appear as simply one alibi among others, a sort of refined reduplication whose implications will not be missed by the most acute.

So one observes the curious phenomenon of a whole new tack concerning language and symbolization in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, buttressed by many sticky fingers in the pages of Sapir and Jespersen — amateurish exercises so far, but it is even more the tone which is lacking. A certain seriousness is cause for amusement from the standpoint of veracity.

And how could a psychoanalyst of today not realize that his realm of truth is in fact the word, when his whole experience must find in the word alone its instrument, its framework, its material, and even the static of its uncertainties.

I. The meaning of the letter

As our title suggests, beyond what we call “the word,” what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language. Thus from the outset we have alerted informed minds to the extent to which the notion that the unconscious is merely the seat of the instincts will have to be rethought.

But this “letter,” how are we to take it here? How indeed but literally.

²*Die Frage der Laienanalyse, G.W., XIV, pp. 281-283.*

By "letter" we designate that material support which concrete speech borrows from language.

This simple definition assumes that language not be confused with the diverse psychic and somatic functions which serve it in the individual speaker.

For the primary reason that language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each individual at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it.

Let us note, then, that aphasia, although caused by purely anatomical lesions in the cerebral apparatus which supplies the mental center for these linguistic functions, produces language deficiencies which divide naturally between the two poles of the signifying effect of what we call here "the letter" in the creation of meaning.³ A point which will be clarified later.

The speaking subject, if he seems to be thus a slave of language, is all the more so of a discourse in the universal moment of which he finds himself at birth, even if only by dint of his proper name.

Reference to the "experience of the community" as the substance of this discourse settles nothing. For this experience has as its essential dimension the tradition which the discourse itself founds. This tradition, long before the drama of history gets written into it, creates the elementary structures of culture. And these structures reveal an ordering of possible exchanges which, even unconscious, is inconceivable outside the permutations authorized by language.

With the result that the ethnographic duality of nature and culture is giving way to a ternary conception of the human condition: nature, society, and culture, the last term of which could well be equated to language, or that which essentially distinguishes human society from natural societies.

But we shall not make of this distinction either a point or a point of departure, leaving to its own obscurity the question of the

³This aspect of aphasia, very suggestive in the direction of an overthrow of the concept of "psychological function," which only obscures every aspect of the question, appears in its proper luminosity in the purely linguistic analysis of the two major forms of aphasia worked out by one of the leaders of modern linguistics, Roman Jakobson. See the most available of his works, the *Fundamentals of Language*, with Morris Halle (Mouton and Co., S-Gravenhage), part II, Chs. 1 to 4.

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original relation between work and the signifier. We shall be content, for our little jab at the general function of *praxis* in the genesis of history, to point out that the very society which wished to restore, along with the privileges of the producer, the causal hierarchy of the relations between production and the ideological superstructure to their full political rights, has nonetheless failed to give birth to an esperanto in which the relations of language to socialist realities would have rendered any literary formalism radically impossible.⁴

As for us, we shall have faith only in those assumptions which have already proven their value by virtue of the fact that language through them has attained the status of an object of scientific investigation.

For it is by dint of this fact that linguistics⁵ is seen to occupy the key position in this domain, and the reclassification of sciences and regrouping of them around it points up, as is the rule, a revolution in knowledge; only the necessities of communication made us call this volume and this grouping the “human sciences” given the confusion that this term can be made to hide.

To pinpoint the emergence of linguistic science we may say that, as in the case of all sciences in the modern sense, it is contained in the constitutive moment of a formula which is its foundation. This formula is the following:

$$\frac{S}{s}$$

which is read as: the signifier over the signified, “over” corresponding to the line separating the two levels.

This sign should be attributed to Ferdinand de Saussure although it is not found in exactly this form in any of the numerous schemas which none the less express it in the printed version of his lectures of the years 1906-07, 1908-09, and 1910-11, which the piety of a group of his disciples caused to be published under the

⁴We may recall that the discussion of the necessity for a new language in the communist society did in fact take place, and Stalin, much to the relief of those depending on his philosophy, cut off the discussion with the decision: language is not a superstructure.

⁵By “linguistics” we understand the study of existing languages in their structure and in the laws revealed therein; this leaves out any theory of abstract codes sometimes included under the heading of communication theory, as well as the theory, originating in the physical sciences, called information theory, or any semiology more or less hypothetically generalized.

title, *Cours de linguistique générale*, a work of prime importance for the transmission of a teaching worthy of the name, that is, that one can come to terms with only in its own terms.

That is why it is legitimate for us to give him credit for the formulation $\frac{S}{S}$ by which, in spite of the differences among schools, the beginning of modern linguistics can be recognized.

The thematics of this science is henceforth suspended, in effect, at the primordial placement of the signifier and the signified as being distinct orders separated initially by a barrier resisting signification. And that is what was to make possible an exact study of the relations proper to the signifier, and of the breadth of their function in the birth of the signified.

For this primordial distinction goes way beyond the debates on the arbitrariness of the sign which have been elaborated since the earliest reflections of the ancients, and even beyond the impasse which, through the same period, has been encountered in every discussion of the bi-univocal correspondence between the word and the thing, even in the mere act of naming. All this, of course, is quite contrary to the appearances suggested by the importance often imputed to the role of the index finger pointing to an object in the learning process of the infant subject learning his mother tongue, or the use in foreign language teaching of methods sometimes called "concrete."

One cannot and need not go further along this line of thought than to demonstrate that no meaning is sustained by anything other than reference to another meaning;⁶ in its extreme form this is tantamount to the proposition that there is no language in existence for which there is any question of its inability to cover the whole field of the signified, it being an effect of its existence as a language that it necessarily answer all needs. Should we try to grasp in the realm of language the constitution of the object, how can we help but notice that the object is to be found only at the level of concept, a very different thing from a simple nominative, and that the thing, to take

⁶Cf. the *De Magistro* of Saint Augustine, especially the chapter "De significatione locutionis" which I analysed in my seminar of 23rd June 1954.

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it at its word reduces to two divergent factors: the cause in which it has taken shelter in the French word *chose*, and the nothing (*rien*) to which it has abandoned its Latin dress (*rem*).

These considerations, however stimulating they may seem to philosophers, turn us aside from the area in which language questions us on its very nature. And one will fail even to keep the question in view as long as one has not got rid of the illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever.

For even reduced to this latter formulation, the heresy is the same, the heresy that leads logical positivism in search of the “meaning of meaning” as its object is called in the language its disciples like to wallow in. Whence we can observe that even a text charged with meaning reduces itself, through this sort of analysis, to meaningless bagatelles, all that survives being mathematical formulas which are, of course, meaningless.⁷

To return to our formula $\frac{S}{s}$: if we could infer nothing from it beyond the notion of the parallelism of its upper and lower terms, each one taken in its globality, it would remain only the enigmatic sign of a total mystery. Which of course is not the case.

In order to grasp its function I shall begin by reproducing the classical, yet faulty illustration by which its usage is normally presented. It is:

T R E E



⁷So, Mr. I. A. Richards, author of a work precisely in accord with such an objective, has in another work shown us its application. He took for his purposes a page from Mong-tse (Mencius to the Jesuits) and called the piece, *Mencius on the Mind*. The guarantees of the purity of the experiment are nothing to the luxury of the approaches. And our expert on the traditional Canon which contains the text is found right on the spot in Peking where our demonstration-model mangle has been transported regardless of cost.

