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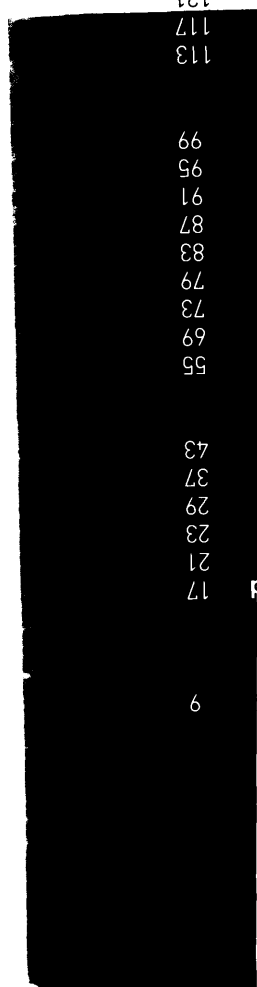
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Event-NLS

Éric Laurent

A Fundamental Point of Departure

During the Congress of the NLS, the interpretations of the theme that have been offered us, the illuminating explanation from Jacques-Alain Miller of the rules for interpretation which do not exist¹, have echoed for us, lest we forget, one of Lacan's fundamental points of departure. Psychoanalysis is above all a practice before being a theoretical corpus. Lacan was drumming that home in the seventies. In a preparatory text for the Congress, Philippe De Georges² reminds us of what Lacan said in 1974 in Nice: "one realises in analytic practice that there are words that hit home and others that don't, and that's what is called interpretation."³ This is why Lacan is able, when he highlights this practice of interpretation, to single out Freud, the first of the psychoanalysts, as the "incontestable theoretician of the unconscious"⁴. Our Congress has forcefully reminded us of the multiple ways of underlining the consequences of this point of departure, this origin that is always being renewed, and it has furnished some striking insights into it. I should like to carry on in this line, to develop them rather than conclude them, by trying to come back to the origin so as to prolong these insights and attempt to make myself a partner to this Congress.

The impact of words

First of all, Lacan defined the impact of words based on their resonance, by helping himself to Ponge's *réson*, no doubt, but also to all the possible poetic

devices from both the West and the Orient, to isolate the sonorous matter that comes out in appearance, and break away from any illusion of coincidence between a word and its signification. The essential aspect of the word is that it touches on poetic creation, and furthermore is able to meet up with the cunning dimension of the pun too, like in the renowned apologue of the young Indian girl: by evoking the presence of a lion in the neighbourhood, and then adding that a dog has just been eaten, she dissuades the Brahman from venturing out where he might surprise her with her lover.⁵ So we have reason, poetry and pun, three logics or a “trilogism” of word and fable production. Lacan underlines, and this is what counts for us, the effects produced not by the lion’s presence but its absence. Indeed, these are void spaces that the signifiers dig into nature, and it is through these void spaces that they act upon the interlocutor, upon the other subject.

Apparatuses of jouissance

The text presented in the dossier for the Congress prepares us for following this path of resonance opened up again by Lacan, to come back afterwards to “Interpretation in Reverse” where Jacques-Alain Miller contrasts two eras of the unconscious, the era of “wanting to say” and the era of “wanting to enjoy, *jouir*”, and two correlative modes of interpretation: interpretation following the example of the unconscious and interpretation running counter to the unconscious. The cutting and linking-up these two moments is first of all stated in *Seminar XI*, where Lacan insists that interpretation must bear not on desire as it did in “Direction of the Treatment...”, but on the object *a* as cause of desire, opening up the perspective that will bring the analyst’s act to the fore. Then we come to the apparatus of jouissance produced in the *Seminar Encore*, which radicalises the novel approach sketched out in *Book XVIII*: “reality is approached with apparatuses of jouissance.”⁶

To pursue the same thread of this Congress, I suggest we read together one way of approaching reality with apparatuses of jouissance, a way that may define a mode of action of interpretation. To do so I would like to go back to just before *Encore*, to the first lesson of *Seminar XVIII*, where on the one hand Lacan is chasing away the ghost of intersubjectivity to replace it with the subjectivised inter-significance of its consequence – intersubjectivity thus being replaced by the division at the very heart of the subject – and, on the other hand, he is showing to what extent the practice of psychoanalysis supposes a refusal of any logico-positivist conception of language, recalling the oracle function that analytic experience depends on in its entirety. I quote: “If analytic experience finds itself implied in getting its official recognition from the Oedipal myth, it’s because it preserves the cutting edge of the oracle’s enunciation, and, I would also say, the interpretation always stays at the same level there. It is only true through what comes in its wake, just like the oracle.”⁷

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Here we have a logic of implication deduced not from a positivism of *enchaînement*, a sequential chain, but from a "*déchaînement* of jouissance", an unbridled torrent, the word *déchaînement* corresponding here to what before was of the order of resonance. It evokes both the chain of implication that follows the setting-up of the truth function and the breakaway from any conception of representation. I quote: "The moment at which truth cuts off, through its *déchaînement* alone, from that of a logic that will try to flesh out this truth is quite precisely the moment at which discourse, as representative of the representation, is dismissed, discredited."⁸ Resonance – *déchaînement* – intersubjectivity – division, there is an inversion of the relationships between the living and the signifier which are approached in a radically new way.

