

THE GAMES OF INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION IN THE TEXTS OF LACAN

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For try as we may, we cannot get behind appearance of things, and the terrible reason may be that there is no real things apart from the appearance; [. . .] to me, beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.¹

In English, German, and French, considering the languages where they at least partially take their origins (Greek, Latin, and Arabic), the words *interpretation*, *decryption*, *sense* (*meaning*), and *comprehension*, along with their equivalents and their negations *uninterpretable*, *indecipherable*, *non-sense*, and *incomprehensible*, and, of course, the words *sign* and *symptom* all travel along all sorts of routes; maintaining with each other an indefinite number of relations. It would be impossible to analyze them all here. But it seems that the area of interest that they allow us to explore leads to a major antithesis; and that the thinkers and even the simple users of those words adopt two different attitudes or two groups of opposed attitudes: the ones who accept without too much trouble or who deliberately promote the notion of *interpretation* of what makes sign, symbol, or symptom; and the others who reject this notion, as does Lévi-Strauss when he claimed to P. Ricœur that: « signification is nothing but a phenomenon ».² Or Deleuze who when engaged in a harsh critique of psychoanalysis gave this instruction: « Experiment, never interpret! ».³

Unhappily, those two types of attitudes do not remain distinct; they cross, tying tangled knots, deliberately or not. Those who advocate the attitude to interpret, or at least who do not challenge it and judge it unavoidable by considering that the signs are given as things, from a certain perspective do no cease wanting to stop the game; either by judging that some prospects

¹ Wilde Oscar, quoted without references by Thomas Mann, in: *Les maîtres. La philosophie de Nietzsche à la lumière de notre expérience*, Grasset, Paris, 1979, p. 246.

² He said that at a roundtable that opposed him to Ricœur and that was related by the review *Esprit* of November 1963, n°11, p. 637: « What you are looking for [...] is a sense of sense, a sense that is behind the sense; whereas, in my view, the sense is never a prime phenomenon; the sense is always reducible. In other words, behind any sense there is a non-sense, but the contrary is not true. For me, signification is nothing but a phenomenon ».

³ Deleuze Gilles and Parnet Claire, *Dialogues*, Paris, Champs Essais, 1996, p. 60.

are better than others, by searching for a logical or mathematical structure that can accommodate them to each other, or by invoking a ‘stop point’ to interpretation in some ultimate meaning of which they could take hold. Those who reject this notion of *interpretation*, while considering that it opens the door to an unacceptable skepticism or to a no less unacceptable dogmatic or religious positions, may well grant to it the status of fiction; but they are also searching for a base on which those fictions are anchored; and they look for it in some quality of stability that would qualify the sign or some component of the sign itself.

We would like to examine if the notion of *interpretation* or of *decryption* cannot be eliminated; or if, on the contrary, we can do without it while invoking a sort of experience of signs—or of what makes signs—that would leave no room for the indefinite disintegration of the interpretation into interpretation of interpretation, etc; and, in this way, to ask what could have been that experience if it did without decryption and interpretation, which has become undesirable. In other words, can the preceding antithesis be solved -- as are all the Kantian antinomies, even if it is under quite different conditions? And what could be the principle of that solving? Or does that solving produce a remainder that, moreover, does not necessarily compromise it, because we believe like Poincaré that each science including mathematics only leads to incomplete proofs?

I. Let us start from the difficulties inherent in the notion of *interpretation* or of *decryption* when it is applied to a sign, to a set of signs, or to that which is given as a sign or seems to be a sign; and let us consider why and how those difficulties have justified that some learners and thinkers have renounced the notion, despite the evidence that it announces or incloses.

When we say that we interpret a text or that we decipher it — whether it be a text of literature, philosophy, mathematics, a musical score, or a lot of symptoms presented by a patient who speaks of them or shows them through their body-- we mean that the text, the score, the lot of signs that I see and that present themselves to my reading and seem to give themselves entirely really give themselves only partially, like the things that offer themselves to perception and that spread in their integrality provided that I take upon them a multitude of other points of view; the point of view I actually occupy allowing not to have all of them but only to guess the

greatest part of them and perhaps only to have a phantasm of the whole. However with a difference that invalidates from the outset the comparison, the text I interpret is entirely in front of me; and, as a lot of signifiers, it will not change during the interpretation; whereas the perceived thing spreads through the points of view I take upon it such that its phenomenon is constantly changing. Compared to perceived things, the phenomenon of the text is astonishingly stable. So, to say that I interpret it or that I have to interpret it may mean many things from which I will provide a list without any care of exhaustivity but with the prospect of summarily classifying them. Either (1) the text contains blanks, gaps, and lacks that do not permit the intelligence of what is said: a lack of meaning of words, signs, or groups of signs; or, on the contrary, too many meanings of words that determine ambiguities putting us before undecidable choices, a lack of grammatical structure, or an enigmatic reference to a context. Then the interpretation becomes a sort of complement, a clogging, a fulfillment of the blanks in the text or what I interpret as being straight away supposed to be defective. Or (2) the text looks like a store window that depends on a stock of sense, a sort of back shop in which it is necessary to tap in order that the understanding be better and even quite complete. The text does not tell what it speaks of all by itself; the interpreter's help is necessary so that he gives to himself the right to say better than the text itself what it does not tell of; what it cannot say, and yet what it is supposed to say. By a sort of narcissism or overconfidence, the interpreter sets himself up as the one who knows the sense behind what is presented; he is the one who knows how to search, then to find, what the text does not tell. He even usurps the place of the author whom he disputes to be the best placed to know what he pretends to say or what he wants to say.⁴ Here again, one can remark on a disjunction: either (2.1) the text does not tell what it says because it does not know it; or (2.2) it knows what it says, but, knowing it, it does not say what it could say or it could have said otherwise and better. In that latter case, again, many hypotheses may follow. Either (2.2.1), it does not tell what it says because it is impossible for it to tell it alone -- it is impossible