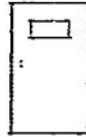
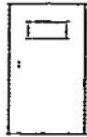
But we shall be no less transported, if less expensively, to see a bronze which gives out bell-tones at the slightest contact with true thought, transformed into a rag to wipe the

and one can see already how it seems to favor the sort of erroneous interpretation just mentioned.

I replaced this in my lecture with another, which has no greater claim to correctness than that it has been transplanted into that incongruous dimension which the psychoanalyst has not yet altogether renounced because of his quite justified feeling that his conformism takes its value entirely from it. Here is the other diagram:

LADIES

GENTLEMEN



where we see that, without greatly extending the scope of the signifier concerned in the experiment, that is, by doubling a noun through the mere juxtaposition of two terms whose complementary meanings ought apparently to reinforce each other, a surprise is produced by an unexpected precipitation of meaning: the image of twin doors symbolizing, through the solitary confinement offered Western Man for the satisfaction of his natural needs away from home, the imperative that he seems to share with the great majority of primitive communities which submits his public life to the laws of urinary segregation.

It is not only with the idea of silencing the nominalist debate with a low blow that I use this example, but rather to show how in fact the signifier intrudes into the signified, namely in a form which, not being immaterial, raises the very question of its place in reality. For the blinking gaze of a near-sighted person would be quite justified in doubting whether this was indeed the signifier as he peered closely at the little enamel signs which bore it, a signifier of which the signified received its final honors from the double and solemn procession from the upper nave.

blackboard of the most dismaying British psychologism. And not without eventually being identified with the meninx of the author himself — all that remains of him or his object after having exhausted the meaning of meaning of the latter and the good sense of the former.

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But no contrived example can equal the sharpness of the encounter with a lived truth. And so I am happy to have invented the above since it awoke in the person whose word I most trust this memory of childhood which having thus happily come to my knowledge could well be inserted here.

A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated in a compartment face to face next to the window through which the buildings along the station platform can be seen passing as the train pulls to a stop. "Look," says the brother, "we're at Ladies!" "Idiot," replies his sister, "can't you see we're at Gentlemen."

Besides the fact that the rails in this story offer a material counterpart to the line in the Saussurian formula (and in a form designed to suggest that its resistance may be other than dialectical!), we should add that only someone who didn't have his eyes in front of the holes (it's the appropriate image here) could possibly confuse the place of the signifier and the signified in this story, or not see from what shining center the signifier goes forth to reflect its light into the shadow of incomplete meanings. For this signifier will now carry a purely animal Dissension, meant for the usual oblivion of natural mists, to the unbridled power of ideological Warfare, relentless for families, a torment to the Gods. Ladies and Gentlemen will be henceforth for these children two countries towards which each of their souls will strive on divergent wings, and between which a cessation of hostilities will be the more impossible since they are in truth the same country and neither can compromise on its own superiority without detracting from the glory of the other.

But enough. It begins to sound like the history of France. Which it is more human, as it ought to be, to evoke here than that of England, destined to tumble from the Large to the Small End of Dean Swift's egg.

It remains to be conceived what steps, what corridor, the S of the signifier, visible here in the plurals in which it focuses its welcome beyond the window, must take in order to rest its elbows on the

ventilators through which, like warm and cold air, scorn and indignation come hissing out below.

One thing is certain: if the formula $\frac{S}{S}$ with its line is appropriate, access from one to the other cannot in any case have a meaning. For the formula, insofar as it is itself only pure function of the signifier, can reveal only the structure of a signifier in the transfer.

Now the structure of the signifier is, as it is commonly said of language itself, that it be articulated.

This means that no matter where one starts from in order to describe the zones of reciprocal infringement and the areas of expanding inclusiveness of its units, these units are submitted to the double condition of reducing to ultimate distinctive features and of combining according to the laws of a closed order.

These units, one of the decisive discoveries of linguistics, are *phonemes*; but we must not expect to find any *phonetic* constancy in the modulatory variability to which this term applies, but rather the synchronic system of distinguishing connections necessary for the discernment of sounds in a given language. Through this, one sees that an essential element of the word itself was predestined to slide down into the mobile characters which — in a scurry of lower-case Didots or Garamonds — render validly present what we call the “letter,” namely the essentially localized structure of the signifier.

With the second property of the signifier, that of combining according to the laws of a closed order, is affirmed the necessity of the topological substratum of which the term I ordinarily use, namely, the signifying chain, gives an approximate idea: rings of a necklace that is a ring in another necklace made of rings.

Such are the conditions of structure which define grammar as the order of constitutive infringements of the signifier up to the level of the unit immediately superior to the sentence, and lexicology as the order of constitutive inclusions of the signifier to the level of the verbal locution.

In examining the limits by which these two exercises in the understanding of linguistic usage are determined, it is easy to see that

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only the correlations between signifier and signified supply the standard for all research into meaning, as is indicated in fact by the very notion of “usage” of a taxeme or semanteme which in fact refers to the context just above that of the units concerned.

But it is not because the undertakings of grammar and lexicology are exhausted within certain limits that we must think that beyond those limits meaning reigns supreme. That would be an error.

For the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates on meaning by unfolding its dimension before it. As is seen at the level of the sentence when it is interrupted before the significant term: “I shall never . . .,” “All the same it is . . .,” “And yet there may be . . .” Such sentences are not without meaning, a meaning all the more oppressive in that it is content to make us wait for it.⁸

But the phenomenon is no different which by the mere recoil of a “but” brings to the light, comely as the Shulamite, honest as the dew, the negress adorned for the wedding and the poor woman ready for the auction-block.⁹

From which we can say that it is in the chain of the signifier that the meaning “insists” but that none of its elements “consists” in the meaning of which it is at the moment capable.

We are forced, then, to accept the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier — which F. de Saussure illustrates with an image resembling the wavy lines of the upper and lower Waters in miniatures from manuscripts of Genesis; a double flow in which the guidelines of fine streaks of rain, vertical dotted lines supposedly confining segments of correspondence, seem too slight.

All our experience runs counter to this linearity, which made me speak once, in one of my seminars on psychosis, of something more like spaced upholstery buttons as a schema for taking into account the dominance of the letter in the dramatic transformation which the dialogue can bring about in a subject.¹⁰

⁸To which verbal hallucination, when it takes this form, opens a communicating door with the Freudian structure of psychosis — a door until now unnoticed.

⁹The allusions are to the “I am black, but comely . . .” of the *Song of Solomon*, and to the nineteenth-century cliché of the “poor but honest” woman. (Trans.)

¹⁰We spoke in our seminar of 6th June 1956, of the first scene of *Athalie*, incited by an allusion — tossed off by a high-brow critic in the *New Statesman and Nation* — to the

The linearity which F. de Saussure holds to be constitutive of the chain of discourse, in conformity with its emission by a single voice and with its horizontal position in our writing — if this linearity is necessary in fact, it is not sufficient. It applies to the chain of discourse only in the direction in which it is oriented in time, being taken as a signifying factor in all languages in which “Peter hits Paul” reverses its time when the terms are inverted.

