

SUBJECT OF LANGUAGE

Reading *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*

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BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION: THE THESIS IN A NUTSHELL

“It is up to you to be Lacanians ... I’m a Freudian”, so Lacan said in one of his last public statements.¹ A ‘Return to Freud’ defined his theoretical development until his final days. As a program, that ‘return’ started ‘officially’ with his 1953 lecture ‘*The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*’ (also known as the *Rome Discourse*), written a few months before the inauguration of the series of annual seminars that lasted until 1980. No doubt *The Function and Field* is a ‘programmatic’ text, also in the sense that it puts forward a thesis without completely developing all its arguments. It is true, it provides plenty of elements that contribute to the argumentation, but an elaborated, well-built line of reasoning, taking the reader from one step to the other, explaining why the latter step necessarily follows the earlier one, is not really given.

What programmatic thesis does *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* defend? That the field in which psychoanalysis operates is that of language and speech. And, moreover, that psychoanalysis must strictly limit itself to that “function and field”, both in theory and in practice. People with mental health problems knocking on a psychoanalyst’s door should not be told what is wrong with their brains or with the way they behave or react upon stimuli: they should be given the opportunity to *talk*. Not so much about their problems as about whatever comes to their mind. And the therapy should never leave the “function and field” of talking behind; it should never look for things beyond language. What is helpful for the patient must be sought in that talking solely: in the way he gives himself a

¹ « C’est à vous d’être lacaniens, si vous voulez. Moi je suis freudiens », Jacques Lacan, Le Séminaire de Caracas (July 12, 1980), in: L’Âne, Le Magazine freudien (1981)1 : 30.

place within the language he produces; in the way he relates to his own speech, i.e. in how he is the subject (*subjectum*, ‘bearer’, ‘support’, ‘ground’) of what he tells about himself.²

More than the emphasis on the ‘real’, which is so characteristic of today’s reception of Lacan’s oeuvre, the *Rome Discourse* thesis about the primacy of language and speech is the most provocative core of his theory. To understand the rationale behind this, one must lean on more elements than those given in the essay from the *Écrits* commented upon in this chapter.

Before going into a more ‘literally’ reading of *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, I will present briefly an overview of Lacan’s ‘completed’ argumentation, as explained in an often disparate way in his seminars and his other writings. In fact, the line of argumentation starts with the very axiom of psychoanalytic theory. This axiom tells that life, certainly human life, is not simply ruled by the preservation principle (as, influenced by modern biology, human sciences used to claim), but also by the *pleasure principle*. Reacting upon stimuli, the organism not only wants to preserve itself, it wants, at the same time, to have *pleasure*, even if this might be at the cost of self-preservation. For ‘pleasure’ may often go together with self-preservation, but it is not reducible to it. At the principle level, pleasure ‘subverts’ self-preservation.

‘Pleasure’ is a strictly *formal* principle, to be qualified as *polymorphously perverse*. It ‘perverts’ (‘subverts’, ‘deconstructs’) the biological function, so that the function is being lived, not merely for what it is meant for biologically, but also for ‘its own sake’: the child sucks the mother’s breast for the sake of sucking, even after having taken the milk needed to stop the hunger stimulus. This is why later, as an adult, he will take pleasure in sucking all kind of things, however unhealthy and weird they may be.

Living by pleasure, the newborn baby’s premature state is doubly traumatic, for he is not only unable to react properly to his biological needs but is also unable to satisfy his demand for pleasure. He is himself incapable of doing so because he has not yet a ‘self’. Entirely dependent on the others, he is satisfied by them in both his biological and libidinal (i.e pleasure) requirements. Hurt by a stimulus, he will cry, and then the other will be there to immediately satisfy his needs. This is why, primordially, the child is not interested in the other or in anything else: the world around is perceived as *immediately* satisfying his pleasure

² To understand the Lacanian subject theory, the term ‘subject’ should be read in its original meaning of ‘subjectum’ (what Aristotle called ‘hypokeimenon’). In Aristotle’s logic this term means the bearer of attributes. In medieval times, it is the ontological bearer the entire creation (God). In modernity, ‘subject’ becomes the name, not for the bearer of the universe, but only for the bearer of our relation to that universe. That subject is launched in the seventeenth century as the Cartesian *cogito* and its nature has been heavily discussed since. Lacan’s theory of the subject must be read as taking part of that discussion that lasts already more than three centuries. Hence the highly philosophical dimension of the Lacanian oeuvre.

requirements. Actually, the child is not even interested in ‘perceiving’ as such. He does not want to face reality; he wants pleasure, immediate pleasure (which implies, so to say, that he does not even want wanting).

This is why, according to psychoanalytical theory, reality and (even) perception are intrinsically traumatic. In order to live and to build up an identity or self, the child will have to repress that trauma, i.e. the radical incompatibility between his demand for pleasure and reality. It is here that reality becomes the “real”, in the Lacanian sense of the term: reality in so far as it is incompatible with human pleasure economy.

Lacan calls this basic condition “*le manqué-à-être*”, “the lack of being”.³ Living by pleasure, man is not able to live on the level of real being. He *is* a lack of being – surely *longing* for being, but without ever *really* becoming it. It is Lacan’s formulation of what Freud defined as the primacy of the “*Wunsch*”, the “wish”. Man even lives his identity as a *wish* to be identical to himself, and never as definitely realized (or *real*).

Here, language enters to play a crucial role, and this discovery is at the base of the entire Lacanian theory. For, just like human beings, language is characterized by ‘lack’, by an impossibility to become identical with the reality it relates to. But unlike the baby’s libidinal ‘lack of being’, the lack of language is productive and operational. Language works *thanks to* its lack. It is the very impossibility of words to coincide with what they represent, that makes them refer endlessly to other words and, for the libidinal being, makes language an appropriate universe to live in.⁴ Repressing the ‘lack of being’ by the ‘lack of language’, the libidinal economy turns its fatal impasse into pure productivity and makes it possible for man to realize himself as based on wishing, on *Wunsch* – or, to put the same ‘in Lacanese’: to realize himself as subject (bearer) of (unsatisfiable) desire.

Yet, this implies that the one who wishes or desires, is always already wished and desired himself. Or, which amounts to the same thing: the subject of desire does not precede or escape desire. He, too, must be considered from the primacy of desire, from the ‘lack of being’ – and, consequently, from the primacy of language. And it is thanks to language that the libidinal being is able to construct an ‘agency’ holding together its economy and supposing itself to be the owner, the ‘ego’, the ‘subject’ of the whole system.

³ See in Fink’s translation: 524, 3; 595, 1; 614, 7.

⁴ This is the basic insight of Ferdinand de Saussure’s and Roman Jakobson’s linguistic theory and of Lévi-Strauss’ structuralist anthropology (it is the break between nature and culture which is the ‘motor’ of culture as symbolic system), all of the fundamental references to understand the development of Lacan’s thought. See: Markos Safiropoulos, *Lacan and Lévi-Strauss or The Return to Freud (1951-1957)*, translated by John Holland, London: Karnak Books, 2010.

The one who wishes has always already been wished for himself. Not by himself (for, originally, there was no ‘self’), but by others. This is the situation of the baby. His wishes – his libidinal requirements – are immediately satisfied by others who are willing and wishing to do so. But once the baby can no longer deny that he lives by – and consequently *with* – others and will be forced to live by himself (which, in this case, means to ‘invent’ a self), it is language that will give him a perfect way out.

The baby gets acquainted with language first as a never stopping flood of articulated sounds, of which he does not understand a word and which he actually doesn’t want to understand, for all he wants is *immediate* satisfaction. But since immediate satisfaction becomes impossible, the only way out is to rely on mediation, i.e. on the stream of words by which he is washed over anyway. His primordial disinterest will turn into interest. Not because he understands what is said. To him it is all but articulated sound or ‘signifier’. But there is nonetheless something he (unconsciously) definitely ‘knows’: all these signifiers have one meaning, and that meaning is ‘me’. The child will construct his first ‘self’ by identifying with what others tell about him, with the ‘subject’ of their discourses.

This first self is an *imaginary* one, Lacan argues. It is the phase of ‘his majesty the baby’. Although lack belongs undeniably to the child, he does as if only the others are marked by lack – that, according to him, is why they are talking all the time. And, consequently, he supposes himself to be the answer to that lack, i.e. that what makes the world in which he lives (named by Lacan ‘the Other’) complete.

Yet, soon the child will realize that he is neither the answer to all the others’ questions nor the sense of the world. Others appear to be busy not exclusively with him. Yet, doomed to a relation of identification with others and identifying himself with the ‘subject’ they talk about, the child will change the condition of that (imaginary) ‘subject’. He will no longer consider himself to be the *subject as answer* to the lack of the other, but the *subject as bearer of* that very lack. Here, the libidinal being becomes the subject/bearer of the desire of the Other, which implies that, now, he acknowledges himself too as marked by a fundamental lack. This turn is only possible within an environment that functions as language. The subject becomes the bearer of ‘himself’ – a ‘self’ that precisely lacks in each signifier and refers again and again to other signifiers.

The demand of the neurotic patient has an imaginary nature, Lacan states. What the patient basically cannot stand is his condition as subject of desire, i.e. the fact that he does not coincide with a ‘full self’ but with the ‘lack of self’ – or, what amount to the same thing, with a desire for ‘himself’ (who, therefore, remains an ‘other’). This is why he unconsciously

supposes that a completion of that lack is possible. That is what his symptom – or his demand in general – is about: ‘if my symptom is healed, if my demand is answered,’ so he supposes, ‘I will be delivered from the bothering lack of desire that keeps me incomplete’. Precisely language enables the patient to play that game and to ‘invent’ a *full* self – a self supposed to be the fulfillment of his desire.

This is why, for the analyst, the most difficult thing in an analytical cure, is not so much the patient’s, but his own desire. For he himself is constantly seduced to operate as the filling in of the lack of desire that his patient is struggling with. This is why the analyst must avoid any answer to the patient’s demands or any diagnosis that links his problems to ‘facts’, to things beyond the surface of language.⁵ Such diagnosis would keep the patient in his imaginary position. And the aim of psychoanalysis is to change this position into one in which the patient can assume to be the subject of the symbolic (or, what amounts to the same thing, the subject of the desire of the Other).

Now we understand why it is so important that the analyst – and psychoanalysis in general – must stick to ‘the function and field of speech and language’. It is with language and speech that the patient denies his symbolic condition (as subject of desire) and tries to use the analyst to support this strategy. But it is at the same time only within the realm of language that the analyst can lead the patient to a confrontation – and, finally, assumption – of the fundamental lack that characterizes him as subject of desire. The patient’s confrontation with the ‘split’ condition of his subject (unable as he is to *really* be who he desires to be) can only happen in speech. Every reference beyond language makes the analyst fall into the imaginary trap set by his patient.

Both the analyst and the patient must keep dancing on the surface of language⁶, a dance that oscillates between the imaginary denial of the lack that human desire is based upon and a symbolic assumption of that very lack. A dance, not of two but of four partners, for both the patient and the analyst oscillate between an imaginary ego and a symbolic subject – or, in the concepts of the *Rome Discourse*: between a ‘*moi*’ (ego) and a ‘*Je*’ (I).

The Function and Field of Speech and Language claims that psychoanalytic practice should consider itself as such a kind of dance, but the essay does not work out the structure and procedure of that dance. Lacan will do this in numerous of other writings and seminars as

⁵ This is the background of Lacan’s famous advice to analysts: “Don’t try to understand” (“*Gardez-vous de comprendre*”) (394, 7). See 242, 5 in *The Function and Field of Language and Speech in Psychoanalysis*.

⁶ At the end of his *Rome Discourse* (264, 2), Lacan will define that surface as a topological one, a torus, where the imaginary demands make circles, but because these never make full circle, that movement makes another circle, the one of desire, in which the missing or the demand’s ‘circle’ is acknowledged.

well as in his famous schemes, for instance the L-scheme (40, 2) and the ‘Graphe of desire’ (692, 1). In his *Rome Discourse* he only gives some of the elements underlying the line of argument for this thesis.

In the next pages, I follow strictly the text of Lacan’s paper, explaining both the line of reasoning (respecting the bends and meanders he creates) and the references to other theories and books he mentions.

READING
*THE FUNCTION AND FIELD OF SPEECH AND
 LANGUAGE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS*

PREFACE

“Paper delivered at the Rome Congress held at the Institute of Psychology at the University of Rome on September 26 and 27, 1953”: it is the subtitle of what soon would be referred to as the “Rome Discourse” (“*Discours de Rome*”). Lacan might have found the indication insufficient, for he starts with a preface explaining in detail the circumstances in which this paper has been conceived and presented. Late 1952 and early 1953, theoretical disputes on the nature of both psychoanalytic theory and practice had split up the French analytical society, and in June 1953, a new society – *Société française de psychanalyse* – was created (197, 3 – 198, 1). On the planned biannual congress of French speaking psychoanalysts, their French colleagues considered the members of the new group (including Lacan) not really welcome. The Italian hosts thought differently, but could not prevent the dissident voices from being excluded from the platform (198, 4).⁷ Yet – so Lacan consoles himself, in that city near the Vatican – even crying is accurate: for did not the second century Roman grammarian Aulus Gellius, in his *Noctes Atticae*, link the word Vagitanus/Vaticanus (originally an Etruscan deity) to ‘vagire’, the crying of a child⁸ (198, 5)? In that sense, crying and infantile stammering is even an adequate form to introduce my main thesis, Lacan suggests (198, 6) anticipating what he will say about “primary language” (232, 7). And, what is more, so he continues, I broke with the rules of the “high priests” in charge – his French colleagues from the other group – because they stick too much to rules and neglect the autonomy of the subject, of that of my students for instance (198, 7-9). Precisely with respect to the formation of new analysts, formalism is fatal; that is why we have to go back to the principles of

⁷ In fact, Lacan was already invited for speaking at that conference before the creation of the *Société française de psychanalyse*, i.e. when he was still the head of the *Société Psychanalytique de Paris*, from which the new *Société* split off. In Rome, Lacan was replaced by another speaker, but was given the occasion to speak on a different moment. He did not read the text of his *Rome discours*, but spoke directly to the audience. For the summary of that speech, see on the internet *Pas tout Lacan* (<http://www.ecole-lacanienne.net/pastoutlacan50.php>: 1953-09-26: Discours de Rome; for the circumstances, see: <http://www.societe-psychanalytique-de-paris.net/wp/?p=2250>).

⁸ Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 16: 17; in: Aulus Gellius, *The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius*, English translation by William Beloe, London, 1795, vol. 3, pp. 247–248. For the Latin original, see: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/L/Roman/Texts/Gellius/16*.html.

psychoanalysis and their clarification, he concludes (199, 3). For holding on to principles does not exclude theoretical disputes or a divergence of opinions. On the contrary, fidelity to principles requires a “dialectical testing of contradictory claims”, and contrary to what one might think, this does not keep a school from severely selecting its candidates (199, 4).

According to Lacan, all this requires a reflection upon the theoretical concepts in Freud’s theory, concepts we must hold on, for it is “premature to break with the traditional terminology” (199, 8). Yet, that terminology needs clarification, and here, current anthropological studies as well as the “latest problems in philosophy” can be helpful (199, 9).⁹ These references will not only prevent psychoanalytical practice from becoming merely a technical procedure, it will also help to extract the meaning of its terminology from that very practice. A driving school does not have “to survey car construction”, he ironically adds (299, 5). All analytical practices – the “role [of the analysts] in relation to the patient, their place in the intellectual society, the relation with peers, and their educational mission” – should be explained proceeding from clearly explained psychoanalytical principles (200, 10).

