

Introduction to a first volume of the Écrits (Walter Verlag), published in Scilicet, 1975, n°5, pp. 11-17.

Translated by Jack W. Stone

⁽¹¹⁾*Le sens du sens* (the meaning of meaning¹), the question of it was posed to us. I would point out as usual that this was in having the answer (*reponse*), if it was not simply a matter of an academic shell game.

The meaning of meaning in my practice is caught (*Begriff*) as it flees: to be understood as a leaking as if from a jar (*comme d'un tonneau*²), not a decamping (*détalade*).

It is inasmuch as it flees (in the sense: leaks [*tonneau*]) that a discourse takes its meaning: in that its effects are impossible to calculate.

The apogee of meaning, it can be felt that it is the enigma.

For me, who does not except himself from the above stated rule, it is from the answer, found in my practice, that I pose the question of the sign to the sign: of how it is signaled that a sign is a sign.

The sign of the sign, says the answer that serves as pre-text to the question, is that no matter what sign might serve the function of every other sign, precisely insofar as it can be substituted for it. For the sign only has a scope from having to be *deciphered*.

Without doubt it is necessary that the sequence of signs take its meaning from the deciphering. But it is not because one *dit-mension* gives to the other its term that it delivers its structure.

We have said what the ell (*l'aune*) of meaning is worth. Ending there does not prevent it from making a hole. A deciphered message can remain an enigma.

The relief of each operation--the one active, the other submitted to--remains distinct.

The analyst is defined by this experience. The formations of the unconscious, as I call them, demonstrate their structure by being decipherable. Freud distinguishes the specificity of the group: dreams, lapse, and witticism, from the *mode*, the same, by which he works with them.

Without doubt Freud stops when he has discovered the sexual meaning of structure. What one finds only a hint of in his work, formulated it is true, is that the test of sex holds only to the fact of meaning, for nowhere, under any sign, is sex inscribed by a rapport.

It is with good reason, however, that the inscription of this sexual rapport could be required: since, in the unconscious, the work of its ciphering is recognized--in what defeats the deciphering.

Ciphering can pass for being more elevated in structure than counting. The muddle, for it is indeed made for that, begins with the ambiguity of the word cipher.

¹ In English in the original (tr.).

² A *tonneau* is barrel, jar, or cask. *Fuite* can be translated as flight, leakage, or leaking. Bernard Nominé, in his article *La Notion du Champ chez Lacan* at <http://users.skynet.be/fcl/fr/CLdocs/for/fornomine5fr.htm>, suggests that Lacan is evoking here the *tonneau des Danaïdes* (a French idiom referring to a futile labor). As is succinctly explained in the *Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology*, at http://www.mythweb.com/encyc/gallery/danaïdes_c.html, the Danaïdes were

The fifty daughters of King Danaus of Argos, who were married on a single occasion to fifty suitors. As instructed by their father, all but one of them murdered their husbands on their wedding night. As a result, they were condemned to an afterlife of unending labor, carrying water from the Styx in leaky jars. (tr.)

The cipher founds the order of the sign.

But on the other hand, to 4, to 5 perhaps, let us go to 6 at maximum, numbers which are of the real although ciphered, numbers have a meaning, which meaning reveals their function of sexual *jouissance*. This meaning has nothing to do with their function of a real, but opens to us an apperception on what can account for the entry of the real into the world of the speaking "being" (being [*étant*] of course that it owes its being [*être*] to speech). Let us suspect that speech has the same *dit-mension* thanks to which the only real that cannot inscribe itself is the sexual rapport.

I say: let us suspect, for the persons, as one says, of whom the status is at first so tied to the juridical, to the *semblant* of knowledge, even to science, which indeed is instituted from the real, that they cannot even approach the thought that it is to an inaccessibility of a rapport that is linked the intrusion of this part at least of the remainder of the real.

This for a living "being" of which the least that one might say is that it is distinguished from the others by inhabiting language, as says a German who I have the honor of knowing (as one expresses oneself to denote having made his acquaintance). This being is distinguished by that abode which is muffled (*cotonneux*) in the "meaning" that pushes it back, said being, toward all sorts of concepts, leaky jars (*tonneaux*) that is, each one more futile than the others.

I apply this futility, yes, even to science, of which it is manifest that it only progresses by way of plugging up holes. That it always succeeds in doing so is what makes it sure. By means of which it has no meaning whatsoever. I will not say as much for what it produces, which curiously is the same thing as emerges from the leakage for which the gap of the sexual rapport is responsible: what I note by the object (**a**), to be read *petit a*.

