LOST IN COGNITION

Psychoanalysis and the Cognitive Sciences

Éric Laurent

Translated from the French by A. R. Price

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CHAPTER FIVE

On the origin of the Other and the post-traumatic object

The following lecture was delivered at the Institut des Sciences Cognitives in Lyon on 6 November 2004 and was later published as "L'origine de l'Autre et l'objet post-traumatique" in the Bulletin de l'ACF Rhône-Alpes, *issue 88/89, November 2006.*

I would like to thank the organisers of this conference for providing me with the opportunity to delight with you in defying a prohibition, one that was laid down by the French Society of Linguistics in 1886 and which pertains to the origin of tongues, the very same prohibition of which Éric Saïer has shown us a façsimile,[1] knowing full well the indubitable adaptive advantage I would draw from it.

Jakobson's structuralism respected this watchword. Linguistics still harboured the memory of the cumbrous debate on the origin of tongues, which compared the respective ages of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, and the search for the perfect language, the Abrahamic tongue (see Eco, 1995; Milner, 2002). Only the refusal of this problematic paved the way for the success of the comparative grammar of the Indo-European languages.

Likewise, the question of the origin of civilisations and their classification in terms of evolution (measured in relation to their supposed

starting-point) encumbered ethnological thought with a certain quantity of dross, for example, the notorious myth of pre-logical mentality which brought together fool, child and savage in a supposed proximity to the point of origin.

Chomsky's work programme, which saw syntax as an organ, opened the doors that this prohibition had slammed shut. If it is an organ, then it rightfully falls within the remit of evolutionary theory. Chomsky's refusal to this day to credit with any interest the contributions from the evolutionary perspective on language does reformulate, however, one of the pillars of the linguistic heritage. It is against this backdrop that we can read the importance of the recent paleontological dating that has been presented here by Bernard Victorri and Éric Saïer. They link the debate on the origin of mankind to the question of language. To this we must add the recent archaeological discoveries which in one fell swoop have pushed back by some 30,000 years the date for the first known fabrication of jewellery by African *homo sapiens* (Allemand, 2004, p. 47).[2] So too we must add the recent dynamic developments in human sciences such as the cognitive psychology that has been put together in correlation with the Chomskyan research programme and the evolutionary psychology that has been constructed as a derivation on bio-sociology. At a time when Chomskyism seems to be setting the pace, these disciplines are taking up the baton. This dynamism is undoubtedly a major factor behind the title and the originality of the conference that brings us together today.

Symbol-use as the sign of the origin of humankind has since Darwin set at least three camps at odds: those who side for a progressive refinement of the biological apparatus that enables humans to speak; those who side for its sudden genetic mutation; and the advocates of mixed solutions and more varied adjustments. For the moment, I won't be dealing with the place and role in this process of the distinction between Theory of Mind (ToM) and the capacity to speak as such; nor the distinction as to whether Theory of Mind is selected as a "meme" or whether it is the product of a module. Nor is it certain that psychoanalysis should have any need of the syntax organ as a condition for the unconscious. The materialism of the inscription of apparatuses of subjectivity is quite sufficient for this condition (Miller & Etchegoyen, 1996, p. 33).

In its Freudian tradition, psychoanalysis sided for sudden breakpoints. This is Freud's strange Lamarcko-Darwinism that reads the

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cause of a generalised anxiety in the glacial periods and the loss of the subject's environment. We will be coming back to this. Lacan took up this tradition by underlining the sudden cut-off point produced by the coupling between language and living being, a veritable trauma for the human species. He generalises Freudian castration by separating it from any notion of a threat voiced by an agent (the father of the horde or the *paterfamilias*) and reads human sexuality as a post-traumatic reconstruction. If we allow ourselves a slight exaggeration, we could say that human sexuation breaks with the animal unity of the species and produces two radically separate sub-species. With language, each of these two sub-species loses the definition of its partner and then has to go via the vast detour of language in order to retrieve the lost object and the remainder of jouissance that is reserved for it in the fantasmatic machinery. This is also a way of underlining the fact that jouissance, which implies a continuum between pleasure and what lies beyond the pleasure principle, cannot be reduced to incentive motivation in the limbic system.