But one has only to listen to poetry, which perhaps Saussure was not in the habit of doing, to hear a true polyphony emerge, to know in fact that all discourse aligns itself along the several staves of a score.

There is in effect no signifying chain which does not have attached to the punctuation of each of its units a whole articulation of relevant contexts suspended “vertically” from that point.

Let us take our word “tree” again, this time not as an isolated noun, but at the point of one of these punctuations, and see how it crosses the line of the Saussurian formula.

For even broken down into the double spectre of its vowels and consonants, it can still call up with the robur and the plane tree the meanings it takes on, in the context of our flora, of strength and majesty. Drawing on all the symbolic contexts suggested in the Hebrew of the Bible, it erects on a barren hill the shadow of the cross. Then reduces to the capital Y, the sign of dichotomy which, except for the illustration used by heraldry, would owe nothing to the tree however genealogical we may think it. Circulatory tree, tree of life of the cerebellum, tree of Saturn, tree of Diana, crystals formed in a tree struck by lightning, is it your figure which traces our destiny for us in the tortoise-shell cracked by the fire, or your lightning which causes that slow shift in the axis of being to surge up from an unnamable night into the “Εν Παντα of language:

No! says the Tree, it says No! in the shower of sparks
Of its superb head

“high whoredom” of Racine’s heroines, to renounce reference to the savage dramas of Shakespeare, which have become compulsional in analytic milieux where they play the role of status-symbol for the Philistines.

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lines which require the harmonics of the tree just as much as their continuation:

Which the storm treats as universally
As it does a blade of grass.¹¹

For this modern verse is ordered according to the same law of the parallelism of the signifier which creates the harmony governing the primitive Slavic epic or the most refined Chinese poetry.

As is seen in the fact that the tree and the blade of grass are chosen from the same mode of the existent in order for the signs of contradiction – saying “No!” and “treat as” – to affect them, and also so as to bring about, through the categorical contrast of the particularity of “superb” with the “universally” which reduces it, in the condensation of the “head” and the “storm”, the indiscernible shower of sparks of the eternal instant.

But this whole signifier can only operate, someone may object, if it is present in the subject. It is this objection that I answer by supposing that it has passed over to the level of the signified.

For what is important is not that the subject know anything whatsoever. (If LADIES and GENTLEMEN were written in a language unknown to the little boy and girl, their quarrel would simply be the more exclusively a quarrel over words, but none the less ready to take on meaning.)

One thing this structure of the signifying chain makes evident is the possibility I have, precisely insofar as I have this language in common with other subjects, that is insofar as it exists as a language, to use it in order to say something quite other than what it says. This function of the word is more worth pointing out than that of “disguising the thought” (more often than not indefinable) of the subject; it is no less than the function of indicating the place of the subject in the search for the truth.

I have only to plant my tree in a locution: climb the tree, indeed

¹¹“Non! dit l'Arbre, il dit: Non! dans l'étincellement
De sa tête superbe
Que la tempête traite universellement
Comme elle fait une herbe.”
Lines from Valéry's “Au Platane” in *Les Charmes*. (Trans.)

illuminate it by playing on it the light of a descriptive context; plant it firm so as not to let myself be trapped in some sort of *communiqué*, however official, and if I know the truth, let it be heard, in spite of all the between-the-lines censures, by the only signifier I know how to create with my acrobatics among the branches of the tree, tantalizing to the point of burlesque, or sensible only to the experienced eye, according to whether I wish to be heard by the mob or the few.

The properly signifying function thus described in language has a name. We learned this name in some grammar of our childhood, on the last page, where the shade to Quintilian, relegated to a phantom chapter of "ultimate considerations on style," seemed in a hurry to get his word in as though threatened with the hook.

It is among the figures of style, or tropes, that we find the word: the name is *metonymy*.

We shall recall only the example given there: thirty sails. For the anxiety we felt over the fact that the word 'boat' lurking in the background was only part of the craft employed in this example did less to veil these illustrious sails than did the definition they were supposed to illustrate.

The part taken for the whole, we said to ourselves, and if we take it seriously, we are left with very little idea of the importance of this fleet, which "thirty sails" is precisely supposed to give us: for each boat to have just one sail is in fact the least likely possibility.

By which we see that the connection between boat and sail is nowhere but in the signifier, and that it is in the word-to-word connection that metonymy is based.¹²

We shall designate as metonymy, then, the one slope of the effective field of the signifier in the constitution of meaning.

Let us name the other: it is *metaphor*. Let us find again an illustration; Quillet's dictionary seemed an appropriate place to find

¹²We give homage here to the works of Roman Jakobson — to which we owe much of this formulation; works to which a psychoanalyst can constantly refer in order to structure his own experience, and which render superfluous the "personal communications" of which we could boast as much as the next fellow.

Let us thank also, in this context, the author [R. M. Loewenstein] of "Some remarks on the role of speech in psycho-analytic technique" (I.J.P., Nov.-Dec., 1956, XXXVII, 6, p. 467) for taking the trouble to point out that his remarks are "based on" work dating from 1952. This is no doubt the explanation for the fact that he has learned nothing from work done since then, yet which he is not ignorant of, as he cites me as their editor (sic).

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a sample which would not seem to be chosen for my own purposes, and for an appropriate dressing I didn't have to go any further than the well known line of Victor Hugo:

His sheaves were not miserly nor spiteful¹³

under which aspect I presented metaphor to my seminar on psychosis.

Let us admit that modern poetry and especially the surrealist school have taken us quite far in this domain by showing that any conjunction of two signifiers would be equally sufficient to constitute a metaphor, except for the additional requirement of the greatest possible disparity of the images signified, needed for the production of the poetic spark, or in other words for there to be metaphoric creation.

It is true this radical position is based on the experiment known as automatic writing which would not have been tried if its pioneers had not been reassured by the Freudian discovery. But it remains a position branded with confusion because the doctrine behind it is false.

The creative spark of the metaphor does not spring from the conjunction of two images, that is of two signifiers equally actualized. It springs from two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the hidden signifier then remaining present through its (metonymic) relation to the rest of the chain.

One word for another: that is the formula for the metaphor and if you are a poet you will produce for your own delight a continuous stream, a dazzling tissue of metaphors. If the result is the sort of intoxication of the dialogue that Jean Tardieu wrote under this title, that is only because he was giving us a demonstration of the radical superfluousness of all meaning to a perfectly convincing representation of a bourgeois comedy.

It is manifest that in the line of Hugo cited above, not the slightest spark of light springs from the proposition that his sheaves were neither miserly nor spiteful, for the reason that there is no question of the sheaves' having either the merit or demerit of these at-

¹³"Sa gerbe n'était pas avare ni haineuse," a line from "Booz endormi." (Trans.)

tributes, since the attributes, as the sheaves, belong to Booz who exercises the former in disposing of the latter and without informing the latter of his sentiments in the case.

If, however, his sheaves do refer us to Booz, and this is indeed the case, it is because they have replaced him in the signifying chain at the very spot where he was to be exalted by the sweeping away of greed and spite. But now Booz himself has been swept away by the sheaves, and hurled into the outer darkness where greed and spite harbor him in the hollow of their negation.