At the end of the *Preface*, using a concept he still has to explain, Lacan mentions a “symbolic action [that] becomes lost in its own opacity” (201, 1). “Symbolic” announces the field in which both the analyst and the patient have to operate: a field of signifiers in which the patient always already has lost himself – i.e. his imaginary ‘ego’ – and where, in that very loss, he will find himself as ‘subject’, i.e. as *subjectum* of desire (desiring even his own ‘self’).

In the last sentences, Lacan apologizes for the “haste in which [his discourse] was written” (201, 2). This, too, is not without direct reference to the psychoanalytical field and praxis he will talk about, he suggests. He more precisely refers to his 1945 essay *The Logical Time*, where he explains “haste” to be the temporal condition of the way in which the patient has to come to conclusions during the analytic cure. Later in the *Rome Discourse* he will return a few times to that essay.

INTRODUCTION

However strange the two mottos may seem at first sight, they announce the main theses of the *Rome Discourse*.

⁹ Later in the text, Lacan will rely on and refer to Lévi-Strauss (279, 2; 236, 3) and Heidegger (212, 3; 231, 3; 261, 7 – 262, 1).

The quotation from Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799) tells that ‘we will determine our position now that, in our voyage around the sun, we are at the farthest point (aphelium), for at the nearest one this might be impossible’. Whether things are possible or not for someone, is a matter of *topology*, i.e. of where one is located. Although abstract, it gives already an idea of what Lacan will state in his *Discourse*: the problem that both the patient and the analyst are facing during the cure is to be considered as a *topological* one, as a matter of where one is located in the intersubjective field they share. That field is not so much constituted by both the patient and the analyst as by what they share with one another: language, considered in its mere materiality: signifiers.

And this is precisely to what the second quotation taken from the nineteenth century writer Robert Browning points. In a fictitious discussion with Mandeville, the interlocutors talk about the constellation Orion. There we read:

‘Is, joint by joint, Orion man-like, — as these dots explain
His constellation? Flesh composed of suns —
How can such be?’ exclaim the simple ones.
Look through the sign to the thing signified.¹⁰

Indeed, from the perspective of the primacy of the signifier defended in the *Rome Discourse*, man may be made of suns, for both man’s and the sun’s identity are first of all a matter of signifiers; it is in that quality that they function in the human libidinal economy.

In a first, baroque sentence, Lacan presents his thesis: when man, in the midst of his action, realizes the truth of what he is doing, he turns away from it; so frightened he is. Lacan speaks about psychoanalysis, more precisely about how psychoanalysts turn away from Freud’s “Promethean discovery” stating that truth is exclusively a matter of speech. They turn away from language, which is the basic ‘element’ in which human intersubjectivity occurs and the subject can find his truth. Lacan reproaches the analysts of his day to remain blind for the materiality of the signifier, which is the only ‘material’ psychoanalysis has to deal with. (201,

¹⁰ Robert Browning, *Parleying with certain people of importance in their day*, Boston / New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1887, p. 30.

6) It is within the realm of language – and only within that realm – that both the analysand and the analyst have to operate.

It is a characteristic of Lacan's style not to explain immediately the idea, but to give an overview first of how it has been neglected by psychoanalysts themselves, showing a "growing aversion regarding the functions of speech and the field of language" (201, 7). The decline of the therapeutic effect or, as some put it, the resistance of the patients must be approached from an analysis of the dialectical play of the analytical process, in which the object is always in some way or another an "alibi of the subject", i.e. a way by which the subject puts himself in the field of language (signifiers) shared by the participants in the intersubjective play of the psychoanalytic cure. (201, 7)

In what follows, Lacan describes the "topography" of psychoanalysis turning away from speech and language. He more precisely overviews the psychoanalytical "scientific literature" and distinguishes three fields in which that tendency is clearly present (201, 8).

- A) The field that deals with the function of the imaginary – of fantasies for instance – in the cure, as observed first of all in the analysis of children. It is the function Lacan himself discovered in the thirties as the "mirror stage".¹¹ That function may be preverbal, yet, it asks for symbolization ("symbolic sanction") in the interpretation – thus Lacan, who will only later explain the term 'symbolic' (symbolic being Lévi-Strauss' term for the realm of the signifier or, more exactly, for culture approached from the perspective of the primacy of the signifier).
- B) The field of the object relation theory, which, unnoticed, has changed the practices of psychoanalysis and has enlarged its domain to psychosis. Lacan refers here to the object relation theories that consider the libidinal vicissitudes as a 'natural' evolution towards the right attitude in relation to the right object, the "genital object" as Bouvet for instance stages.¹² Here, psychoanalysis is reduced to a kind of 'orthopraxis', a praxis aiming at a 'right' way of living. It is in this sense that psychoanalysis is reduced to "existential phenomenology", and even "an activism activated by charity". And again, Lacan announces "symbolization" to be the remedy here.
- C) The field of counter-transference and, more precisely, how this phenomenon can hinder the formation of the candidate at the end of his "training analysis". When, at

¹¹ See: "The Mirror Stage as Formative for the I Function" . *Ecrits*; Fink's translation, p. 55-81.

¹² See: "La clinique psychanalytique: la relation d'objet", in : Maurice Bouvet, (1972 [1967]), *Oeuvres psychanalytiques I: La relation d'objet*, Paris, Payot 1972, p. 161-225.

the end of the cure, the patient resists accepting the completion of an analysis, most theories of Lacan's day say it is due to countertransference, the transference of the analyst with regard to the patient. Here too, Lacan claims, the psychoanalytic literature oscillates between a recognition of "being of the analyst", i.e. his impact (implying the recognition of the primacy of the inter-subjective field) and some "unconscious mainspring" to be located *beyond* the inter-subjective field of speech and language.

In these three fields of problems, the psychoanalytical theories of Lacan's day attempt "to abandon the foundation of speech" – precisely in domains in which, more than elsewhere, the function of speech should have been examined: "the child's education by its mother [A], Samaritan-type aid [B] and dialectical mastery [C]" (202, 4). In the following paragraphs (202, 5-6), Lacan indicates some other, positive attempts (for example Ferenczi's study on the "confusion of tongues" in the child/adult relation, for instance)¹³, but "only an appropriate return to the study of the function of speech" can help here, argues Lacan. (203, 2) And it is precisely via speech and language that Freud approached the libidinal problems of, for instance, Little Hans and Daniel Schreber (203, 3).¹⁴ After Freud, all this has been left behind, and rather than a dialectical play in the field of language, psychoanalytical cure has become a formal procedure similar to what Freud himself has diagnosed as "obsessional neurosis" (203, 5)

According to Lacan, all this is due to an "ignorance of the origin of the terms", to the lack of insight in the way psychoanalytical concepts fit into Freud's own theory and, what is more, into Freud's *thinking*. (203, 6) Instead, the meaning of concepts has been determined by the way the psychoanalytical community (the important American group included) has used them (204, 3) – thus Lacan, declaring that, by criticizing the analysts, he only applies the "analytical method [i.e. the primacy of language and discourse] to the collectivity that sustains it" (203, 9).

In this context, Lacan introduces the triad 'symbolic, imaginary, real' (204, 2), although without giving the terms a first explanation.¹⁵ Referring to the American psychology

¹³ "Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child", in: Sándor Ferenczi, *Final Contribution to the Problems and Methods of Psycho-Analysis*, edited by Michael Balint, translated by Eric Mosbacher, New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1980 (1955), p. 156-167.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition*, Translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey, Volume XVIII, London: Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1978 (1955), p 22-100; Volume XII, p. 12-58.

¹⁵ July 8th of the same year (1953), in a lecture with that title ("Le symbolique, l'imaginaire et le réel"), he had introduced this distinction for the newly created *Société française de psychanalyse*. See: Jacques Lacan, *Des*

and psychiatry of his day as dominated by “a-historicism” and “behaviorism”, he opposes his approach as being symbolic, i.e. as recognizing the primacy of the “symbolic order” (i.e. the field of language, the realm of signifiers). But, once again, instead of explaining the term, he refers to an effect of that order, to something he once labeled as the “factor c” (at a “Congress of Psychiatry” in 1950) (204, 4). This refers to the way in which, contrary to what behaviorism states, the subject is “cultural”, i.e. not adapted and not totally adaptable.¹⁶

And even from the imaginary point of view, so he adds in the following paragraph, one must conclude that, under the influence of the American group, the psychoanalytical theory has moved in the direction of a psychological adaptation theory (204, 6-7). This is the reason for the “eclipse in psychoanalysis of the liveliest terms of its experience – the unconscious and sexuality” (204, 7). And a correct understanding of such concepts is a condition *sine qua non* for “true mastery teaching”, Lacan adds, sarcastically referring to the American psychoanalytic community obliging their new analysts “to give at least one class” (205, 1).

Yet, the emphasis on a correct understanding of the concepts is not a plea for a new orthodoxy in psychoanalytical theory (205, 2). It is but a way to announce that “these concepts take on their full meaning only when oriented in the field of language and ordered in relation to the function of speech” (205, 3).

In the ultimate paragraph of the introduction, he refers at length to an unnamed psychoanalytical author who reduces Freud’s thinking to an instinct theory, a misunderstanding worsened by – as Lacan recalls – the reference to the work of Marie Bonaparte as being of the same level as the work of Freud himself.¹⁷ Add to this the complete

noms-du-père, Paris: Seuil, 2005, p. 9-63. At the end of that lecture, he declares he will say more about all this in his lecture in Rome, i.e. the *Rome Discourse*.

¹⁶ “The theory interests us because it shows that all science called psychological must be affected by the ideals of the society in which it is produced; this is not to say that we link it to what the literature teaches us about the manifestations of sex in America, but to the consequences of what it literally says, namely that the mechanic animals that we almost everywhere are producing by the procedure of *feedback* [...] in a while will surely manifest a new appetite to make love [que les animaux mécaniques qu’on est en train de monter un peu partout sur le ressort du *feedback* (...) ne manqueront pas de manifester d’ici peu une neuve envie de faire l’amour]. Let us indicate this subjective lack [in the objective determinations of the mechanical animal’s behavior] by a small c, symbol to which you can give all the translations that seem to fit. This *factor* escapes our cares as well as our criticism, and yet the subject enjoys it and it guarantees social coherence. But if the effect of the symbolic discordance which we call mental disease, succeeds in breaking this factor, then it would be only our task to restore it.” [my translation, MDK], in : *Intervention au Premier Congrès mondial de psychiatrie en 1950* qui fait suite aux exposés de Franz Alexander, Anna Freud, Mélanie Klein et Raymond de Saussure, dans le cadre de la V^e section du Congrès mondial, « Psychothérapie, psychanalyse », *Actes du Congrès*, volume 5, Paris: Hermann et Cie, 1952, pp. 103-108 ; see also <http://www.ecole-lacanienne.net/pastoutlacan50.php>.

¹⁷ It is known that Bonaparte – a descendant from Napoleon Bonaparte who by her riches had supported substantially the psychoanalytic movement – is a very negative reference for Lacan. Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan: Esquisse d’une vie, histoire d’un système de pensée*, Paris: Fayard, p. 116, 265, 270

denial of the importance of language and speech in that theory that reduces psychoanalysis to a neurology “modeled on the activity of lice seekers¹⁸”, and you understand why Maurice Bénassy – for this is the name Lacan refuses to speak out – is a negative reference par excellence for him.¹⁹ Cynically, he refers to his writings as a patchwork of misunderstandings. His theory can barely be called psychoanalytical, Lacan stresses. It did not keep Bénassy, a few years later, from publishing a book entitled “La théorie psychanalytique”.²⁰

I. Empty Speech and Full Speech in the Psychoanalytic Realization of the Subject

Both mottos on top of the text put forward an encouragement to speak. As Lacan will explain in this part of the *Rome Discourse*, speech and language constitute the exclusive field in which psychoanalysis can – and must – operate.

The first motto is taken from *L'eternelle consolacion*, a contemporary French version of the fifteenth century ‘bestseller’ in spirituality, *De Imitatione Christi*: “Put true and stable speech into my mouth and make of me a cautious tongue”.²¹ To the plea for speech, it adds a reference to truth. This is part of the thesis Lacan will defend in what follows: the mental health care operation known as psychoanalysis is not only a matter of language and speaking, but of truth as well. Someone in psychic trouble must not merely look for a way to become happy again. His problem is not with feeling or behavior. What he is after is in the first place ‘truth’: he wants to rediscover himself as the subject/bearer of a life/story of which he realizes he no longer can identify with. It is his lost ‘self’ he wants to find again. This is the truth he is after, and that truth can only be found in what he or she shares and exchanges with others, with the analyst in this case, namely language. In order to heal his problems, he will

¹⁸ “... so dear to the poet”, Lacan adds. The poet is Arthur Rimbaud, and *The Lice Seekers* (*Les chercheuses de poux*) is the poem’s title. Arthur Rimbaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, édition établie, présentée et annotée par Anoine Adam, Paris : Gallimard, Les éditions de la pléiade, 1972, p. 65-66.

¹⁹ In 1952, Lacan had given an intervention “Sur la théorie des instincts”, reacting to a lecture of Benassy. This intervention is still not published.

²⁰ Together with Sacha Nacht and others (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969).

²¹ *Le livre de l'eternelle consolacion, première version Française de l'imitation du Jésus-Christ*, Nouvelle édition avec une Introduction et des Notes par L. Moland et Ch. D’Haricault, Paris : Janet, 1856, p. 165.

have to talk and, in this ‘talking cure’²², search for truth. Speaking is psychoanalysis’ ‘method’; its aim is truth.

“Always speak”, the second motto, is by Lacan himself, and is left untranslated in the English edition. For the French “*cause toujours*” allows one to see the semantic link to the fictitious origin of the quote: “Motto of a ‘causalist’ thought”. “Causalist” refers to theories that locate the origin of the patient’s problem in a “cause” outside the field of language, outside the speaking process of an analytic cure. Later in his *Discourse*, Lacan will discuss this position by criticizing an unnamed representative of that theory (see for instance 208, 5). Here (as in 208, 5) he uses the word ‘causalist’ in reference to the French word ‘*cause*’ in “*Cause toujours*”, insinuating that the real origin and ‘cause’ of the problems psychoanalysis deals with is to be found in speaking and language.

To take its proper start, the *Rome Discourse* simply puts forward its main thesis: psychoanalysis, whatever form it takes, has only one medium: “the patient’s speaking” (206, 1). And speaking is meant to be an inherently social practice, since it necessarily supposes an answer, even if it “meets only with silence”. This is the case in the patient’s ‘empty speech’. It is there that the analyst, unaware of the function of speaking, may be inclined to look for something *beyond* the patient’s speech. Yet, Lacan stresses, even if he finds (or supposes to find) something there, he will nonetheless return to speech for he will have to speak about it to his patient anyway. Psychoanalysis is strictly limited to the realm of speech and language.

What the patient is asking for in his ‘empty speech’ is truth; but he at the same time avoids the confrontation with it and uses his demands to seduce the analyst in order to support him in keeping up his narcissistic ego (206, 5). In this case, the moments of silence are not the ones of introspection, as many analysts think, so Lacan argues (206, 6-8). Even when the patient has prepared his introspection, “free association” is there to deliver him from it. Free association is “forced labor of a discourse that leaves no way out”, read: that does not facilitate the comfort of turning around in one’s own imaginary ego. Psychoanalysis is not a matter of (imaginary) introspection, it is a (symbolic) inter-subjective procedure in which, in the field of language and by way of speaking, one tries to find the truth about his ‘self’: he tries to find his ‘subject’ as the place (*topos*) from where he addresses himself to others and (even) to himself (as Lacan later will explain).

²² As Anna O. once defined her analytic cure; see Freud’s *Five lessons on Psychoanalysis* (in Standard Edition, Volume IX, p. 13; 21).

