

Chapter 5
*The Agency of the Letter
 in the Unconscious
 or Reason Since Freud*

OVERVIEW

This essay deserves a special place among the papers selected for this collection, partly because it articulates, more fully than any other single essay available to us here, Lacan's fundamental thesis that the unconscious is "structured like a language," partly because it is slightly more readable than the rest. The reason for this (and Lacan almost apologizes for the fact) is that in its present form it finds a place midway between the genre of the spoken word and the genre of the written text.

Generally speaking, the genre of the spoken word for Lacan is more easily comprehensible by the auditor than the genre of the written text, which is intended to be read rather than heard. Editing the latter permits a "kind of tightening up" that Lacan likes "in order to leave the reader no other way out than the way in"—a way that Lacan prefers "to be difficult" (1977, p. 146/493). In this much, at least, he succeeds admirably! The

present essay, though written down after it was delivered, happily escapes such strenuous redaction and retains some of the original rhythms (*mesures*) of the spoken word essential to shaping the response Lacan intends.

At any rate, the invitation to address the *Fédération des étudiants ès lettres* offers an especially appropriate occasion to discuss the role of the *letter* in the unconscious. For the commitment of these students to the world of letters (i.e., literature) recalls the primary place that Freud assigned to literature in the formation of the psychoanalyst—an insistence that is overlooked by many present-day analysts. Yet how can they fail to recognize its importance when their "whole experience must find in speech alone its instrument, its content, its material, and even the background noise of its uncertainties" (1977, p. 147/494)?

I

The meaning of the letter

Lacan's purpose in these pages is to discuss the function (*instance*) of the letter in structuring the unconscious—a conception that challenges, of course, the notion of the unconscious as "seat of the instincts." How is "letter" to be understood here? Quite "literally" as "that material support that concrete discourse borrows from language" (1977, p. 147/495), where "concrete discourse" is taken to be the "speech" of an individual subject and "language" the universal structure that preexists "the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it" (1977, p. 148/495). Language, thus understood as structure, precedes and founds the social patterns of a community as well as its historical "discourse." This structure, Lacan admits, is discernible through the methods of scientific linguistics as these have developed under the inspiration of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure's fundamental position is that a language is made up of signs, in which the signifying component (e.g., acoustic image) and signified component (e.g., mental concept) are related only arbitrarily (i.e., not necessarily).

But the import of “this primordial distinction [between signifier and signified] goes well beyond the discussion concerning the arbitrariness of the sign” (1977, p. 149/497), so much so that the bar that separates signifier and signified in the formula S/s may be conceived as “a barrier resisting signification” (1977, p. 149/497). What Lacan seems to be insisting on is that not only is the relation between signifier and signified arbitrary, but there is no one-to-one correspondence between them at all (as the logical positivists would like to maintain)—still less between the signifier and the “thing” referred to. The hard fact is that “no signification can be sustained other than by reference to another signification” (1977, p. 150/498).

To exemplify this Lacan introduces an example of his own invention: two different signifiers (“Ladies” and “Gentlemen”) are located respectively above two separate doors—each signifier referring to essentially the same signified (a water closet). What differentiates these two signifiers, then, is not the content of the signified, which is common to both, but rather the chains of associative signifiers that history, culture, and social mores have assigned separately and reciprocally to the sexual differentiation implied in them.

More precisely, what is the structure of the signifier? Basically, it is composed of “ultimate differential elements” that then are combined “according to the laws of a closed order” (1977, p. 152/501). These basic units are the phonemes that, when divided into 12 sets of binary pairs (“differential couplings”), account for “the discernment of sounds in [any] given language” (1977, p. 153/501), as Jakobson and Halle (1956) have shown. It is when these sounds find written form that they constitute, in the strictest sense, the “letter” with which the whole essay deals, i.e., the rudimentary and “essentially localized structure of the signifier” (1977, p. 153/501).

As for the combination of these elements “according to the laws of a closed order,” these laws (e.g., of grammar and lexicology) function in different ways that interlink with one another to form what Lacan calls the “signifying chain”: “rings of a neck-

lace that is a ring in another necklace made of rings” (1977, p. 153/502). Yet the capacity of signifiers to convey meaning is not restricted by such laws. A signifier, for example, can “anticipate” meaning “by unfolding its dimension before it” as happens in the pregnant interruption or in the adroitly adversative “but. . .” That is why “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 signification of which it is at the moment capable,” so that we “are forced. . . to accept the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier” (1977, pp. 153–154/502).

The relation between signifier and signified is not purely linear, as if a single voice were articulating the signifiers in temporal sequence. Rather, signifiers relate to one another “vertically” as well as “horizontally,” clinging together in clusters (“anchoring points”) of sounds that in effect produce a polyphonic effect that can be “aligned along the several staves of a [musical] score” (1977, p. 154/503). Hence: “There is in effect no signifying chain that does not have, as if attached to the punctuation of each of its units, a whole articulation of relevant contexts suspended ‘vertically’, as it were, from that point” (1977, p. 154/503).

Lacan proceeds to discuss through the remainder of this first section two fundamental ways in which clusters of signifiers coalesce: through processes that the linguistic tradition calls “metonymy” on the one hand and “metaphor” on the other. Each of these processes is illustrated by an example.

Lacan introduces his treatment of metonymy by an elaborate example of the signifier “tree,” in which he recalls some of the complexities of its polyphonic resonances, beginning with the simple matter of “vowels and consonants,” then extending the associations to “symbolic contexts.” There are two points to make here: in the first place, the richness of association belongs to the signifier “tree” quite independently of any subject who uses it in speech, and such trans-subjective wealth permits the subject, “precisely in so far as [the subject has] this language in common with other subjects, that is to say, in so far as it exists

as a [natural] language, to use it in order to signify *something quite other* than what it says" (1977, p. 155/505). Second, the associative richness of the signifier "tree" accrues to it by virtue of a kind of "*word-to-word* connexion" with other signifiers, and this is what Lacan understands by metonymy.

For Lacan, then, metonymy is "the one side (*versant*) of the effective field constituted by the signifier, so that meaning can emerge there. The other side is *metaphor*" (1977, p. 156/506). What characterizes metaphor is not the connection of one word to another but the substitution of "*one word for another*" (1977, p. 157/507). The critical example here is taken from Victor Hugo's (1859) poem about "Sleeping Booz": "*His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful.*" "Sheaf" is the signifier that is substituted for another, namely, Booz himself. The connection between the two is indicated here by the word "his," thus emphasizing what is true for every metaphor, namely, that "the occulted signifier [remains] present through its (metonymic) connexion with the rest of the chain" (1977, p. 157/507). Thus, "the munificence of the sheaf" is attributed to Booz by virtue of his "accession to paternity," and it is in this attribution that the "creative spark" of this particular metaphor consists—it is here that "sense emerges from non-sense" (1977, p. 158/508). Such, then, is the other side "of the effective field constituted by the signifier, so that meaning can emerge there."