But once *his* sheaves have thus usurped his place, Booz can no longer return there; the slender thread of the little word *his* which binds him to it is only one more obstacle to his return in that it links him to the notion of possession which retains him in the very zone of greed and spite. So *his* generosity, affirmed in the passage, is yet reduced to less than nothing by the munificence of the sheaves which, coming from nature, know not our caution or our casting out, and even in their accumulation remain prodigal by our standards.

But if in this profusion, the giver has disappeared along with his gift, it is only in order to rise again in what surrounds this figure by which he was annihilated. For it is the figure of the burgeoning of fecundity, and this it is which announces the surprise which the poem sings, namely the promise which the old man will receive in a sacred context of his accession to paternity.

So, it is between the signifier in the form of the proper name of a man, and the signifier which metaphorically abolishes him that the poetic spark is produced, and it is in this case all the more effective in realizing the meaning of paternity in that it reproduces the mythic event in terms of which Freud reconstructed the progress, in the individual unconscious, of the mystery of the father.

Modern metaphor has the same structure. So this ejaculation:

Love is a pebble laughing in the sunlight,

recreates love in a dimension that seems to me most tenable in the face of its imminent lapse into the mirage of narcissistic altruism.

We see, then, that metaphor occurs at the precise point at which

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sense comes out of non-sense, that is, at that frontier which, as Freud discovered, when crossed the other way produces what we generally call “wit” (*Witz*); it is at this frontier that we can glimpse the fact that man tempts his very destiny when he derides the signifier.

But to draw back from that place, what do we find in metonymy other than the power to bypass the obstacles of social censure? This form which lends itself to the truth under oppression; doesn't it show the very servitude inherent in its presentation?

One may read with profit a book by Leo Strauss, of the land which traditionally offers asylum to those who chose freedom, in which the author gives his reflections on the relation between the art of writing and persecution.¹⁴ By pushing to its limits the sort of con-naturality which links that art to that condition, he lets us glimpse a certain something which in this matter imposes its form, in the effect of the truth on desire.

But haven't we felt for some time now that, having followed the path of the letter in search of the truth we call Freudian, we are getting very warm indeed, that it is burning all about us?

Of course, as it is said, the letter killeth while the spirit giveth life. We can't help but agree, having had to pay homage elsewhere to a noble victim of the error of seeking the spirit in the letter; but we should like to know, also, how the spirit could live without the letter. Even so, the claims of the spirit would remain unassailable if the letter had not in fact shown us that it can produce all the effects of truth in man without involving the spirit at all.

It is none other than Freud who had this revelation, and he called his discovery the Unconscious.

II. The letter in the unconscious

One out of every three pages in the complete works of Freud is devoted to philological references, one out of every two pages to logical inferences, and everywhere the apprehension of experience is dialectical, with the proportion of linguistic analysis increasing just insofar as the unconscious is directly concerned.

¹⁴Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, The Free Press, Glencoe, Ill.

Thus in *The Interpretation of Dreams* every page deals with what we are calling the letter of the discourse, in its texture, its usage, its immanence in the matter in question. For it is with this work that the work of Freud begins to open the royal road to the unconscious. And Freud gave us notice of this; his confidence at the time of launching this book in the early days of this century¹⁵ only confirms what he continued to proclaim to the end: that his whole message was at stake in this, the whole of his discovery.

The first sentence of the opening chapter announces what for the sake of the exposition could not be postponed: that the dream is a rebus. And Freud goes on to stipulate what I have said from the start, that it must be understood literally. This derives from the persistence in the dream of that same literal (or phonematic) structure through which the signifier in ordinary discourse is articulated and analyzed. So the unnatural images of the boat on the roof, or the man with a comma for a head which are specifically mentioned by Freud, are examples of dream-images which have importance only as signifiers, that is, insofar as they allow us to spell out the “proverb” presented by the rebus of the dream. The structure of language which enables us to read dreams is the very principle of the “meaning of dreams,” the *Traumdeutung*.

Freud shows us in every possible way that the image’s value as signifier has nothing whatever to do with what it signifies, giving as an example Egyptian hieroglyphics in which it would be sheer buffoonery to pretend that in a given text the frequency of a vulture which is an *aleph*, or of a chick which is a *vau*, and which indicate a form of the verb “to be” or a plural, prove that the text has anything at all to do with these ornithological specimens. Freud finds in this script certain uses of the signifier which are lost in ours, such as the use of determinatives, where a categorical figure is added to the literal figuration of a verbal term; but this is only to show us that even in this script, the so-called “ideogram” is a letter.

But the current confusion on this last term was not needed for there to prevail in the minds of psychoanalysts lacking linguistic

¹⁵See the correspondence, namely letters 107 and 109.

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training the prejudice in favor of a symbolism by natural analogy, that is of the image as fitted to the instinct. And to such an extent that, outside of the French school which has been alerted, one must draw the line between reading coffee grounds and reading hieroglyphics, by recalling to its own principles a technique which nothing could possibly justify except the very aim and content of the unconscious.

It must be said that this truth is admitted only with difficulty and that the bad mental habits denounced above enjoy such favor that today's psychoanalyst can be expected to say that he decodes before he will come around to taking the necessary tour with Freud (turn at the statue of Champollion, says the guide) which will make him understand that he deciphers; the distinction is that a cryptogram takes on its full dimension only when it is in a lost language.

Taking the tour is nothing other than continuing in the *Traumdeutung*.

Entstellung, translated as distortion, is what Freud shows to be the general precondition for the functioning of dreams, and it is what we described above, following Saussure, as the sliding of the signified under the signifier which is always active in speech (its action, let us note, is unconscious).

But what we called the two slopes of the incidence of the signifier on the signified are also found here.

The *Verdichtung*, or condensation, is the structure of the superimposition of signifiers which is the field of metaphor, and its very name, condensing in itself the word *Dichtung*, shows how the process is connatural with the mechanism of poetry to the point that it actually envelops its properly traditional function.

In the case of *Verschiebung*, displacement, the German term is closer to the idea of that veering off of meaning that we see in metonymy, and which from its first appearance in Freud is described as the main method by which the unconscious gets around censorship.

What distinguishes these two mechanisms which play such a privileged role in the dream-work (*Traumarbeit*), from their homologous functions in speech? Nothing except a condition imposed on the

signifying material by the dream, called *Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*, translated as Considerations of Representability. But this condition constitutes a limitation operating *within* the system of notation; it is a long way from dissolving the system into a figurative semiology on a level with certain phenomena of natural expression. This fact could perhaps shed light on the problems involved in certain modes of pictography which, simply because they have been abandoned by writing systems as imperfect, are not therefore to be considered as mere evolutionary stages. Let us say, then, that the dream is like the parlor-game in which one is put on the spot to cause a group of spectators to guess some known utterance or variant of it by means solely of a silent performance. That the dream uses words makes no difference since for the unconscious they are but one among several elements of the performance. It is exactly the fact that both the game and the dream run up against a lack of taxematic material for the representation of such logical articulations as causality, contradiction, hypothesis, etc., that proves they are both writing systems rather than pantomime. The subtle processes which dreams are seen to use to represent these logical articulations, in a much less artificial way than the game brings to bear, are the object of a special study in Freud in which we see once more confirmed that dream-work follows the laws of the signifier.