⁴ Thomas Mann said beautifully, in *Les maîtres*, op. cit., p. 330: « It is a mistake to believe that the author is the best connoisseur and interpreter of his own work. Perhaps he is so as long as he works at it and sticks to it, but an unfinished work, left behind him, becomes more and more a foreign parcel detached from him, so that the others are, over time, much better to recall than him many things he has forgotten or that perhaps he has never clearly seen. We need to be recalled to ourselves; we are not always in full possession of ourselves. The consciousness of our own person is weak insofar as our being is not always present in its totality ».

for it to tell what it wants to tell— without the aid of the one who proposes and perhaps imposes its help. Or (2.2.2) it does not tell it because it does not want to tell it. In that case, the distance between what we mean and what we effectively say is deliberate. The will to ignore can be the author's, who uses the text for intimating thoughts to the reader, whereas the reader, who can become aware of this intimation, foils it and substitutes it with a signification supposed to be better and perhaps may be the right signification. The interpreter puts himself in a position to say what the author (of the emitted signs) really wanted to say; he makes himself indispensable for that task because it is necessary to search for the « right » signification; or (2.2.3) he substitutes himself for the author who is accused of hiding what he really wants to say; and he flushes out the hidden meanings in the text and gives to the text the sense of what seems to be only partially given. The interpretation can be made — or it pretends to be made — by inferring the intention of the author, whether by sticking to the author's intentions or by giving to it a sort of « truth » that it could not have without this act of interpretation.

In all the preceding cases, we acted like the question was for the interpreter to search for an ultimate « truth » of what is proposed in the text or of what he has met or constituted as a text. But this position could be questioned by sufficiently skeptical interpreters as unjustly accepting a circular movement of the interpretation; which, if accepted, in turn raises all sorts of possible issues: some interpretations may be better than others, stronger than others, without being forcibly truer than others. So, we will say, in a Nietzschean way, that there is never stable data from which we could settle an interpretation; that any pretended data upon which we want to base our interpretation are themselves already interpretations, and on indefinitely. So again, even though the vocable of *interpretation* is more usually attributed to the productions of the imagination, the memory, or the conception that admit it more evidently, the sensation that seems to be given to us is already by itself an interpretation. Or, in another register, if we believe it possible to take hold of the past and the pretended filiations to the past in the text in order to explain from where the text that is interpreted comes, and what gives it a sort of initial stability, it would quickly be realized by reversing this perspective that what seems to be actually given to us as what would be really a product of the past is, as well, the starting point of a quest towards origins that intimates to us a way of reading the past that entirely depends on the present from

which we project our own considerations.⁵ Not considering that those filliations, whether we descend or ascend to them, are themselves recompositions or reconstructions that satisfy us when we believe we have succeeded in an interpretation.

II. Whatever meanings we give to the interpretation, it is susceptible to a critique that tears it to pieces in the claims it seems to satisfy. However diverse those claims are, nearly all of them seem dependent on the position of the interpreting subject that, to our eyes at least, discredits them from the start in their pretense to tell the truth; and even merely in their pretense that some interpretations are stronger than others and must therefore be taken into account because of their subservience to the phantasm of the subject.

Why would it be necessary that the interpretation of a text, a set of signs or of symptoms, be the act of a subject, whether it is related with objects or/and with other subjects, and quite particularly with the subject supposed to have produced the text? Why would that interpretation be, in that way, more firmly focused so that it could imagine itself derived from an unshakable foundation? Rather than taking the text in a subjective or intersubjective relation supposed to be more serious than the text itself, or rather than making it depend on that relation, nothing prevents us starting from the text that has the merit of existing⁶ and, as such, putting up resistance by its consistency; and so, in this way, can we not take what is called the *subject* for an ideal or fictitious production of this text itself in a game of signs, or of that text in its relation

⁵ Lacan often returns to this theme of the discourse that anticipates itself and gives always itself as a sort of secondary elaboration of something that precedes whereas it has itself created that illusion. The mind can only function while producing something antecedent to its own acts. He says that in *The Seminar*, XIX, Paris, Ed. Le Seuil, August 2011, p. 151 —I translate: « As soon as we speak, it is a fact that we suppose something for what is said. That something, we imagine it pre-posed, though it is not sure that we do not ever suppose it only afterwards. » Sometimes, Lacan states this idea in the own terms of a philosophy of interpretation, even late in his work, although he has already raised objections against the very notion of interpretation. Such is the case, for example, in Book XVI of *The Seminar*, Paris Ed. du Seuil, March 2006, p. 1979-1980: « The dream is already an interpretation, certainly wild, but an interpretation. [...] At each of the terms that are signifiers, from a diachronic point of view of the progress through which its articulation is instituted, the dream, because of its function of pleasure, gives an imaged translation that subsists only for being articulable and signifying. What are we doing when we substitute our reasoned interpretation to the wild interpretation? [...] That reasoned interpretation is nothing but a reconstituted sentence that reveals a fault point; as a sentence, and not as a sense, it lets see what is wrong. And what is wrong is the desire ». nb—this follows the example of the burning child.