What in nature is semblant

Lacan tells us the following too: "It's not for nothing that I reminded you that any discourse that mentions nature has ever only started off from what in nature is semblant. Because nature is full of it. I'm not speaking about animal nature, which quite clearly has an abundance of it."⁹ Nature full of signifiers? That's rather odd. Until then, Lacan had been arguing more that signifiers were in culture, as it were, in language, in the locus of the Other, and not in the world. There is even an anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who devoted himself to explaining that if there is one place where signifiers are not to be found, it is in nature. To isolate them, first you need a cut between nature and culture. The "savage mind", faced with nature and through its particular functioning made from nature, gives itself food for thought. The "savage mind" classifies, it orders and it produces masks, identifications, and bearings. It is still the case that it is not only the savage mind that Lacan questions and casts doubt on here. He goes farther when he says that, "there are sweet dreamers who think that animal nature in its entirety, from the fish to the birds, sing divine praise. That goes without saying. Each time they open whatever, a moth, an operculum, it's an obvious semblant. Nothing necessitates these wide openings." In this new perspective, Lacan will find not only signifiers in nature, but he will also lay the emphasis on the opercula, the mouths, the opening and closing, what is shapeless, whereas the thesis upheld by classical structuralism is that these are signifiers extracted from natural substances, which will lead on to science and classification. Lacan highlights the openings and closings of the living being and not the eternal substances or animal lines of descent, the "bear" line or "ram" line. It is not about totemic identifications but rather openings and closings or eclipses, i.e. phenomena that appear and disappear like comets. Lacan brings to light, at the very heart of this nature, the thing that, whether trunk, operculum or mouth, is ready to receive the consequences of impossible identification.

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Because when I turn myself into an animal, with a mask or a dance, I am using signifiers from nature to constitute the support to my classificatory thought. I extract them and what happens afterwards is that on the one hand I need a guarantee – which will be the first identification or paternal identification – and on the other hand there is something in my body that is necessarily to be excluded and will be ejected into the said nature.

“I’m not a nominalist”

In this first lesson from the Seminar *D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, Lacan takes up the Freudian myth of the first identifications, which he had already presented and criticised in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, where he noted that the real and mythical father “fades at the moment of the decline of the Oedipus [...] into the imaginary father.”¹⁰ It is this real and mythical father that is in question in the first identification; but whereas Freud brought this identification to the fore as crucial, Lacan pushes it back behind the fundamental experience of privation that the young child goes through, not so much because he is young, he said back then, but because he is a man.

Thus it is in privation, in the expulsion outside of oneself, in self-hate, that identification with the master signifier and the experience of jouissance will be connected. Everything within me that is a flop, everything I hate in myself and in this God that made me, I will spend my life separating myself from. The *kakōn* that is in me will be expelled and this expulsion will meet the world, tacking itself onto it just as any body tacks itself onto it, making the *monde* into something *immonde*, making the world foul. This is what Lacan takes up again in this first lesson from *Séminaire XVIII*, underlining that certainly something has to be kept of this link between identification with the master signifier and expulsion out into the *immonde*. Except that what there is in the *immonde* as an outside is no longer the same world as the one that had been found. It is a world in which the subject finds again what he had lost of himself, in a form that he tends always to mistake.

This is the advance that Lacan makes in this first lesson, distinguishing between the world that science is able to present us, the world as reference of scientific discourse, and the real as what it is, as what the subject we deal with encounters. It is a full world, full of what does not work and in which the subject tries to find himself again through the use he makes of the signifying stream he is caught up in. In this sense, the presentation made by Lacan demonstrates that the signifier can in no way whatsoever be the name of a thing pinned onto the real, and this is what leads him to say: “I’m not a nominalist.”¹¹ The name cannot be something that gets pinned on. However, it is not enough to be a realist in the Middle Ages sense of the word. It is rather a matter of pointing out

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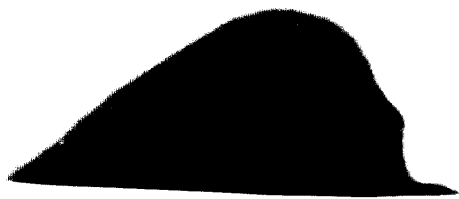
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that scientific discourse only meets up with the real at that point at which it
depends on the function of the semblant. Now, the ambition of psychoanalysis
is different; it wants to find a real that only depends on the break of the
semblant, i.e., on what remains of the gullies produced by the successive
breakings of the semblants.