To be qualified as “work”, free association does not make the apprentice in psychoanalysis a “skilled worker”. What is at stake in the cure is work in the sense of what Freud calls ‘*durcharbeiten*’, “working through”. This is difficult to translate into French, Lacan adds, quoting the seventeenth century poet Nicolas Boileau from his *L’art poétique* where he states that one should, if necessary, rewrite things twenty times. It illustrates perfectly what precisely “*durcharbeiten*” means (207, 5).²³

Lacan refers to the theories of his time that relate *Durcharbeitung* to the “triad: frustration, aggressiveness, regression”. He vehemently criticizes the then common practice to link frustration to “affectivity” (207, 6). Where does “this frustration comes from?”, he asks. Not from the non-answer or the “silence” the patient gets from his analyst, for an answer frustrates him even more. Frustration is thoroughly inherent to the patient’s discourse itself. And this is a good thing, for the patient has to get “involved here in an ever greater dispossession of himself”. In other words, he has to become aware of the *imaginary* character of that ‘self’, while his ‘true’ self is *symbolic*. It is a self that got its identity from the fact that it is the subject/bearer of a desire that links him to the other: he is the bearer of a desire he both got from the other and makes him long for the other. This is why the patient, in his *Durcharbeitung*, has to deconstruct his closed imaginary ego and to “reconstruct” himself “*for another*”, the analyst, thus finding himself back “*as another*”, which implies that his ‘self’ is “always [...] destined to be taken away from him *by another*” (2007, 7 – 2008, 8).

Unlike the ego-psychological oriented psychoanalysis of his time explaining the ego as a positive power that withstands frustration, Lacan defines the ego as “frustration in its very essence” (208, 2). It is not the frustration *of his desire*, for the ego is precisely the imaginary formation in which the symbolic desire – including its “enjoyment” – has been alienated. And it is this ego which, in the *Durcharbeitung* of the cure, has to go through frustration.

Concerning aggressiveness, Lacan states that this is not some regression to an animal stage, but a reaction of the ego trying to hold off any attempt of the analyst to break through his imaginary construction (208, 4). This is what happens in the so-called counter-transference – as put forward by that “naïve analyst”, “the same one” who situates the origin of the patient’s problem outside the field of speech and language (this is, as we have seen, the “causalist” position, ironized in the second motto). Again, Lacan refers to Maurice Bénassy,

²³ See the famous *Canto one* of his *The Art of Poetry*: “Make haste but slowly; never give up heart: / Perhaps the twelfth revision buffs your art [Hâtez-vous lentement, et, sans perdre courage, / Vingt fois sur le métier remettez votre ouvrage]”, in: Nicolas Boileau, *Selected Poems*, translated from the French by Burton Raffel, Introduction by Julia Prest, New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2007, p. 27.

leaving the author once more unnamed and reproaching his “anxiety of having to think that his patient’s freedom may depend on that of his own intervention” (208, 5). What, according to Lacan, Bénéassy is afraid of, is the intersubjective play between patient and analyst in which the former has to find his ‘self’ in his dependency – his desire – of the other, just like the ‘self’ of the analyst is also to be located in the field of his dependency on – desire of – the other.

Some say that what must be analyzed in a psychoanalytic cure, is simply what happens there “*hic et nunc*”, in the intercourse between analysand and analyst. Of course the patient’s history is completely part of the game, but what must be analyzed is how the patient reports that history, how he relates to it “here and now”, and how he ‘transfers’ it to the relation with his analyst. Lacan fully agrees with all this, but specifies that the analysis must concern the imaginary ego. The ego the patient performs must be related to “the symbolic relation in which it is expressed”. The “*moi*” must be connected to the “*je*” (i.e. the *I*): to the subject as being the subject/bearer of symbolic desire – a desire of which the subject is the bearer but which has its origin not in that subject, but in the other (208, 6).

“I was this only in order to become what I can be” (209, 1): I was and am an imaginary ego, but not to remain what I am, but to long for the other I can be. For my being is not to be located in the presence (of my imaginary ego), but in the future, in my longing for myself as the other whom I will never become. Of this longing, I am the subject. And that longing or desire is what makes a psychoanalytical cure progress.

This is what the analyst must do with his patient’s moments of silence during the sessions: he has to integrate them in his narcissistic, imaginary discourse in order to break it open (209, 2). For this, and not the “negative reaction of the subject”, is the real threat to be fought during the cure (209, 3). The patient’s security must be suspended, and the analyst must punctuate the dissolution of it, for it is at such moments that the patient’s discourse meets its symbolic nature (209, 4).

The speaking of the patient has to be led away from its content and brought back to its empty state of speaking words that are like eroded coins, as Mallarmée puts it.²⁴ Speech, “even when almost completely worn out, retains its value as a *tessera*”, as a ‘symbolon’ (209, 5).²⁵ Precisely ‘empty speaking’ shows that language is primordially not a tool to transfer information, but a medium of inter-subjectivity in which even eroded coins/signs create

²⁴ Stéphane Mallarmée, *Oeuvres complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris: Gallimard, 1945, p. 369; 857.

²⁵ ‘*Tessera*’, Latin for admission ticket. In Greek it is ‘*symbolon*’. Originally ‘symbolon’ was the half of a broken potsherd. When that half (that *symbolon* / *tessera*) fitted to the one (for instance) a doorkeeper had, you were allowed to come in.

relations between people and, what is more, provide them an identity. For identity does not precede the medium – the language – people share with one another. It is the reverse: it is the medium, it is language, it is the fact that a child is addressed to with signifiers, that gives him the opportunity to imagine himself to be the subject those signifiers refer to. This is the way in which he will constitute himself as a subject, i.e. as a subject of language: not a subject that supposes itself to be the ‘*signifié*’ of all these signifiers (this is the imaginary position of the ego), but as the subject of mere ‘signifiers’, in which he endlessly will long for ‘himself’ as for ‘another’ (this is his symbolic position of subject of the desire of the Other).

That subject – i.e. the point where a libidinal being is the bearer of his own life story that in fact has its origin in the Other, the point where it realizes itself to be radically alienated in the Other – is the place where the patient meets his truth. And the reference to that truth is implied in every act of speaking, which is why, “even if it communicates nothing [...] it affirms that speech constitutes truth” (209, 6).

The analyst, therefore, takes the long explications of his patient as a polite salutation, because it is in a simple slip of the tongue that he hears the complex problem his patient deals with (209, 7). Only where it meets a breaking point, his discourse opens the way to his ‘subject’, to the place where the libidinal being is the bearer of the desire of the Other. The analyst can provoke such breaking points by means of interventions, interpretations or, as Lacan puts it here, “propitious punctio[n]s” (209, 8).

The background of that paragraph is the variable duration of Lacan’s psychoanalytical sessions. Instead of sessions of a fixed fifty or sixty minutes, as ordered by the *International Psychoanalytic Association*, Lacan varied in the length of his session and often had much shorter ones. His argument is that “a propitious interpunction” – or ending – “gives meaning to the subject’s discourse”. It was a tricky point for the newly established *Société française de Psychanalyse*, of which Lacan was a leading member. Because of the latter’s variable session length, the *International Psychoanalytic Association* would refuse to give him official approval to the new *Société*. Lacan will come back to his “short sessions” at length at the end of his *Rome Discourse* (257, 3 – 260, 3).

In the following paragraph Lacan discusses the third element of the “triad: frustration, aggressiveness, regression”, as announced in 207, 6. Regression, too, is to be considered as an imaginary way to hold on to the ego-position, integrating in it “fantasmatic relations” of the past (209, 9). “After all, the regression is not real.” (210, 1)

One of the traps many analysts fall into, Lacan continues, is to think that the cure is not so much meant to lead the subject to his truth, but to free him from ill-making fantasies

and to restore a proper “contact” with reality (210, 2). Even the “supervision” that every young analyst has experienced, demonstrates the contrary, argues Lacan. It is not conformity to reality that makes a supervision thoughtful, but the new perspective – the “second sight” – it can give to the same “reality”, which is by definition a thoroughly phantasmatic one (210, 3). For the analyst is always in the “position of [...] second subjectivity”, and this is what a supervision should bring about with the one supervised, so Lacan adds, criticizing the misleading connotations of the French term for supervision and supervised: *contrôle et contrôlé* (210, 5).

An analyst must be aware of this “second subjectivity” when he listens to his patient with what is classically called a “defuse, or even absentminded, attention” (210, 6), paying attention not to the manifest content of what the patient says but to his hesitations and slips of the tongue. Lacan stresses once again that the analyst certainly should not listen to an object beyond the patient’s talking, as so many contemporary theories claim. If there is an ‘object’ the analyst has to look for in the patient’s discourse, it is ‘the imaginary relation that links him to the subject qua ego’ (211, 1). For the analyst must be aware that he is an element in the discourse of the patient who puts him (the analyst) in a position where he is the keystone of the patient’s discourse: the analyst being the *signified* making full circle of the signifiers the patients utters. The analyst has to keep this ‘object’ constantly under his attention, in order not to give way to that seduction. He must listen in the way the Gospel says you should not: “having ears *in order not to hear*” (211, 2).²⁶ The only ‘object’ the analyst must listen to is the “empty speech” of the patient. This implies that one should resist today’s inclination to look for some “individual psychophysiological factor” beyond the patient’s speech, so Lacan emphasizes once again (211, 3).

But there is more. In the second part of the first section, the *Rome Discourse* focuses on what, in the analytical cure, breaks the full circle of the patient’s imaginary strategy and forces him to “full speech”, a word Lacan introduces here. (211, 4).

But is the aim and task of a “talking cure” not “anamnesis”, i.e. making conscious the patient’s unconscious traumas? Are these events not the cause of his symptoms, since, when uttering the former, the latter disappears? (211, 7) And is, then, the speech of the patient not only a “breath of the voice”, a “*flatus vocis*” whose truth lies in the facts, not in words and

²⁶ Mark 4: 9, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear”. See also Mark 4: 23; Luke 14: 35; Matthew 11: 15; 13: 9.

speech? Does the result of the cure not depend of the becoming aware of those very facts? (212, 1)

Lacan's answer to these questions is negative. Decisive to him is that the patient has brought these events to the level of speech, that he has verbalized them and mixed them up with earlier verbalizations, and that he made things comprehensible for his contemporary fellows (212, 2). Not the past event as such matters here, but the way the subject has appropriated that past in the present.

Lacan understands this in a Heideggerian way. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger explains that the past of the *Dasein* (his term for 'subject') is not situated behind but *before* him. He is not at the origin of his life and world, he is thrown into the world that was there before him, but he has to take that 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*) upon him as a 'project' (*Entwurf*) he still has to realize. Our past, that which we have been (our '*Gewesenheit*') is lived, not as something behind us, but as what we *have to be*, *have to assume* as being ours. Our past is what we always still *have to take* upon us. In that sense, our past is located in the same time as in which we live now, and this is not the present, but the future time. This is why, for Heidegger, human existence is ex-sistence, 'standing out' in the direction of the future. I am not what I am now, I am what I have to be. I always *have to be* what I am, and in that sense also what I *was* – I have to take even my past upon me as a possibility allowing me to become what I am. (212, 3).²⁷

If the patient's revelation is ambiguous, it is not because it hesitates between imagination and reality, nor because "it is made up with lies", but because it shows us the "birth of truth in speech, and thereby brings us up against a reality of what is neither true nor false" (212, 4). What kind of truth Lacan has in mind here? It is not the truth defined by a proposition's correspondence to the reality it refers to; not even when that reality is "duration" repressed by linear temporality and only accessible by a memory that is led by intuition, thus Lacan specifies with a reference to the philosophy of Henri Bergson.²⁸ "In psychoanalytic anamnesis, what is at stake is not reality, but truth". And on the base of what Lacan writes, it

²⁷ *Sein und Zeit* §65: "Taking over thrownness, however, is possible only in such a way that futural Da-sein *can be* its ownmost "how it always already was," that is, its "having-been." Only because Da-sein in general *is* as I am-having-been, can it come futurally toward itself in such a way that it *comes-back*. Authentically futural, Da-sein is authentically *having-been* [*gewesen*]. Anticipation of the most extreme and ownmost possibility comes back understandingly to one's ownmost *having-been*. Da-sein can *be* authentically having-been only because it is futural. In a way, having-been arises from the future." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambough, Albany: SUNY Press, 1996, p. 299.

²⁸ See the basic chapter "The idea of duration" in Bergson's first book *Time and Free will, An essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*; Henry Bergson, *Key Writings*, edited by Keith Ansell Pearson & John Mullarkey, New York / London: Continuum, p. 49-77.

is obvious he understands this in a Heideggerian way. Truth qualifies the event in which the *Dasein* takes upon him the *Da* of his being, including his being in the past, in order to assume the being that he always again will *have to be*.

Here, Lacan reformulates the Heideggerian idea of *Erschlossenheit* (*Disclosedness*)²⁹ in his own psychoanalytical terms. Truth is the event of “full speech”, he writes, in which the patient “reorders past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the scant freedom through which the subject makes them present.” (213, 2). Truth emerges when the patient takes upon him the true (read: symbolic) condition that his imaginary ego-position denies. The patient’s ‘self’ (i.e. that which he is in trouble with, his identity, the point from where he relates to the world as an *I*) is not a closed circle catching himself in the *Gestalt* of an ego. The self’s truth is to be found at the point where the story in which he tells his lifestory (which originates in the other) is assumed in order to open it for his future story to come. By assuming the non-closed condition of his identity, by assuming that he coincides with an openness to the future (an openness making him the subject of a radical, i.e. unfulfillable desire), he relates to what he is and was (his *Gewesenheit*), to “the sense of necessities to come”.

In order to illustrate this, Lacan refers to Freud’s analysis of the Wolf Man as well as to his own essay on the *Logical Time*, published eight years earlier. In the latter, he presents an experiment in which three prisoners are marked with a colored plate on their back, selected from a set of three black and two white ones. The prisoners, prohibited to speak to one another, can see the plate on the others’ back, but do not know their own. The one who first guesses the color on his back and explains the correct logic that brings him to this conclusion will be released. Lacan explains that each of them, proceeding from what the other thinks about himself and about the other, succeeds in guessing his color.³⁰ He shows that the truth the patient has to deal with is one to *decide to*; it is a matter of anticipating a certainty *to come*. In this experiment the participants take into account only the black and white marks they have on their back – they only rely on signifiers. Solely on that basis, and on the fact that the others have to rely on these signifiers as well, each of the participants has to come to a decision regarding the truth (213, 4-5).

²⁹ Heidegger 1996: 70; see also: 172-178 (§ 40. The Fundamental Attunement of Angst and the Eminent Disclosure of Da-sein).

³⁰ “That is to say, he annuls the *times of understanding* in favor of the *moments of concluding ...*” (213, 4); see chapter *** in this volume. For a short explanation of that ‘sophism’, see: Elisabeth Roudinesco, *La bataille de cent ans. Histoire de la psychanalyse 2, 1925-1985*, Paris: Seuil, 1986, p. 269.

Similarly, in the cure, the subject assumes “his history, insofar as it is constituted by speech addressed to the other”. Herein, Lacan adds, lies “the basis of the new method Freud calls psychoanalysis” (213, 6).³¹

This is not to say that there are no “psychophysiological discontinuities” in hysteria and neurosis. Only, the psychoanalytical method should not rely on them, Lacan stresses (213, 7 – 214, 1), and repeats that its means are exclusively “those of speech” – speech as the element allowing the subject to constitute ‘meaning’ and to facilitate the inter-subjective field in which it can constitute itself (as the subject of the desire of the Other) (214, 2-6).