⁶ *The Seminar*, B. XVII, Paris, Ed. du Seuil, March 1991, p. 63 : « What has been said? It is the sentence. But there are no means to have the sentence supported otherwise than by the signifier, as it does not concern the object. [...] For us, we stick to this: the signifier does not concern the object, but the sense ».

with other texts, in such a way that what is called the *subject* is nothing but the effect of the relations of signs between themselves? Rather than a producer of signs and texts, is it not possible for the *subject* to be produced by those signs and texts and for its identity to be a mere illusion? That illusory function can be projected in the text or the play of texts that begot it and imagine itself, while taking this text or this play of texts as one mirror or a system of mirrors, to be stepping in its other side, as causing the effects of sense. In this way, the causes and the effects, what is real and what is fictitious, are totally upset. Certainly, the subject loses its reality, but it also avoids being sent 'into the infinite'; as, conjunctly, the sense avoids the break down of the sense in sense of sense, and in sense of sense of sense, etc.⁷ It will be objected that we have no more right to condemn that « subjectivo-objective » interpretation than to feel obliged to adopt a philosophy that refuses to grant a central place to the subject. We will answer that the advantage is still on our side, because —as we said—the text has the merit of existing and so we have to start from the text to construct in a deliberate way, if it is needed, a subject, an object, subjects, and objects. Unlike the philosophers and other supporters of the thesis of the subject, the supporters of the antithesis do not from the outset discredit the text, substituting it with the phantasms of a system composed with subject(s) and object(s).⁸ From that a series of criticisms follow that can be found in Lacan, in Freud (particularly when he is « reread » by Lacan), in Deleuze, and Foucault.

It is absurd to believe and to count among the principles of interpretation that these criticisms consist in trying to adjust to a sense that would be situated behind the text or

⁷ As Hobbes contested to the Cartesian Cogito that to multiply to infinity, against all experience: 'I know that I know that I know... But from where does it come that you know what you know, etc.?'

Lacan sees the link that ties that sense that disintegrates in sense of the sense, sense of the sense of the sense, etc., and the subject that is sucked in by that leak of sense as by a bottomless pit. Lacan says that: « the sense that has in its nature to shirk, to cause itself to shirk, but also to arise as an extremely full meaning whose leak sucks the subject towards what could be the very core of the delusional phenomenon, its umbilicus » (*The Seminar*, Paris, Ed. du Seuil, 1981, B. III, p. 295).

⁸ In a very beautiful text of the *Seminar*, Lacan shares an experience he often makes with zealous psychoanalysis students who are always ready to substitute what they suppose the patient wanted to have say for what the patient actually said to them: « It is always the moment when they have understood, when they were in a hurry to fulfill the case with an understanding, that they missed the interpretation that was relevant to do or not to do. That is generally expressed with a full ingenuity by the formula: *the subject wanted to say that*. But what do you know of it? What is certain is that he has not said that. And most often, after having heard what he said, it appears, at the very least, that a question could have been asked and would have been sufficient by itself to constitute the correct interpretation and, at least, to initiate it » (op. cit., p. 31).

underlying it. Why should we think that a behind-text would be preferable to the text itself to which it was substituted? Does not this substitution attract the suspicion onto itself of wanting to dilute, in binder points, a misunderstanding that simply gives us the illusion that the text is better understood because we have submitted it to a syntax that we bring to text? Lacan remarked on this by referring to the seemingly absurd locution: « Colorless green ideas sleep furiously »; commenting on it by saying that it is no less reassuring in spite of its absurdity because it obeys syntax rules that we are used to and that give us the purring illusion of a sense. But would the sentence have sense solely by the words that it brings together?⁹ As soon as I make by memory, imagination, or understanding connections between elements that, by themselves, resist all meaning, I give myself, through them, the illusion of understanding; and I obtain for myself a *jouissance* of sense¹⁰ that reassures me as much as the disunity of elements worried me. It was easy for Lacan to say to those who received his teaching that true meaning requires delaying the moment of understanding, without rushing it at least,¹¹ and, as paradoxical as it seemed, to put one's intelligence in a position to accept not to understand everything; it also implies a rule of remaining sensible to what remains incomprehensible, without reducing it by some dodging.¹² It

⁹ *Seminar*, B. XIV, 18/I/1967. The same sentence was used later, in the *Seminar* XV, March 6th, 1968. The grammatical consistency may have no chance to be true; nevertheless, it preserves meaning. So « never a phantasm may be expressed in nothing better than in a sentence that has no other sense than grammatical, that, at least, in the game and the formation of the phantasm, is only agitated grammatically; for example: *un enfant est battu* » (A Child is Being Beaten) (*Seminar*, B. XVI, op. cit. p. 276).

¹⁰ It's a Lacanian thesis that the searching for sense (for meaning) is searching for *jouissance*. In his lecture of November 20, 1973, asking himself what is the meaning of the incalculability of interpretation in its effects, Lacan answers: « it means that is only sense is *jouissance* ».

¹¹ « To quickly understand is to have missed an essential signifier; a signifier that makes possible the level change that has given the feeling of a contradiction . We must never miss a signifier. It is in so far as the signifier does not stop you that you understand. But: to understand is always to be grasped in the effects of discourse; this discourse demands to us the effects of the knowledge already precipitated only by the formalism of the signifier » [*Seminar*, B. XIX, op. cit. p. 151]. The advice given not to understand too quickly, and even not to understand in order to better understand, punctuates the *Seminar* from the beginning: [IV, (Paris, Ed. du Seuil, March 1994), lecture of April 3, 1957; V (Paris Ed. du Seuil, May, 1998), lecture of November 13, 1957; VI (Paris, Ed. de la Martinière et le Champ Freudien, June 2013), p. 491, p. 501; VII (Paris, Ed. du Seuil, 1986), lecture of June 8th, 1960; XVI, op. cit., p. 162].