After this general treatment of metonymy and metaphor, Lacan says a word about the function of metonymy in the development of the subject. The matter is far from clear, but let it suffice for the moment to say that the dynamic of desire will find in metonymy (among other things) "the power to circumvent the obstacles of social censure" (1977, p. 158/508).

In conclusion, Lacan alludes to the classic adage, "the letter killeth while the spirit giveth life," conceding a certain basic truth in it but adding "we should also like to know how the spirit could live without the letter," for the letter "produces all the effects of truth in man without involving the spirit at all" (1977, p. 158/509). This takes us to the heart of Freud's experience of the

unconscious as Lacan understands it, and introduces the whole problem of the "decentered" self, which becomes thematic in the second section of the essay.

II

The letter in the unconscious

In this section Lacan comes to the heart of the matter: the function of the "letter" in the "unconscious" as Freud reveals it to us. But first some precisions. To begin with, the "unconscious" for Freud (hence, at issue here) does not necessarily coincide, we are told, with the "psychical" unconscious, i.e., "psychical effects" that exclude the characteristic of consciousness. Rather, at issue is the "topography" (*topique*) of the unconscious—we take this to mean the unconscious as a fundamental structure that for Lacan can ideally be formalized in algorithms (1977, p. 163/514). Second, "letter" here refers not only to the strict sense of that term mentioned above, i.e., the written form of the phonemes, but to the broad sense according to which it is taken to be the underlying structure of signification as such. Thus, Freud's conception of the unconscious is modeled on his experience of the dream as a "rebus"—a notion that Lacan (with Freud) insists must be taken literally (*à la lettre*):

This derives from the agency in the dream of that same literal (or phonematic) structure in which the signifier is articulated and analysed in discourse. 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 that are to be taken only for their value as signifiers, that is to say, in so far as they allow us to spell out the 'proverb' presented by the rebus of the dream. The linguistic structure that enables us to read dreams is the very principle of the 'significance of the dream', the *Traumdeutung* [1977, p. 159/510].

Dream-images, then, are signifiers, and signifiers are let-

ters that “spell out” the message of the dream. Accordingly, the “letter” in question here is “the same literal (or phonematic) structure in which the signifier is articulated and analysed in discourse.” Such is the fundamental principle of Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), and Freud “staked the whole of his discovery on this essential expression of his message” (1977, p. 159/509). That is why hieroglyphics were so suggestive to him — a set of images that are essentially signifiers of meaning that has nothing to do with what the images themselves pictorially represent. Hence, the discernment of meaning contained in them (and, by analogy, in a dream) resembles far less the “decoding” of a message, i.e., the conversion of an artificial convention into “natural” language, than the “deciphering” of a cryptogram, i.e., the translation of one “natural” language that (like hieroglyphics) has been lost into another (1977, p. 150/510–511).

In any case, what Freud describes as “dream-work” follows the laws by which signifiers relate to each other: “distortion” (*Entstellung*) is the “sliding of the signified under the signifier”; “condensation” (*Verdichtung*) “is the structure of the superimposition of the signifiers, which metaphor takes as its field”; “displacement” (*Verschiebung*) “is closer to the idea of that veering off of signification that we see in metonymy” (1977, p. 160/511). And the “subtle processes” by which “such logical articulations as causality, contradiction, hypothesis, etc.” find expression “are the object of a special study in Freud in which we see once more confirmed that the dream-work follows the laws of the signifier” (1977, p. 161/512).

But the crucially important function of the signifier in this conception of the unconscious was overlooked by Freud’s early followers, partly because his formalization of the nature of the unconscious preceded the “formalizations of linguistics for which one could no doubt show that it paved the way by the sheer weight of its truth” (1977, p. 162/513), partly because psychoanalysts “were fascinated exclusively by the significations revealed in the unconscious” without realizing that the “secret

attraction” of these significations was derived from a “dialectic that seemed to be immanent in them” but in fact was rooted more profoundly in the still unthematized nature of the signifier itself (1977, p. 162/513). In any case, it is the nature of the unconscious with its intrinsic relationship to the law of the signifier that accounts for the “absolute coherence” between Freud’s “technique” of free association and his “discovery” of the unconscious — whether this be considered “in the normal person or in the neurotic” (1977, p. 163/514).

At this point Lacan turns to the topography (*topique*) of the unconscious, elaborating a series of formalizations that transpose Saussure’s original formula S/s into algorithms that transcribe this relationship when the signifier refers directly to other signifiers under the guise either of metonymy (word-to-word relationships) or of metaphor (word-for-word substitution) (1977, p. 164/515). In either case, the question arises as to the place of the subject. At stake is the relationship between the unconscious as transindividual structure and the individual subject of our normal experience.

Good Frenchman that he is, Lacan begins all over again with Descartes. It is a commonplace, of course, that Descartes found his “unshakable foundation of truth” in the subject’s awareness of himself in the very process of his own thinking/doubt: “I think, therefore I am.” A philosophical analysis of this procedure, as well as the historical record of how it was subsequently embroidered with such terminology as “transcendental” and “existential,” need not concern us here. Let it suffice to say simply that, taken at face value, the formula suggests that consciousness and subjectivity are coterminous.

But this is precisely what Freud with his own version of the Copernican revolution challenges, and Lacan poses the neuralgic question thus: “Is the place that I occupy as the subject of a signifier concentric or excentric, in relation to the place I occupy as subject of the signified?” (1977, p. 165/517). The expected answer is, of course, “excentric,” for excentric circles, as opposed to concentric ones, are those that have different centers. The

sense is that the subject occupies different “places,” one the center of conscious discourse (signifiers), another the center of unconscious discourse, governed by “signifying mechanisms” that shape the signified and are quite legitimately designated as “thought” (1977, p. 165/517). This double polarity permits Lacan to relish a series of paradoxes such as: “I think [i.e., on the unconscious level] where I am not [i.e., consciously], therefore I am where I do not think” (1977, p. 166/517). The heart of the matter is that “the S and the s of the Saussurian algorithm are not on the same level” (1977, p. 166/518)—and this was the secret of Freud’s great discovery.