Symptom, fantasy, and trauma were always linked for Freud, albeit in a distinct manner. At the outset, in 1895, Freud understood neurosis and the syndrome of traumatic repetition as being bound together. In his description of anxiety hysteria he mentions night waking followed by a syndrome of repetition and nightmares.[3] It was only after having isolated the death drive that he would separate recurrent dreams from hysteria, and would speak, with respect to the syndrome of traumatic repetition, of a failure of neurotic repetition, a failure of the defences, and a failure of the "protective shield against stimuli" (Freud, 1920g). In 1926, when he modifies the sense of "the trauma of birth" first identified by his pupil Otto Rank, Freud attributes the energetic conceptions that he had previously entertained to moments of anxiety in the face of essential loss. Freud distinguishes with great precision between birth and what arises from the traumatic loss of the maternal object properly speaking. He dares to read the necessary loss of the mother as the model for all other traumas.[4] It is against this backdrop that we should understand the aphorism from an almost contemporary text, the 1925 article "Negation", where the aim is "not to *find*" the object, but always "to *refind* such an object". It is always to be found against the backdrop of a primordial loss (Freud, 1925h).[5]

Lacan took the Freudian unconscious and the fundamental loss that is central to it and translated them using terms from the thought of the

twentieth century, the same that was called the century of the "linguistic turn". In the course of the century, from different philosophical traditions, Frege, Russell, Husserl, and others, accentuated the drama that leads to the fact that once we are in language, we can no longer get out of it. This is what the first Wittgenstein stated in his pessimistic thesis that philosophy can only demonstrate tautologies and so the world can only "show" itself through other aesthetic, moral, and religious discourses. The breach in discourse is produced by *monstration*; the rest is tautology. To Wittgenstein's list we should add, with psychoanalysis, a breach by sex.

Lacan rewords Freud's thesis thus: we come into the world with a parasite known as the unconscious. Our "species-specific" trait is the combination of language with the bungling of sexual satisfaction. Psychoanalysis reckons not only on syntax but also on the bungling of sex. Our representations have a hole in them, that of the partner of whom we nevertheless continually dream, whom we continually hallucinate and strive to meet through the experience of jouissance. We can form for ourselves as many meta-representations as we wish: the sexual partner as such will still bear the stamp of an impossible. In his recent book *In Gods We Trust*, Scott Atran speaks of the "evolutionary landscape of religion" (Atran, 2002).[6] He deduces the gods from the very possibility that meta-representations offer of stretching the domain of a module beyond its effective domain. Since he hypothesises a module that recognises and classifies living beings, this module can then apply itself to meta-representations of non-living beings that are treated as living beings, as veritable supernatural creatures. Belief in the sexual partner is something of the same order: a meta-representation starting off from the "jouissance module" that is centred on the *refound*-object (in the Freudian sense). At the very moment we learn to speak, we experience something that lives in a different way from the living being, and this is language and its significations, which fairly quickly take on an autonomous existence for the subject, as "false belief reasoning" in cognitive psychology bears out. Freud gave a significant place to the *proton pseudos*, the "original lie" (Freud, 1895a, p. 356), and Melanie Klein gave a similar place to the power of the "no" in constructing the subject's world. In the same move by which we communicate our libidinal demand and exigency, we discover the limits of this communication. We experience language as a wall. If we are not overly crushed by the misunderstanding in our exchanges with those we love, we nonetheless manage to

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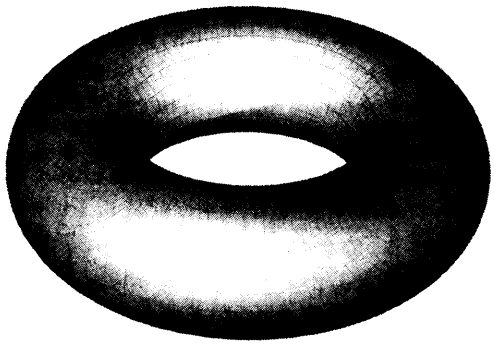
speak. And so we come to experience the fact that we will only ever leave language by means of some breach or ecstatic transport.

On the fringes of the language system, a certain number of clinical phenomena are produced which fall within the category of the real, a real that is specific to the speaking being. These phenomena stand at once on the edge of this system and at its heart. They stem from a topology that is more complex than a mere inside and outside. Trauma, hallucination, and the experience of "perverse" jouissance all belong to this category. Neurotics too experience moments of anxiety that give them some idea of these phenomena and pull them away from their tendency to consider life as a dream.

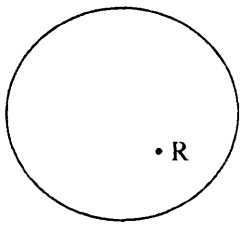
As a way of taking this into account, Lacan proposes as of 1953 to inscribe language within a particular enclosed space, the torus, "in so far as the peripheral exteriority and central exteriority of a torus constitute but one single region" (Lacan, 2006, p. 264).



This model has the particularity of designating an interior that is also an exterior. It is profoundly linked to the conception of space in general. Reflections on topology allow us to move towards "progressive liberation from the notion of distance in geometry" (Luminet, 2008, p. 262)[7] and also from psychical "distance" with respect to a trauma.