This implies that the unconscious is not the immediate object of enquiry. It is a “third term”, something “transindividual, which is not at the subject’s disposal in reestablishing the continuity of his conscious discourse” (214, 8). It is Lacan’s way of neutralizing the paradox of what Freud calls ‘unconscious thought’. For how can thinking be unconscious? Lacan’s answer puts forward *language* as the support of thinking, and not man’s consciousness. The unconscious is a ‘thinking’ that is not at the disposal of the subject, and is borne by language not yet assumed by that subject.

This is why the “blank” chapters in one’s history, i.e. his unconscious, are nonetheless written down somewhere and can be found again: in one’s bodily symptoms for instance, or in his infantile memories (215, 3-8). Once more Lacan says that this shows the “reality of discourse in its autonomy” (213, 2).

The third and last section of part one in the *Rome Discourse* starts by saying that, for the few who read Freud himself instead of his summarizers, Lacan’s thesis is “hardly original, even in its verve”. It can all extensively be read precisely in Freud. The conceptual apparatus of psychoanalysis is not metaphorical in the sense that it refers to something non-metaphorical. It operates basically in a realm of metaphors, which is the “reality of discourse in its autonomy” (as mentioned above). This is the basic insight of all Freudian texts (216, 2).

And this is precisely what Otto Fenichel³² – the summarizer Lacan targets here – has not seen. He brings back the history of the patient to “the supposedly organic stages of

³¹ To the remark that Freud called this method ‘psychoanalysis’, he adds: “not in 1904 – as was taught until recently by an authority who [...] appeared on that day to know nothing of Freud except the titles of his works – but in 1895”. Again the blamed, unnamed author is Maurice Bénassy. “1895”, thus both Fink’s translation and Lacan’s original; however, the first translation of this text, by Anthony Wilden, writes 1896, which is indeed correct. Freud mentions the term for the first time in 1896, in his paper, ‘Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence’ (SE 3: 162, 165-66). Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self. The function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, Translated with Notes and Commentary by Antony Wilden, New York: Dell Publishing, 1968, p. 19.

individual development” (216, 2). This is bad historiography, Lacan explains, for what psychoanalysis and historiography have in common is the fact that “they are both sciences of the particular”, of facts that are “purely accidental or even factitious” (216, 5). This means that the facts described by historians are already “a primal historicization” – that “history is already made on the stage where it will be played out once it is written down, both in one’s heart of hearts and outside” (216, 6). In other words, history is always already a ‘story’, it is always already what they *say* historically to have happened. History immediately plays on the scene of interpretation, of representation, of language, and the inter-subjective dimension that this implies.

On July the 2nd, 1652, in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in Paris, the rebellious noblemen – called the *Frondeurs*, members of the revolutionary movement called ‘La Fronde’ – won the battle and conquered the French capital: the Parliament won, the Royal Court lost. But, so Lacan argues, in another time an event named after the same ‘Faubourg Saint-Antoine’ is experienced by its “actors” as a victory of the proletarians over the bourgeoisie. The battle in that Faubourg was a decisive moment in the taking of the Bastille on July 14th, 1789, which, at least for Jean Jaurès³³, was a victory of the proletarians, although the French Revolution was one of the bourgeois (216, 6-8). History’s events are immediately ‘stories’, which is why different events can easily name one another. This is the way one must understand the discourse of the patient on the couch: the trauma’s he had lived through were, while being lived, already interpreted and are, in that quality, involved in later trauma’s and their interpretations.

This goes for the so-called “instinctual stages” as well. Lacan takes the example of the anal stage, indicating that there, the child is taken in an intersubjective field in which he tries to conquer a place. This perspective allows an insight in the installation of the ‘anal’ structuration of the child’s body. Because of his confrontation with a prohibition of anal production that is not in the loo, the child constitutes a ‘self’ by denying that prohibition. Only after a long ‘oedipal’ struggle between ‘love and hate’, he manages, out of love for his forbidders, to do what he has been asked. It was his way of “turning his excremental expulsions into aggressions, his retentions into seductions, and his movement of release into symbols”. With emphasizing italics, Lacan adds: this way of doing “*is not fundamentally different* from the subjectivity of the analyst” when he tries to understand his patient (217, 5).

³² See Part One, B (Mental Development) in: Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, New York: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Cie, 1946. p. 30-99.

³³ Jean Jaurès, *Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française, Tome 1 : La constituante*, édition par Albert Soboul, Paris: Éditions sociales, 1968, p. 385.

The analyst, too, is inclined to give himself the position of an imaginary ego mastering the patient's problem by referring it to "some supposed instinctual maturation", to some cause in the sphere of "ontogenesis", or to any other fixed cause outside the intersubjective play (i.e. the field of language and speech) (217, 6). So, the analyst's *analysis* concerns as much his own imaginary tricks and ruses as his patient's.

This is why psychoanalysis must not fall into the trap of "analogical" thinking, of explaining cultural phenomena by analogous phenomena in nature.³⁴ This is often the way in which "symbolism" is understood: as if the outside world is reflecting what is going on in man's inner world – the macro-cosmos supposed to be the mirror of the inner micro-cosmos. Instead of such an analogical symbolism, Freud clearly opts for an "analytical symbolism", Lacan writes. Lacan understands the term 'symbolism' in a strictly Lévi-Straussian sense, acknowledging for the sciences of the human the radical difference between culture and nature. Culture takes place within the 'symbolic' field of signifiers, whose functioning cannot be reduced to natural laws (218, 1-2).

This is why psychoanalytic theory cannot rely on a natural development that leads the libidinal being from an uncertain and unstable so-called 'pre-genital phase' into a certain and stable 'genital' one, enabling him to have an adult and steady relation with his basic object of desire (218, 4).³⁵ Analytical theories that claim this consider the goal of the cure to be of moral nature. Like the Pharisees criticized by Christ, Lacan argues, they "bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders" (218, 5).³⁶ Psychoanalysis needs at least a discourse and a practice that surpass this kind of morality.

Lacan refers to "the ancient quarrels about Nature and Grace" (218, 6). There, the relation of the subject to his object of desire is not rectilinear and does not depend entirely on the 'works' of the subject. In a footnote, he refers to Blaise Pascal and his "wager", which in Lacan's interpretation formulates the way the libidinal being constitutes itself as subject of desire (or, what amounts to the same thing, as bearer of language/signifier/*logos*). As explained here and in *Logical Time*, this way is "waging", i.e. anticipating a truth that can only be so thanks to that anticipation. So, the libidinal relation of the subject to its object is complex because the "*logos*" is involved, so Lacan claims relying here on the different meanings of the term: *logos* as the divine Word that in its Grace created all that is; *logos* as

³⁴ Lacan refers to "a certain Jaworski", author of a book that defends the parallel between the evolution of the armor in the Middle Ages and the one of armor of shellfish. Unfortunately, the book or article of Jaworski that Lacan refers to remained untraceable to me.

³⁵ In other writings, Lacan's target in this is Maurice Bouvet, who coined the terms "pregenital" and "genital love". See Maurice Bouvet, *Oeuvres psychanalytiques I: La relation d'objet*, Paris, Payot, 1972 (1967), p. 169.

³⁶ Matthew 23: 4.

the order of the signifier that forms the ‘element’ enabling us to live our inherently libidinal life.

Lacan quotes Rochefoucault saying “[t]here are people who would never have been in love if they had never heard love mentioned” (219, 1).³⁷ That love is not to be reduced to “instinct” is now illustrated with a reference, once again, to Freud’s analysis of the Wolf Man, whose fight with love “is only a question of the vicissitudes of subjectivity” (219, 2). “Perfect love is the fruit not of nature but of grace”, Lacan concludes, it is an “intersubjective agreement” that is rooted in the field of signifiers and in the way the libidinal being relates to his own condition as subject/bearer of these signifiers (219, 3).

“But what, then, is this subject? [...] Haven’t we already learned from Mister Anyone³⁸ that everything experienced by the individual is subjective?” (219, 4) With this question, Lacan closes the first part of the *Rome Discourse*. His answer, put in his typical rhetorical, cryptic style, says that subjective experience is to be analyzed as an imaginary affirmation of the ego, limited to consciousness. (219, 5) The subject that psychoanalysis talks about, however, is the subject of the “unconscious”, the bearer of the ‘other’s discourse” (219, 6). That subject – i.e. the point where the libidinal being testifies that it is the support of a language that originally is that of the Other – shows itself even in telepathy, he explains referring to Freud’s text about this topic.³⁹ There, at that point, the patient meets with his truth – with a truth to be located beyond conscious experience (which is imaginary). This is why psychoanalytical experience never is simply “a two-person relation”. Were this the case, the experience would be a basically *imaginary*, and not a profoundly *symbolic* one. With this statement, he makes a step to the second part of his *Rome Discourse*.

II. Symbol and Language as Structure and Limit of the Psychoanalytic Field

³⁷ « Il y a des gens qui n’auraient jamais été amoureux, s’ils n’avaient jamais entendu parler de l’amour. », in: François de la Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims and Other Reflections*, Translation with an Introduction and Notes by E.H. and A.M. Blackmore and Francine Guigère, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 38-39.

³⁸ Fink leaves “Monsieur de La Palice” untranslated. It is the French way to say ‘Mister Nobody’, Mister Everyone’, Mister Banal. “Une lapalissade” and “une vérité de La Palisse” are expressions in French for an all too banal or tautological proposition, as for instance ‘he was not dead, so he was alive’.

³⁹ *Psychoanalysis and telepathy*, in: Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition*, Translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey, Volume XVIII (1920-1922), London: Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1975 (1955), p. 174-193.

“Just what I have been telling you from the beginning”. Lacan leaves his first motto – a quote from the Gospel of John (8:25) – untranslated. It is Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees who asked ‘Who are you?’. Lacan’s focus is not on the content of Jesus’ expression, but on his speech *as such*, on the ‘material’ his identity is made of: signifiers. It is in the field of the symbolic – i.e. of language – that the truth of someone’s identity is to be found. In this part of the *Rome Discourse*, Lacan will put forward the thesis that, in psychoanalysis, one should stick to the surface of language, to the materiality of the signifier.

The second motto draws attention to this as well. “Do crossword puzzles”: take exercises in playing with language on the level of its mere superficiality.

Lacan “take[s] up the thread” by repeating that, in theory and in practice, psychoanalysis is about the “particular”, about that which is not reducible to general patterns such as, for instance, those of “genetic psychology” (220, 3). The particular is not something like the patient’s “sensitivity to blows or colors” or the “vivacity of his taste” (221, 1). Not without sarcasm, Lacan refers to the “young analyst-in-training” of his days who consider “sniffing each other” and “smelling” the patient to be a criterion to get accepted as an analyst (221, 3).⁴⁰ The ‘particular’ by which psychoanalysis intends to become science, requires an adequate understanding of what ‘experience’ means, and the term certainly may not legitimize the reduction of its practice to mere ‘technics’, Lacan adds (221, 5). The particular can only be experienced in the materiality of the discourse the patient performs in the presence of his analyst.

This is why we should go back to the Freudian oeuvre: not to the current Freud interpretations of Lacan’s day, but to its very text (221, 5). To the *Traumdeutung*, for instance, in which we read that dreams are structured as a sentence or, more exactly, as a “rebus”, and that the dynamics at work in both the dream and the way it is told by the patient has its specific rhetoric, be it “ostentatious or demonstrative, dissimulating or persuasive, retaliatory or seductive” (222, 1).

The dream is a work of desire, Lacan states with Freud. But more than Freud, he stresses that desire must also be located in the inter-subjective field of the analytic cure. The desire at work in the dream can be as well the desire to contradict Freud’s (or the analyst’s) thesis that, in dreams, desire is at work. Yet, this desire, too, has its full place and function in

⁴⁰ Bruce Fink refers to Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre IV, Les relations d’objets*, texte établi par J.A Miller, Seuil, 1998, p. 79.

the inter-subjective play between patient and analyst (222, 2). This perfectly illustrates the thesis that “man’s desire finds its meaning in the other’s desire”, more precisely in the other’s recognition of his desire (222, 3).

A return to the letter of the Freudian text is required, if only for the reason that the analyst’s job requires a reading of the patient’s desire which is always already performed as a text, marked by all kinds of rhetorical tricks and ruses and unavoidably addressed to the other and, thus, constituting an inter-subjective scene. Symptoms are structured as “overdetermined” signifiers, constituting a “double meaning – symbol of a defunct conflict beyond its function in a *no less symbolic* present conflict” (222, 7). The “symptom itself is structured like language”: that is why it can be treated by speech. (223, 1).

Even numbers chosen at random can betray the unconscious of the subject, so Lacan writes, referring to a passage in Freud’s *Psychopathology of Every Day Life* (223, 2-4).⁴¹ In the same sense, he praises another of Freud’s works, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. The joke illustrates perfectly Lacan’s thesis that (unconscious) truth is only to be found in the field of language and, what is more, that it is the result of the way words play their game in an inter-subjective field (223, 6 – 225, 1).

In Fink’s translation we read: “The mind that lives as an exile in the creation whose invisible support he is, knows that he is at every instant the master able of annihilating it” (224, 1). “Mind” is Fink’s translation of the French “*esprit*”. Yet, in this context, the first meaning of *esprit* is joke or wit. It is the wit that slumbers underneath the signifiers constituting the story told – a wit that only reveals itself at the end of the joke, when breaking the supposed sense of the signifiers and suddenly introducing a totally unexpected meaning, which immediately is laughed away. This is how the joke works and how it illustrates the primacy of the signifier over the signified (how language works proceeding from the materiality of the signifier and not from the ‘ideality’ of the signified or the meaning). In that sense Fink’s translation of “*esprit*” by “mind” is not really correct. But in so far as the “mind” is the traditional term for the subject, the translation is not without sense. For the subject is to be analyzed in the same way as the joke and its wit. This is at least the thesis Lacan defends here. The subject is what is *underneath* the chain of signifiers, its “support” (“*soutient*”), repressed as it is by the signified, by the meaning, i.e. by the imaginary ego.⁴² That subject

⁴¹ See chapter XII: “Determinism, Belief in Chance and Superstition – Some Points of View”; Freud, *Standard Edition*, Volume VI, p. 243-246.

⁴² In seminar session at the end of 1961 (December 6th; unpublished), Lacan put forward a very precise definition of the subject as that “which a signifier represents for another signifier”. This definition enlightens clearly the primacy of the signifier in the Lacanian subject theory.

can only be revealed at the moment when the predominance of the meaning/signified – or, which amounts to the same thing, the imaginary ego – gets broken and the ‘naked’ signifier suddenly suggests an unexpected, repressed, unconscious meaning. In the emergence of that ‘naked’ signifier, only a single moment, the subject is revealed. Just as with the joke, however, that revelation does not last, and is repressed again quasi immediately. A few sentences further, Lacan writes that “it is truth, in fact, that throws off the mask in coming out of his mouth, but only so that the joke might take on another and more deceptive mask”. And it depends on the individual subject whether he takes the joke or not. Lacan quotes Freud: “A joke [*esprit*] in fact entails such a subjective intentionality [...]: a joke is only what I accept as such” (224, 2).⁴³

This kind of acceptance is the core of psychoanalysis. During the cure, the patient has to learn to accept this other truth that disturbs the comfort of his imaginary identity. He has to face the fact that his I is another: not even the other of the imaginary image of the self, but the symbolic other, the other as materialized in language and endlessly differing one’s desired full identity from one signifier to another. Like the joke, the subject “is always about something else”; it always supposes the other (224, 2). And just like the joke disappears once his truth is explained, the truth of the subject is again and again to be regained in the act of speaking.

‘In the beginning was the deed’, so Lacan quotes Goethe (225, 1).⁴⁴ And he adds that the latter was not entirely right by correcting ‘In the beginning was the word’, the opening words of the Gospel of Saint John. What is in the beginning, is in fact the word, the signifier; but for man, this requires a constantly repeated act in which he assumes that he is the subject of this signifier, i.e. that his ‘I is another’. To this, Lacan adds the implication concerning the notion of ‘sense’. Psychoanalysis shows that ‘sense’ is what man realizes in the act of speaking. But it makes clear as well that there is no such thing as the “sense of sense”, because the sense exists only in and through the very act of speech (224, 6).