¹² In a very Pascalian way -since Pascal noticed that the Christian religion has better survived in the words of its opponents than in those of its supporters-, Lacan confesses that he prefers sometimes the discourses of the adversaries of psychoanalysis to those soothing of the ego psychology that weakens psychoanalysis and makes it lose its abruptness, its sense of the fault, and of the raising of the real: « The misunderstanding, the refusal, the shock showed by Emil Ludwig -whether honest or in bad faith, we do not care- witness better than the dissolution of Freud's work that happened through the decadence in which the analysis is slipping » (*Seminar*, B. III, op. cit. p. 270).

is by paying attention to not assimilating the incomprehensible, to letting it be irreducible, that the text is being, is resisting as a text. M. Foucault, who has spoken so little about music, even though he has done it more than Lacan and a little less than Deleuze who has invoked music more than the two other authors,¹³ has however succeeded in whispering about the perception of music; saying that he has always distinguished it from the perception of paintings or drawings; and he asked why music can be so extremely moving; so much so that if in front of a graphic work he always felt game to make a discourse about it, certain musical effects left him defenseless, unable to write.¹⁴ To comment, to translate, to think, to write are to defend oneself against what we do not understand; that defense does not mean that we obtain a gain in understanding; thinking may even consist in preventing us from understanding and countering thought. For example, the necessary adoption of a language allows the expression of some thoughts and, on principle, disturbs the expression of other ones. Thinking is an act that one must distrust in oneself because, under the name of rationality, it can go on sleeping while giving oneself the illusion of understanding as in a dream.¹⁵ The dream often gives the phantasm of a solution to a problem that we meet in reality. We can enjoy what we don't understand and feel jouissance in what perturbs us by a filling that hinders what would carry us to a hole or gap in ourselves; but if the question is to explain what strives to really think, then we have to cling to the faults,¹⁶ to use an expression of Lacan, to substitute for the continuity of the sense discontinuity; for what makes sense is what we are ordinary doing to prevent ourselves from understanding and to ignore the real. One cannot notice this substitution because the language

¹³ In *Mille Plateaux*, for example.

¹⁴ Foucault M., *Dits et Écrits*, II, Paris, Quarto Gallimard, 2011, p. 1354:

¹⁵ That is exactly what Lévi-Strauss saw when -taking the words from Russell-, he fought against the mysticism of a certain number of philosophers, including Ricœur.

¹⁶ « We are mistaken when we ask about the dream: *what does it mean?* because that is not what matters. What matters to us is: *where is the fault of what is said?* and it is at that level that what is said is distinct from what it presents as meaning. And yet that says something, without knowing what that is said, since we are obliged to help it by our reasoned interpretation » (*Seminar*, B. XVI, op. cit., p. 199).

fills or conceals by itself its own holes at the very place where it makes them.¹⁷ The translation is precisely that « stop-gap » operation that the language that translates seems to oppose to the porous character of the significations that look to be left by the language we are translating.

We obtain a more conscious effect of understanding when we translate one text into another, either because of a difference of languages or because of a will to comment than we do when we speak the same language as the text itself. To understand is to experience a game of differences between two or several systems of signs. The translation is the mode of understanding of those who know that there is an unsurpassability to the signs of a text, except in producing one or other texts, in symbolically converting one text to another, or in inducing from a text what it could be the function of. In focusing on the *relation between texts*, one means that: « every discourse keeps one's sense of another discourse »;¹⁸ whatever the level where that translation is located, it always pretends to reach more than the mere illusion of understanding that is associated to a language that we know too well and that seems to turn on itself.¹⁹ And focusing on the work of *function*, we can understand why structuralism has always turned to mathematics, whether by means of definite or indefinite ways, in order to be exposed.

In a Kierkegaardian way we can say that there are « to know » and « to know », « not to know » and « not to know », as the author of the *Sicknesses Unto Death* says when he wants to

¹⁷ In the lecture of November 20th, 1973, he says : « Language is made like that. It is something that, as far as you decipher, will never let go of what it means, because it is there at the very place of meaning ». Since the beginning of the Seminar, Lacan has often repeated this analysis: the signifier fades away precisely because it produces the meaning. As the cuttle fish fades away behind the sepia curtain it emits, the signifier fades away behind the signified, as if the signified held radically alone in a forgetfulness of the signifier. « How was it possible to forget the fundamental role of the signifier? Of course, we understand why. What is expressed inside the apparatus and the game of the signifier is something that goes out of the subject, that can be called its desire. Since the subject's desire is seized in the signifier, it is a signified desire. And here we are fascinated by the signification of that desire. And we forget, in spite of Freud's reminders, the apparatus of signifier » (*Seminar*, B. III, op. cit., p. 270).

¹⁸ *Seminar*, B. XIX, lecture of February 9, 1972. We are here very near to what Lévi-Strauss might have taught about myths. Lacan would have done well to remember that formula when he came up with the dangerous idea that some languages lend themselves to better expression of the unconscious than others. While speaking in this way, he lent languages a substantiality that is denied by the formula of February 9, 1972.

¹⁹ *Seminar*, B. XIX, p. 153: « The essence of meaning is always to be confusional, it is to say to believe having bridges the gap between a discourse that precipitates a social link and what, of another order, comes from another discourse. » The sense is always linked with a potential difference between two discourses. Staying in a single language does nothing more than induce a miscomprehension: « When you know a language and when you read a text [written in that language], you understand, you always understand. That should put you on your toes. You understand in the sense that you know in advance what is said there » (id., p. 150-151). If it seems normal to us to understand all of a language that we have learned and that we know, really it is abnormal to place all understanding into it. This position is only a kind of illusory trust.

explain the Socratic formula « to sin is to ignore ». There is a dialectic between « not to know what we believe we know » and the « not to know of the Socratic ‘I do not know’ ». There is an understanding that understands nothing and that is only due to the illusion of understanding, to the feeling of understanding and a higher comprehension that accompanies the strain done against the backdrop of misunderstanding, and that is the mark of the symbolic.