The torus is the most straightforward form of space that includes a hole. So, in a first sense, trauma is a hole that lies within the symbolic. Here, the symbolic is posited as the system of the *Vortsellungen* through which the subject aims to refind the presence of a lost object. Here, the symbolic includes both the symptom in its formal envelope and also that which does not manage to be absorbed into it, the real point that remains exterior to any symbolic representation, whether symptom or unconscious fantasy. This allows the real to be figured

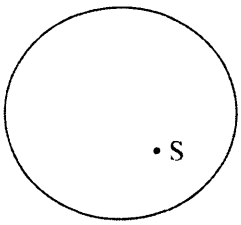
in an "exclusion that is internal to the symbolic". "The symptom can appear as a repetitive statement about the real. [...] [It] is the subject's response to the traumatic aspect of the real" (Miller, 1998, p. 63). Here I am reproducing the diagram proposed by Jacques-Alain Miller which represents this real point:



The Symbolic

The relationships between subject and symbolic may also be approached the other way around. There is something of the symbolic in the real: this is the *structure* of language, the existence of the language in which the child is caught, the pool of language into which he falls. In this sense, language conforms to the Theory-of-Mind supposition of speech functions.

We do not learn the rules that compose the Other of the social bond for us. Language as real is a tongue that escapes the system of language rules, a system that is no more than a "harebrained lucubration", as Lacan puts it (Lacan, 1998a, p. 139). The meaning of the rules is invented in starting off from a primordial point that lies outside meaning, a point of "attachment" to the Other. This is a perspective that is closer to late Wittgenstein and his argument on the constitution of a "community of life" that forms a primordial pragmatics. From this angle, after the trauma of loss, one has to reinvent an Other that no longer exists. Thus "caused", the subject now re-finds the rules of life with an Other that has been lost. In Freudian terms, one invents one's symptom and one's fantasy by overcoming the anxiety of the loss of the mother, the anxiety "caused" by the mother. One does not "learn" to live with the lost Other, and there is no pedagogy of reconciliation with life. One has to invent one's own "private language" from the contingency of events that surrounded the loss, from the public language shared with the Other one addresses. The status of language in the real may be noted as follows:



The Real

In yet another way, the immersion in language is traumatic because at its centre it bears a non-relation. The goal that is targeted—re-finding the lost partner—is never achieved. This is what Lacan calls *le non-rapport sexuel*, sexual non-relation. This non-relation is the experience of the variety of symptoms and fantasies that vouch for the fact that there is also a missing rule that has to be invented, yet which is forever wanting. In both cases, this inscription of the relationships between the real and the symbolic breaks with any relationship of modelling the real through the symbolic, which would merely be a reflection of the real in a relationship of exteriority.

It is on the basis of this experience, the subject's experience of his origin in the experience of loss that structures human jouissance, that I would like to read the different contributions to today's conference from its various participants, by indicating how they have helped me to gain a better grasp of the paradoxes and oddities of this jouissance.

Cognition and emotion

I shall start with the contributions from Pierre Jacob who broadly examines the relationships between stimulus and action on the basis of the Theory-of-Mind notion of a general capacity of attribution. I find the distinctions that he has set out and developed between motor representations and visual representations to be decisive. He thereby sets limits to the temptation "to use the concept of mental simulation as a theoretical basis to unify motor cognition and social cognition" (Jacob, 2004). These reservations have been abundantly useful for me. I recently heard a paper by a colleague from University College London, who also has links with the Tavistock Clinic through his psychoanalytic interests, in which he managed to reconstruct social cognition in its entirety

on the basis of the organ for the Imaginary that is endued by "mirror neurone systems" (Rizzolatti et al., 2001). Furthermore, evolutionary psychology allowed him to argue out a basis for the evolutionary utility of aggressiveness in the reinforcement of "in-group" identifications, and then to demonstrate how the constraints of civilisation take over in order to obtain the same utility. From this he concluded that, as we continue down our evolutionary path, we should soon be able to abandon the archaic aspects of aggressiveness so as to pursue the same ends of group reinforcement through social rules properly speaking. In sum, we would purportedly be getting to what Robert Kagan called, when referring to the gap between the American and European positions, a veritable reconciliation between Hobbes and Kant, or between Mars and Venus (Kagan, 2002).

In his rejection of the Freudian death drive, which was so disturbing by virtue of the fault-line that it introduced with respect to the reduction of the subject to biological mechanisms, this author was pursuing a Kleinian current in which a number of excellent authors have distinguished themselves. Take for example Roger Money-Kyrle who in 1955 wrote:

> [B]efore accepting the death instinct, that is, the existence of an instinct with a self-destructive aim which cannot have been evolved by selection to promote survival, we must do our best to see how far the analytic facts can be explained without it. (Money-Kyrle, 2001, p. 503)

So, I am interested in these fine distinctions that Pierre Jacob has set out, but I would also like to turn to a very widespread effect on psychoanalysis that is generated by these too hasty borrowings from advances in neuroscience. These borrowings can produce conservative effects and freeze up specifically psychoanalytic debates, which are falsely resolved by this kind of borrowing. We can see this in authors like Mark Solms when he believes he has found Freud's second topography inscribed in the brain, or in the uncritical borrowing of the notion of "mental image" that some neuroscientists have gladly been employing without it being indispensable to their enterprise.