The rest of the dream-elaboration is designated as secondary by Freud, the nature of which indicates its value: they are fantasies or day-dreams (*Tagtraum*) to use the term Freud prefers in order to emphasize their function of wish-fulfillment (*Wunscherfüllung*). Given the fact that these fantasies can remain unconscious, their distinctive trait is in this case their meaning. Now concerning these fantasies, Freud tells us that their place in dreams is either to be taken up and used as signifying elements in the message of the dream-thought (*Traumgedanke*), or else to be used in the secondary elaboration just mentioned, that is in a function not to be distinguished from our waking thought (*von unserem wachen Denken nicht zu unterscheiden*). No better idea of this function can be got than by comparing it to splotches of color which when applied here and there to a

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stencil would create for our view in a topical painting the pictures, rather grim in themselves, of the rebus or hieroglyph.

Excuse me if I seem to have to spell out the text of Freud; I do it not only to show how much is to be gained by not cutting or abridging it, but also in order to situate the development of psychoanalysis according to its first guide-lines, which were fundamental and never revoked.

Yet from the beginning there was a general failure to recognize the formative role of the signifier in the status which Freud from the first assigned to the unconscious and in the most precise formal manner. And for a double reason, of which the least obvious, naturally, is that this formalization was not sufficient in itself to bring about a recognition of the insistence of the signifier because the time of the appearance of the *Traumdeutung* was well ahead of the formalizations of linguistics for which one could no doubt show that it paved the way by the sheer weight of its truth.

And the second reason, which is after all only the underside of the first, is that if psychoanalysts were fascinated exclusively by the meanings revealed in the unconscious, that is because the secret attraction of these meanings arises from the dialectic which seems to inhere in them.

I showed in my seminars that it is the necessity of counteracting the continuously accelerating effects of this bias which alone explains the apparent sudden changes, or rather changes of tack, which Freud, through his primary concern to preserve for posterity both his discovery and the fundamental revisions it effected in our other knowledge, felt it necessary to apply to his doctrine.

For, I repeat: in the situation in which he found himself, having nothing which corresponded to the object of his discovery which was at the same level of scientific development — in this situation, at least he never failed to maintain this object on the level of its proper ontological dignity.

The rest was the work of the gods and took such a course that analysis today takes as its basis those imaginary forms which I have just shown to be written on the margin of the text they mutilate —

and analysis tries to accommodate its goal according to them, in the interpretation of dreams confusing them with the visionary liberation of the hieroglyphic apiary, and seeking generally the control of the exhaustion of the analysis in a sort of scanning process¹⁶ of these forms whenever they appear, with the idea that, just as they are a sign of the exhaustion of regressions, they are also signs of the remodeling of the “object-relation” which characterizes the subject.

The technique which is based on such positions can be fertile in its diverse results, and under the aegis of therapy, difficult to criticize. But an internal criticism must none the less arise from the flagrant disparity between the mode of operation by which the technique is justified — namely the analytic rule, all the instruments of which, from “free association” on up, depend on the conception of the unconscious of their inventor — and on the other hand the general ignorance which reigns regarding this conception of the unconscious. The most peremptory champions of this technique think themselves freed of any need to reconcile the two by the simplest pirouette: the analytic rule (they say) must be all the more religiously observed since it is only the result of a lucky accident. In other words, Freud never knew what he was doing.

A return to Freud’s text shows on the contrary the absolute coherence between his technique and his discovery, and at the same time this coherence allows us to put all his procedures in their proper place.

That is why the rectification of psychoanalysis must inevitably involve a return to the truth of that discovery which, taken in its original moment, is impossible to mistake.

For in the analysis of dreams, Freud intends only to give us the laws of the unconscious in the most general extension. One of the reasons why dreams were most propitious for this demonstration is exactly, Freud tells us, that they reveal the same laws whether in the normal person or in the neurotic.

But in the one case as in the other, the efficacy of the unconscious

¹⁶That is the process by which the results of a piece of research are assured through a mechanical exploration of the entire extent of the field of its object.

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does not cease in the waking state. The psychoanalytic experience is nothing other than the demonstration that the unconscious leaves none of our actions outside its scope. The presence of the unconscious in the psychological order, in other words in the relation-functions of the individual, should, however, be more precisely defined: it is not coextensive with that order, for we know that if unconscious motivation is manifest in conscious psychic effects, as well as in unconscious ones, conversely it is only elementary to recall to mind that a large number of psychic effects which are quite legitimately designated as unconscious, in the sense of excluding the characteristic of consciousness, never the less are without any relation whatever to the unconscious in the Freudian sense. So it is only by an abuse of the term that unconscious in that sense is confused with psychic, and that one may thus designate as psychic what is in fact an effect of the unconscious, as on the somatic for instance.

It is a matter, therefore, of defining the locus of this unconscious.

I say that it is the very locus defined by the formula $\frac{S}{s}$. What we have been able to unfold concerning the incidence of the signifier on the signified suggests its transformation into:

$$f(S) \cdot \frac{1}{s}$$

We have shown the effects not only of the elements of the horizontal signifying chain, but also of its vertical dependencies, divided into two fundamental structures called metonymy and metaphor. We can symbolize them by, first:

$$f(S...S') \quad S \sim S \quad (-)s$$

that is, the metonymic structure, indicating that it is the connection between signifier and signifier which alone permits the elision in which the signifier inserts the lack of being into the object relation, using the reverberating character of meaning to invest it with the desire aimed at the very lack it supports. The sign — placed between () represents here the retention of the line — which in the original

formula marked the irreducibility in which, in the relations between signifier and signified, the resistance of meaning is constituted.¹⁷

Secondly,

$$f \left(\frac{S'}{S} \right) S \sim S (+) S$$

the metaphoric structure, indicates that it is in the substitution of signifier for signifier that an effect of signification is produced which is creative or poetic, in other words which is the advent of the signification in question.¹⁸ The sign + between () represents here the leap over the line – and the constitutive value of the leap for the emergence of meaning.

This leap is an expression of the condition of passage of the signifier into the signified which I pointed out above, although provisionally confusing it with the place of the subject. It is the function of the subject, thus introduced, which we must now turn to as it is the crucial point of our problem.

Je pense, donc je suis (cogito ergo sum) is not merely the formula in which is constituted, along with the historical apogee of reflection on the conditions of knowledge, the link between the transparency of the transcendental subject and his existential affirmation.

Perhaps I am only object and mechanism (and so nothing more than phenomenon), but assuredly insofar as I think so, I am – absolutely. No doubt philosophers have made important corrections on this formulation, notably that in that which thinks (*cogitans*), I can never pose myself as anything but object (*cogitatum*). None the less it remains true that by way of this extreme purification of the transcendental subject, my existential link to its project seems irrefutable, at least in its present form, and that:

“cogito ergo sum” ubi cogito, ibi sum,

overcomes this objection.

Of course this confines me to being there in my being only inso-

¹⁷The sign ~ here represents congruence.