The secret penetrates to the very “dimension of being [of the subject]: *Kern unseres Wesen* are Freud’s own terms” (1977, p. 166/518). It is on this level that neuroses (as also myths) find their roots: “whether phobic, hysterical, or obsessive, the neurosis is a question that being poses for the subject ‘from where it was before the subject came into the world’ (Freud’s phrase, which he used in explaining the Oedipal complex to little Hans)” (1977, p. 168/520). How “being” is to be understood here is not terribly clear, still less is any possible distinction between the unconscious, the “other scene” (1977, p. 167/519), and the “being” of the self, but the term reappears in the title of the third section of the essay and we shall return to it below.

More important for the present argument is to see how the law of the signifier functions on the level of psychopathology. The mode of metaphor, for example, gives structure to the symptom, insofar as “flesh or function is taken as a signifying element” that substitutes for the “enigmatic signifier of the sexual trauma.” Between the two “there passes the spark that fixes in a symptom the signification inaccessible to the conscious subject in which that symptom may be resolved” (1977, p. 166/518).

The mode of metonymy, for its part, functions through the processes of desire. The nature of desire itself is treated elsewhere and it is not practical to delay over it now. Here it is important only to see that desire, the residue of a lost paradise, seeks its term by “eternally stretching forth towards the *desire for*

something else” (1977, p. 167/518), where the “something else” is related to a previous “something else” by means of metonymy.

But the thrust of desire is a “dialectic of return” to some lost paradise, hence essentially a “recollection.” This movement of return marked the development of Freud himself in his dogged fidelity to the “humble but inflexible consequences of the ‘talking cure’” (1977, p. 167/519). But, for our present purposes, it is perhaps more important to note how Freud, in the case of Little Hans (1909a), treated the boy’s pathology by helping him, through the mediation of the boy’s father, to develop, “around the signifying crystal of his phobia, all the permutations possible on a limited number of signifiers” (1977, p. 168/520). In fact, then, if not in theory, Freud dealt with this patient’s unconscious according to the law of the signifier that governs it.

What of the patient’s ego in all of this? Lacan introduces it apparently out of the blue and refers again to the analysis we have already seen (Chapters 1 and 2), according to which the ego is an alienating projection and its defenses essentially “imaginary inertias that it concentrates against the message of the unconscious.” What he adds here is that these defenses (as Fenichel, for example, describes them) are themselves simply “the reverse side of the mechanisms of the unconscious,” which have the form of figures of speech that are “the active principle of the rhetoric of the discourse” that is ultimately determined by the laws of the signifier (1977, p. 169/521).

If Lacan’s thesis is taken seriously, then the analyst must accept certain austere consequences. In the first place, the analyst must renounce any pretension to omniscience, for “the simplest (and even sickest) . . . [may seem] to know as much as [the analyst]” about what ought to be made of a given discourse (1977, p. 169/521), since he has equal access to the law of the signifier in the unconscious. Again, as analysts we must strive to become, as Freud was, “an encyclopedia of the arts and muses,” and be content “to be antidotes to trifles” in spending time on the “allusions, quotations, puns, and equivocations” of the patient’s discourse (1977, pp. 169–170/521). Examples of

Freud's own practice abound in what may be called his three "canonical" books on the unconscious: *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905b). There we see the early Freud in full possession of (and by) his insight, and it is instructive to note how a much more mature Freud, for example in his article on "Fetishism" (1927), follows the same form of analysis (1977, p. 170/522).

All of this adds up to a highly different conception of the Freudian unconscious from the one most readers are used to. But Lacan's position is unequivocal: "The unconscious is neither primordial nor instinctual; what it knows about the elementary is no more than the elements of the signifier" (1977, p. 170/522). In fact, as Lacan sees it, the "intolerable scandal" of Freud's discovery was not the emphasis on man's sexuality, but rather the fact that it was so "intellectual" (1977, p. 171/523) — as such a conception of the unconscious implies. For Lacan, the infallible sign of "bad psychoanalysts," then, is that they deprecate with the term "intellectualization" "all technical or theoretical research that carries forward the Freudian experience along its authentic lines," as, presumably, Lacan's own does (1977, p. 171/523).

III

The letter, being and the other

The English translation of this title loses completely the musical assonance of the French: *La lettre, l'être et l'autre*, which has to be heard rather than read to be appreciated. The aural contiguity of these three signifiers shows (through metonymy) the interconnectedness and the mutual complementarity of what is signified by them. This signified is a complex unity that, like a musical chord, attempts to sound the interior harmony of all that has been said so far. To summarize this section we shall separate out the different elements of this chord according to the sequence of signifiers in the title.

The letter

As to how "letter" is to be understood at this point we already have some idea: it is that "same literal (or phonematic) structure in which the signifier is articulated and analysed in discourse" (1977, p. 159/510)—in other words, the law of language. What is strummed out here is how central language and its laws are to all human intercourse. It is only with the appearance of language, for example, "that the dimension of truth emerges" (1977, p. 172/524), since without language even a lie would be impossible. Similarly, it is language that makes possible all questioning (1977, p. 172/525); all negotiations between human agents that reach beyond sheer behavior presuppose this "third locus which is neither my speech nor my interlocutor"—"the locus of signifying convention" (1977, p. 173/525).

But the profound role that language plays in the entire human enterprise may be seen most strikingly, perhaps, in the example of a scholar such as Erasmus when we realize that the impact he had on "the revolution of a Reformation" derived from the fact 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 moorings that anchor his being" (1977, p. 174/527). This suggests that the real reason why Freud himself has had such an earth-shaking effect, not just on the human sciences but on all aspects of contemporary Western culture, is that he, too, "is seen to have founded an intangible but radical revolution" of a very similar kind (1977, p. 174/527).

Being

So be it: "the slightest alteration in the relation between man and the signifier" modifies "the moorings that anchor [man's] being." The laws of language, then, anchor man's being: that is why the unconscious for Freud reaches down to the "*Kern unseres Wesen*, the nucleus of our being" (1977, p. 173/526). To be sure, this dimension cannot be an "object of knowledge," but "we bear

witness to it as much and more in our whims, our aberrations, our phobias and fetishes, as in our more or less civilized personalities" (1977, p. 174/526). To the extent that such a testimony can still be called "scientific," Lacan can say that "Freud brought within the circle of science the boundary between the object and being that seemed to mark its outer limit" (1977, p. 175/527).