When Dan Sperber presents the seminal theses of Paul Grice, he carefully stresses that the latter's approach does not presuppose any hypotheses that may be equated with the "mental image" hypothesis:

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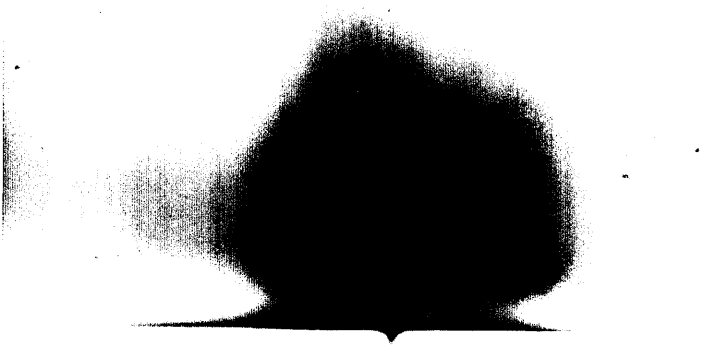

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> According to the inferential model, different versions of which have been developed in contemporary pragmatics, an utterance is a piece of evidence of the speaker's meaning. Decoding the linguistic sentence meaning is seen as just one part of the process of comprehension—a process that relies on both this linguistic meaning and on the context in order to identify the speaker's meaning. [...] Meaning, in Grice's analysis, [...] is an intention to achieve a certain effect upon the mind of the hearer by means of the hearer's recognition of the very intention to achieve this effect.
>
> Seen this way, communication depends upon the ability of human beings to attribute mental states to others; that is, it depends upon their naïve psychology [...]. Living in a world inhabited not only by physical objects and living bodies, but also by mental states, humans may want to act upon these mental states. They may seek to change the desires and beliefs of others. (Orrigi & Sperber, 2004)[8]

This presentation covers elements of what Pierre Jacob has presented to us. According to Grice, in the subject's activity, the Other is reached by going via a prior questioning as to the other party's intention. Therefore, there can be no production of meaning without a willingness to decipher intention. Lacan's formula that the subject receives from the Other his own message in an inverted form includes this *intention-to-be-deciphered*, but also integrates a critique of the code/message model. Indeed, it is ultimately a matter of reaching in the Other the partner of the fantasy.

It is by no means certain that the different currents of cognitivism have carried this initial Grice-inspired programme through to its end as a research programme. Take for example the programme of emotional cognitivism, which replaces the *processes of inference* with *processes of perception* by maintaining that a feeling is the cognitive perception of an emotion. Antonio Damasio is the paradigmatic author of this approach.

In their monumental *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience* which recently appeared, Bennett and Hacker present his position critically:

> Antonio Damasio's work on patients suffering from emotionally incapacitating brain damage is rightly renowned, and his insistence on a link between the capacity for rational decision-making and

> consequent rational action in pursuit of goals, on the one hand, and the capacity for feeling emotions, on the other, is bold and thought-provoking. However, his speculations on the emotions are, in our view, vitiated by conceptual confusion. [...] Damasio's conception of thoughts is firmly rooted in the eighteenth-century empiricist tradition. Thoughts, he claims, consist of mental images (which may be visual or auditory etc ..., and may be of items in the world or of words or symbols that signify such items). Damasio apparently holds the view that if thought were not exhibited to us in the form of images of things and images of words signifying things, then we would not be able to say what we think. [...] Damasio distinguishes an emotion from the feeling of an emotion. An emotion is a bodily response to a mental image, and the feeling of an emotion is a cognitive response to that bodily condition, a cognitive response "in connection to the object that excited it, the realisation of the nexus between object and emotional body state". Feelings of emotion, Damasio avers, are just as cognitive as any other perceptual image, and just as dependent on cerebral-cortex processing as any other image. (Bennett & Hacker, 2003, pp. 210–211)

So, the notion of "mental image" is essential to Damasio, and despite his critiques of Descartes he does not seem to have rid himself of presuppositions about representation such as it was conceived of in the seventeenth century.

Ian Hacking takes issue with Damasio's version of his theory as outlined in the latter's most recent book, *Looking For Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*:

> [According to Damasio] "Emotions play out in the theatre of the body. Feelings in the theatre of the mind." Both are *for* "life regulation" but feelings do it at a higher level. Joy is the feeling of a life in equilibrium, sorrow of life in disarray ("functional disequilibrium"). [...]
>
> Both feelings and emotions are states, conditions, or processes in the body. An emotion such as pity "is a complex collection of chemical and neural responses forming a distinctive pattern." Moreover, for Damasio there is nothing [...] "outer-directed". [...] For him pity is not of or about someone. And emotions seem to be caused by changes in [one's] body. [...]