In the second section of part II, the *Rome Discourse* discusses the nature of that “word”, that “language” which is in the ‘beginning’, which is the ‘*arche*’ or ‘ground on which the entire culture rests, that which gives it its law. (225, 2). Lacan’s line of reasoning starts with a reference to archaic culture, in which the value of things depends on a system of gift-giving. Things are never simply what they are, they are ‘symbols’ in the sense that they are gifts, elements in an entire system of gift-giving that creates bonds between people. The original

⁴³ Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre VIII, Le transfert*, texte établi par J.-A. Miller, Paris: Seuil, 2001, p. 105.

⁴⁴ Goethe, *Faust* I, 903.

meaning of symbol is a “pact”. So symbols “are first and foremost signifiers of the pact they constitute as the signified” (225, 3). This is to say that language is immediately involved, as Lacan writes: “these gifts, the act of giving them and the objects given, their transmutation into signs, and even their fabrication, [are] close intertwined with speech”.⁴⁵

Here, Lacan asks, “Is it with these gifts, or with the passwords that give them their salutary nonmeaning, that language begins along with the law?” (225, 3) Is it the gift-giving – i.e. that capacity of abstracting things from their primary use-value or instrumental ‘sense’, and implying them in mutual “words [signifiers] of recognition” – that renders things into symbols? “Is this neutralization by means of the signifier the whole of the nature of language?” (225, 4)

If this were the case, then, the nature of animal language was not radically different from human language, Lacan replies. He refers to an ethological observation: sea swallows are able to turn catch fish into gifts; but he adds that he does “not shrink from seeking the origins of the symbolic behavior outside the human sphere” (225, 5).

It is then that he starts a long attack on Jules Masserman, a psychoanalytic author who also claims this thesis, but in a way to which Lacan is radically opposed (225, 5).⁴⁶ Not without sarcasm, he reports how Masserman “reproduced neurosis ex-pe-ri-men-tal-ly” (sic, 226, 2) by putting a dog in a setting in which his reactions to controlled stimuli could be empirically observed. It is meant to eliminate the testee’s “extensive ruminations”, so the author explains, supposing there is a direct “road [...] from signal to symbol” (226, 4). The symbol is considered as a signal, and man’s behavior – also in the context of a psychoanalytic cure – can be traced back to such signals (226, 6). This goes for words as well, which Masserman calls “idea-symbols” (227, 2). What analysts like Masserman do not see, Lacan explains, is that understanding a word is understanding an element of language, which supposes with the hearer a split between the material side and the content side, between the signifier and the signified (227, 2). Although psychoanalyst, Masserman has understood nothing of the basics of psychoanalysis, which is – as Lacan repeats – “Freud’s discovery [...] of the field of the effects, in man’s nature, of his relation to the symbolic order” (227, 5). He has not seen that man relates to the world (including himself) by mediation of language, i.e. of

⁴⁵ Lacan refers to Maurice Leenhardt, *Do Kamo. Person and Myth in the Polynesian world*, translated by Basia Miller Gulati, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979 (original French edition, 1947). The “pacific Argonauts” mentioned here (225, 2), refers to: Borislav Malinowski, *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account on the Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Milanesian New Guinea*, London: Routledge, 2002 (1922).

⁴⁶ Lacan refers to: Jules H. Masserman [Lacan mistakenly writes a double n], “Language, behavior and dynamic psychiatry”, in: *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 25 (1944) 1&2: 1-8.

a differential system of signifiers – signifiers which first of all refer to other signifiers and which only in a second moment refer to what they say, to the signified.⁴⁷

It is then (228, 2) that Lacan returns to his reflection upon the “symbolic object” that he had questioned as an element in the archaic culture of gift-giving (225, 2-3). Is the nature of the symbolic (or of language) founded in changing an object into a gift, as it is even the case with sea swallows able to treat caught fish like this (Lacan retakes that example, 228, 3)?

“‘Something else’ completes the symbol, making language of it”, Lacan writes. What makes a symbol symbolic? What turns it into language? Not only the fact that it is disconnected from its instrumental value or, more precisely, from its immediate relation to the signified. It also has to signify this very disconnection and to make it operational. A “symbolic object” is a “presence made of absence” – as a gift makes clear: the thing it renders present (recognition, mutual bond, et cetera), is not ‘really’ and ‘materially’ present in it. But that gift becomes language in so far as “absence itself comes to be named”. What makes a word language is not simply “the sonorous quality of its matter” (the fact that it has a proper materiality disconnected from its *signified*), but that it names that disconnection and proceeds from that very naming.⁴⁸ So, with Mauss, Malinowski and Leenhardt, Lacan agrees that language is a gift, but he reads this gift not in the functionalistic way they do (i.e. as *directly* supporting social recognition). Lacan reads the gift of language in a structuralistic way, as Lévi-Strauss does (i.e. as autonomously functioning structure which, only in that quality, enables social recognition).

Lacan illustrates this with the famous *Fort/Da* observation (in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*), where the little child, with a small object that he throws away (*Fort*) and pulls back (*Da*), not only symbolizes the coming and going of the mother, but symbolizes also that symbolization itself and thus starts a proper language (228, 5).⁴⁹ Lacan’s other example is the

⁴⁷ In a long, rhetorical parenthesis (227, 4 – 228, 1), referring to Masserman (“this monument of naïveté”), Lacan writes: “I would prefer to have the raccoon I mentioned earlier sitting in the armchair to which, according to the author, Freud’s shyness confined the analyst by placing him behind the couch” (227, 6). One of the test subjects of Masserman’s experiment was a raccoon (226, 3). But since Masserman is not able to understand signs he hears as split up in signifier and signified, he is as incompetent to do psychoanalysis as a raccoon is. Let alone that he should understand that “thanks to Jacques Prévert, even “the raccoon, at least, has definitely the poetic bestiary and partakes as such, in its essence, of the symbol’s eminent function”. Lacan refers to the beginning of *Inventaire*, a poem by the popular French writer Jacques Prévert (in: *Paroles*, 1946): “A stone, two houses, three ruins, four ditch diggers, a garden, some flowers, a raccoon” (228, 1).

⁴⁸ This is way, by introducing the reference to the gift, in 225, 2, Lacan limited himself to gifts described in Leenhardt and Malinowski. These gifts, too, name their disconnection with the signified, but it is not as clear as with that precious gift Lacan mentioned in that same sentence: the gift of the Greek (“the detestable Danaï”, 225, 2) to the Trojans: a gigantic horse hiding soldiers who, once inside the walls, opened Troy’s doors and caused the fall of the city. Since that gift, Lacan suggests, it is clear that the law is in language, and not in the gift: man has to organize his trust in reality not from what is given, but from what is *said* that is given.

⁴⁹ Standard Edition, Volume XVIII, p. 14-17.

“*koua* mantics of China”, i.e. the origin of Chinese writing: eight characters, each of three bars (trigrams) and different from one another according to the breaks on the bars.⁵⁰



Those characters not only ‘break’ with reality, they name that break, and make it an element in each of them. And it is that element that enables them to function as an operational system by means of which everything can be signified. In the picture represented here, those (in Chinese mythology presented as) ‘basic’ characters are naming the basic elements of the entire cosmos. In fact, starting from those eight characters, the entire cosmos becomes a well ordered symbolic system, as is the case in the old Chinese book, the *I Ching (Book of Changes)*, based on them.⁵¹ Every signifier repeats its difference with the real, and it is that difference which makes the signifier endlessly referring to other signifiers. Each word tells always also its impossibility to say what it says, and it is that impossibility which makes language work.⁵²

Now we understand what it means that ‘it is the word which was in the beginning’. It is the break with the signified reality, it is the “nothingness” of words – of “concepts”, as Lacan calls them here – that “engender things”. In the word ‘three’, for example, the real three is denied and negated, but at the same time survives and becomes an ‘idealistic’ entity immune to the mortality characteristic for real threes. It is words that “preserve in duration of what passes away” (228, 6).⁵³ Words (signifiers) abstract things from their inaccessible singularity of ephemeral, temporal existence, and give them the status of firmness and constancy. And it is words, too, that make man: “Man thus speaks, but it is because the symbol has made him man” (229, 2).

⁵⁰ Image is taken from: <http://www.chinese-names.net/phrase/%E5%85%AB%E5%8D%A6>. Lacan, who studied Chinese in the early forties and had a degree at the Paris *Ecole des Langues Orientales*, might have read: Ernst Viktor Zenker, *Histoire de la philosophie Chinoise*, Paris: Payot, 1932 (original edition in German, 1926); see p. 29-30.

⁵¹ See Lydia H. Liu, *The Freudian Robot: Digital Media and the Future of the Unconscious*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 181-182.

⁵² And it is precisely at the locus of that impossibility that the libidinal being, forced as it is to realize itself within language, positions itself as a ‘self’, i.e. as the subject/bearer of that language.

⁵³ Which Lacan underscores with a quotation from Theucidides (I, xxii): “My history has been composed to be an overlasting possession [“kthma eç aei”; “ktème es aei”], not the showpiece of an hour.

Here, without unveiling his name, Lévi-Strauss is put forward as the answer to Lacan's reference to Leenhardt and, also unnamed, Malinowski in 225, 2. Those claimed rightly that things are not simply what they are, but have to be approached as elements in a system of 'symbolic gifts'. Yet, for Lacan, it is not the gift as such, but language that provides the law that things represent. Rather than gift-giving, it is language that "constitute[s] a community" and "subject[s it] to the rules of matrimonial alliance – determining the direction in which the exchange of women takes place" (229, 2). Here, Lacan fully embraces Lévi-Strauss' main thesis of the primacy of the symbolic order, of language, as structuring human cultures.⁵⁴ So, it is not a coincidence that, here, Lacan quotes the motto – a SiRonga proverb – from the *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949): "A relative by marriage is an elephant's hip".⁵⁵ It refers to Lévi-Strauss' thesis that the structure of elementary kinship (kinship in archaic societies) is basically a linguistic structure – that it is language that provides the grammar of this structure – and that, in this language/structure, one can find the "logic of combinations; thus the law of numbers – that is the most highly purified of all symbols – prove to be immanent to the original symbolism" (229, 2). But if elementary kinship – i.e. the way how men get wives, and how children relate to their relatives – is marked by law, this means that, in the choice of matrimonial partners, one is not as free as one might suppose.

The unconscious law ruling elementary kinship – but also complex kinship such as the modern one – is marked by a law of which the Oedipus-complex "mark[s] the limits", which are at the same time the limits of "subjectivity" (229, 3). The law constituting society is neither founded in nature, nor in the distance taken from nature as exemplified for instance in the gift-giving of archaic cultures. It is founded in a system that takes this distance as its very motor, that, in every gesture, takes the difference with nature as its productive principle. That system is language. Words/signifiers do not refer primordially to what they signify, but to other signifiers, making the break with the real (i.e. with nature) the productive hallmark of every signifier. And it is this linguistic law underlying culture that institutes man's two forbidden 'natural' objects: his mother and his sisters. The break with nature constitutes the heart of the (cultural) family. For the family is in the end not based on the natural relation among its members but on a cultural alliance with another family. This is to say that, to create a family, the male human has to find his female partner outside his natural milieu (the family he is born into). A wife belonging to his own family cannot become the wife he finds his

⁵⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, translated from the French by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, New York: Basic Books, 1963. See especially chapter VI (Linguistics and Anthropology) and X (The Effectiveness of Symbols).

⁵⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *Elementary structure of Kinship*, New York: Beacon Press, 1969, p. 1.

own family with. This is the structuralistic interpretation of the Oedipus-complex as Lacan acknowledges in his *Rome Discourse* (229, 4-5). And he adds some examples illustrating how devastating a mixing up of elementary kinship relations can be (230, 2-3).

This is why, according to Lacan, the relation to the father, which is crucial in the Freudian concept of the Oedipus complex, has to be re-interpreted. It must be re-formulated proceeding from the primacy of language. The father involved in the Oedipus complex – and, consequently in the formation of both the subject's identity and the law that rules society – is a symbolic father, a signifier: it is the *name* of the father (230, 5). To underscore the “fecundity of this conception” (distinguishing, in the patient's relation to his figures of authority, the symbolic father function from the imaginary as well as from the real father), Lacan explicitly refers to his own experience as well as to those of “the students I have introduced to this method” (230, 5).

It is language that makes the law, it is to “the Word” we pay our “Great Debt”, a debt which is “inviolable”, absolute, priceless, and which marks everything humans exchange with one another.⁵⁶ That debt is the name of the distance vis-à-vis things as they are in their functionality – a distance that is the motor of the symbolic system. In the Polynesian archaic cultures, it is incorporated in the “sacred *hau* or the omnipresent *mana*”, which, for Lévi-Strauss, indicates the “zero-symbol”, the symbol indicating the symbolic nature of all things constituting a culture (231, 2).⁵⁷ This is how some cultures (like the Christian) are able to consider everything to be subjected to a Last Judgment. The latter can be read as a figure of the zero-symbol – that symbol of symbolicity, that symbol marking everything with negativity, with the possibility of its destruction (i.e. its disconnection from the real).

Even if one does not acknowledge such things as a Last Judgment, one can recognize the zero-symbol in what Heidegger calls “Being-towards-death” (231, 3).⁵⁸ As already mentioned, according to Heidegger, human existence – *Dasein* – is a project (*Entwurf*) inherently oriented to the future. Man ‘is’ his ‘*having to be*’ (both what he *is* and *was*). And this goes even for the moment of his dying: even then, he *is to be* his dying. This means that his orientation to the future goes hand in hand with his radically finite condition: even while dying, one is living in the primordial future tense. It is this combination of future tense and

⁵⁶ “As Lacan indicates, “Great Debt” refers to Rabelais, *Gargantua et Pantagruel*, *Le Tiers Livre*, III-IV ; François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, translated by Burton Raffel, New York / London : W.W. Norton & Company, p. 253-259.

⁵⁷ For the notion of ‘*hau*’, see Marcel Mauss, *The gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Society*, with a foreword by Mary Douglas, London / New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 14-15; for the concept of ‘*mana*’, see *ibidem*, p. 11; 13. For the notion of “zero-symbol”, see Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, translation by Felicity Baker, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987, p. 64.

⁵⁸ See Being and Time § 51-53; Heidegger 1996, p. 233-246.

finitude that Lacan reads in a Lévi-Straussian way. He thinks finitude as realized in the signifier denying the real (*das Ding an sich*), i.e. in the symbolic order implying the ‘death’ of that real, of the things as they are. Equally, human existence, realizing itself within the realm of the signifier, is marked by the same finitude. More precisely, human existence is to be considered as the movement of desire that “preserve[s] his part in the interferences and pulsations that the cycles of language cause to converge on him” (231, 4). The signifiers deny the ‘real’ of man’s life, but jumping from one signifier to another, man lives his life as *desire*. As desire, he ‘is’ within the interferences between the signifiers, adhering to each of these signifiers, in search for who he is and for the satisfaction of any other of his desires.

This desire requires recognition, to be obtained either in an imaginary way, as is for instance the case in the “struggle for prestige”, or in a symbolic way, as in speech (231, 5). The aim of psychoanalysis is to allow the patient’s desire to *speak*. Only by speaking he can explore both his imaginary fixations and symbolic conflicts, and discover, within these fixations, the void referring to the Other and allowing him, step by step, to assume himself as being the subject of the desire of the Other. The path that leads him there is the one of the “intersubjective experience” (231, 6). There, the patient has to experience, in himself, the problematic relation between speech and language: the empty speech is the one in which he thinks himself to be the owner of his story. It is only in ‘full speech’ he realizes he is the subject of a story that, although entirely his own, originates in the others’ talking or, more generally, in language. In full speech, the patient realizes that he is not simply the ‘same’ as his imaginary image reflects to him, but that he is the subject of the Other, of an ever sliding and changing set of signifiers allowing him to constitute himself as desire.