If I may speak of the absurdity of a sense hidden behind the text I interpret, it is no less absurd to believe that interpreting may consist of trying to join the intention of the author or of the agent who would have produced that text. Why should we suppose that what we imagine beneath the surface is « truer »? And even that there is, under the surface, something waiting to be flushed out? Not only are the notions of *author* or *agent* fictitious or phantasmatic constructions, we appeal to that trivial geometry of inside, outside, above, and below to allow these constructions; and we think that these notions and their sketchy geometry play the real game and give us the key to the text that has first been discredited from the outset by the belief that it presents the text as a dissimulation, something that hides or that wants to hide. But hides from whom? To whom? And by whom? If there is one thing that is missing and that is useless to fancy for the understanding of a text, whatever it is, it is the intelligence that its author is supposed to have had in composing it; we have no chance to encounter anything real in that direction. Once again, the text is more surely existant than its pretended author and more resistant than the « we » or the fictitious « I » that are (or am) searching to grasp it; and it is less delusional to pretend to configure the text, to combine with it, than to pretend to be in unison with an author who we have constructed or projected into the text. It might be added that the text is also more certain in its present than the past filiations in which it is decked out, feigning that it derives its meaning from them, whereas the past is always a reconstruction given by the present when we project ourselves in a memory that may not be warranted otherwise than by other texts and other traces.

We should also add that Lacan seems to us perfectly initiated into the paradox of Diodorus Cronus²⁰ who in an actual situation leaves us the choice between two or more hypotheses or options. He refuses to say that either one of them is « true », even though the facts

²⁰ Dead about 284 before Christus.

would seem to have proven one or another right or to confirm which had really occurred in the past. Similarly, in an Aristotelian way, and giving probability all its weight and force, Lacan writes: « The interpretation is right only by what follows from it, exactly as the oracle. To interpret is not testing a truth that would be decided by yes or no; it is to unchain truth as such. It is right only as really followed ».²¹ He could have added: « or as being really the following ». We recognize here an idea of Freud's *Constructions in Analysis*. There is nothing beneath the discourse; but there are consequences in holding such a discourse rather than another.

Moreover, is it indeed true that despite its pretenses interpretation is searching for both what magnetizes its motion and what is meant to stop it? What could be this sense meaning, seemingly different from relations between signs or between texts? In any case, in taking them as relations, we avoid speaking the language of the secret and the hidden since all is visible and audible in the language; or, if something is hidden, it is: « what is hidden by the form of the discourse itself ». And isn't it of the highest improbability that, searching for a coherence between the signs, without leaving too many rebellious signs to this investigation or without making too much slag, we find exactly what should be found? Who would have made this coherence? And is it not enough that, under the name of *truth*, we receive a conjunction of signs that makes enough of a system, until we find a better one? Has Descartes himself not shown in his *Principles in The Treatise of the World*, in spite of the theory of truth that he spells out in his *Meditations* and his *Discourses*, that what we call truth is nothing but the result of a substitution to the « right world » of a world of fiction over which we would have better control? Is the effect of a construction more effective than a truth that is impossible to warrant if not by symbolic, blind means; and which is always in need of rebuilding? That was the point of view of Freud in a text written at the end of his life, entitled *Constructions in Analysis*, already quoted above, but relatively little quoted by Lacan,²² though of a great importance from the point of view of the Lacan who advocated for a « return to Freud ». It does not matter that the stories of the dreams we tell, and even the stories of our own life, are right; at the opposite of what has been said so

²¹ *Seminar*, B. XVIII, Paris, Ed. du Seuil, October 2006, p. 13. Without ever talking about it, Lacan shows himself to be deeply Bayesian. In any case he does not discredit the probabilities as Foucault believes he could do or gives the impression that he does.

²² We ordinary quote only a few -modesty or ingratitude?- of the author who inspire us the most.

much, sometimes to gratify psychoanalysis: « the analysis is neither a restitution of the sense nor a comprehension »;²³ it is an explanation²⁴ that has effects on our ways of feeling, of thinking, and on our behaviors. So it is of the utmost importance that those effects increase our existence rather than reduce it. And they have those effects neither because there are right, nor because they are interpretations.”²⁵ Deleuze will follow this line of inquiry when he substitutes for games of representations seemingly capable of truth — though they have none vis-à-vis to which they could correspond— by games of intensity that discriminate with more certainty the valuable constructions from those that are not.

III. But as strong as their criticisms are (so strong that one can wonder what could remain of the philosophies of interpretation, which are weak in their answers particularly when they are dependent on a subject philosophy), don't the philosophies of Foucault, Lévi-Strauss,²⁶ Deleuze, and Lacan (if he had any need for a philosophy as coherent as Foucault's and Deleuze's) also present some fault that they manifest on other points than those they denounce, often with brio, in their adversaries; and even on other points than the fault that they themselves claim? In other words, triumphant in the apagogy, in the fight against the thesis, do they have the same consistency, so different they are from each other, when the question is otherwise than an antithesis?

²³ *Seminar*, B. III, November 16, 1955. Here, all the texts are convergent and particularly in the Book III of the Seminars. Wanting to rectify a well-established prejudice, Lacan challenges the point where the advance of the psychoanalysis is ordinary seen: « It is believed that the major progress of the psychiatry since the introduction of the movement of investigation that is called psychoanalysis has been to restore the meaning of a chain of phenomena. That is not mistaken in itself. But what is mistaken is to imagine that the sense of which we speak is what may be understood. We ordinary believe that the new thing that we would have learned in the staff-rooms, the expression of the psychiatrists' *sensu commune*, is to understand the ill persons. It is only a mirage » (op. cit., p. 14).

²⁴ *Seminar*, B. III, op. cit., p. 259: « The question in psychoanalysis is that of a manifestation of the positive spirit of science as an explanation. It is as far as possible from an intuitionism. It has nothing to do with that hasty, short-circuiting interpretation that simplifies and so narrows its scope. » He had said, in his *Seminar*, B. III, resuming a constantly open debate in the fifties: « You know the pretended opposition between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*. The *Verstehen* is open to all confusions. [...] The nature of *Erklären* is the appeal to the signifier as the only foundation of any relevant scientific structuration » (op. cit., p. 216).

