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uz, Gérard Wajcman

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ian Francesco

liakoff: cyrus.saint@gmail.com

The Lacanian Review

STILL LIFE?

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**A REAL SCIENCE
OF LIFE?**

PIPOL 9, the 5th European Congress of Psychoanalysis organized by the EuroFederation of Psychoanalysis (EFP), took place in Brussels on 13-14 July 2019, under the title "The Unconscious and the Brain: Nothing in Common." The congress director, Yves Vanderveken, assured the orientation of the preparatory work and of the congress itself (which gathered over 1,200 participants concerned with the practice of psychoanalysis in institutional settings) with the following compass: "Psychoanalysis proposes an ethical choice: to promise each one who wants to lend himself to it that he will not be compared or 're-educated,' while proposing to him to tighten as much as possible the singular coordinates which found the irreconcilable of the contingency which is his own. So that he can orient himself in life from the logic that determines his always symptomatic mode of being, away from the illusions of identification." We bring to our readers two of the works presented at the plenary sessions of PIPOL 9, as well as the text of a presentation by Vanderveken, delivered in New York ahead of the event.

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1. Éric Laurent, *L'Envers du*
freudien, 2016).

— A REAL SCIENCE OF LIFE? —

PREFACE TO THE GERMAN AND HEBREW EDITIONS OF *THE OTHER SIDE OF BIOPOLITICS*

Éric Laurent

The *Other Side of Biopolitics*¹ set out to draw attention to the impact of fresh contributions in Lacan's late teaching to the practice and experience of psychoanalysis. To ground the envisaged developments, I took as my compass the Lacanian Orientation as laid out in the texts and courses of Jacques-Alain Miller. And so I explored the consequences of the move from symptom to sinthome, of the inscription of sites of jouissance onto the body, of the lessons for psychoanalysis that Lacan drew from his reading of Joyce, culminating in a reformulation of both the clinical field and *Massenpsychologie* on the basis of the "event of the body" and the *parlêtre*. These points are articulated in their development with the new proposition that Lacan put-forward concerning an unconscious that is articulated no longer to the figurative writing of the

Published in French in *Lacan Quotidien*, no. 851 (18 September 2019): 2–6. Éric Laurent is a psychoanalyst practicing in Paris. He is an Analyst Member of the School of the ECF, the NLS, the ELP, the EBP, the EOL, and the NEL. He is a member of the WAP and former president of the WAP. His recent books include *Lost in Cognition: Psychoanalysis and the Cognitive Sciences* (2014), and *L'Envers de la biopolitique* (2016).

1. Éric Laurent, *L'Envers de la biopolitique. Une écriture pour la jouissance* (Paris: Navarin/Le Champ freudien, 2016).

dream, as fine-tuned by Freud, but with an altogether different form of writing, that of the knots. This new form of writing does not transcribe a tongue; it conjoins the three dimensions necessary to the formulation of the experience of *jouissance*: the real, the symbolic and the imaginary, named respectively by the letters R, S, and I. These knots do not transcribe; they form arrangements which translate whichever support the traumatic signifiers of subjective experience have found in the body of the speaking subject.

The Subject Transformed by a Propping Afforded by the Letter

The German edition of this book includes an extra text, written subsequent to the publication of the French edition. It concerns interpretation. Indeed, the book ended with an examination of the new relations between the signifier and the instance of the letter such as they can be thought through on the basis of Lacan's late teaching: what Lacan calls the relation of *appui*, of propping, as much between what is written and what is thought as between the written and the signifier.² In order to situate correctly the necessity of this propping, one has to start from the fact that a tongue finds no support whatsoever in the referent. It is supported by metaphor alone. "There is no language but metaphorical language. [. . .] Any designation is metaphorical. It can only be performed through the intermediary of something else, even were I to say *this* while pointing to it."³ The crystal of the Chinese tongue struck Lacan as exemplary for designating this point. The character *wèi*, which translates loosely into the verb "to act," may also denote the conjunction "as,"⁴ which Lacan qualifies as a "conjunction of metaphor."⁵ The impossibility of designating the referent makes it real, in the logical sense of the term. From this Lacan deduces that this real is to be constructed.⁶

Writing will come precisely to the place of this construction. To get this across, Lacan turns to Japanese speech and its dual system of reading Chinese characters. He makes use of the distinction between the two modes of reading and uttering Chinese characters to underscore how writing, at a

2. Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A.R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 124.