So, in the psychoanalytical cure, everything comes down to problems occurring in the way the patient, by way of speaking, tries to assume his position as being the subject of language. In other words, it is all about the relation between speech and language (231, 7).

In this relation, Lacan distinguishes three paradoxes (231, 8).

(1) One can speak without being implicated in his speaking. This is the case in psychosis, in the “delusion [...] which objectifies the subject in a language devoid of dialectic” (231, 9) This is not to say that a psychotic subject fully accepts that language; more than the neurotic, he is unable to assume being the subject of language (232, 2).

(2) The speaking can be done by bodily symptoms (“symbol[s] written in the sand of the flesh”). This is the case in hysteria, or in obsessive images that characterize phobia or obsessional neurosis (232, 3-5). That speaking is a “fully functioning speech”, for it is

inherently addressed to the other (232, 6). And it is by “deciphering the speech” of those symptoms “that Freud rediscovered the first language of symbols” (232, 7).

(3) And there is, thirdly, the speaking as it is practiced and crystalized in the realm of science. Lacan argues that, in scientific speaking, the subject “loses his meaning in the objectifications of discourse” (233, 1). It is the kind of discourse that the patient produces at the beginning of the cure. Lacan stresses that, for the analyst, it is a matter of leaving that “wisdom” behind. For that scientific discourse is the patient’s way to support his imaginary strategies. And this is still reinforced by the modern discourse, which Lacan evokes by two references. One to the Hegelian concept of the *Beautiful Soul* – that self-understanding of the modern bourgeois who supposes that, in ethics, all is fine when he has done his duty, not seeing that ethics requires action and, unavoidably, dirty hands.⁵⁹ That ‘soul’ does not realize that one’s madness starts with obsessively thinking that the world outside is mad, not seeing there is something wrong with himself (233, 3).⁶⁰ The other reference is to a verse by the fifteenth century French poet François Villon, who, in a famous poem, uses the expression “it is I” (“*ce suis-je*”) instead of “it’s me” (“*c’est moi*”), as we moderns do (233, 2).⁶¹ In an nutshell, the switch from “it is I” to “it’s me” summarizes the switch the self-understanding of modern man has made from a symbolic subject (proceeding from the Other to talk about oneself: *ce suis-je*) to an imaginary ego (proceeding from oneself in order to talk about everything else, supposing that one’s relation to the world has its starting point in himself: *c’est moi*).

The imaginary strategies – defined by Lacan as ‘empty speech’ – keep the patient “on the wall of language”, a “wall” which is sustained by innumerable piles of scientific research results. While the aim of the cure is to come to moments of ‘full speech’, acknowledging the holes in that wall, i.e. the lacks indicating the place of the libidinal being as being the subject of the lack of desire/language. That kind of speech is evoked here by the first lines of T.S. Eliot’s famous poem ‘The Hollow man’ (234, 2).⁶² Notice that the full speech acknowledges

⁵⁹ See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, translated by S.W. Dyde, Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001, p. 128.

⁶⁰ This is also the sense of the quote from Lichtenberg in Lacan’s note 21 (231, 9).

⁶¹ See François Villon’s poem ‘Le débat du coeur et du corps de Villon’: « Qu'est-ce que j'oy ? - Ce suis je. - Qui ? - Ton cœur, / Qui ne tient mais qu'a un petit filet. »; ‘The Debate Between Villon And His Heart’ « Who's that I hear?—It's me—Who?—Your heart / Hanging on by the thinnest thread ». François Villon, *The Poems of François Villon*, Translated with an introduction and notes by Galway Kinnell, Hanover: University Press of England, 1982, p. 199-202.

⁶² “We are the hollow men / We are the stuffed men / Leaning together / Headpiece filled with straw. Alas! / Our dried voices, when / We whisper together / Are quiet and meaningless / As wind in dry grass / Or rats' feet over broken glass / In our dry cellar / Shape without form, shade without colour, / Paralysed force, gesture without

itself to be “hollow”, realizing that the I is not the authentic owner of his self and his words, which is precisely what the empty speech does suppose.

Madness is not a matter of the body, a matter of phrenology for instance, as Hegel already criticized in his time.⁶³ It is a matter of meaning,⁶⁴ which Lacan underscores with a Pascalian “*pensée*”: “Men are necessarily mad that it would be being mad by another kind of madness *not* to be mad” (234, 3).⁶⁵ Which means that no man is what he supposes he is (sticking to his imaginary ego), for he is the subject of the unconscious or, which amounts to the same thing, the subject of the symbolic, of signifiers.

This however does not imply that man is *entirely* subjected to the symbolic order in the sense that he would be unable to intervene in it. On the contrary, man has a “creative subjectivity”, able to give the symbolic new impulses or to support it in an active way (234, 5). “Psychoanalysis has played a role in the direction of modern subjectivity”, thus Lacan, but it could have done this better, if it were not so seduced by the “objectification of our experience” and “experimental method” as practiced in behaviorism (235, 4). So, it is surprising that psychoanalysts, “as practitioners of the symbolic function”, have neglected to elaborate this function (235, 5). It could have put psychoanalysis in the center of a new kind of science as taking shape under the influence of the new anthropology installed by Lévi-Strauss (as will become clear a few paragraphs further).

That new discipline resists the tendency to reduce science to positivism⁶⁶ and takes up again the tradition of “true science”, as old as Plato’s *Theaetetus* (235, 5).⁶⁷ It is today’s “conjectural sciences”, the sciences build upon conjecture and estimates, that discover “once again the old-age notion of science” (235, 7). Lacan adds that here, linguistics, with its own particular “form of mathematization”⁶⁸, should play a guiding role, as is already the case in the new anthropology set up by Lévi-Strauss. The “general theory of the symbol” constitutes

motion; [...]”. Eliot, Thomas Stearns, *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963, p. 77.

⁶³ Dean Moyer & Michael Quante, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of the Spirit: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 107-109.

⁶⁴ See for instance, in the *Écrits, Presentation on Psychological Causality* (135, 5): “which is to say that madness is experienced entirely within the register of meaning”.

⁶⁵ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Edited and Translated by Roger Ariew, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005, p. 6.

⁶⁶ François Dosse, *History of Structuralism, Volume I, The Rising Sign 1945-1966*, translated by Deborah Glassman, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 104.

⁶⁷ This dialogue does not define but only discusses “true science” without ever coming to a conclusion, except, as at the end Socrates tells, that Theaetetus may now have become “too modest to fancy that you know what you do] not know.” (210c). Most probably, Lacan refers to 201-206. There, the discussion goes about the difference between true insight (*alèthhè doxa*) and knowledge (*epistèmè*), and one of the theses defended is that knowledge requires motivation and argumentation (*logos*).

⁶⁸ A mathematization of the “phonemes”, the elementary particals of language. Lacan refers to Freud’s ‘Fort/Da’-observation to illustrate the compatibility of linguistic and psychoanalytic theory (235, 10).

an excellent base for the sciences of the human being now acknowledged as “sciences of subjectivity” (236, 4). That theory conceives man as making his actions into objects (and, thus, objectifying them), which he, then, puts in a context – read: he makes them signifiers which he renders operational in a symbolic field (236, 5). Lacan adds, this goes for the way man deals with numbers as well as with historical facts (236, 6-8).

This is the way how, in opposition to “exact sciences”, “conjectural sciences” work. The latter are about truth, the former about exactitude, argues Lacan (236, 10). Yet, both have their own “rigor” (237, 1). None of them provides (or grants) access to reality⁶⁹ as both are experimental in the sense that they apply an ‘*experimentum mentis*’ to reality. The word doesn’t fall here, but Lacan clearly refers to the term of Galilei, which he mentioned earlier in his *Discourse* (see 215,2). This is to say that experimental science does not so much measure the real – the real time for instance – as “introduce” measurement and (mathematical) time “into the real” (237, 5). And it is mathematics that gives science its exactitude.

The conjectural science of subjectivity, however, does not provide exactitude but truth. Yet, here too, mathematics provides the rigor. Lacan enchains on the scientific approach of time – “inter-subjective time” – and refers again to his essay on *Logical Time* (237, 8-10). In the “sophism” he elaborates there (261), the subject comes to a ‘false or true’ decision on the basis of a reasoning which is merely logical, even mathematical. The three prisoners of the story, each of them having to guess the color on their back, are only allowed to use strict logic to come to their conclusion. But it is within that merely logical reasoning that they have to include ‘time’. The prisoners’ conclusion is not possible without being anticipated by them. So, as mentioned above, truth is not a matter of correspondence with reality (for Lacan, even modern “exact sciences” have broken with that paradigm), but a matter of ‘subjective’ decision, of “certainty anticipated by the subject”: in a field where one only knows signifiers, disconnected from their signified, one has to make a decision by anticipating a truth that, in the very act of deciding, realizes itself.

In a difficult paragraph (238, 2), Lacan applies this to the “historian’s technique” (“*technique historique*”): in speaking about his past, the patient does not have to remember the “lived reaction” of the original experience; he rather has to find ways to meet the point where he anticipated (and anticipates) it as an event ‘to come’, as a future, as an otherness he

⁶⁹ The modern condition of science is that it is disconnected from reality *as it is*, from “das Ding an sich”, or, as Lacan calls it, from the *real*. Lacan illustrates this with a quote from a poem by Paul Valérie, ‘La Pythie’ (from *Charmes*. Notice that the quote is taken from the last strophe of this long poem, which is ode to LANGUAGE (with capitals) and is very compatible with the way language has its place in Lacanian theory; Paul Valérie, *Oeuvres I*, édition établie et annotée par Jean Hytier, Paris: Gallimard, La bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957, p. 130-136.

decides to be the subject of. Unlike Carl Gustav Jung, so Lacan adds, Freud understood the “progressive dimension” implied in “psychoanalytic regression” (238, 3).⁷⁰

The method of psychoanalysis is not only based on mathematics. Lacan indicates other disciplines as well: linguistics with the distinction it makes between the synchronic and the diachronic (238, 4); the “sister sciences” Freud mentioned as to be taught in an “ideal Department of Psychoanalysis”⁷¹; and even the “liberal arts” (“*artes liberales*”) as taught in the medieval university, “rhetoric, dialectic, [...] grammar, and poetics” (238, 7 – 239, 1). All these are elements necessary to “provide scientific foundations” for both psychoanalytical theory and practice.

III. The Resonances of Interpretation and the Time of the Subject in Psychoanalytic Technique

Here, the motto’s are not as programmatic as in the previous parts or the *Rome Discourse*. Instead of illustrating the main thesis of the third part, they only refer to some elements of its development.

The first quote is from a poem which Lacan accidentally read in a magazine, written by a certain Antoine Tudal at the age of fourteen: “Between man and love, / There is woman. / Between man and woman, / There is a world. / Between man and the world, / There is a wall.”⁷² The “wall” announces Lacan’s notion of the “wall of language”, which both the patient and the analyst face, unable as they are to get beyond it. It is nowhere else than in front of – or, as he sometimes suggests as well: *on* – that wall, that both the psychoanalytic theory and practice have to take place. It is there they have their ‘field’, as the main title of the essay says (see 260, 5-6).

The second quote is from Petronius’ *Satyricon* and reads, in translation: “For with my eyes I saw the Sibyl of Cuma hanging in a bottle, and when kids asked her in Greek: ‘Sibyl, what do you want?, she replied: ‘I want to die’”. For reason of a failed love affair, the Sibyl was punished that way by her lover, Apollo, and her answer to

⁷⁰ Jung considered the individual libidinal life and its neuroses as a founded in the libidinal life of mankind as it has taken shapes in the religious traditions of the past. According to Freud, thus Lacan, the libidinal live is basically future oriented. For Freud’s criticism of Jung, see *On the History of the Psychoanalytical Movement*, Standard Edition, Volume XIV, p. 62-63.

⁷¹ In *The Question of Lay Analysis*; see *Standard Edition*, Volume XX, p. 246.

⁷² For an extensive comment, see Jean Allouch, *L’amour Lacan*, Paris: EPEL, 2009, p. 252-258. See also : Joël Dor, *Introduction à Lacan, 2. La structure du sujet*, Paris: Denoël, 1992, p. 271-272.

the children expresses her ultimate desire. This quote anticipates Lacan's reflection upon the "death instinct" as the ultimate form of desire, desiring even to escape the field of language and speech, the element indispensable for desire to live (see 263, 3).

The *Rome Discourse's* third part is about the psychoanalytical "technique", more precisely about the importance of bringing it "back to speech and language as its foundations". For it is certain that, unlike behaviorist practices, psychoanalysis cannot be based in what escapes language and speech (i.e. in the "ineffable"). Yet, this insight is mostly interpreted wrong, argues Lacan (239, 6). And this is at the base of "the new aims to which psychoanalytic theory has become receptive", he adds, without however explaining it, because he supposes the reader knows already that 'adaptation to happy behavior' or 'correcting oneself in the direction of a natural psychic maturity' is not the aim of an analytical cure. Psychoanalysis is about "truth", about finding oneself as authentic subject/bearer of 'his' desire – which, more correctly is the desire of the Other, i.e. of a desire that has its material support in the symbolic order.

According to Lacan, the problems current psychoanalysis has with "symbolic interpretation" go back to a misreading of Freud's directive guiding style during the cure. The case studies he published give the impression that he all too directly just explained to his patients what was wrong with them – as if the sole diagnosis of the doctor would be able to heal the patient's mental problem. That "indoctrination" (239, 7) stimulates the idea that "a complete objectification" of mental disease diagnosis is possible (240, 3). What is more, it seems to show Freud brutally neglecting the transference relation with his patient, including the latter's "resistances". As if Freud himself is guilty of "misrecognition of the subject", and of "the intersubjectivity of speech" (240, 4), which is to say that his directive style neglects the patient's task to find himself a way out of his problems. That way out is nothing else than 'himself', i.e. his being the subject/bearer of his desire of/for the other, or which amounts to the same thing, his being subject of language and speech.

Lacan, however, takes up the defense of Freud who, according to him, "understood perfectly well the seductive scope of this game in the imaginary" (240, 6). For this is what the analyst has to analyze in the first place: the way in which, in the intersubjective relation of the cure, the patient uses him as a strategic point of reference to keep up his imaginary ego and to deny his real problem, which is the split condition of his identity, the fact that he 'is' unfulfilled desire or, which amounts to the same thing, that he is the subject of the desire of the Other. The patient denies this, and, for that purpose, tries to 'use' the analyst.

This is called transference. So, the analyst must be aware that he is always some way or another involved in what the patient says – that, more precisely, the patient continuously tries to use him and his reactions to satisfy his own imaginary strategies. Lacan notices that, during his analysis of the Rat Man, Freud pays attention to the pleasure his patient shows while telling the cruel memory about the torturing technique in which a rat was put in the victim's anus slowly eating him to death: "His face [...] reflected horror at a *jouissance* of which he was unaware".⁷³ Lacan writes: "The effect in the present of his repeating this narrative did not escape Freud, no more than did the fact that he identified his analyst with the 'cruel captain' who forced his narrative to become etched in the subject's memory" (240, 6). Freud's relation to his patients is not marked by "indoctrination", but rather by "symbolic gift of speech", so Lacan concludes (240, 8). Freud does not "misrecogniz[e] the resistance", but "uses it as a propitious predisposition for setting in motion the resonances of speech". This is why he sometimes breaks up conversation, in order to prevent the patient from "continu[ing] seducing the analyst by slipping beyond his reach" (241, 2). The analysis "consists in playing on the multiple staves that speech constitutes in the registers of language", which is to say that the analyst must at any time be aware on which level he supposes himself to be located in the intersubjective play opened by the patient's speaking: on the imaginary or on the symbolic level (241, 3).