¹⁸(S' i.e. prime) designating here the term productive of the signifying effect (or significance); one can see that the term is latent in metonymy, patent in metaphor.

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far as I think that I am in my thought; just how far I actually think this concerns only myself and if I say it, interests no one.¹⁹

To elude this problem on the pretext of its philosophical pretensions is simply to show our inhibition. For the notion of subject is indispensable even to the operation of a science such as strategy (in the modern sense) whose calculations exclude all subjectivism.

It is also to deny oneself access to what we may call the Freudian universe — in the way that we speak of the Copernican universe. It was in fact the so-called Copernican revolution to which Freud himself compared his discovery, emphasizing that it was once again a question of the place man assigns to himself at the center of a universe.

The place that I occupy as the subject of a signifier: is it, in relation to the place I occupy as subject of the signified, concentric or ex-centric? — that is the question.

It is not a question of knowing whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather of knowing whether I am the same as that of which I speak. And it is not at all inappropriate to use the word “thought” here. For Freud uses the term to designate the elements involved in the unconscious, that is the signifying mechanisms which we now recognize as being there.

It is none the less true that the philosophical *cogito* is at the center of that mirage which renders modern man so sure of being himself even in his uncertainties about himself, or rather in the mistrust he has learned to erect against the traps of self-love.

Likewise, if I charge nostalgia with being in the service of metonymy and refuse to seek meaning beyond tautology; if in the name of “war is war” and “a penny’s a penny” I determine to be only what I am, yet how even here can I eliminate the obvious fact that in that very act I am?

And it is no less true if I take myself to the other, metaphorical pole in my quest for meaning, and if I dedicate myself to becoming

¹⁹It is quite otherwise if by posing a question such as “Why philosophers?” I become more candid than nature, for then I am asking the question which philosophers have been asking themselves for all time and also the one in which they are in fact the most interested.

what I am, to coming into being, I cannot doubt that even if I lose myself in the process, in that process, I am.

Now it is on these very points where evidence will be subverted by the empirical, that the trick of the Freudian conversion lies.

This meaningful game between metonymy and metaphor up to and including the active edge which splits my desire between a refusal of meaning or a lack of being and links my fate to the question of my destiny, this game, in all its inexorable subtlety, is played until the match is called, there where I am not because I cannot locate myself there.

That is, what is needed is more than these words with which I disconcerted my audience: I think where I am not, therefore I am where I think not. Words which render sensible to an ear properly attuned with what weasling ambiguity the ring of meaning flees from our grasp along the verbal thread.

What one ought to say is: I am not, wherever I am the plaything of my thought; I think of what I am wherever I don't think I am thinking.

This two-faced mystery is linked to the fact that the truth can be evoked only in that dimension of alibi in which all "realism" in creative works takes its virtue from metonymy; it is likewise linked to this other fact that we accede to meaning only through the double twist of metaphor when we have the unique key: the S and the s of the Saussurian formula are not on the same level, and man only deludes himself when he believes his true place is at their axis, which is nowhere.

Was nowhere, that is, until Freud discovered it; for if what Freud discovered isn't that, it isn't anything.

The content of the unconscious with all its disappointing ambiguities gives us no reality in the subject more consistent than the immediate; its force comes from the truth and in the dimension of being: *Kern unseres Wesen* are Freud's own terms.

The double-triggered mechanism of metaphor is in fact the very mechanism by which the symptom, in the analytic sense, is deter-

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mined. Between the enigmatic signifier of a sexual trauma and its substitute term in a present signifying chain there passes the spark which fixes in a symptom the meaning inaccessible to the conscious subject in which is its resolution — a symptom which is in effect a metaphor in which flesh or function are taken as signifying elements.

And the enigmas which desire seems to pose for a “natural philosophy” — its frenzy mocking the abyss of the infinite, the secret collusion by which it obscures the pleasure of knowing and of joyful domination, these amount to nothing more than that derangement of the instincts that comes from being caught on the rails — eternally stretching forth towards the desire for something else — of metonymy. Wherefore its “perverse” fixation at the very suspension-point of the signifying chain where the memory-screen freezes and the fascinating image of the fetish petrifies.

There is no other way to conceive the indestructibility of unconscious desire, when there is no natural need which, when prevented from satisfying itself, isn't dissipated even if it means the destruction of the organism itself. It is in a memory, comparable to what they call by that name in our modern thinking-machines (which are in turn based on an electronic realization of the signifying compound), it is in this sort of memory that is found that chain which insists on reproducing itself in the process of transference, and which is the chain of dead desire.

It is the truth of what this desire was in its history which the patient cries out through his symptom, as Christ said that the stones themselves would have cried out if the children of Israel had not lent them their voice.

And that is why only psychoanalysis allows us to differentiate within memory the function of recall. Rooted in the signifier, it resolves the Platonic puzzles of reminiscence through the ascendancy of the historic in man.

One has only to read the “Three Essays on Sexuality” to observe, in spite of the pseudo-biological glosses with which it is decked out for popular consumption, that Freud there derives any accession to the object from the dialectic of the return.

Starting from Hölderlin's *voστος* Freud will arrive less than twenty years later at Kierkegaard's repetition; that is, through submitting his thought solely to the humble but inflexible consequences of the talking cure, he was unable ever to escape the living servitudes which led him from the regal principle of the Logos to re-thinking the mortal Empedoclean antinomies.

And how else are we to conceive the recourse of a man of science to a *Deus ex machina* than on that other stage of which he speaks as the dream place, a *Deus ex machina* only less derisory for the fact that it is revealed to the spectator that the machine directs the director? How else can we imagine that a scientist of the nineteenth century, unless we realize that he had to bow before the force of evidence that overwhelmed his prejudices, put more stock in his *Totem and Taboo* than in all his other works, with its obscene and ferocious figure of the primordial father, not to be exhausted in the expiation of Oedipus' blindness, and before which the ethnologists of today bow as before the growth of an authentic myth?

So that imperious proliferation of particular symbolic creations, such as what are called the sexual theories of the child, which supply the motivation down to the smallest detail of neurotic compulsions, these reply to the same necessities as do myths.

Likewise, to speak of the precise point we are treating in my seminars on Freud, little Hans, left in the lurch at the age of five by his symbolic environment, and suddenly forced to face the enigma of his sex and his existence, under the direction of Freud and of his father, Freud's disciple, developed in a mythic form, around the signifying crystal of his phobia, all the permutations possible on a limited number of signifiers.

The operation shows that even on the individual level the solution of the impossible is brought within man's reach by the exhaustion of all possible forms of the impossibilities encountered in solution by recourse to the signifying equation. It is a striking demonstration for the clarifying of this labyrinth of observation which so far has only been used as a source of demolished fragments. We should be struck also with the fact that the coextensivity of the unfolding of the symp-

tom and of its curative resolution shows the true nature of neurosis: whether phobic, hysterical or obsessive, a neurosis is a question which being poses for the subject "from the place where it was before the subject came into the world" (Freud's phrase which he used in explaining the Oedipal complex to little Hans).

The "being" referred to is that which appears in a lightning moment in the void of the verb "to be" and I said that it poses its question for the subject. What does that mean? It does not pose it *before* the subject, since the subject cannot come to the place where it is posed, but it poses it *in place* of the subject, that is, in that place it poses the question *with* the subject, as one poses a problem *with* a pen, or as man in antiquity thought *with* his soul.