A peaceful hamlet

How then might an interpretation help in finding this point? Lacan recalled the
resources of poetic devices here. I should like to follow his indication and present
you the way Baudelaire, through the devices of his poetics, manages to get
absorbed into the world, finding the point of foulness that brings him peace as
he moves forward in the signifier, in the experience of his radically new poetics.
To do so, I would like to consider the nineteenth poem of the *Flowers of Evil*,
“The Giantess”, in which the poet describes a sort of regression towards the
inanimate, where enjoying substance, where the eternal feminine joins itself to
a particular event of jouissance.¹² Here it is:

When Nature once in lustful hot undress
Conceived gargantuan offspring, then would I
Have loved to live near a young giantess,
Like a voluptuous cat at a queen's feet.

To see her body flower with her desire
And freely spread out in its dreadful play,
Guess if her heart concealed some heavy fire
Whose humid smokes would swim upon her eye.

To feel at leisure her stupendous shapes,
Crawl on the cliffs of her enormous knees,
And, when in summer the unhealthy suns

Have stretched her out across the plains, fatigued,
Sleep in the shadows of her breasts at ease
Like a small hamlet at a mountain's base.¹³

Baudelaire established poetic modernity by refusing analogy: the world is not
like a woman, it is a woman. The mountains are not *like* breasts, they are breasts.
It is his way of breaking the semblants. He himself starts off from the fact that
the world does indeed speak. There are signifiers available there, signifiers that
are produced like gargantuan offspring until the poet identifies with “a peaceful

hamlet at a mountain's base" where the jouissance at stake is scooped out in the "peaceful" in question, finally allowing the words to stop, as it were. The *hameau* (French for "hamlet") of the text is an *"a/mot"*, it is the word that finally allows the noise of the signifiers to hush up, to facilitate an access, at the end, to the "peaceful hamlet at a mountain's base". Here, this mountain is not *like* the shadow of the breast, it really is the breast in so far as the poetic interpretation has appropriated it by way of the paths that the beasts are, finally procuring for the poet the satisfaction that is not, of course, a satisfaction only connected to the sexual but also to a primordial relationship, to Nature and the woman as giantess. Baudelaire was very impressed by big things. He says as much in his *The Salon of 1859*: in nature, in art, what he prefers, all things being otherwise equal, are big things: big animals, big landscapes, big ships, big men, big women, big churches. Thus he proceeds, transforming his tastes into principles. Isn't this how he manages to avoid the pitfalls of the ideal? From his taste, from his relation to the giantess, he forges a principle that guides him and ultimately gives him the peace of the contingent encounter with jouissance.

Lived substance

Let's compare this encounter with jouissance to the way Lacan presented enjoying substance as a "lived substance". In *Seminar VII*, to situate the lived experience of jouissance in so far as it lies in opposition to the pleasure principle, he mentions the experiences "from beyond" constituted by courtly love, Hindu erotic technique and its extremely precise codification, or Muslim mystical erotic technique. "Hindu or Tibetan erotic practices [...] have been codified in the most precise way and constitute a disciplined asceticism of pleasure from which a kind of lived substance may emerge for the subject."¹⁴

He would later call this lived substance "enjoying substance", and he would maintain that it is possible to encounter it. This is what makes for the importance of the sentence from Jacques-Alain Miller that François Leguil highlighted in a preparatory text for the Congress¹⁵, tracing out a destinal horizon for interpretation: "the interpretation is judged by the event of jouissance it is capable of engendering."¹⁶ This is how the link between the course of the analysis, its interpretations, and the "final satisfaction" of the analysis as event of jouissance is articulated. In this sense, this event is produced beyond the crossing of the fantasy. The two perspectives are sketched out and contrasted at the end of "Subversion of the Subject..."¹⁷, where the event of jouissance that it is possible to engender at the end of analysis is articulated in two directions.

I remind you of the end of "Subversion of the Subject...", where Lacan says the following: "[...] castration makes of fantasy a chain that is both supple and inextensible by which the fixation of object cathexis, which can hardly go beyond

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"Really coming to terms with this Other" is not the same thing as assuring the jouissance of the Other through the fantasy! Thus, on the one hand jouissance is assured in the fantasy and on the other, it is produced in a crossing through an object realisation, the very same whose path is indicated by Baudelaire by way of poetic means. Perhaps we ought, in the Pass itself, to grasp the way in which what falls under the articulation of what still makes for "history" and what is of the order of the contingent encounter with jouissance, its "realisation", come to be articulated.