That this mode of expression has echoes of Heidegger, Lacan is ready to admit, not by way of resorting to some "ready-made mental jetsam" by which "one excuses oneself from any real thought" but by "the effort to leave the speech he proffers us its sovereign significance" (1977, p. 175/528). But what is that "sovereign significance" for Lacan? What is clear is that Heidegger's talk of "being" bears some deep affinity with the Freudian unconscious with its languagelike structure; what is not clear is how the two are to be differentiated. In any case, the dimension of being, as also of the unconscious, is a center that is "other" than the center of conscious thought and constitutes "the self's radical ex-centricity to itself" (1977, p. 171/524). But this brings us to the third element of the essay's closing chord: "the other."

The other

Lacan poses the question sharply: referring to the paradox mentioned above ("I think where I am not," etc.), he asks, "is what thinks in my place, then, another [ego]?" (1977, p. 171/523). Certainly not, if this means a "split personality" of some sort. Well, 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 agitates me" (1977, p. 172/524)? Evidently it is not an "other" subject, nor is it discovered through an "awareness of others" (1977, p. 173/526). In terms of other subjects, the "other" in question here "can be understood only at a second degree of otherness," through which it is in a "position of mediating" between me and other subjects (1977, p. 172/525). As such, it is the "guarantor of the truth" (1977, p. 172/524) and of "Good Faith" (1977, p. 173/522).

That is why Lacan capitalizes it: "If I have said that the un-

conscious is the discourse of the Other (with a capital O) it is in order to indicate the [dimension] beyond [individual subjects]" (1977, p. 172/524). If he adds here that in this dimension "the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire for recognition," this introduces the whole problem of the nature of desire which is not otherwise thematized in this essay. We defer a discussion of this formula, then, to later. In any case, it is the otherness of *this* other that constitutes the "radical heteronomy that Freud's discovery shows gaping within man" (1977, p. 172/524).

Such, then, is the "self's radical ex-centricity to itself." What is the subject's task in the face of all this? Freud himself suggests the formula: "*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*" (There where it was, I must come to pass) (1977, p. 171/524). But this does not so much engage us to seek to "Know thyself" on the psychological level as to reconsider the ways that lead us back to this original "where" that Freud has shown us (1977, p. 174/526). To the extent that we succeed, the result is "one of reintegration and harmony, I could even say of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*)" (1977, p. 171/524).

The closing chord is resolved with one final word that brings us back to the principal issue of the entire essay, namely, that the laws of language in the unconscious are grounded in being itself: "if the symptom is a metaphor, it is not a metaphor to say so, any 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, however funny people may find the idea" (1977, p. 175/528).

MAP OF THE TEXT

Introduction.

- A. This reworking of a lecture to liberal arts students falls between writing and speech.
 1. Writing makes possible a tightening of discourse so that the reader has no way out but the way in.
 2. Speech has different rhythms "essential to the formative effect" that is sought.

- B. Literary training was designated by Freud as requisite for analysts,
1. but in the psychoanalytic journals we observe novice concerns with symbolization and language.
 2. How can today's psychoanalyst fail to recognize that "speech is the key to [the] truth"?
 - a. For from it his experience receives its instrument, framework, material, and even the static of its uncertainties.
- I. *The meaning of the letter.*
- A. Language is distinguished from speech.
1. In the unconscious, psychoanalysis discovers the entire structure of language,
 - a. whose letter is to be taken literally
 - i. in the sense of the phonemes of language used by a speaker.
 2. Language exists prior to the moment the subject speaks and should not be confused with speech's psychical and somatic functions.
 - a. The aphasias distribute their deficits according to the two slopes of the signifier (as Jakobson shows).
 - b. The subject is the serf of language and of a discourse in which he is already located at birth.
 - i. This discourse establishes tradition, which sets down the basic structures of culture, (a) and whose laws governing exchange are a function of language.
 - c. Even dialectical materialism does not view language as a superstructure.
- B. The science of linguistics has achieved objectivity through its algorithm: S/s—"the signifier over the signified."
1. This Saussurian formula expresses the primordial distinction between two orders separated by a barrier that resists signification.
 - a. It presumes the arbitrariness of the sign,

2. thus demonstrating that every signification depends on its reference to another signification.
 - a. Language covers the entire field of the signified,
 - i. constituting objects through concepts.
 - b. It is an illusion to think that the signifier serves to represent the signified.
- C. A diagram from the sexual field replaces Saussure's illustration of S/s.
1. In this example we see how the signifier becomes physically part of the signified (the sign over separate doors).
 2. In the example of the children at the railway station, the bar is materialized in the rails,
 - a. whose form suggests that its resistance may not be dialectical.
- D. The signifying domain has an articulated structure.
1. Its units are subject to a double condition:
 - a. that of "being reducible to ultimate differential elements,"
 - i. which are the phonemes;
 - b. that of being combined "according to the laws of a closed order"
 - i. to form signifying chains.
 - ii. These are laws of grammar and lexicology.
 2. Meaning does not reign supreme beyond this closed order,
 - a. for the signifier foreshadows meaning, sketching its dimension as the chain unfolds,
 - i. as is illustrated by the use of adverbs and conjunctions.
 - ii. Hence, it is only in the signifying chain that meaning "insists," for meaning is not constituted by the single element of the chain.
 3. There is imposed, then, the notion of a continual "sliding of the signified under the signifier,"
 - a. which is illustrated by Saussure's image of lines

- connecting corresponding segments of the Waters of *Genesis*.
- b. A linear conception of the way the chain of discourse is constituted has merit only in the direction of time.
 - c. Our experience instead suggests the image of "anchoring points."
 - d. Poetry reveals a polyphony like that of a musical score,
 - i. for every signifying chain has, suspended vertically from its units, whole contexts of association,
 - (a) as illustrated by the word "tree."
 - ii. For the signifier to operate, it is not necessary that it be present in the subject,
 - (a) for it has become part of the linguistic tradition.
- E. This structure of the signifying chain allows me to use it "to signify *something quite other* than what it says."
1. The figure of style through which I can do this is called metonymy,
 - a. as in the example "thirty sails."
 - b. It is based on the word-to-word connection, not on any part-to-whole relation.
 2. The other slope of the effective field of the signifier is called metaphor,
 - a. as in "*His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful.*"
 - b. Its formula is "*one word for another,*" where one signifier takes the place of the other in the signifying chain.
 - c. Metaphor occurs precisely where "sense emerges from non-sense."
 3. In metonymy we find the means of evading censorship.
 - a. We are now getting warm in our investigation of Freudian truth.