3. Jacques Lacan, *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant: Le Séminaire, livre XVIII* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), 45.

4. *Ibid.*, 47.

5. *Ibid.*, 48.

6. *Ibid.*, 46.

remove from phonetic of a prop for the pho prop for the metapho registers can have it speech."⁷

Lacan grounds the threaded net of sembl the letter. Semblance props up against the l to use this effect of p which the Japanese ha spoken but, above all, ematics.

Lacan presents the the end of *Seminar XV*

language is cons consists in one be for metaphor [. . . said is ratified in of writing, which through to its m something that i be the flesh."⁸

The accentuation against writing define describes. Those form a referent, a bone, in metonymy. Yet the pro writing stands in oppo this being the most instance, what is unwe taking note of the bon function of the signifi which motions toward

7. Jacques Lacan, "Lituratere

8. Jacques Lacan, *D'un discou*

9. Cf. *ibid.*, 149.

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Propping Afforded by

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of this construction. To get this nd its dual system of reading nction between the two modes to underscore how writing, at a

remove from phonetic pronunciation, assumes a new function, namely that of a prop for the phonetic signifier: “It is the letter as such which forms a prop for the metaphor in keeping with its law of metaphor. [. . .] one of its registers can have its fill of the reference to writing and the other of speech.”⁷

Lacan grounds the subject’s prop on the “*filet du semblant*,” the finely threaded net of semblance that is cast over the empty referent isolated by the letter. Semblance thereby instates a “constellation,” a multitude, which props up against the letter: a new type of referent. This is how Lacan is able to use this effect of propping against writing to account for the ease with which the Japanese handle the discourse of science, a discourse that is not spoken but, above all, written; for the book of the world is written in mathematics.

Lacan presents the knotting of letter and referent slightly differently at the end of *Seminar XVIII*:

language is constituted from but a single *Bedeutung* [. . .], which consists in one being able to use it, on account of inhabiting it, only for metaphor [. . .] and for metonymy. [. . .] Now, what I have just said is ratified in history alone, and on the basis of the appearance of writing, which is never mere inscription. [. . .] From its origins through to its most recent technical proteanisms, writing is simply something that is articulated like a bone on which language would be the flesh.⁸

The accentuation given to this propping of the signifier, of speech, against writing defines a new instance of the letter and the poetics that it describes. Those forms of jouissance which are called upon in speech find a referent, a bone, in writing and the instance of the letter, metaphor or metonymy. Yet the propping of speech upon the referent constructed from writing stands in opposition to the absence of any writing of sexual relation, this being the most fundamental emptiness of reference. In this last instance, what is unveiled is the dimension of writing as what allows for a taking note of the bone of the impossible sexual relation.⁹ To generalize the function of the signifier is also to generalize the function of writing as that which motions toward the impossible referent.