²⁵ *Seminar*, B. XVI, p. 198: « In any case, Freud agrees: the interpretation of a dream is not what in the reality has caused the dream. Thus when we interpret a dream what leads us is neither: *what does it mean?* nor: *why does it want to say that?*, but: *what, through saying, is wanted?* Appearance does not know what it wants. We quote a very similar text in the preceding note 16.

²⁶ If indeed he claimed a philosophy.

One of the weak points of those philosophies is particularly identifiable in the least philosophical of them --Lacan.²⁷ The subject philosophies having been disputed without the hope of return, all the thinkers, except perhaps Deleuze — as we will see —, are attracted by a language philosophy early on that, if it manifests a formidable ability to destroy the subject philosophies does not present its rights any better than the dethroned subject philosophies once the conflict is over and the question is all but settled in its favor. If we can obtain with the philosophies that claimed to be structuralist the same advantages as the subject philosophies, without having their disadvantages,²⁸ do they not present, in their turn, some damaging faults? Starting with an usurpation: once the multiplication of the subject is posited, and having reduced the subject to a state of fiction, we cannot see why language would have more right to take over the place abandoned by the subject than the imagination or affectivity, for example. It is the question asked by Deleuze when, as a keen reader of Hume, he wonders about the exorbitant rights that some of his contemporaries of the years 60-70 who worked on the domain of what is known as « human sciences » granted to linguistics; which, by itself, does not call for that so much and does not pay back either Lacanian psychoanalysis or the archeologic searching of Foucault. Without going into detail at this point about all the major drawbacks that arise from wanting that *the unconscious is structured as a language*,²⁹ a thesis whose assertion soon becomes almost absurd when language is understood as a plurality of vernacular tongues — as

²⁷ Lévi-Strauss said it very well, about Lacan, in a meeting with Judith Miller and Alain Grosrichard. In: *L'Âne. Le magazine freudien*, 1986, n°20, p. 27-29: « Lacan's path and the mine crossed, but we went, basically, in very different directions. Myself, coming from philosophy, I tried to go towards those human sciences of which Lacan criticized the legitimacy, whereas Lacan who was started from a positive knowledge, or what he considered as such, was lead towards an increasingly philosophical approach to the problem ».

²⁸ The subject is a sort of emanation of the relations of signs that constitutes language: « The signifier is a sign that is addressed to another sign; it is what waves to a sign; it has nothing to do with the communication with somebody else [and, we could add: with things, with beings], it determines a subject; it has for effect a subject. As for the subject, it is quite enough that it is determined by that, to know that he rises from something that can only have its justification elsewhere » (lecture of November 20, 1973).

²⁹ On the one hand, we did it elsewhere, in a book published by érès under the title *Lacan et la langue anglaise*, in 2017; on the other hand, in the translation of that book in Anglo-American, in 2021, under the title *Lacan and the English language*. That text broadly takes up, in its epilogue, an article published in September 2018 in the Francophone review *Essaim*.

Lacan has imprudently said that it must be understood--,³⁰ we must highlight two or three difficulties resulting from the « linguisticism » of authors that deny the philosophies of the subject and that are loath to use the the notion of *interpretation*, at least when they want to do theory, because it is rare that they deprive themselves of practical and *prima facie* use of the notion.³¹ When we want them to explain all the acts of the mind, their general remarks about language, if they make an impression for a time, turn out to be extremely fragile and dangerous when we want to take a step beyond comfortable generalities. Deleuze saw it; and so he has criticized both Lacan (whom he doesn't like much) and Foucault³² (whom he admires): the defect of these two philosophies, he says, is that both believe in the *Grund*, the founding; a prospect which Deleuze is reluctant to accede to. Why grant this function of foundation to language when we don't grant it to the subject?

The choice, which seems arbitrary, of the linguistic founding of all the mind's acts is perhaps less arbitrary than we think when we consider the way Lacan views the sign. In a

³⁰ Far from insisting on the « as » (« as a language »), he has rather shifted the focus on a quasi-identification to language, that makes his thesis vulnerable because of the extravagances to which it leads: an Anglophone or a Japanophone would be less analysable than a Germanophone or a Francophone. There would be languages that put up more resistance than others to analytic work with the unconscious. The insistence on the « as » would have preserved Lacan from extremely risked adventures.

³¹ Foucault does not understand « interpretation when he uses this word otherwise than in its Freudian use; and he does not refine the critique of the term more than Freud does himself. And yet, he is extremely critical with this term of interpretation on a theoretical level when the interpretation becomes a target: « If interpretation cannot be achieved, it is simply because there is nothing to interpret » (*Dits et écrits*, I, Paris, Quarto, Gallimard, 2001, p. 599).

³² Foucault showed himself to be a more skillful philosopher than Lacan when, the former substituting -as the latter- the « system of language » to the « subject », he will isolate, in language, the effects of power and so shelter it against the critiques for which others will reproach the structuralists: the arbitrariness of positing the supremacy of language for explaining psychical, social, and cultural phenomena.