"These principles are nothing but the dialectics of self-consciousness, as it is realized from Socrates to Hegel", states Lacan. In psychoanalysis, the patient's questions all come down to that single one: who am I? According to Socrates, "know thyself" ("γνῶθι σεαυτον", "*gnoothi seauton*", as inscribed above the entrance of the Delphi Oracle), was the central task of human thought, and he invented the dialectic of dialoguing in order to deal with it. And it was not different for Hegel, for whom history is basically the history of consciousness, of the search for its 'self', be it that this self again and again has to get alienated in order to recognize in that otherness its very self. "Freud's discovery" must be seen as a step further in that tradition. The search for the self remains crucial, but it is not to be found in self-consciousness, as Hegel put it, but in its "decentering". Man "reaches [his] subject only by decentering him from self-consciousness" – read: from his imaginary ego. (241, 8).

⁷³ "I could only interpret it as one of *horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware*"; Standard Edition, Volume X, p. 167. Notice how Fink, by using the word 'jouissance', gives a 'lacanian' translation of Freud's sentence.

Here, Lacan refers to Hegel's saying that "all what is rational is real and that all what is real is rational".⁷⁴ There is much irony in it, Lacan says, but what it in fact claims is that self-consciousness (the Spirit, Being's very essence) is able to show the rationality of the most far off, 'material' reality, because it is precisely there it has to look for – i.e. to alienate – itself. This is what, a few lines further, is referred to as "the fundamental identity of the particular and the universal".⁷⁵

Lacan keeps the Hegelian insight that the self has to recognize itself in radical otherness, but reinforces the latter's radicalism. The other in which man has to recognize himself remains obstinate to consciousness and has to be defined as the unconscious. In the end, the self is an "object" which resists self-consciousness and is to be considered as the 'subject of the unconscious'.⁷⁶ Or, more precisely, human "identity" – i.e. his imaginary ego – is "realized as disjunctive of the subject" (which is the subject of the unconscious) (242, 2). This is why Lacan refutes "any reference to totality in the individual" (242, 3), to the idea that the 'lived experience of the subject fully present to himself' should constitute the base of mental health care.

The reference to Hegel is also important in order to understand the "so-called analytic neutrality" stating that the analyst must keep some distance from immediately understanding his patient (242, 5). Yet, Lacan also keeps the reference to Socrates, in order to underscore the active way of intervention needed in an analytic cure. Like Socrates' maieutic method allowing a slave to invent a geometrical truth,⁷⁷ the analyst must help his patient to discover the truth. Not in the sense that the slave digs up the discourse of the master, so Lacan adds. The discourse the patient has to find is the one defended by Humpty Dumpty in Lewis

⁷⁴ "Was vernünftig ist, das ist wirklich; und was wirklich ist, das ist vernünftig". See: G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Edited by Allen W. Wood, Translated by H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 20.

⁷⁵ This is one of the main paradigm's of the Hegelian/Lacanian critical theory of Slavoj Žižek, often expressed in the paradox: "The Spirit is a bone" ("der Geist ist ein Knochen"). See for instance Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing. Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectic Materialism*, London/New York: Verso, 2012, p. 205; 391; 532. You find the expression in Hegel, *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*: "When in other respects it is said of Spirit that it is, that it has being, is a Thing, a single, separate reality, this is not intended to mean that it is something we can see or take in our hands or touch, and so on, but that is what is said; and what really is said is expressed by saying that the being of Spirit is a bone." G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phänomenology of the Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller, With Analysis of the text and Foreword by J.N. Findlay, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 208.

⁷⁶ Already Hegel developed the idea that the Self has to find himself in an 'object', that for instance the slave has to recognize himself in the master because he in fact turns out to be the master of the master, just like the master finds his real self in the slave, to whom he has become addicted (to refer to the famous dialectic of master and slave to which Lacan refers here). But in Hegel the recognition results in a subject appropriating the object, in Lacan, it results in a subject recognizing in the object its own radical alienation, its radically split condition.

⁷⁷ This is the main issue in Plato's *Meno*.

Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*: a discourse that gives full priority to the signifier over the signified (242, 6).⁷⁸

This is the “primary language” Lacan is mentioning here, i.e. the “language of [the patient’s] desire [...] in which – beyond what he tells us of himself – he is already speaking to us unbeknown to himself, first and foremost, in the symbols of his symptom” (243, 1). It is this language that gives access to the “absolutely particular” of the subject (243, 2) and it is the merit of Freud to be the “Champollion” who deciphered it.⁷⁹

Lacan sees this confirmed in what Ernest Jones (member of Freud’s inner circle and his biographer), in a famous article, writes about symbolism (243, 5).⁸⁰ Symptoms must be read in reference to that primary language, and the analyst can “play with the power of symbols by evoking them in a calculated fashion in the semantic resonances of his remarks” (243, 6).⁸¹ For under the semantic level of language (meaning) there is the symbolic level (signifier): only the “interferences” between signifiers give access to repressed meanings (244, 3). To train oneself in reading symptoms that way, a familiarity with reading literary texts can be very helpful, as Freud put already forward.

Lacan criticizes an opposite theory that does not proceed from the primacy of the signifier. He refers to an English concept named “*wording*”. Analyzing symptoms would consist in tracing them back to their origin outside language and retracing how they would have taken the shape of words (instead of symptoms) (244, 6). This is the background of the confusion between “need” and “demand”, as Lacan observed in the work of his English colleague Ernst Kris. “Needs” have their origin in man’s biological dimension. But “demands” are different. They are basically “demands for love” and originate in man’s intersubjective condition, a condition which is mediated by language and takes place at the level of the symbolic. A demand is to be situated in the context of speech, which is radically different from “*wording*”: “in its symbolizing function, speech tends toward nothing less than

⁷⁸ ““I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'” Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!’”

“But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument!,'” Alice objected.

“When *I* use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that's all.”” Lewis Carroll, *The complete Illustrated Lewis Carroll*, London: Wordsworth, p. 186.

⁷⁹ Champollion (1790-1832) was the first to decipher the Egyptian hieroglyphs.

⁸⁰ Ernest Jones, “Theory of Symbolism”, in: *British Journal of Psychology*; 9 (1918) 2: 181-229. Lacan discusses Jones’ theory of Symbolism at length in another chapter of the *Écrits*: ‘In Memory of Ernst Jones: On His Theory of Symbolism’ (p. 584-601).

⁸¹ Lacan illustrates this with a story from the Hindu tradition, in which a young girl holds of someone by the sole force of the signifier (244, 1-2).

a transformation of the subject to whom it is addressed by means of the link it establishes with the speaker – namely, by bringing about a signifying effect” (245, 2). Language is not to be understood as ‘signal’, as direct translation from an extra-linguistic reality. Precisely because this is not the case, we do not immediately trust a *subject* sending out ‘signals’ (language). But, so Lacan once again complains, “we” analysts have lost any feeling with what ‘speech’ means and “we find ourselves in search of a gesture, a grimace, a posture adopted, a face made, a movement, a shudder” (245, 5).

Lacan shows extensively the “inadequacy of the conception of language as signs”, as signals, by referring to Karl von Frisch’s research of the “wagging dance” and other forms of ‘language of the bees’ (245, 6-8).⁸² Is this language? Lacan’s answer is negative, for it shows a “fixed correlation between its signs and the reality they signify”. In (human) language this correlation is broken and “signs take their value from their relations to each other”. Signifiers first relate to other signifiers, and the same goes for signifieds⁸³ – thus Lacan repeats the principles of linguistics as elaborated by Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson (245, 9 – 246, 1).

A second difference with the animal language-as-sign is that, in human language, the subject is involved. Language, in its speaking, involves the subject as addressee. It invests him “with a new reality, as for example, when a subject seals his fate as a married man by saying ‘You are my wife’” (246, 2-3). Once, a person in the audience translated this to Lacan as “the sender receiv[ing] his own message back from the receiver in an inverted form” (246, 5).⁸⁴ Calling someone my wife, I receive my message back as implied in it not as the subject/agent speaking but as the object spoken about. And it is precisely this object position in the discourse of the other, I have to assume (i.e. I have to be the subject of)’. It is the act of speaking which constitutes me as both subject and object. Or, more generally, it is my involvement in the intersubjective language practice that makes me who I am, just like it makes the others who they are.

This is also why “speech always subjectively includes its own reply” – which tells the axiom of psychoanalytic practice. The fact the patient addresses his demand to the analyst,

⁸² Karl von Frisch, „Über die ‚Sprache‘ der Bienen. Eine tierpsychologische Untersuchung“, in: *Zoologische Jahrbücher (Physiologie)* 40, 1–186 (1923); *Aus dem Leben der Bienen*. Springer Verlag Berlin (1927); *Bees: Their Vision, Chemical Senses, and Language*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1956; *The Dance Language and Orientation of Bees*: Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1993.

⁸³ As signifier, before meaning something, ‘cat’ refers to ‘fat’, ‘mat’, ‘rat’, et cetera. As signified, ‘cat’ refers to ‘dog’, ‘lion’, ‘panter’ et cetera.

⁸⁴ According to Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, this is “a formula suggested by his friend Lévi-Strauss” (Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan, The Absolute Master*, translated by Douglas Brick, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991, p. 143).

supposes already that the latter has the answer. Similarly, the speech including its own reply also tells the fear of the paranoiac, Lacan adds. “Thou wouldst not seek Me, if thou hadst not found Me” expresses exactly what the patient cannot stand and what he tries to escape by all means (246, 5). The paranoid person feels persecuted by the other, i.e. by the fact he only is what/who he is thanks to his reference to the other (in speech and language). What he cannot stand is that he is profoundly involved in the language that connects him to the other, and that the other is always already a constitutive element of his speaking. He cannot stand his basic condition, i.e. his being the subject/bearer of language.

Yet, the language that unites the subject to the other is not a general, but a particular or singular one. This is the “antinomy in the relation between speech and language. The more functional language becomes, the less suited it is to speech, and when it becomes overly characteristic of me alone, it loses its function as language” (246, 7). Speech – in the sense of “full speech” – is the act in which the libidinal being assumes himself as the subject of the other, i.e. of language. But that subject is not a totalizing summary of language, it is what lacks in language, which is why its relation to that language is ‘particular’, ‘singular’, for each individual in a different, irreplaceable way.

This is why language is not the same thing to psychoanalysis as it is to other human sciences, which see no problem in applying general concepts to particular facts. According to psychoanalytical theory, the language in play in the particular intercourse between the patient and the analyst (or, which amounts to the same thing, between the patient and ‘himself’) cannot be treated from insights in language *in general*. This is why sciences that treat human language this way, consider it most of the time to be redundant (247, 3). They focus on the information and not on the way the subject is involved in the language exchange. Yet, “the function of language in speech is not to inform but to evoke” (247, 5): to look for the answer of the other and, by asking the other, to constitute myself as subject. “I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it as an object” (247, 7). I lose myself, i.e. my imaginary ego, and I am not who I think I am but who others tell me that I am; I constitute myself in identifying myself with the object the others talk about (when talking about me). I suppose myself to be the answer to the lack around which the signifiers of their discourse turn, and it is proceeding from that lack in the Other that I build up my ‘self’, my identity.

Once again, Lacan emphasizes the implications all this has concerning time. Implying the other in my speech, I realize myself as ‘other’ (i.e. other than the imaginary ego I suppose I am), as the other that I have always been, but not simply in the past, but in the future. I am the (other) one who I will have been: in the “future anterior” tense (247, 7).

All this implies that the subject cannot be thought of in any kind of stimulus/reaction theory. “Reaction is not response”, it is not an ‘answer’ (247, 8). Contrary to a reaction, a response is constitutive for the subject asking for it. Herein lies the base for the “*responsability*” of the analyst intervening in his patient’s discourse (248, 1). An analyst’s bad response/interpretation – i.e. a response that does not open the patients *demand* to his *desire* – can hold the patient in his neurotic position.⁸⁵

This is not to say that psychoanalysis does not embrace the materialism proper to modern sciences. Language is “not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is”, thus Lacan (248; 3). Words give body to the neurotic symptoms, just like they themselves can “suffer symbolic lesions”. The (German) word “*Wespe*” (wasp) – or rather “*Espe*”, as he spelled it – was a knot in the Wolfe Man’s dream, hiding himself (his initials) in a primordial scene in which he took revenge on a servant he was libidinally involved with as a child (248, 4).⁸⁶ And the entire discourse can become eroticized under the influence of the position the patient takes in the intersubjective play in the cure.⁸⁷

Psychoanalysis is only possible by respecting the primacy of that intersubjective play – which, as here, Lacan often calls “dialectics” – in which the impact of language is of primordial order. Resuming this central thesis of the *Rome Discourse*, Lacan recalls again the necessity to “return to Freud” (249, 4). He retakes his reflections on the Rat Man, and shows how Freud’s interventions sometimes might be wrong at the level of facts, but even then they point to the patient’s “truth”. It is not the facts as such that count, but the way the patient relates to them or, more precisely, the way he is the subject/bearer, not of the facts, but of the story reporting those facts (249, 6-7) – a subject constituting itself in the intersubjective event of that reporting. It is not a matter of seeking behind the “fear” or “resistances” vis-à-vis the analytic process. Whatever happens, the process itself – i.e. the intersubjective language exchange – is all that matters (249, 8).

In that exchange, the psychoanalytical method tries first of all “to determine where his [the patient’s] ego is situated”. It tries to locate the imaginary identity which his symptom or demand tries to behold. For this will reveal in which way the patient is using the analyst’s reactions to imagine himself not to be marked by lack and desire, and where the symbolic subject is who the patient avoids facing – the subject of, precisely, lack and desire (250, 4).

⁸⁵ Here, Lacan approves an article by Edward Glover, “The Therapeutic Effect of Inexact Interpretation: a contribution to the theory of suggestion”, in: *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 12 (1931): 397-411.

⁸⁶ Freud, *Standard Edition*, Volume XVII, p. 94.

⁸⁷ Lacan refers to: Robert Fliess, “Silence and verbalization. A supplement to the theory of the ‘analytic rule’”, in: *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 30 (1949) 21-30.

Lacan explains this by briefly referring to the difference between hysteria and obsessional neurosis⁸⁸ as two ways of the subject to maintain him- or herself in an imaginary ego position (and so to avoid a confrontation with himself as (lack and) desire of the Other). “It is therefore always in the relation between the subject’s *ego* and his discourse’s *I* that you must understand the meaning of the discourse if you are to unalienate the subject” (250, 8).

Notice that to “unalienate”, here, does not mean that the subject must be brought back to his real self. On the contrary, ‘unalienating the subject’ aims at a subject assuming his alienated condition, i.e. stopping him from denying it by imaginary strategies. This means that, as Lacan puts it, “the subject’s ego is [not] identical to the presence that is speaking to you”. So, this approach is contrary to what is supposed by “the systems of the subject’s objectification” and by theories of evolutionary psychology, like Pierre Piaget’s, which supposes the evolution of the ego to be led by a “reality function”, principle of “psychological orthopedics” (250, 9 – 251, 2). Also Michael Balint’s definition of psychoanalysis as “two-body psychology” is to be criticized that way: there, the subject is considered a body, subjectivity an illusion, and speech is excluded by the ideal of “lived experience” (251, 3).