Lacan, *Book XXIII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller,

lant: *Le Séminaire, livre XVIII* (Paris: Seuil,

7. Jacques Lacan, “Lituraterre,” *Hurly-Burly*, no. 9 (2013): 37.

8. Jacques Lacan, *D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant: Le Séminaire, livre XVIII*, op. cit., 149.

9. Cf. *ibid.*, 149.

The Writing and the Poetics of Interpretation

The reference is impossible, but meaning takes flight. Only poetics—and not linguistics—can then take charge of the study of meaning effects, of enjoy-meant. “Linguistics is, after all, [. . .] a very poorly oriented science. Linguistics lifts itself up only to the extent that the likes of Roman Jakobson tackle questions of poetics head on.”¹⁰ It is poetics that allows Lacan to locate the place and the function of psychoanalytic interpretation, where what is at stake is to make the body’s *lalangue* resonate. If the only use of language is a metaphorical one, and the referent thus steals away, there is only any real in metonymic surplus *jouissance*. Meaning is simply surplus meaning in its effect on the body. It resounds within it. From this perspective, interpretation is the use of this very resonance as a means of loosening the subject’s bind to his master signifiers. It performs “the function of something else” says Lacan; it enables the subject to extricate himself from his subjection:

Metaphor and metonymy hold scope for interpretation only inasmuch as they are capable of performing the function of something else, whereby sound and sense become closely united. It is in so far as a correct interpretation puts paid to a symptom that truth is specified as poetic.¹¹

With this forceful expression, *putting paid to a symptom*, Lacan is reformulating the dictate that interpretation should target *jouissance*. While linguistics attempts to stabilise the union of sound and sense, interpretation, like poetry, must target what is *new* in the union of sounds and sense. More than a translation, interpretation has to be *neologistic*, equivocal and resounding.

Jacques-Alain Miller tied up the question of interpretation in Lacan’s late teaching in a decisive way: “This definition of the symptom as an ‘event of the body’ makes the status of the interpretation that might respond to it far more problematic.”¹² From this moment forth, the status of the symptom becomes bound to the impact of language on the body.¹³ The interpretation that stands a chance of responding to the bodified writing

10. Jacques Lacan, *L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue s’aile à mourre*: Seminar XXIV, lesson of 19 April 1977, published as “Vers un signifiant nouveau” in *Ornicar* 2, no. 17/18 (1979): 16.

11. *Ibid.*, 16.

12. Jacques-Alain Miller, “Biologie lacanienne et événement de corps,” in *La Cause freudienne*, no. 44 (2000).

13. *Ibid.*

of the symptom is not also take into account supersedes the Saussurian and sense through the dimension, that of the terms of a new tone in intonation. It is a hurli-

To define the field asks himself how *jouissance* to the interpretative voice underscore how, while affair. It is communal enable the analyst to m thing that evokes *jouissance* poetry, and especially between the written and

Yet Chinese poetic v between speech and writing that exploits the interplay

The psychoanalyst, poetics, as much of the way. He is not an artist poet. Analytic interpretation on the ethical, that is to remark consists of. It co one for which it was de been rumpled a little rumpling.”¹⁷ The new p tation is not linked to b ted remark that triggers beautiful to say. Another ited remark. A spirited voque, or as Freud says,

This new aim thus o fier, and even the possib

14. Jacques Lacan, *L’insu que sait*

15. *Ibid.*, 16.

16. *Ibid.*, 16.

17. *Ibid.*, 16.

18. *Ibid.*, 16.

Interpretation

...takes flight. Only poetics—and the study of meaning effects, of very poorly oriented science. ...the likes of Roman Jakobson ...tics that allows Lacan to locate interpretation, where what is at ...if the only use of language is a ...away, there is only any real in ...imply surplus meaning in its ...this perspective, interpretation ...loosening the subject's bind to ...of something else" says Lacan; ...his subjection:

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...n of interpretation in Lacan's ...on of the symptom as an 'event ...ation that might respond to it ...ent forth, the status of the ...language on the body.¹³ The ...nding to the bodified writing

of the symptom is not only a hybrid between speech and writing but must also take into account the hidden consequence implied by this hybrid that supersedes the Saussurean atom of signification. The new union of sound and sense through the prop of the written equivocal ushers in a new dimension, that of the voice that was hidden within it. We may speak in terms of a new tone in the handling of interpretation, which is more than intonation. It is a hurling or a vociferation.