As for my "friend" Heidegger evoked above out of the respect I bear for him, if only he would stop an instant, a wish that I emit purely gratuitously since I know very well that he would not know how to do so, stop, I say, at this idea that metaphysics has never been anything and would not know how to prolong itself except in occupying itself with plugging up the hole of politics. That is its province (*ressort*).

That Politics does not attain to the summit of futility, is how good sense is affirmed in it, which is what constitutes the law: I do not have to stress it, addressing as I am a German public, which has traditionally added to it the so-called meaning of the critique. Without it being vain to recall where that led it toward 1933.

Useless to speak of what I articulate concerning university discourse, since it speculates on the senseless (*insensé*) as such and that in this sense the best it can produce is the witticism, which nonetheless frightens it.

This fear is legitimate, if one thinks about what analysts pin down (*plaque au sol*), that is, the speakings (*parlants*) who find themselves subjected to analytic discourse, of which one can only be astonished that it has arrived among beings, I speak of speakings, of whom it is to say everything that they have only been able to imagine their world from supposing it idiotic (*abrutis*), that is, from the idea that they have had for not very long of the animal that does not speak.

Let us not seek excuses for them. Their being itself is one. For they benefit from this new destiny, that to be, they might have to ex-sist. Unbreakable in any of the preceding discourses, it would be necessary that to these (*à ceux-ci*) they ex-sist, although they believe themselves bound to take support from the meaning of these discourses to proffer what contents theirs, for good reason since it is more leaky (*fuyant*), which accentuates it.

However, everything brings them back to the solidity of the support they have in the sign: this would only be the symptom, with which they have business, and which makes a thick knot of the sign, a knot such as Marx apperceived as owing even to political discourse. I scarcely dare say it, because Freudo-Marxism is a muddle without issue.

Nothing teaches them, not even that Freud was a doctor and that the doctor like the lover has not seen it for very long, that they must therefore go elsewhere to have its genius: namely to make itself a subject, not from a reassessment, but from a discourse, from a discourse without precedent from which it happens that lovers are made ingenious in finding themselves again, what do I say? to have invented it well before Freud established it, without moreover love serving them for anything, it is patent.

I, who would be the only one, if certain people did not follow me, to make myself a subject of this discourse, I am once more going to demonstrate why some analysts are troubled by it (*s'en embarrassent*) without recourse.

While the recourse is the unconscious, the discovery by Freud that the unconscious works without thinking, or calculating, or judging and that nonetheless the fruit is there: a knowledge that it is only a question of deciphering since it consists in a ciphering.

To what does this ciphering serve? to hold them back might I say, from abounding in the mania, posed from other discourses, for utility (saying: a mania for the useful (*utile*) does not deny the useful)? The decisive step is not taken by this recourse, which nonetheless reminds us that outside of what serves, there is the enjoying (*le jouir*). The idea that in the ciphering is *jouissance*, certainly sexual, is developed in Freud's teaching (*dire*), and well enough for us to conclude that it implies that this is what creates an obstacle to the established sexual rapport, hence to this rapport's ever writing itself: I mean that language never produces a trace of it other than from an infinite chicanery.

Of course there are between beings who are sexed (although sex is only inscribed by the non-rapport), there are encounters.

There is the good hour (*bon heur*³). There is nothing but that: catch-as-catch-can (*au petit bonheur la chance*)! Speaking "beings" are happy-go-lucky (*heureux*), happy-go-lucky by nature, this is even all of her that remains to them. Is it that from analytic discourse, there could not be a little more of this? This is the question whence the *ritournelle*, I would not speak if there were not already the answer.

In more precise terms, the experience of an analysis delivers to what I call the analysand --ah! what success I have obtained with the so-called orthodox with this word, and how many by that have admitted that their desire in analysis was not to be there for nothing--delivered to the analysand, say I then, the meaning of his symptoms. Well, I pose that these experiences would not know how to be added up. Freud said it before me: everything is to be gathered in an analysis--where one sees that the analyst cannot free his paws--to be gathered as if nothing were otherwise established. This means nothing if not that the leaking of the jar is always to be re-opened.