- II. *The letter in the unconscious.*
 - A. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud deals with "the letter of the discourse."
 1. As a rebus, the dream has the same literal and phonematic structure in which the signifier is articulated in discourse.
 - a. The signifier's image has nothing to do with its signification.
 - b. Only the linguistically untrained favor a symbolism derived from natural analogy.
 - c. Today's analyst must learn to decipher, not decode.
 2. The general precondition for the functioning of the dream is *distortion* or *Entstellung*.
 - a. This is "the sliding of the signified under the signifier."
 - b. It is always present in discourse,
 - c. but this action is unconscious.
 3. The two slopes of the incidence of the signifier over the signified are also found in the functioning of the dream.
 - a. *Condensation* or *Verdichtung* involves "the superimposition of the signifiers":
 - i. metaphor is its field;
 - ii. its mechanism is "connatural with poetry" (*Dichtung*).
 - b. *Displacement* or *Verschiebung* is the "veering off of signification,"
 - i. which is demonstrated in metonymy,
 - ii. and is the most appropriate device the unconscious uses to elude censorship.
 4. These two mechanisms are distinguished from their homologous role in discourse only in a regard to the means of representation.
 - a. This is a limit, imposed on the signifying material, that functions interior to the discourse,

- i. and does not reduce it to mere pictorial display.
 - b. Like charades, the dream lacks the precise meaning to represent subordinate clauses.
 - c. The rest of the dream-elaboration consists of secondary fantasies, like daydreams, which function in wish fulfillment.
- 5. The constitutive role of the signifier suffered a general misunderstanding from the beginning,
 - a. because *The Interpretation of Dreams* appeared before the formalizations of linguistics,
 - b. and because psychoanalysts were bewitched by unconscious symbolism.
 - i. Freud changed his tack to counteract this bias,
 - ii. while maintaining the dignity of the object of his discovery.
 - c. Theory and practice are no longer integrated, as they were in Freud.
- 6. In analyzing dreams, Freud intends to demonstrate the laws of the unconscious.
 - a. Dreams of the normal person or the neurotic reveal the same laws.
 - b. This unconscious is not synonymous with the psychological order,
 - i. for many psychical effects that exclude consciousness have nothing to do with the Freudian unconscious.
 - ii. And the Freudian unconscious can have somatic effects.
 - c. The topography of the unconscious is defined by the algorithm S/s,
 - i. whose formula can be applied to metonymy and metaphor.
- B. The function of the subject is crucial to our discussion.
 - 1. The Cartesian *cogito* is the historical peak of the epistemology of science.

- a. Simply criticizing it evades the notion of the subject,
 - i. which is necessary even for a science of strategy.
 - ii. It also keeps us from recognizing Freud's Copernican revolution,
 - (a) which questioned the centrality of the place man assigns himself in the universe.
- 2. Is my place as subject of a signifier concentric or excentric in regard to my place as subject of the signified?
 - a. It is not a matter of knowing whether my self-description conforms to my reality,
 - i. but instead of knowing whether I as speaker am identical with myself as spoken about.
 - b. The Cartesian *cogito* is central to the mirage that makes modern man so sure he is himself even when he has doubts about himself.
 - c. The signifying game of metonymy and metaphor goes on without my awareness.
 - d. In this way I can say, "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think."
- C. The unconscious is the kernel of our being.
 - 1. The symptom is a metaphor in which flesh or function becomes the signifying element,
 - a. whose signification is not accessible to the conscious subject.
 - 2. Desire is channeled by metonymy,
 - a. in an endless series of substitute objects.
 - 3. Myths, the sexual theories of the child, neurotic compulsions, all respond to the same necessities.
- D. The ego was defined by Freud according to its particular resistances.
 - 1. These are of an imaginary nature, lures reducible to the narcissistic relation as developed in the mirror stage.

- a. In synthesizing sensorimotor selections, the ego answers for reality, a reality suspended from duty along with the ego.
- 2. The ego concentrates imaginary inertias to resist the message of the unconscious.
- 3. Its disguises operate through a resistance that is intrinsic to discourse.
 - a. Thus the defense mechanisms are inversions of unconscious mechanisms,
 - i. whose most proper labels are Quintilian's figures of speech.
 - b. Psychoanalysts of today mistakenly describe resistance in terms of a fixed emotional state, thus losing one of Freud's truths.
 - i. Because we must make our way into the truth, it is disturbing and we repress it.
 - ii. The scientist, seer, or quack wants to be the only one to know the truth.
- E. As Freud shows, knowledge of art and literature helps in interpreting the unconscious,
 - 1. for the unconscious does not consist of instincts but of signifiers.
 - a. Freud's early works give a web of examples involving the two axes of language: connection and substitution.
 - 2. The incident of the "shine on the nose" discloses the nature of unconscious thought.
 - 3. The abyss opened by the idea of unconscious thought, and not sexuality, provoked early resistance to psychoanalysis.
 - a. Sexuality, after all, always prevailed in literature.
 - b. Ironically, recent psychoanalysis has turned sexuality into a moral affair.
 - c. Before Freudian sexuality was sanctified it was a scandal because it was so "intellectual."

- d. Today all research forwarding the authentic Freudian experience is condemned as "intellectualization."
- III. *The letter, being and the other (La lettre, l'être et l'autre).*
 - A. To account for unconscious thought, are we postulating another ego? Do we have psychological Manichaeism?
 - 1. This is not a matter of split personality,
 - a. but rather a goal: *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*,
 - b. a goal of reintegration and harmony, even of reconciliation.
 - 2. We cannot ignore "the self's radical ex-centricity to itself," i.e., the truth Freud discovered,
 - a. or else psychoanalysis becomes a compromise tactic.
 - b. Nor can we speak of the "total personality."
 - c. The gap in man caused by this radical heteronomy can be covered over only dishonestly.
 - d. Who is this other who wags me and "to whom I am more attached than to myself"?
 - B. "The unconscious is the discourse of the Other,"
 - 1. as the region where the desire that seeks to be recognized is the desire for recognition.
 - 2. The Other is "the locus of signifying convention," "the guarantor of Good Faith."
 - a. The dimension of truth emerges with the appearance of language.
 - b. Every question presupposes language.
 - i. This goes beyond the signal systems found among animals.
 - ii. This also goes beyond "an awareness of others."
 - c. The other challenges our truth, as in Gide's case.
 - C. Freud shows us the ways that lead to "the nucleus of our being," *Kern unseres Wesen*,
 - 1. not as what we know objectively, but rather as that which makes our being.
 - a. We bear witness to it in whims, phobias, fetishes,

- as well as in our civilized personalities.
- b. Madness and reason both serve the Logos.
2. Our being's moorings are modified by the slightest change in the relation between us and the signifier, as is seen when exegesis shifts its approach.
 - a. Here lies Freud's revolution, affecting everything.
 - i. This is not a matter of technique based on categories of psychology,
 - ii. or on the vulgar concepts in which its practice recommends itself.
 3. Freud brought into science the relationship between being and the object.
 - a. This is not to be dismissed as a case of neo-Heideggerianism.
 4. We refer to being and the letter and differentiate the other from the Other,
 - a. in order to deal with the effects of resistance and transference.
 - b. For it is not a metaphor to say that the symptom is a metaphor,
 - i. because "the symptom *is* a metaphor,"
 - ii. just as "desire *is* a metonymy."