Saussurian prospect that contrary to the Anglo-Saxon linguists³³ he does not question, Lacan distinguishes the signifier from the signified in the sign and he isolates the signifier as the most active and the most resistant part of the sign; dedicating the signified to the status of a more or less evanescent fiction. He will end up saying: «We always think against a signifier »³⁴ while highlighting in a Pascalian way³⁵ that we hardly ever think³⁶ since most of the time we let ourselves be taken to the turnstile of signifiers. That constrained identification of the sign to the signifier fills three functions: the first is to figure in this way the force of the unconscious's structuration of all our psychical acts. The second is to grant a sufficiently effective grasp on psychic acts so that the analysand can work with his analyst during the cure.³⁷ The third is so that the signifier (escaping, at least apparently, to historicity in any case, more than the signified that

³³ An Anglo-Saxon is not carried by his tongue to distinguish between *language* and *tongue*, whereas this is almost self-evident for a Francophone who distinguishes in the *langage*, *la langue* that becomes a set of stable signs, from the parole that seizes that set to make it « mean » to other speakers and to relate it to the world. We understand that a Francophone tends to relate the sign as *langue* to *signifier* and *la parole* (the *speech*) to *signified*, the variations and the modulations of which being more patent. That idea, that is not encouraged in an English speaker and that plays no role at the background of his way to think of language, is probably one of the reasons that make it difficult to promote Lacanism in the Anglo-Saxon land. In that sense, the English language could be, not an obstacle for psychoanalysis but a handicap for a certain way to conceive it.

However, the relation of Lacan with Saussure is complicated: we could wonder if Lacan does not try to keep what he considers as something acquired from Saussure -the distinction between the signifier and the signified- while opening to an Anglo-Saxon problematic that he considers particularly in regards to Berkeley, to whom he devotes an ancient and great admiration. Lacan does not hesitate to say in the lecture of April 10, 1973 of his **Seminar XX**: « If Berkeley had not been of my oldest food, many things probably, including my casualness in using linguistic references, would not be possible » (*Encore*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1979, p. 93).

³⁴ *Seminar*, L. XXIII, May11, 1976.

³⁵ The thought being used, following Pascal, to make diversion from thinking.

³⁶ *Seminar*, B. I, Paris, Le seuil, 1975, p. 192: « Thank God, we do not think: that is an excuse ».

³⁷ « What is true is that the level of understanding is far from exhausting the springs of the structure that we seek to penetrate, because it is upon it that we look to act » (*Seminar*, VI, op. cit., p. 59-60).

we have known for a long time is not fixable)³⁸ offers an element conducive to the psychic work that the psychoanalysis proposes.

If those three points had to be taken up in detail and criticized we could wonder about the legitimacy of resorting by analogy to the Saussurian conception of the sign in order to deal with the functioning of the psychical acts in their relations with the unconscious;³⁹ and we also could wonder about the relevance of considering the historicity of the signifier as more stable; its erosion being slower than that of the signified.⁴⁰ Let us content ourselves with emphasizing a major point that leads to a difficulty for Lacanism.

³⁸ Pascal knew it when he remarks in his *Pensées* that: « we assume that everyone conceives of them [the things] in the same way, but that it is a quite gratuitous assumption, because we have no proof that it is so. I see indeed that we apply these words on the same occasions; every time two men see a body change its position they both use the same word to express what they have seen, each of them saying that the body has moved. Such conformity of application provides a strong presumption of conformity of thought, but it lacks the absolute force of total conviction, although the odds are that it is so, because we know that the same conclusions are often drawn from different assumptions » (Pascal B., *Les Provinciales et les Pensées*, La Pochothèque, Paris, 2004, frag. Sellier 141, p. 889-890; Pascal B., *Pensées*, London, New York, ..., 1995, Penguin Books, p. 27-28). So, there is another relativity than that of motions analyzed by Galileo: the relativity of words in order to say that relativity or to give it rules.

³⁹ We could have considered how much that analogy can be dangerous when we search to establish it in detail, posing for example the inverse problem of that supposed to be solved by the general thesis: *the unconscious is structured as a language*. If the question is to proceed by analogy, it is easy to agree with this thesis; but if we quite legitimately wonder - from the point of view of the general thesis- whether some tongues make more difficulties, more difficulties than others, and even makes impossible the functioning of the unconscious, the generality of the thesis is jeopardized because it ceases to function as an easy analogy.

⁴⁰ Lacan has not always ignored it, as it is showed by that reflection of an historical nature on what he calls, in the B. VIII of the *Seminar*, op. cit. 390, the turn of 1920: « Around what does the turning of 1920 turn? Around the fact that -people of that epoch say it, the heroes of the first analytic generation- the interpretation does not function anymore as it had functioned. The atmosphere is no longer conducive that it functions, that it succeeds. And why? It did not wow Freud. He said it a long time ago. We can point to one of his texts where he says it, in the *Technical Essays*: Let's take advantage of the opening of the unconscious, because soon it will have found another trick. What does it mean for us who, from the experience once made and sliding with it, could find -in spite of all- the landmarks? I say that it is this: the effect of a discourse, I speak of the discourse of the first generation dealing with the effect of a discourse to know; the unconscious, does not know that discourse is what is in question -though it was there since the *Traumdeutung* where I taught you to recognize and to spell it because the question is constantly, under the terms of mechanisms of the unconscious, of nothing but the effect of discourse. It is that -the effect of a discourse that carries on the effect of a discourse that does not know it, and that leads to a new crystallization of the effect of unconscious that opacifies that discourse. » The text is particularly obscure, muddled and badly written. I give it you in French the three last sentences that are not clearer than in English: « Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire pour nous qui pouvons, de cette expérience faite, et nous mêmes glissant avec, trouver tout de même les repères? Je dis que c'est ceci -l'effet d'un discours, je parle de celui de la première génération qui, portant sur l'effet d'un discours, à savoir l'inconscient, ne sait pas que c'est de ça qu'il s'agit- encore que ce fût là, et depuis la *Traumdeutung*, où je vous apprendis à la reconnaître et à l'épeler, car il ne s'agit constamment, sous le terme de mécanismes de l'inconscient, que de l'effet du discours. C'est bien ceci -l'effet d'un discours qui ne le sait pas, et qui aboutit nécessairement à une cristallisation nouvelle de cet effet d'inconscient qui opacifie ce discours. »