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> [This is] an inadequate theory, for you cannot have emotions without cognitive input [...]—that is perhaps the majority opinion of neurologists. (Hacking, 2004a, pp. 32–33)

Damasio's conception is of an Otherless organism, a profoundly autistic organism focused on its homeostatic auto-regulation and progressively refined throughout the course of evolution. Hacking says that:

> What he chooses to call emotions come first, historically speaking, in the history of evolution, and they are first causally, as the items that instigate a cycle of responses within the body. They produce feelings in another part of the brain, one that evolved later, and are in turn monitored and used in what he calls mind. (Hacking, 2004a, p. 33)

The meaning of the vocabulary of affects is thus ultimately none other than the precise emotion that is felt in the body. Damasio holds that it is possible to perform a one-to-one mapping of *feelings* onto bodily states (*emotions*). No more metaphorical or metonymical sliding would be possible, despite the fact that the register of affects is part and parcel of language. This is what Hacking is criticising:

> Feelings and emotions have been part of the language of persons, both for expressing my self and for describing others. Damasio proposes something different: instant anatomical identification of emotions; this is what they really are, that is what joy is. [...]
>
> [...] [T]here seems in Damasio's account to be no "I" left who decides how to handle [any given] situation. There is just self-regulating homeostasis going on in this organism. [...]
>
> Damasio will surely go on lobbying for an identification of the personal language with current anatomical conjectures. (Hacking, 2004a, pp. 35–36)

I fear that a number of psychoanalysts, including one author who is well known to Marc Jeannerod, the director of the institute that is hosting us so comfortably today—I'm referring to the current president of the International Psycho-Analytic Association—give a description of psychoanalytic activity that makes uncritical use of notions of "mental representation" such as Damasio employs. Thus, Daniel

Widlöcher writes that, "the analyst's listening is occupied with mental representations constructed by references taken from the analysand's words" (Widlöcher, 1996, p. 135). This is how he sets forth his "communicational" conception of the unconscious, the first condition of which is the capacity to attribute to the other party a Theory of Mind.

> The Theory of Mind in question stems from what the cognitivists call the capacity to *mind-read*. For an interpretation to be heard by the patient, a certain number of conditions are necessary. The first condition is that both interlocutors share a certain Theory of Mind. (Widlöcher, 1996, p. 135)

Theory of mind strikes him as being a prerequisite for the mode of inference that leads to interpretation. Thus he terms "empathy" the inference that gives him access to the meaning of what the analysand says, "meaning that lies beyond a mere decoding of the signified" (Widlöcher, 1996, p. 143). This research into mental state comes at a price:

> At the end of the day, the words are always missing in psychoanalytic communication. For want of precise and reciprocal conversational imperatives, mental states take on a chaotic and fluctuating character that forbids any clear idea from being extracted from them. [...] Analytic comprehension affords a view of a labour of inference that knows no end. [...] If we push the paradox further, we could say that the ideal session would be this dual silence. (Widlöcher, 1996, p. 147)

Can one really say that an "ideal" session would be one in which both parties would at last fall silent, each having withdrawn into the jouissance of their auto-erotic inference? Grice's inference emerges from this utterly transformed into a limitless process. This is an odd way to encounter the limitlessness of language.

Bernard Victorri's narrative and the Freudian Witz

Bernard Victorri's text struck me as especially interesting to the extent that the functionalist approach that he develops mirrors the psychoanalytic subversion of the code/message linguistic model so as to raise the question of the origin of novelty in natural languages. This dynamics

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of novelty caught my attention, as did his accentuation of "dynamic situations" described in natural languages, and, more generally, his choice to broach syntax via semantics.

The approach to modalities and deictics that he puts forth from this perspective imparts to the subject's relations with the world a description that does not make do with a simple inside/outside opposition. Describing modal verbs in terms of *access* does not create any other exterior besides the very process of narration itself. In this way it produces a functionalist speech space, which is reminiscent of the "function of speech" that Lacan isolated in "Function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis" (Lacan, 2006, pp. 197–268). Let's look first at how the modalities immerse us into this space:

> The access from the previous scenes to the new one can be necessary (no other path towards another situation), just possible (at least two paths leading one to the evoked new scene and the other not), or impossible (no path to the new scene). These distinctions are the most important ones from the point of view of a narrative process in which each new scene is constructed from what is already present in the intersubjective space produced by previous discourse. (Victorri, 2007, p. 3)

When it comes to deictics, the functional choice that Victorri makes goes in the same direction:

> If we accept the idea that the main objective of language is to give a phenomenological presence to all the entities and events evoked by discourse, it is obvious that the use of the same markers for referring to real as well as discourse entities is a very efficient way to endow these discourse entities with the same unquestionable presence in the intersubjective space. In fact, language appears as a better device to give strength to the phenomenological existence of what is said, than to secure transmission of factual information. (Victorri, 2007, p. 4)[9]

The approach to syntax then follows on from the same perspective:

> [A]nother important set of syntactic phenomena, which has been emphasised by functional grammar theorists [...] concerns all

> the syntactic mechanisms offered by languages to introduce new entities, events and relations (which are called "new information" or "focus" or "rheme"), by "anchoring" them into a framework composed by the entities, events and relations already shared with the addressee [...]. It is clear that these mechanisms are of particular interest for narrative purposes, since the success of a narration depends crucially on the capacity of evoking new characters or events on the unique basis of what has already been put on the stage. (Victorri, 2007, p. 4)

Another of Victorri's perspectives also caught my attention: his presentation of the dead ends of *hominisation* and the distance he takes from a linear vision of development. He gives a very interesting version of man as an "evolution-sick animal".

> In humankind [...] social regulation does not happen at the biological level, but at the socio-cultural level. [...] [T]his means that in humans the biological control of behaviours that present a danger for the species are inexistent or at the very least considerably weakened. [...] In other words, the development of individual intelligence had its corollary in the loss of instinctive reactions, including, ultimately, those reactions which were most firmly established because they were vital to the survival of the species, such as those that regulate aggressiveness within groups.[10]

Victorri's formulation of the woes of cognition leads us to the appointment with the suffering of thought:

> This same evolutionary pressure led to an almost total domination of the neocortex that endangered the species by weakening the instinctive constraints that formerly regulated social life. [...] It is simply a matter of giving a concrete illustration of a general principle: the development of individual intelligence can generate antisocial behaviour that is harmful to the survival of the species. In the absence of biological or social constraints that would be able to stem its effects, the *Homo* branch found itself submitted for an entire period to social crises that can explain the inherent weakness that we have qualified as an evolutionary dead end.[11]

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This presents us with a schema that profoundly complicates the simplicity of a mechanical reading of Freud's second topography, with an *id* that drives, a *superego* that inhibits, and an *ego* that survives by virtue of its "Perception-Consciousness System".

Freud had supposed that the legislating father was a relic of the privations that arose in the last glacial period:

> Our first hypothesis would thus maintain that mankind, under the influence of the privations that the encroaching Ice Age imposed upon it, has become generally *anxious*. The hitherto predominantly friendly outside world, which bestowed every satisfaction, transformed itself into a mass of threatening perils. There had been good reason for realistic anxiety about everything new. [...] As the hard times progressed, the primal humans, whose existence was threatened, must have been subjected to the conflict between self-preservation and the desire to procreate [...] The subsequent evolution is easy to construct. It primarily affected the male. After he had learned to economise on his libido and by means of regression to degrade his sexual activity to an earlier phase, activating his intelligence became paramount for him. [...] It is the time of the animistic worldview and its magical trappings. As a reward for his power to safeguard the lives of so many other helpless ones he bestowed upon himself unrestrained dominance over them, and through his personality established the first two tenets that he was himself invulnerable and that his possession of women must not be challenged. At the end of this epoch the human race had disintegrated into individual hordes that were dominated by a strong and wise brutal man as father. (Freud, 1987, pp. 13–16)

Bernard Victorri also reads social invention as a competitive advantage, but he places the invention of narrative poetics prior to the invention of law:

> [E]ven if it happened rarely, a successful outcome [of such a "narrative trick"] would have had immediate consequences for the survival of the group in which it took place. Therefore, it could have generalised in the long run, exactly like an advantageous genetic trait, which spreads over a species by natural selection rules. One

> important step in this process could have been the "ritualisation" of the narrative behaviour: instead of waiting for the outbreak of a crisis, it would have been much more efficient to organise regular events in which the famous ancestors and the prohibited acts were evoked. (Victorri, 2007, p. 8)

A "narrative function" employed by the new legislators enables "our species to control the social disturbances that could explain the extinction of the other archaic *Homo sapiens*" (Victorri, 2007, p. 8).