NOTES TO THE TEXT

- 146/493 The translation of *l'instance* as "agency" suggests the active nature of the letter in the unconscious, but not the quality of this action. In the first English translation of this essay, Miel (1966) uses "insistence," conveying the autonomous quality of this agency. (Miel's translation is one we have drawn on, as Sheridan apparently also has in his translation of *Écrits: A Selection*.) In French, *l'instance* means "entreaty," "solicitation," "urgency," "earnestness," and "instance," with the last strengthened by the notion of the "in-stand-ing" or persistence of the letter.
- 146d/494 Speech has different meters (*mesures*)—not "tech-

- niques"—which are essential to the formative effect.
- 147g/495 The French word for "meaning" is *sens*, connoting both "sense" and "direction" or "way."
- 148b/495 For "the two sides of the signifying effect," the French text has *les deux versants de l'effet signifiant*. We prefer to translate *versants* as "slopes," to be more congruous with later expressions regarding the sliding (*glissement*) of the signified under the signifier. The reference is to the twofold character of language, the axis of selection (metaphor) and the axis of combination (metonymy) as delineated by Jakobson (1956). They view aphasia as a linguistic problem involving two basic types of speech disturbance: a deficiency in verbal selection and substitution based on similarity or a deficiency in combination and contexture based on contiguity.
- 149b/497 Saussure writes: "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. . . . I propose to retain the word *sign* [*signe*] to designate the whole and to replace *concept* and *sound-image* respectively by *signified* [*signifié*] and *signifier* [*signifiant*]" (1916, pp. 66-67).
- 150b/498 The point seems to be that the signified (the concept) is itself not a *thing*, but an aspect of language, whose meaning lies in words, other signifiers. Language, then, covers the field and in doing so it can answer or correspond to every need that can be articulated.
- The example of the word *chose* ("thing") appears in Saussure (1916, p. 95) to illustrate the change from its Latin origin *causa* ("cause," "reason," "case," or "point"). Lacan elaborates to suggest the inherent contradiction implied in any attempt to chart a univocal connection between "things" and individual words.
- Lacan's note refers to his seminar dealing with St. Augustine's "De locutionis significatione" ("On

the signification of speech”) as reported in Volume I of *Le Séminaire* (1953–1954), in which he says:

The fundamental phenomenon of the analytic revelation is this relationship of one discourse to another on which it is propped. We find manifested there this fundamental principle of semantics, that every semanteme refers to the whole of the semantic system, to the polyvalence of its uses. Furthermore, for all that is properly of language, insofar as it is human, that is to say, utilizable in speech, there is never any univocal quality to the symbol. Every semanteme always has several senses. . . every signification only refers to another signification. . . language is not made to designate things [p. 272; our translation].

He goes on to speak, following Augustine, of how “it is impossible to handle language by referring the sign to the thing on a word-by-word basis” (p. 277).

151b/500 The nominalist debate refers to the classical discussion, ancient in origin but of special importance to medieval thinkers, concerning the philosophical status of universal terms such as “man,” which seem to refer both to a class and to individual members of that class. Does such a term refer to some ontological absolute? Or to some construct of the mind? Or to nothing at all beyond the term or name (*nomen*) itself, since only individuals exist? The nominalist position holds the last of these and retains its importance for contemporary thought.

152b/500 The rails separate the two orders of signifier (Ladies/Gentlemen) and signified (the children as sexual beings). Later the rails suggest the incessant veering off of meaning found in metonymy in which desire is caught “eternally stretching forth towards the *desire for something else*” (1977, p. 167/518).

152d/501 In *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift (1726) describes how the prolonged war between the two kingdoms of Lilliput and Blefuscu originated in a dispute over whether eggs should be broken at the larger or smaller end (p. 53).

153a/501 Claude Garamond (1480–1561) designed a roman type which was influential in establishing the roman letter as standard. The Didot family spans 250 years of printing history.

153d/502 In his discussion of St. Augustine, Lacan states:

If is a conjunction of subordination. But in the sentence “the *if* displeases me,” this word is used as a noun. St. Augustine proceeds with all the rigor and analytic spirit of a modern linguist, and he shows that it is the usage in the sentence which defines the qualification of a word as part of the discourse [1953–1954, p. 274; our translation].

153g/502 The Miel translation (1966) provides a helpful note: “The 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’ ” (p. 111). The identical note, with no reference to Miel, appears in Sheridan’s translation (Lacan, 1977, p. 176).

154a/502 Saussure’s illustration appears in his discussion of the relation between thought and language (1916):

Psychologically our thought—apart from its expression in words—is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed in recognizing that without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language [p. 111].

For Saussure, the sounds that go to make up pho-

nemes are as shapeless as thought and the “mysterious fact” is that both thought and sound come together in an arbitrary manner in working out reciprocally differentiated units of language (i.e., words). He goes on to say:

In addition, . . . to consider a term as simply the union of a certain sound with a certain concept is grossly misleading. To define it in this way would isolate the term from its system; it would mean assuming that one can start from the terms and construct the system by adding them together when, on the contrary, it is from the interdependent whole that one must start and through analysis obtain its elements. . . .

Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others [pp. 113–114].

For a recent critique of Saussure on linguistic grounds, see the review essay by Marie-Laure Ryan (1979).

154c/503 It is unclear to us why the inversion of the terms “Peter hits Paul” would reverse the time of the action rather than the direction of intentionality.

155a/504 The French text has Ἐν-Πάντα. The allusion here (and later, p. 168e/520) is to Heraclitus’ *Logos* and Heidegger’s (1951) interpretation, “Logos” (which Lacan [1956] translated, as he tells us near the end of this essay, making it available in *La Psychanalyse*).