To define the field of interpretation that lies outside meaning, Lacan asks himself how jouissance can elude the body's autoeroticism and respond to the interpretative vociferation. He has several responses. The first is to underscore how, while jouissance is autoerotic, language is not a private affair. It is communal.¹⁴ And Lacan explores the resources of what can enable the analyst to make something other than meaning resonate, something that evokes jouissance in common language. There is first of all poetry, and especially Chinese poetry which introduces a "parallelism" between the written and the oral, in its scholarly procedures.¹⁵

Yet Chinese poetic writing is not merely the incarnation of a new bond between speech and writing. It also includes a certain chanting, a soft singing, that exploits the interplay between the tonic accents of the Chinese tongue.¹⁶

The psychoanalyst, though he must be informed as to the resources of poetics, as much of the East as of the West, even so, ought not to lose his way. He is not an artist. Lacan was to say that he was a poem rather than a poet. Analytic interpretation, like the spirited remark, has to set its sights on the ethical, that is to say, on jouissance. "This is even what the spirited remark consists of. It consists in deploying a word for another use than the one for which it was designed. In the case of *famillionairely*, the word has been rumbled a little, but its operative effect inheres in this very rumpling."¹⁷ The new poetics that Lacan brings to light through interpretation is not linked to beauty, but it touches on jouissance, as does the spirited remark that triggers a particular surplus jouissance. "We have nothing beautiful to say. Another resonance is at issue, to be grounded on the spirited remark. A spirited remark is not beautiful. It hinges only on an equivocal, or as Freud says, on an economy."¹⁸

This new aim thus offers a very fine definition of a fresh use of the signifier, and even the possibility of producing a new signifier, made to measure.

re: *Seminar XXIV*, lesson of 19 April 1977, 10. 17/18 (1979): 16.

de corps," in *La Cause freudienne*, no. 44

14. Jacques Lacan, *L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre*, op. cit.: 16.

15. *Ibid.*, 16.

16. *Ibid.*, 16.

17. *Ibid.*, 16.

18. *Ibid.*, 16.

The new signifier allows the fact of saying to be elevated to the heights of an event, like the symptom itself.

Note that I didn't say speech. I said *le dire*. *The fact of saying*. Not every uttered word is a fact of saying, otherwise every spoken word would be an event, and this is not the case. Were it not for this, there would be no talk of empty words. A fact of saying belongs to the order of the event.²⁰

The power that Lacan attributes to this new usage of the signifier amounts to direct action on the symptom. He employs a curious expression in this regard, *éteindre le symptôme*: "It is in so far as a correct interpretation puts paid to [*éteint*] a symptom that truth is specified as poetic." The reader will see in this book and its final text what this verb *éteindre* means. In this preface, it is enough to underscore how Lacan makes the new paths of interpretation and those of the reformulated *sinthome* respond the one to the other. This is the *interpretation-event*. Hitherto, for the readers of the earlier editions, this was wanting.

Translated from the French by A.R. Price

20. Jacques Lacan, *Les non-dupes errent: Seminar XXI*, lesson of 18 December 1973, unpublished.

THE ATOPIA

In his article "On a Ref" sent to *Le Monde* but v brain is the crossroads event, "no formation i In an ironically polem the psychiatric event cann another place? If it is abo

A couple of years before located this "other place" said, "somewhere in the brain is "the language app

"Now, what I say is tha One student had argued th of language. Lacan contrac offers a way out: "L wou unconscious was the lo unconscious without langu of the implication and of t thing, he could have antic that supposes my knowle represents for an always o

Lacan puts the accent especially "where the func call *parallelism*. Not so as which was, as we all know suggest that the break sho but between the psychical

Antonio Di Ciaccia is a psychoanal the ECF and SLP and a member of th

1. Jacques Lacan, "Di una riform
2. Jacques Lacan, *My Teaching*, tr
3. Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, t
4. *Ibid.*, xiii.
5. Jacques Lacan, "Presentation d 2013), 233.
6. Jacques Lacan, *My Teaching*, op