It seems to me that it is perfectly possible to subscribe to Victorri's final thesis of the *Homo narrans*:

> It is in this spirit that we have presented this thesis, which sees man as a *Homo narrans* because it is not intelligence that would distinguish him from the other species of *Homo sapiens* that came before him, but the capacity to tell his own story, the wellspring of a new founding "wisdom" for human societies.[12]

To my mind, this presentation of *Homo narrans* joins up with the function that Lacan attributes to the Freudian *Witz* in his fifth Seminar (Lacan, 1998b). The *Witz* is above all a new signifier that escapes the code. From this perspective, only those signifiers that escape the code really "make sense". They must, however, come to be inscribed in the "family" of signifiers that already exist. This is why, in his remarkable commentary on this Seminar, Jacques-Alain Miller notes:

> The *Witz* is first and foremost this: something new in the fact of saying. The principial example that he sets off from, which since then has resonated for us, is Henrich Heine's "famillionairely". It is a word that had never been uttered, a creation, a novelty. [...] The witticism is only really accomplished once the Other has recognised it as such. This difference is then sanctioned by the Other as a flash of wit. (Miller, 2000, pp. 12–15)

He continues: "The crux of it lies in not disconcerting the Other. You still have to obtain his acquiescence, his consent. You still need him to say 'yes'" (Miller, 2000, p. 19). This acquiescence at one remove presupposes a public language that is recognised as such by a group: a social bond in Lacan's sense of the term.

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> There is no flash of wit in abstract space. This is congruent with what Lacan set out thereafter: the one thing that he salvages from Bergson's book on *Laughter*, namely, that the other party has to be from the same parish. For there to be a witticism, the other party has to understand you, and for that, he has to be from the same vicinity. The parish is a limited Other. It's neither the universe nor a list of dignitaries, nor is it the whole of Christendom. The parish is a neighbourhood. [...] It's like with a baby's babbling: if it isn't put up with and welcomed in a certain way, it perishes. First of all it has to be put up with, the Other has to smile at it, and so on. Even our neuroscientist colleagues have confirmed that it takes an other party who smiles before the neurones start functioning as they should. (Miller, 2000, pp. 26–32)

Moreover, what interests us in this Seminar is that Lacan generates the father function, the Name-of-the-Father, from its function in the poetics of the *Witz*:

> In this Seminar, the Name-of-the-Father is definitively that which in the code can say "yes" to neologisms. [...] The Name-of-the-Father is this function which represents the Law so as to be able at the same time to welcome the exception. (Miller, 2000, pp. 36–37)

The father according to Lacan cannot be reduced to the father who forbids or the father of the primal scene. This father is the one who favours the emergence of a new signifier.

You can understand, therefore, that Bernard Victorri's perspective has held my attention just as Scott Atran's has, as we are about to see. This function of welcoming what is new is certainly crucial for our civilisation to be able to cope with the growing impasses that its programme is meeting, rather than trusting blindly in the evolutionary inheritance given us at the outset.

The Darwinism of jouissance and cultural nominalism

Scott Atran presents a version of the "cognitive theory of culture" conceived of as a radical cultural nominalism: "culture *per se*" is not a well-defined entity (neither a system of rules, mores, or norms, nor a code or a grammar of symbols or behaviours) nor is it a "super organism".

It is a fluid distribution of private and public representations, natural and artificial ecological conditions that channel and relay represented information (seas, mountains, edifices, paper, etc.) and the behaviours that arise from them. This distributive conception of culture stands in opposition to a conception based on the usual social science and cognitive notions of culture, such as a) the error of conceiving of culture as a delimited system or an independent variable, and b) the tendency to "essentialise" culture and to treat it as an explanation and not as a phenomenon to be explained. Just as it was (and remains) hard for biology to reject the essentialist concept of "species" (as a well-defined entity with its own structure) in favour of "species" as an historic lineage of individuals, it is also hard to abandon the popular notion of culture as a body endued with its own essence (a system of rules, norms or practices) (Atran, 2004).[13]

I would like to situate Atran's perspective as that of a radical nominalist, and relate it to the biological conceptions developed by Pierre Sonigo and Jean-Jacques Kupiec. In his section of the book that he authored with Sonigo, *Ni Dieu ni gène*, Kupiec sets Darwin into a wider English filiation, making him a radical heir to William of Ockham's nominalism:

> Repeating in biology what Ockham had done five centuries earlier for metaphysics, Darwin abandons the ideal entities that haunted his precursors to turn instead to real individuals. This definition no longer translates an immutable property of the species, such as the possession of a characteristic structure (specific difference) or the fact of not being able to mix with members of another species, but the mechanism of evolution itself, i.e. the variation that lies at its base. Darwin's definition does not say what species are, but what they do. The species is not a static entity. What is involved is a process. With this abandonment of specificity, Darwin opened the possibility of a new biological theory that broke away from Aristotle's metaphysics. (Kupiec & Sonigo, 2000, p. 49)

The criticism that he gives of a genetic ideology as the realisation of a programme that is already written out interests us because it offers a critique of the more comprehensive notion of language reduced to a code/message mechanism. From the perspective of the programme, a continuous chain establishes a mechanism in which the programme

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contains the essence of the living being in a discrete form that can be duly decoded. The genome is thus thought of as a veritable divine writing of the living being. Kupiec and Sonigo call this into question, thereby justifying the title of their book, a book that goes so far as to cast doubt on the necessity of a "programme" and its determinism.