Heidegger claims that Heraclitus’ formula Ἐν-Πάντα (one-in-many [-beings]) describes the manner in which Λογος functions. As Ἐν, Λογος is the One, the Only, that unifies all beings in themselves, insofar as it gathers them into themselves, letting them lie forth in non-concealment as themselves. Because Λογος is Ἐν,

it may be called the utterly Simple. Ἐν is likened to a lightning-bolt, by reason of which beings are lit up in their Being [Richardson, 1963, pp. 492–493].

155d/504 The “level of the signified” is the “whole articulation of relevant contexts suspended ‘vertically’ ” (1977, p. 154/503)—the polyphony that resonates with the signifier, i.e., the richness of language itself, going beyond the individual subject and certainly going beyond conscious awareness.

155f/505 Lemaire (1970) writes of metaphor and metonymy as “the two linguistic phenomena responsible for the autonomy of the signifier, or for the supremacy of the signifier over the signified in language. This supremacy of the signifier was defined by language’s peculiar aptitude for signifying something other than what it is literally saying” (p. 191). Lacan later elaborates the role of metaphor and metonymy as slopes for the sliding of the signified under the signifier, and thereby accounts for the nature of dream distortion (1977, p. 160/511). These language processes operate unconsciously, thus raising the question about the place of the subject, which he takes up again later.

156f/506 The Loewenstein (1956) article referred to in Lacan’s note (1977, p. 177/506) contains a “personal communication” footnote mentioning Jakobson.

156h/506 Both the French text and Sheridan’s citation in footnote 21 contain an error; *n’était pas* should read *n’était point* (Hugo, 1859). See *Écrits* (1966, p. 892), for additional commentary by Lacan in which he makes explicit the link between “His sheaf” and the phallus.

158d/508 The non-sense of the sheaf being neither miserly nor spiteful makes sense only because the subject, Booz, has gone underground to the level of the signified, displaced by the new signifier, “the sheaf”; in jokes

there is an irruption of non-sense “from below” that disrupts the sense of the conscious discourse.

158f/508 This book by Strauss (1952), a political philosopher, is also discussed by Gadamer (1960) in the context of how to understand a text:

Is not conscious distortion, camouflage and concealment of the proper meaning in fact the rare extreme case of a frequent, even normal situation? — just as persecution (whether by civil authority or the church, the inquisition etc) is only an extreme case when compared with the intentional or unintentional pressure that society and public opinion exercise on human thought. Only if we are conscious of the uninterrupted transition from one to the other are we able to estimate the hermeneutic difficulty of Strauss’ problem. How are we able to establish clearly that a distortion has taken place? Thus, in my opinion, it is by no means clear that, when we find contradictory statements in a writer, it is correct to take the hidden meaning — as Strauss thinks — for the true one. There is an unconscious conformism of the human mind to considering what is universally obvious as really true. And there is, against this, an unconscious tendency to try extreme possibilities, even if they cannot always be combined into a coherent whole. The experimental extremism of Nietzsche bears irrefutable witness to this. Contradictions are an excellent criterion of truth but, unfortunately, they are not an unambiguous criterion when we are dealing with hermeneutics [p. 488].

158h/509 Lacan begins his *Écrits* (1966) with “The Seminar on [Poe’s] ‘The Purloined Letter.’ ” This has been translated by Mehlman (1972b).

159c/509 There is a discrepancy between the letters cited in the French text (107 and 119) and in Miel’s (1966) translation (107 and 109); the latter are repeated in the *Selection* (1977). The letters appear in Freud’s *The Origins of Psychoanalysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes* (1887–1902). In letter 107, Freud wrote, “I cannot afford to keep to myself the finest — and probably the only lasting — discovery that I have made” (p. 281); in letter 119: “The climax of my achievements in dream interpretation comes in this installment” (p. 299).

159d/510 In his first sentence Freud does not mention the word “rebus” but states that by using his procedure “every dream reveals itself as a psychical structure which has a meaning” (“jeder Traum sich als ein sinnvolles psychisches Gebilde herausstellt”) (1900a, p. 1; 1900b, p. 1). The rebus appears at the beginning of Chapter VI, in a context buzzing with linguistic referents: the dream-thoughts and dream-content are like two different languages (*Sprachen*), the dream-content “seems like a transcript [*Übertragung*, ‘transference’] of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression [*Ausdrucksweise*, ‘style’], whose characters [*Zeichen*, ‘signs’] and syntactic laws [*Fügungsgesetze*] it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation [*Übersetzung*]. . . . The dream-content . . . is expressed as it were in a pictographic script [*Bilderschrift*], the characters of which [*deren Zeichen*] have to be transposed [*zu übertragen sind*] individually into the language [*die Sprache*] of the dream-thoughts” (1900a, p. 277; 1900b, p. 283–284). He goes on to say we would be led into error if we tried to read (*lesen*) these signs (*Zeichen*) as pictures instead of according to their symbolic relation (*nach ihrer Zeichenbeziehung*, “according to their character as signs”). An example of a rebus, a picture-puzzle, is

then given, and Freud instructs us to “try to replace each separate element by a syllable or word [*eine Silbe oder ein Wort*] that can be represented by that element in some way or other. The words [*Die Worte*] which are put together in this way are no longer nonsensical [*sind nicht mehr sinnlos*] but may form a poetical phrase [*Dichterspruch*] of the greatest beauty and significance” (1900a, p. 278; 1900b, p. 284).

For a careful analysis of the role of language, especially in Freud’s early works, see Forrester (1980), whose book is presented, in part, as a prolegomena to understanding Lacan’s reading of Freud.