But this is also the case with science (and Freud had no other understanding of it, put flatly [*vue courte*]). For the question begins with there being types of symptoms, with there being a clinic. Only, there we have it: this is prior to analytic discourse, and the latter sheds some light on it, this is sure but not certain. We need certitude because only it can be transmitted and demonstrated. This is the requirement of which history shows to our stupification that it was formulated well before science responded to it, and that even if the response had been other than

³ A play on *bonheur* (happiness or luck) and *heure* (hour) (tr.).

the path clearing that the requirement produced, the condition from which it took its departure, the certitude that it was transmissible was satisfied there.

We would have been wrong to pride ourselves on only putting it back there--were this with the reserve of the catch-as-catch-can.

For such opinion has for a long time given proof of being true, without for all that constituting science (*cf.* the *Meno* where it is a question of that).

That clinical types arise from structure, this is what can already be written although not without wavering. This is only certain and transmissible from the discourse of the hysteric. This is even how a real close to scientific discourse is manifested. One will remark that I have spoken of the real, and not of nature.

By which I indicate that what arises from the same structure does not necessarily have the same meaning. This is why there is only analysis of the particular: it is not at all that a same structure proceeds from a single meaning, and above all not when the structure attains to discourse.

There is no common meaning of the hysteric, and the role played for them (*eux ou elles*) by identification is structure, and not meaning, as is clearly read in the fact that it bears on desire, on lack taken as an object, not on the cause of the lack. (*Cf.* the dream of the beautiful butcher's wife--in the *Traumdeutung*--become exemplary thanks to me. I am not prodigal in my examples, but when I involve myself with them, I carry them to the paradigm.)

Thus, subjects of one type are of no use to others of the same type. And it is even conceivable that an obsessional not be able to make the least sense of the discourse of another obsessional. This is even how religious wars get started, if it is true that for religion (for this is the only trait that makes them a class, moreover insufficient), obsession is in the mix.

As a result of this, there is only communication in analysis by a path that transcends meaning, the path that proceeds from the supposition of a subject to unconscious knowledge, to ciphering. Which I have articulated: of the subject supposed to know.

This is why the transference is from love, a sentiment that there takes on so new a form that it introduces a subversion to it, not that it is less illusory, but that it gives itself a partner who has a chance to respond, which is not the case in other forms. I again put in play the *bonheur*, inasmuch as this chance comes this time from me and I must furnish it.

I insist: it is love that is addressed to knowledge. Not desire: for the *Wisstrieb*--might it have had Freud's seal of approval? We can return to that--there is no such thing (*il n'y en a pas le moindre*). This is the case even to the point that the speaking being's principle passion is founded on it: which is neither love, nor hate, but ignorance. This is made palpable to me every day (*Je touche ça du doigt tous les jours*).

That analysts, let us say those who only from posing themselves as such hold the job, and I agree with this for this reason alone: really, the fact that analysts, I say it thus in the full sense, whether they follow me or not, have not yet understood that what enters into the matrix of discourse is not meaning but the sign, gives us the called for idea of this passion of ignorance.

However, before stupid being took these analysts, others, not idiots (*sots*), stated of the oracle that it neither reveals nor hides: σημάζει, it makes a sign.

This was in a time before Socrates, who is not responsible, although he was an hysteric, for what followed: the long Aristotelian detour. Hence, Freud from listening to the Socratics whom I have said to be so, returned to those before Socrates, in his eyes capable of testifying to what he rediscovered.

It is because the meaning of their interpretation has had some effects that analysts are in the true, since even were this interpretation accurate, its effects are incalculable. It testifies to no knowledge, since to take it in its classical definition, knowledge is insured by a possible foreseeing.

What they have to know is that there is a knowledge that does not calculate, but that nonetheless works for *jouissance*.

What can write itself of the work of the unconscious? It is there that is revealed a structure that indeed belongs to language, from its function of permitting the ciphering. Which is the meaning from which linguistics has founded an object in isolating it: named the signifier.

This is the only point from which analytic discourse has to connect to science, but if the unconscious testifies to the real that is proper to it, there inversely is our chance to elucidate how language carries in the number the real from which science is elaborated.

That which does not cease (*ne cesse pas*) to write itself is supported by the play on words that my *lalangue* has retained from another *lalangue*, and not without reason, the certitude to which the mode of necessity testifies in thought.

How can we not consider that contingency, or that which ceases to not write itself, is that by which impossibility, or that which does not cease to not write itself, is demonstrated. And a real is thereby attested to, which, for not being better founded, is transmissible by the flight to which all discourse responds.

October 7, 1973