In the end, Lacan chose to introduce the phrase “mendacious truth” to shed light on it, and Jacques-Alain Miller has shown its scope which, in Lacan’s late teaching, meets up in its own way with Aragon’s “truthful-lying”. You know that Aragon published a collection in 1980 in which he brought together a certain number of short stories drafted throughout his life between 1923 and 1972, which he had not published. “Le mentir-vrai”, which gives its title to the collection, is a short story that portrays his childhood at the same time as Aragon is defining an art of narrative. He interweaves the evocation of his childhood years, mixing fiction and reality, and the evocation of particular moments of universal history. In the end, he presents a kind of satire of the general picture of History, decompleted by the consequences that this History had for him, notably the after-effects of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, showing how he undid himself, freed himself subjectively from History – from the impact it has on him – and how, thanks to his devices, more proper to the novel than the poem here, he was able to get through it. Let’s listen to him: “I’m repeating myself. Fifty-five years later. That deforms the words. And when I think I’m looking at myself, I’m imagining myself. I can’t help it, I order myself. I move facts that happened closer together, but they were separate. I think I’m remembering, I’m inventing myself [...] These bits of memory are not a photograph, badly stitched together, but a carnival. Moreover, I wasn’t called Pierre, it was Father Pangaud (and not Prangaud) who used to call me Pierre, and not Jacques. All that is like shuffling cards. At the end

of the day, the cheater has kept the ace of hearts up his sleeve, and the one they call a novelist is always making the pass."¹⁸

This is not without an evocation of the system of the Pass, where each person has to be heard on how, when he goes forward for it, he repeats himself and how much "that deforms the words", and to what extent, when the subject thinks he is looking at himself, he is imagining himself, he orders and re-orders himself. The "truthful lying" – or the mendacious truth – is always underwritten by an enunciation which is the moment the signifier touched on enjoying substance and something of the symptom was named. This nomination marks the unforgettable moment of the encounter that eludes any logically defined description. It is a moment of encounter, of the sole presentation that will be capable of being worded, but which will never let one forget this moment of the encounter which is the matrix of the enunciation to come, the moment at which something was expelled from my body, forever expelled to be found again on the outside to the point that it can never be seen again. Indeed, each time you think you are looking at yourself, what you will find is the narcissistic image, this object from the mirror stage that makes me think I have not lost anything. Nevertheless, each time, I realise that there is this body, this body that is always fleeing me, and which I lose again even though I have never had it and I have never lost it. I am left with the moments of encounter with *jouissance*, which define the way I construct myself, my *immonde*, back and forth between hope and causality. Isn't this what gives, again and again, the chance to one and all to find and find again his peaceful hamlet?

Translated from the French by Adrian Price

1 Miller, J.-A., "The Hurtful Word", in this issue, pp. 45-49.

2 De Georges, P., "[Untitled preparatory text]", in *ECF-débats*, 5 May 2009.

3 Lacan, J., "Le phénomène lacanien", in *Les Cahiers Cliniques de Nice*, Issue 1, June 1998, pp. 9-25.

4 Lacan, J., "Preface to the English-Language Edition of Seminar XI", *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Penguin, London: 1994, p. xxxix.

5 Lacan, J., "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis", in *Ecrits, The First Complete Edition in English*, transl. by Bruce Fink, New York, Norton & Co., 2006, pp. 244-5.

6 Lacan, J., *The Seminar, Book XX, Encore*, transl. by Bruce Fink, New York/London: W.W. Norton, 1998, p. 55.

7 Lacan, J., *Le séminaire, Livre XVIII, D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, Paris: Seuil, 2006, p. 13.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

10 Lacan, J., *The Seminar, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, transl. Dennis Porter, New York/London: Norton/Routledge, 1992, pp. 307-8.

11 Lacan, J., *Le séminaire, Livre XVIII, op. cit.*, p. 28.

12 [TN. We have omitted an apology to the English interpreters for neglecting to bring an English translation of the poem on the day.]



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13 [TN. This English translation is by Karl Shapiro, from *Person, Place and Thing*, Random House, New York, 1942. Shapiro translates "Hameau paisible" as "small hamlet". A selection of English translations of "La géante" can be found online at: fleursdumal.org/poem/118.]

14 Lacan, J., *The Seminar, Book VII, op. cit.*, p. 153.

15 Leguil, F., "En quoi l'interprétation lacanienne est-elle un devoir?" in *ECF-débats*, 7 May 2009.

16 Miller, J.-A., *L'Orientation lacanienne III, 10, Tout le monde est fou* (2007-08), teaching delivered in the framework of the Paris VIII Department of Psychoanalysis, 12 March 2008.

17 Lacan, J., "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious" in *Écrits, op. cit.*, pp. 700-1.

18 Aragon, L., *Le mentir-vrai*, Paris: Gallimard, 1980, p. 12.

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...June 1998, pp. 9-25.

...Book XI, *The Four*

...in *Écrits, The First*

...pp. 244-5.

...London: W.W. Norton,

...and Paris: Seuil, 2006,

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