It is only in this way that Freud fits the ego into his doctrine. Freud defined the ego by the resistances which are proper to it. They are of an imaginary nature much in the same sense as those adaptational activities which the ethology of animal behavior shows us in courting-pomp or combat. Freud showed their reduction in man to a narcissistic relation, which I elaborated in my essay on the mirror-stage. And he grouped within it the synthesis of the perceptive functions in which the sensori-motor selections are integrated which determine for man what he calls reality.

But this resistance, essential for the solidifying of the inertias of the imaginary order which obstruct the message of the unconscious, is only secondary in relation to the specific resistances of the journey in the signifying order of the truth.

That is the reason why an exhaustion of the mechanisms of defence, which Fenichel the practitioner shows us so well in his studies of technique (while his whole reduction on the theoretical level of neuroses and psychoses to genetic anomalies in libidinal development is pure platitude), manifests itself, without Fenichel's accounting for it or realizing it himself, as simply the underside or reverse aspect of the mechanisms of the unconscious. Periphrasis, hyperbaton, ellipsis, suspension, anticipation, retraction, denial, digression, irony, these are the figures of style (Quintilian's *figurae sententiarum*); as catachresis, litotes, antonomasia, hypotyposis are the tropes, whose terms

impose themselves as the most proper for the labelling of these mechanisms. Can one really see these as mere figures of speech when it is the figures themselves which are the active principle of the rhetoric of the discourse which the patient in fact utters?

By the obstinacy with which today's psychoanalysts reduce to a sort of emotional police station the reality of the resistance of which the patient's discourse is only a cover, they have sunk beneath one of the fundamental truths which Freud rediscovered through psychoanalysis. One is never happy making way for a new truth, for it always means making our way into it: the truth demands that we bestir ourselves. We cannot even manage to get used to the idea most of the time. We get used to reality. But the truth we repress.

Now it is quite specially necessary to the scientist and the magician, and even the quack, that he be the only one to *know*. The idea that deep in the simplest (and even sick) souls there is something ready to blossom — perish the thought! but if someone seems to know as much as the savants about what we ought to make of it . . . come to our aid, categories of primitive, prelogical, archaic, or even magical thought, so easy to impute to others! It is not right that these nibblers keep us breathless with enigmas which turn out to be only malicious.

To interpret the unconscious as Freud did, one would have to be as he was, an encyclopedia of the arts and muses, as well as an assiduous reader of the *Fliegende Blätter*.²⁰ And the task is made no easier by the fact that we are at the mercy of a thread woven with allusions, quotations, puns, and equivocations. And is that our profession; to be antidotes to trifles?

Yet that is what we must resign ourselves to. The unconscious is neither primordial nor instinctual; what it knows about the elementary is no more than the elements of the signifier.

The three books that one might call canonical with regard to the unconscious — the *Traumdeutung*, the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and *Wit in its Relation to the Unconscious* — are but a web

²⁰A German comic newspaper of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Trans.)

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of examples whose development is furnished by the formulas of connection and substitution (though carried to the tenth degree by their particular complexity – the rundown of them is sometimes given by Freud outside the text); these are the formulas we give to the signifier in its *transference*-function. For in the *Traumdeutung* it is in the sense of such a function that the term *Übertragung*, or transference, is introduced, which only later will give its name to the mainspring of the intersubjective link between analyst and analyzed.

Such diagrams (of the various transfers of the signifier) are not only constitutive of each of the symptoms in a neurosis, but they alone make possible the understanding of the thematic of its course and resolution. The great observations of analyses which Freud gave amply demonstrate this.

To fall back on data that are more limited but more apt to furnish us with the final seal to bind up our proposition, let me cite the article on fetishism of 1927,²¹ and the case Freud reports there of a patient who, to achieve sexual satisfaction, needed something shining on the nose (*Glanz auf der Nase*); analysis showed that his early, English-speaking years had seen the displacement of the burning curiosity which he felt for the phallus of his mother, that is for that eminent failure-to-be the privileged signification of which Freud revealed to us, into a *glance at the nose* in the forgotten language of his childhood, rather than a *shine on the nose*.

That a thought makes itself heard in the abyss, that is an abyss open before all thought – and that is what provoked from the outset resistance to psychoanalysis. And not, as is commonly said, the emphasis on man's sexuality. This latter is after all the dominant object in the literature of the ages. And in fact the more recent evolution of psychoanalysis has succeeded by a bit of comical legerdemain in turning it into a quite moral affair, the cradle and trysting-place of attraction and oblativity. The Platonic setting of the soul, blessed and illuminated, rises straight to paradise.

The intolerable scandal in the time before Freudian sexuality

²¹*Fetischismus*, G.W., XIV, p. 311.

was sanctified was that it was so “intellectual.” It was precisely in that that it showed itself to be the worthy ally of the terrorists plotting to ruin society.

At a time when psychoanalysts are busy remodeling psychoanalysis into a right-thinking movement whose crowning expression is the sociological poem of the autonomous ego, and by this I mean what will identify, for those who understand me, bad psychoanalysts, this is the term they use to deprecate all technical or theoretical research which carries forward the Freudian experience along its authentic lines: *intellectualization* is the word — execrable to all those who, living in fear of being tried and found wanting by the wine of truth, spit on the bread of men, although their slaver can no longer have any effect other than that of leavening.

III. Being, the letter and the other

Is what thinks in my place then another I? Does Freud’s discovery represent the confirmation on the psychological level of Manichaeism?²²

In fact there is no confusion on this point: what Freud’s researches led us to is not a few more or less curious cases of split personality. Even at the heroic epoch we were talking about, when, like the animals in fairy stories, sexually talked, the demonic atmosphere that such an orientation might have given rise to never materialized.²³

The end which Freud’s discovery proposes for man was defined by him at the apex of his thought in these moving terms: *Wo es war, soll Ich werden*. I must come to the place where that (id) was.

The goal is one of reintegration and harmony, I could even say of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*).

But if we ignore the self’s radical ex — centricity to itself with which man is confronted, in other words, the truth discovered by Freud, we shall falsify both the order and methods of psychoanalytic

²²One of my Colleagues went so far in this direction as to wonder if the Id of the last phase wasn’t in fact the “bad Ego.”

²³Note, none the less, the tone with which one spoke in that period of the “elfin pranks” of the unconscious; a work of Silberer’s is called, *Der Zufall und die Koboldstreiche des Unbewussten* — completely anachronistic in the context of our present soul-managers.

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mediation; we shall make of it nothing more than the compromise operation which it has effectively become, namely just what the letter as well as the spirit of Freud's work most repudiates. For since he constantly invoked the notion of compromise as the main support of all the miseries which analysis is meant to help, we can say that any recourse to compromise, explicit or implicit, will necessarily disorient psychoanalytic action and plunge it into darkness.

Neither does it suffice, moreover, to associate oneself with the moralistic tartufferies of our times or to be forever spouting something about the "total personality" in order to have said anything articulate about the possibility of mediation.

The radical heteronomy which Freud's discovery shows gaping within man can never again be covered over without whatever is used to hide it being fundamentally dishonest.