Against this, Lacan defends the idea of an “intra-subjective topic”. The play between *I*, *Id* and *Super-Ego*, for instance, is to be considered as *inter*-subjective, as what happens between the participants of the analytic cure. But since most of the analytic theories do not proceed from the primacy of the inter-subjective, the players of that game become objectified, which concretely means that the patient has to adapt himself to his supposed ego or, which often amounts to the same, to the ego of the analyst. Hence the idea of resistances which, in the cure, should be analyzed firstly (251, 6).

Lacan illustrated this with Freud’s behavior in this sense. Freud, too, made mistakes, such as objectifying his patient and getting caught into a ‘counter-transference’, forcing her to accept interpretations that betrayed more *his* than her hidden wishes. That made him also get caught by analyzing her resistances. In his way, Freud “presents us with a rough idea of the intersubjective complicity that an ‘analysis of resistances’ might have perpetuated between them” (252, 3). Referring to “counter-transference” is an admission of weakness on the part of the analyst. The only thing involved in the cure is transference, and both partners in the

⁸⁸ Hysteria and obsessional neurosis are two structurally different ways in which the libidinal being can relate to its ‘manque-à-être’, or, which amounts to the same thing, to its ‘symbolic castration’, to its ‘lack in the Other’ that constitutes him as subject of desire. Hysteria seeks for that lack in the Other (in the analyst for instance), in order to say that the Other is not the fullness he pretends to be – which in fact is a way for the patient to deny the lack that constitutes *his own* desire and to keep up the (imaginary) appearance that he himself is a full self. Instead of seeking for it, the obsessional neurosis does what it can to hold that lack in the Other at distance, which is his specific way to keep on seeing himself as a (imaginary) full self. In this context, Lacan quotes Vergil, *Bucolica* II, 65: *Trahit sua quemque voluntas*, each has his own way to let him lead by his pleasure.

relation deal with it and have to analyze it (read: the language relation they share) in order to discover themselves as the subject of the relation (desire) of the other.

Maybe because analysts fear that their “magic” power allowing them to heal their patients only by means of words is not scientifically defensible, they have lost interest in the dimension of speech and language (252, 5). Yet, for Lacan, the primacy of speech and language is perfectly defensible and in line with contemporary scientific research (such as linguistics and sociology/anthropology of the gift, as he explained elsewhere) (253, 3).

In highly baroque paragraphs, Lacan repeats his thesis of the primacy of language and speech, warning that psychoanalysis has nothing to seek “beyond the wall of language”. That the patient believes he can find something beyond language goes hand in hand with his belief that “truth is always already there in us”. And Lacan adds: “This is also why he [the patient] is so open to our objectifying interventions” (254, 2).

Again, Lacan targets an author who reduces psychoanalysis to what is supposed to be objective facts. He quotes him saying: “It is high time we put an end to the fraud that tends to perpetrate the belief that anything real whatsoever takes place during treatment” (254, 6). “This sally was not ill directly”, Lacan comments, for it sought for “a distinction never previously made in psychoanalysis”, “known as the symbolic, the imaginary and the real” (255, 2). The author was in fact seeking the distinction Lacan recently introduced. In a couple of paragraphs, that are far from excelling in clear explanation, Lacan indicates that the real in psychoanalysis is to be located in the negative relation with the symbolic. It is at the moment of a “*parole pleine*” (“full speech”), that the real is to be located. It is the moment when he recognizes himself in the caesura, the “punctuation” of his discourse: there, where his discourse meets its own finitude or lack. This “punctuation” is provoked – or, in case of success, repeated – by the intervention of the analyst (255, 4-6). Because of the central place of this “punctuation”, Lacan dwells “for a moment on time’s impact on technique” (255, 7).

First, Lacan treats the point that, for the patient, the length of his analysis is unforeseeable. He cannot know in advance when his “time for understanding” (the second moment of the analysis’ ‘logical time’) will come (255, 11). And Lacan adds that the presence of the analyst reinforces this, for on him the patient projects the answer to his demand, which is a strategic manner to keep his imaginary ego unbroken (256, 1).

Lacan illustrates this once again with the case of the Wolf Man. And herewith, he also shows the effect of “setting in advance a time limit to an analysis” (256, 2). This effect is alienating, explains Lacan. Despite all Freud’s efforts, the Wolf Man did not succeed in

integrating his primordial scenes into his history. And, what is worse, the alienation ended up in paranoia (256, 5).

Lacan's second point is the "function of time in analytic technique [...], the length of sessions" (257, 3). He takes more than three pages to discuss this topic, for he obviously wants to defend the variable length he handles in his own practice ("what have been called my 'short sessions'"; 259, 10). He starts with the suggestion that the standard of an invariable length of the sessions enforces, with the analysts, an attitude of obsessional neurosis (257, 5).

However, before explaining obsessional neurosis (which he will do extensively), he develops a general reflection on the historicity of time. For time as we know it – time objectively measurable – is an invention of modernity, as Alexandre Koyré taught.⁸⁹ He even adds the year and the author: 1659, Christiaan Huygens, the inventor of the first clock (257, 6). But in psychoanalysis, the "reality" of time is different. It has a "localized value (258, 1). The cure is "punctuate[d]" by "its dialectics", by the punctuations made by the patient as well as by those of the analyst (258, 4-5). This is why the "indifference" of a fixed timing "interrupts the subject's moments of haste", which "can be fatal to the conclusion toward which his discourse was rushing headlong" (258, 7).

It is then that Lacan turns back to the argument that a fixed time runs the risk of installing in the analyst an obsessional neurosis attitude, or at least an attitude allowing him to secretly connive with his patient, for waiting is a typically obsessional attitude, keeping the patient in an imaginary position. Lacan explains this by referring to Hegel's master/slave dialectics. The obsessional is as the slave, afraid of facing death (which is why he has become a slave) and therefore spending his life waiting for the death of his master, i.e. of the one who was not afraid of dying. So, to win from his master, the obsessional in a way plays for dead himself – which, in his unconscious imaginary fantasy, is why his master can live. "He is the anticipated moment of the master's death" (259, 3), which is his way to constitute himself as the imaginary answer to the Other's lack and desire – this being a way to keep his own imaginary position intact. He unconsciously thinks that, thanks to his waiting on living (i.e. of facing death, as the master does), the Other (the master), although marked by lack and desire, can live.⁹⁰ The slave (i.e. the obsessional) lives his time as postponing his time to live.

⁸⁹ See A. Koyré, "An Experiment in Measurement", in: *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 7 (1953): 222-237. See also Joella G. Yoder, *Unrolling Time. Christiaan Huygens and the Mathematization of Nature*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004 (1988), p. 15.

⁹⁰ The typically *imaginary* strategy of the patient consists in taking such a position in relation to the (symbolic) Other that he can hide/deny the lack (the death) of that Other (that he is the subject of).

In the analytic cure, this means that the patient will enjoy the fixed ending of the session, allowing him not to assume his own ending, his finitude, the haste of the “moment of understanding” (as explained in *Logical Time*). Meanwhile, he will seduce his analyst by showing “his good intentions” and taking his time for “*working through*” his problems (259, 4-5).

To this argument in favor of “short sessions”, Lacan adds a direct reference to his own practice. If he had not applied that technique, so he tells, one of his patients would not have stopped entertaining him with “his speculations on Dostoyevsky’s artistry” (259, 10). Yet, he writes, “I am not here to defend this procedure, but to show that it has a precise dialectical meaning in analytical technique” – which is a defense of the “short sessions” anyway. The latter is yet enforced by a reference to “traditional asceticism of certain Far Eastern schools”, more precisely “the technique known as Zen”. The short sessions procedure “shatters discourse only in order to bring forth speech” (260, 1-4).

It is all about speech, which is to be located in front of the wall of language, “and it is off this wall⁹¹ – which is the same for the patient as for us – that we shall try to respond to the echo of his speech. There is nothing that is anything but outer darkness for us beyond this wall” (260, 5-6).

This does not imply that the analyst “thoroughly masters the situation”. There is always the possibility of a “negative therapeutic reaction” which, according to Freud, is rooted in the death drive.⁹²

After a remark saying that both the ego-psychological psychoanalysis and the organicistic one (William Reich is mentioned) miss the point because both deny the importance of language and speech (260, 9), Lacan goes into the relation between “death instinct” and speech. The connection of death with life is nothing to be surprised of, he explains, referring to Bichat who, at the beginning of modern biology, defined life as “the set of forces that resists death” – confirmed by W. B. “Cannon’s notion of homeostasis” (261, 1).⁹³ And the connection with repetition is understandable from this biological perspective as well. But from a psychoanalytical perspective, things are different. There, we have to focus on the resonance of the words, including the Freudian concepts, rather than on their first

⁹¹ Literary, it is “on the wall”, “*sur ce mur*”.

⁹² Thus Freud in *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*; in: *Standard Edition*, Volume XXIII, p. 242.

⁹³ Xavier Bichat, *Physiological Researches on life and death*, Washington: University Publications of America, 1978 (original French edition, 1800). Walter Bradford Cannon, *The Wisdom of the Body*, New York: Norton, 1967 (1932).

meaning.⁹⁴ A bit like Freud who in Goethe's *Hymne to Nature* heard the appeal that made him study medicine, so Lacan suggests (261, 4).⁹⁵ Or like the reference to the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles, claiming that the universe is reigned by a fight between love and hate (262, 5).

Lacan's baroque sentences on the death drive only get somewhat more clearly when one has in mind Heidegger's notion of *being-towards-death*: "so the death instinct essentially expresses the limit of the subject's historical function" (261, 7). The subject is the subject of language, of history, of a story; and the sense of this story is made possible by its finite condition, by the fact that it ends. It repeatedly ends, and it is this ending that gives it meaning. A sentence gets its meaning only thanks to the point put at the end of it. Similarly, the patient realizes himself as subject of the desire of the Other thanks to the punctuation of the analyst's interpretation. That punctuation redoubles the limit (the death) which makes the subject's history/story possible. In that sense "this limit is present at every instant in what is finished in this history" (262, 1).

In the struggle between love and hate Empedocles mentioned, the subject finds in death his partner. For it is death that brings everything to the level of the symbolic. It is the 'force of the negative' (Hegel) as realized in the signifier that "gives birth to the symbol" (i.e. changes everything into signifiers) and masters our "dereliction". Lacan refers explicitly to Freud's *Fort/Da*. By using the signifiers *Fort* and *Da*, the child negates the going and coming of his mother by elevating both, together with his mother, in a symbolic system, in language, thus making himself, too, an "object" in that language. Which is to say that the child has constituted himself in reference to these signifiers and to signifiers in general – and in reference to the world of the others realizing themselves as subjects of desire. "*Fort! / Da!* It is already when quite alone that the desire of the human child becomes the desire of the other" (262, 7).

It is the signifier (which "manifests itself as the killing of the thing") that elevates the subject's desire to a level where it can endlessly perpetuate. On the basis of that killing or death, man lives and is able to transfer his life and culture to next generations. It is not a coincidence, Lacan suggests, that the oldest evidence of the existence of humans are burials (262, 10 – 263, 1). That burial, this 'death' (denial) of man's real death, makes him living also after he died. This is what distinguishes animals from humans. "Empedocles, throwing

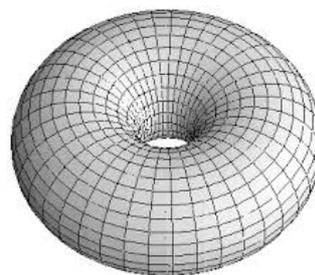
⁹⁴ Lacan refers to "Laksanalaksana", a principle of "Hindu aesthetics" that reads words always in their second or third meaning. See G.T. Deshpande, *Indian Poetics*, translated by Jayante Paranjpe, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan Pvt, 2009, p. 47.

⁹⁵ Freud, *Standard Edition*, Volume XXI: 208-212.

himself into Mount Etna, leaves forever present in the memory of men the symbolic act of his being-towards-death” (263, 2).

In a difficult paragraph, referring once again to Hegel’s dialectic of master and slave, Lacan articulates human freedom as oscillating between three poles: the one of the master imposing renunciation to the other’s desire, the one of the slave subjecting himself to the desire of the other (which is man’s common position, being the subject of the desire of the Other), and the one of suicide, radically refusing to subject to the Other’s desire. The latter is the most radical and most “particular” manifestation of desire, in which desire coincides with death drive. And, so Lacan stresses, this is “not [...] a perversion of instinct, but rather a desperate affirmation of life”.⁹⁶

That kind of “pure desire” implies that man, as subject of language and speech, is centered around what remains exterior to language.⁹⁷ To explain this or, rather, to make it visual, Lacan refers to the topological surface of a *torus*.



Desire takes place on a surface, which is the one of the field of language as universe of signifiers, but that surface is marked by a central void which structures the entire surface, and hence desire (263, 7 – 264, 1). The central void is death, defining the process of desire as well as the subject of that desire as a “being-towards-death”. The most particular form in which this death is assumed is suicide. But the end of the analysis takes the other option in which the subject assumes his desire as being the desire of the Other. There, “the subject’s satisfaction is achievable in the satisfaction of all – that is, of all those it involves in a human undertaking” (264, 4). Lacan illustrates this by saying that “the end of a training analysis [...] is not separable from the subject’s engagement in this practice” (264, 4). This is why the analyst must be trained in the symbolic order – read: art, literature and visual culture – of his days and the subjectivity of his time, for his place will be in the center of the Babylonian discourses projecting on him man’s questions and demands (264, 5).

⁹⁶ This is the “pure desire” he describes in some of his seminars as ‘mè phunai’ (Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre VII, L’éthique de la psychanalyse*, texte établi par J.-A. Miller, Paris : Seuil, 1986, p. 361) or as the ‘sign of no’ of Sygne de Coüfontaine (Paul Claudel, *Théâtre I*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris : Gallimard, 2011, p. 986 ; Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire, Livre VIII, Le transfert*, texte établi par J.-A. Miller, Paris : Seuil, 2001, p. 329). Compare it also with the motto from *Satyricon* introducing Part III, which describes the same situation.

⁹⁷ In a way, the Lacanian theory of the real is fully present already in the *Rome Discourse*. He even defined the concept at the conference he gave two months earlier (July 8th), more exactly; in the answer he gave there to the remark that, despite his title (“The Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real”), he had said nothing about the real. Replying to that remark, he said: “I did say a little about it. The real is or the totality or the vanishing instant. In the analytic experience, it is when bumping into something, for instance into the silence of the analyst” (Jacques Lacan, *Des noms-du-père*, Paris: Seuil, 2005, p. 53, my translation).

Lacan ends his *Rome Discourse* by repeating his main thesis: Freud's theory as well as his practice proceed from the primacy of language and speech. "Psychoanalytic experience had rediscovered in man the imperative of the Word as the law that shapes him in his image" (264, 8). "The whole reality of its effects lies in the gift of speech, for it is through this gift that all reality had come to man and through its ongoing action that he sustains reality" (265, 1). Lacan concludes with a long quotation from the Bhrad-âran'yaka Upanishad, a famous old Indian textbook out of the late Veda-tradition, telling how the "powers above" ("Devas"), the human beings, and the "powers below" ("Asuras"), all expressed their respect for the power of speech, by "submission, gift, [and] grace" (265, 3-7).⁹⁸ "Gift" is what characterizes humans: "the sacred text meaning that men recognize each other by the gift of speech" (256, 5). This is to say that not merely the gift as such, but the gift of language and speech defines the human.

⁹⁸ *Upaniṣads*, Translated from the Original Sanskrit by Patrick Olivelle, Oxford World's Classics, Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, p. 73. Most probably, Lacan must have come across that passage from the Bhrad-âran'yaka Upanishad via *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot's poem which, in *Champ et Fonction*, is at the background of other passages as well. See, in Eliot's poem, the end of "V. What the Thunder Said" (v. 399-432 of the First Edition; T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: a Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, Edited and with an Introduction by Valerie Eliot, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971, p. 145-146).