> From the 'sixties and 'seventies on, the genomes of pluricellular organisms were analysed in ever greater detail, which allowed for some unexpected characteristics to be brought to light that are still hard to explain within the framework of deterministic models: redundancy, non-coding DNA, recombinations and point mutations. (Kupiec & Sonigo, 2000, pp. 112–113)

The contingency of a topological position and selection by a host environment could be more important for the activation of a gene than its signification as determined by a so-called programme.

For us, this perspective echoes the texts we have examined and also the situation that Lacan describes of a *symbolic in the real*. Lacan determines a space in which the signifier is no longer the master that reiterates a rule. The signifier passes over to the function of an instrument of jouissance as a means of expression for the fantasy. The Other as a system is articulated with equivocal "odds and ends of the real" that constantly give rise to multiple readings. *Equivocation* stands in the foreground of this conception, forming an obstacle to any essentialist representation of reading and writing. In a world of partial readings, the topology of the signifier enables the equivocal twisting of chains that are ever more supple, folding to the constraints of a jouissance which does not seek to be spoken, but which makes use of the symbolic in order to enjoy *encore*.

Far from a rigid and frozen definition of the law of language or of the mechanics of the second topography, the contributions from Pierre Jacob, Bernard Victorri and Scott Atran have allowed me to form a grasp of this bond with the Other that is articulated on the basis of elements and fragments, without for all that having to take on board any notion of representation or of mental images, both of which inevitably refer back to a preceding whole.

Psychoanalysis, which is not a naturalist psychology, is able to take into account the displacements of its problematic by the discoveries of science. It is also able to warn us against one of the illusions of

evolutionary psychology: the excess of belief in an order of Nature that would absorb the aporias that lie between the Other, civilisation, and jouissance.

At a time when Nature no longer exists, when she has been replaced by "the environment", and at a time when science can no longer provide us with "the theory of everything", the danger that an overly strong belief in the just-so stories of evolutionary psychology presents is to end up with a return to good old Nature and her orderly state. This *Aufhebung* would soon reveal itself as the fairytale for the children of science that it is. It would be a way of restoring belief in Father Christmas, of which psychoanalysis was designed to rid us.

Notes

1. See Dr Saïer's "Allocution d'accueil" to the conference *Origine de l'homme et souffrance psychique*, at the Institut des Sciences Cognitives, Lyon, 6 November 2004.
2. "There are thirty-nine of these beads fashioned from shells. [...] Made some 75, 000 years ago, their discovery pushes back by thirty thousand years the date when bodies were first adorned with jewellery, and with it the date for the first fabrication of symbolic objects. What's more, they were found deep in the Southern African continent, when previously the oldest known pendants came from Bulgaria and Turkey." (Allemand, 2004, p. 47).
3. The *pavor nocturnus* of adults that Freud outlines in point 5 of Freud, 1895b.
4. Addendum C to Freud, 1926d, p. 171: "In consequence of the infant's misunderstanding of the facts, the situation of missing its mother is not a danger-situation but a traumatic one. [...] Thus, the first determinant of anxiety, which the ego itself introduces, is loss of perception of the object (which is equated with loss of the object itself). [...] The traumatic situation of missing the mother differs in one important respect from the traumatic situation of birth. At birth no object existed and so no object could be missed."
5. The original German reads: "Der erste und nächste Zweck der Realitätsprüfung ist also nicht, ein dem Vorgestellten entsprechendes Objekt in der realen Wahrnehmung zu finden, sondern es wiederzufinden, sich zu überzeugen, daß es noch vorhanden ist." ("Die Verneinung" in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XIV, Fischer Verlag, 1948, p. 14).

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6. See too the review: Hacking, 2004b. [Scott Atran participated in the *Origine de l'homme et souffrance psychique* conference with the paper "Origine et évolution de la culture humaine".]
7. This is determined on the basis of a magnitude that was defined by Simon Lhuilier in 1813 as the *genus* of any given closed surface: "It can also be defined for any type of closed surface, and it is then called the *genus*. The genus of the torus is 1, that of a sphere is 0, and that of a sphere equipped with H handles is H." (Luminet, 2008, p. 262).
8. [What is translated here as "naïve psychology" might also be rendered as "Theory of Mind" (Tr.).]
9. [The original French text (published in *Langages*, Vol. 36, Issue 146, 2002, pp. 112–125) has *simulation de perception* where the English has "the phenomenological existence of what is said" (Tr.)]
10. [Our translation of the 2002 French version in view of the considerably re-written 2007 English version. The reader may wish to compare the passage reproduced here with section III from the 2007 text: "The problem of the near total extinction of archaic *Homo sapiens*", pp. 5–7. (Tr.)]
11. [As per preceding note (Tr.).]
12. [As per preceding note (Tr.).]
13. See also: Atran, 2003.