Then who is this other to whom I am more attached than to myself, since, at the heart of my assent to my own identity it is still he who wags me?

Its presence can only be understood at a second degree of otherness which puts it in the position of mediating between me and the double of myself, as it were with my neighbor.

If I have said elsewhere that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other (with a capital O), I meant by that to indicate the beyond in which the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire of recognition.

In other words this other is the Other which my lie invokes as a gage of the truth in which it thrives.

By which we can also see that the dimension of truth emerges only with the appearance of language.

Prior to this point, we can recognize in psychological relations which can be easily isolated in the observation of animal behavior the existence of subjects, not on account of any projective mirage, the phantoms of which a certain type of psychologist delights in hacking to pieces, but simply on account of the manifest presence of intersubjectivity. In the animal hidden in his lookout, in the well-laid trap of certain others, in the feint by which an apparent straggler leads a

bird of prey away from a fugitive band, we see something more emerge than in the fascinating display of mating or combat ritual. Yet there is nothing even there which transcends the function of decoy in the service of a need, nor which affirms a presence in that Beyond where we think we can question the designs of Nature.

For there even to be a question (and we know that it is one Freud himself posed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*), there must be language.

For I can decoy my adversary by means of a movement contrary to my actual plan of battle, and this movement will have its deceiving effect only insofar as I produce it in reality and for my adversary.

But in the propositions with which I open peace negotiations with him, what my negotiations propose to him is situated in a third place which is neither my words nor my interlocutor.

This place is none other than the area of signifying convention, of the sort revealed in the comedy of the sad plaint of the Jew to his crony: "Why do you tell me you are going to Cracow so I'll believe you are going to Lvov, when you are really going to Cracow?"

Of course the troop-movement I just spoke of could be understood in the conventional context of game-strategy where it is in function of a rule that I deceive my adversary, but in that case my success is evaluated within the connotation of betrayal, that is, in relation to the Other who is the guarantee of Good Faith.

Here the problems are of an order the basic heteronomy of which is completely misunderstood if it is reduced to an "awareness of the other" by whatever name we call it. For the "existence of the other" having once upon a time reached the ears of the Midas of psychoanalysis through the partition which separates him from the Privy Council of phenomenology, the news is now bruited through the reeds: "Midas, King Midas is the other of his patient. He himself has said it."

What sort of breakthrough is that? The other, what other?

The young André Gide, defying the landlady to whom his mother had confided him to treat him as a responsible being, opening with

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a key (false only in that it opened all locks of the same make) the lock which this lady took to be a worthy signifier of her educational intentions, and doing it with ostentation in her sight – what “other” was he aiming at? She who was supposed to intervene and to whom he would then say: “Do you think my obedience can be secured with a ridiculous lock?” But by remaining out of sight and holding her peace until that evening in order, after primly greeting his return, to lecture him like a child, she showed him not just another with the face of anger, but another André Gide who is no longer sure, either then or later in thinking back on it, of just what he really meant to do – who’s own truth has been changed by the doubt thrown on his good faith.

Perhaps it would be worth our while pausing a moment over this dominion of confusion which is none other than that in which the whole human opera-buffa plays itself out, in order to understand the ways in which analysis can proceed not just to restore an order but to found the conditions for the possibility of its restoration.

Kern unseres Wesen, the nucleus of our being, but it is not so much that Freud commands us to seek it as so many others before him have with the empty adage “Know thyself” – as to reconsider the ways which lead to it, and which he shows us.

Or rather that which he proposes for us to attain is not that which can be the object of knowledge, but that (doesn’t he tell us as much?) which creates our being and about which he teaches us that we bear witness to it as much and more in our whims, our aberrations, our phobias and fetishes, as in our vaguely civilized personalities.

Folly, you are no longer the object of the ambiguous praise with which the sage decorated the impregnable burrow of his terror; and if after all he finds himself tolerably at home there, it is only because the supreme agent forever at work digging its galleries and labyrinths is none other than reason, the very Logos which he serves.

So how do you imagine that a scholar with so little talent for the “engagements” which solicited him in his age (as they do in all ages), that a scholar such as Erasmus held such an eminent place in the

revolution of a Reformation in which man has much of a stake in each man as in all men?

The answer is that the slightest alteration in the relation between man and the signifier, in this case in the procedures of exegesis, changes the whole course of history by modifying the lines which anchor his being.

It is in precisely this way that Freudianism, however misunderstood it has been, and confused the consequences, to anyone capable of perceiving the changes we have lived through in our own lives, is seen to have founded an intangible but radical revolution. No need to collect witnesses to the fact:²⁴ everything involving not just the human sciences, but the destiny of man, politics, metaphysics, literature, art, advertising, propaganda, and through these even the economy, everything has been affected.

Is all this anything more than the unharmonized effects of an immense truth in which Freud traced for us a clear path? What must be said, however, is that any technique which bases its claim on the mere psychological categorization of its object is not following this path, and this is the case of psychoanalysis today except insofar as we return to the Freudian discovery.

Likewise the vulgarity of the concepts by which it recommends itself to us, the embroidery of Freudery which is no longer anything but decoration, as well as the bad repute in which it seems to prosper, all bear witness to its fundamental denial of its founder.

Freud, by his discovery, brought within the circle of science the boundary between being and the object which seemed before to mark its outer limit.

That this is the symptom and the prelude of a reexamination of the situation of man in the existent such as has been assumed up to the present by all our postulates of knowledge — don't be content, I beg of you, to write this off as another case of Heideggerianism, even

²⁴To pick the most recent in date, Francois Mauriac, in the *Figaro Litteraire* of May 25, excuses himself for not "narrating his life." If no one these days can undertake to do that with the old enthusiasm, the reason is that, "a half century since, Freud, whatever we think of him" has already passed that way. And after being briefly tempted by the old saw that this is only the "history of our body," Mauriac returns to the truth that his sensitivity as a writer makes him face: to write the history of oneself is to write the confession of the deepest part of our neighbors' souls as well.

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prefixed by a neo- which adds nothing to the trashcan style in which currently, by the use of his ready-made mental jetsam, one excuses oneself from any real thought.

When I speak of Heidegger, or rather when I translate him, I at least make the effort to leave the word he proffers us its sovereign significance.

If I speak of being and the letter, if I distinguish the other and the Other, it is only because Freud shows me that they are the terms to which must be referred the effects of resistance and transfer against which, in the twenty years I have engaged in what we all call after him the impossible practice of psychoanalysis, I have done unequal battle. And it is also because I must help others not to lose their way there.

It is to prevent the field of which they are the inheritors from becoming barren, and for that reason to make it understood that if the symptom is a metaphor, it is not a metaphor to say so, no more than to say that man's desire is a metonymy. For the symptom *is* a metaphor whether one likes it or not, as desire *is* a metonymy for all that men mock the idea.

Finally, if I am to rouse you to indignation that, after so many centuries of religious hypocrisy and philosophical bravado, nothing valid has yet been articulated on what links metaphor to the question of being and metonymy to its lack, there must be an object there to answer to that indignation both as its provocator and its victim: it is humanistic man and the credit, affirmed beyond reparation, which he has drawn on his intentions.

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