- 160b/510 In discussing representation by symbols, Freud wrote: “I should like to utter an express warning against over-estimating the importance of symbols [*Symbole*] in dream-interpretation, against restricting the work of translating dreams merely to translating symbols and against abandoning the technique of making use of the dreamer’s associations” (1900a, pp. 359–360).
- 160f/511 We prefer the translation, “the two slopes of the incidence of the signifier” (*les deux versants de l’incidence du signifiant*).
- 161b/512 Freud’s Chapter VI, Section I deals with secondary revision (1900a, pp. 488ff.).
- 162g/513 The “hieroglyphic aviary” appears to refer back to the “ornithological specimens” (1977, p. 159/510), whose role as signifiers is overlooked.
- 164a-b/
515 These difficult formulas we shall attempt to illustrate by Lacan’s own example of the fetish (1977, p. 170/522), in which the patient had to see a “shine on the nose (*Glanz auf der Nase*)” to obtain sexual satisfaction. *Glanz* (shine) in the patient’s original English was “glance.” The contiguity of sound establishes a metonymic link between *Glanz*/*glance at the nose*, while the similarity of shape establishes a metaphoric link between the nose and phallus. In the metonymy

desire is chained from the original glance at the mother in sexual curiosity to the shine (*Glanz*) needed for sexual satisfaction, both words forming part of the word-to-word chain “glance (*Glanz*) at the nose.” The intervals between words concretize (and actually allow for the chaining of) the gap, the want-to-be (*manque à être*) out of which desire originates and which the chain of signifiers perpetuates (since the discourse never fills or closes the gap but only conceals it). The bar is not crossed in metonymy (i.e., the signified is never attained) since there is a continual veering off of meaning. In this example the meaning emerges only in the metaphoric structure in which “nose” is a substitute signifier for “phallus,” the primary signifier of desire, now the signified which has crossed the bar.

- 164c/516 Earlier (1977, p. 153f/505), Lacan touched on the role of the subject in language’s ability to signify something other than what it says; it is not a matter of the subject deliberately disguising his thought, but of an unconscious chain of signifiers set up by metaphor. Laplanche and Leclaire (1960) quote Lacan: “Metaphor must be defined as the implantation, into a chain of signifiers, of another signifier, by dint of which the one it replaces falls to the rank of signified, and, as latent signifier, perpetuates the interval onto which another chain of signifiers can be grafted” (p. 156). The subject as conscious thinker has no place in this process of associative chaining.
- 165a/516 The Latin phrase reads: “Where I think ‘I think, therefore I am,’ there I am.” Lacan counters this with: “I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think” (1977, p. 166/517).
- 165c/516 The problem is the relationship between the conscious subject and thought. This problem would be of special interest to Lacan’s university audience,

- seated in the Descartes Amphitheatre of the Sorbonne (1977, p. 176, n. 3/494, n. 1). Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (1973, p. 19) call attention to Lacan's address as being his first *intervention véritable* in a university.
- 165d/516 In his paper "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis" (1917), Freud describes how humanity's narcissism has "suffered three severe blows" (p. 139), first, from Copernicus' challenge to the earth's central place in the universe (the cosmological blow), second, from Darwin's challenge to man's presumption of superiority to other animals (the biological blow), and, third, from the challenge of the Freudian unconscious to the ego's mastery in its own house (the psychological blow).
- 166c/517 Desire is split in the unconscious processes of metonymy (related to a lack of being in the gaps of the chain of the signifiers) and metaphor (related to a refusal or denial of the signifier repressed below the bar).
- 167f/519 These allusions all appear to relate to the earlier discussions of what the subject's "desire has been in his history." Hölderlin's *nostos* refers to his poem "Homecoming/To the Kinsmen," suggestive of nostalgia (and perhaps Lacan is also alluding to Heidegger's [1943] meditation on Hölderlin and a view of temporality as the future coming through the past). On the other hand, the notion of repetition in Kierkegaard (1843) is forward-looking (see Nordentoft, 1972, p. 106). Lacan seems to be saying that Freud, ever-faithful to the basically linguistic nature of his discovery, was able to discern in the history of the subject the movement of desire (made apparent in symptoms, dreams, and parapraxes) as structured by unconscious signifiers and by radical finitude. Regarding *Logos*, see note 155a and the end of the Overview in Chapter 8 (discussing Lacan's reference

- to *Logos* on p. 291/695). Empedocles was discussed earlier (see note 102e).
- 168d/520 Freud's phrase is "Long before he was in the world" (1909a, p. 42).
- 169a/520 The translation should read, "Freud seems to abound in the delegation which is traditionally made to it [the ego] of answering for reality" ("Freud. . . paraisse abonder dans la délégation qui lui est faite traditionnellement de répondre de la réalité"). Suspension (*le suspens*) connotes being suspended from duty (like a priest or policeman); when the ego is so treated, its "reality" of perceptual synthesis is also suspended.
- 169b/520 The subject is a displacement at least in the sense that he becomes caught up in the signifying chain and subject to the metonymy of desire.
- 169c/521 To the earlier definitions (note 58a) of some of these terms, we now add these:
- Periphrasis* uses a longer phrasing in place of a possible shorter expression.
- Suspension* defers the principal idea to the end of a sentence or paragraph.
- Litotes* emphasizes by understatement, by indicating the negative of its opposite ("not many" for "a few").
- Hypotyposis* is a vivid, picturesque description.
- (The above was drawn from *Webster's New International Dictionary* [1960] and *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* [1974]).
- 170e/522 After describing the fetish (see note 164a-b), Freud (1927) wrote:

When now I announce that the fetish is a substitute for the penis, I shall certainly create disappointment; so I hasten to add that it is not a substitute for any chance penis, but for a particular and quite special penis that had been ex-

tremely important in early childhood but had later been lost. That is to say, it should normally have been given up, but the fetish is precisely designed to preserve it from extinction. To put it more plainly: the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and — for reasons familiar to us — does not want to give up.

What happened, therefore, was that the boy refused to take cognizance of the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not possess a penis. No, that could not be true: for if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger; and against that there rose in rebellion the portion of his narcissism which Nature has, as a precaution, attached to that particular organ [pp. 152–153].

- 171c/523 To minimize ambiguity, since the French has *un autre moi*, we translate, "Is what thinks in my place, then, another ego?"
- 172f/524 The relation between the recognition of desire and the desire for recognition is a repeated theme (see 1977, pp. 141d/431, 260c–d/623).
- 173d/525 In *The Praise of Folly*, Erasmus makes reference to Midas in his second paragraph (1509, p. 43). Dionysus gave King Midas the power to turn everything he touched into gold because he had befriended Silenus, the oldest of the satyrs. When even his food was affected, he begged to be relieved of his power. He was also given ass's ears by Apollo for preferring the music of Pan to that of Apollo. Midas hid his shame under a high cap so that only his barber knew. The secret, however, was uttered into a hole in the ground whence reeds grew, and whenever the wind blew they voiced his secret folly.

There also appears to be a dig at Husserlian phenomenology. See Husserl's Fifth Meditation in his *Cartesian Meditations*, where the question is posed: "How can my ego, within his peculiar ownness, constitute under the name, 'experience of something other,' precisely something *other*" (1929, p. 94).