Language is recognized as a force, as a cause producing an effect — an effect of sense--neither as representation,⁴¹ nor as communication. Language forms, establishes, and institutes. And Lacan, as he had himself recognized, is placed in a certain way in the position of Berkeley for whom the function of language is constitutive of things and is not confined to their interpretation. But with an important difference: Berkeley constructs a language of representation that is challenged by Lacan who insists on the fact that when language rotates on itself — if we can say it like that -- its constitution of objects and things is certainly at work; but, contrary to Cloyne's Bishop, let us not forget that for Lacan the real seeps into the cracks and the cuttings of the system as part of its ordinary functioning. It is not by its sense that it does this but by that part deprived of meaning — if not of fixity— that Saussure seemed to distinguish in the sign under the name of *signifier*; and to its greatest benefit Lacanian psychoanalysis realized the signifier deprived of meaning gives a stronger support than the subject could offer to the opposite party (the defenders of the subject as synthesis). It would be a strange reality and a strange real if they could be reached by having language rotate on itself.⁴² It happens that Lacan oscillates in his analyses, or rather in the vocabulary they require⁴³ but this is not the essential point of our complaints, which rather consists in the two following grievances that illustrate how difficult it is to get out of the trap of interpretation, understanding, and sense; even if we would do it with a great reenforcement of formulas and claims.

⁴¹ From this point of view, Deleuze was perhaps a little quick in his critique of Lacan, because he asserts, against the psychoanalyst, that language remains a representation, while he deals it himself in a very Humean fashion, as a force: however, he should have himself highlighted this last characteristic as a point of rapprochement with Lacan, at least in his negation that language could stick to its representative function. [It is true that Lacan challenged the notion of force or strength that he esteems obscure and confusing in psychanalysis.]

⁴² There is only to draw from Lacan's work to be assured by it. March 8th, 1977, Lacan said: « There is one thing that is, in all cases, certain, if anything can be so; it is that the idea of Real includes in itself the exclusion of all sense. » The philosopher Alain, that cannot be suspected to have the least sympathy with Lacan and that has so unfortunately understood Freud -that the mind is obscure to itself, that is good to know, etc.- did, in his own way, in a completely different style, make the same critique about Berkeley.

⁴³ Here he says that « the system does not need sense » (*Seminar*, B. XVII, p. 14); there, and it can be only 50 pages further in the *Seminar*, as it is the case for the present example [we quote the text, above, in the note 6, *Seminar*, B. XVII, p. 63], he advocates, on the contrary, that the system sucks all meaning, giving the illusion that it is attributed to the Real or received from the Real; which, in a case as in another, cannot be so. If those formulations are contradictory, the thesis they put into play is not so or, at least, supports contradiction.

The first more general grievance was perfectly detected by Deleuze (and it is not an accident that he is a fine connoisseur of Hume). It is that we do not go out of the sphere of representation as easily as imagined. To fancy having gotten out of it, is it not necessary to make a dogmatic and realistic use of causality and effect? Something which is not only not necessary but can even seem rather arbitrary. There is no reason for causality to be any less fictitious than the other categories that allow for representation.⁴⁴ However, the skill of Lacan is that he does not talk about the cause of thinking but merely about the cause of discourses;⁴⁵ and in this way he escapes the trap that when one discourse causes another it does not itself make the causality going out from the sphere of ideality or fictitiousness of the relations.

The second reproach can be applied to what Lacan says in the page that I alluded to before where he says that: « The essence of psychoanalytic theory is a discourse without spoken words ».⁴⁶ As usual, while appearing to change nothing in the theses that he affirms all along in

⁴⁴ The character of Philo, if not Hume himself, had fallen into the same trap; he takes Cleanthes aback in making a dogmatic use of the cause, that counters the whole skeptical philosophy of Hume: as Lacan will do, he wants to explain thought's phenomena by elements that have nothing to do with thought, the non-thought explaining the thought. « What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call « thought », that we must make it the model of the whole universe? » (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hackett Pub. Company, Indianapolis, 1986, p. 19). In a text that strangely echoes the preceding, written by Hume and in which it is not certain that its author is taking Philo's side, Lacan does not hesitate to define structuralism by what he does not seem to perceive as a dogmatism of the cause: « Structuralism is the taking seriously of the knowledge as cause, cause in the thought and usually, it must be said, of a delusional thought ». In other words, the causality is not only a relation produced by the thought: it can, again, to be applied to the thought, which so becomes an effect. Then Lacanian structuralism becomes a badly bounded theory and so, dogmatic -of an impressive dogmatism that is not immediately visible because it applies the cause to itself, in a way, and that we see rather the intelligence of that act rather than a bid for power. The text of Lacan goes on to define structuralism as: « A rule of thinking that has to ensure that the non-thought can be its cause, such is what we face with the notion of unconscious. It is only in proportion to the nonsense of the words -and not to the sense, as it may be fancied and as the phenomenology supposes it- that I am as thought. My thought is not adjustable to my liking, -*halas* may be added or not-. It is ruled. In my act I do not intend to express it, but to cause it. In the discourse, I have not to follow its rule, but to find its cause » (*Seminar*, B. XVI, op. cit. p. 14). And if the unconscious was linked to the right - it's to say, really, a blow of force- that I grant to me making a dogmatic enclave in my critical discourse?

⁴⁵ The quotation of the preceding note is clear from this point of view. *Mutatis mutandis*, we find ourselves in the situation of the traveler of whom Galileo speaks in his own *Dialogues*; who, instead of drawing as their author makes him do (what allows the equivalence between this plot and a simple line that only slightly deviates from the arc of circle from Venezia to Alep, though constantly and in a various way-), would write the Galilean equations of motion. In a way, the claim to settle the relativity of (physical) motions can still be considered as a motion from the point of view of another and more general system that would make relative the very point of view of Galileo.

⁴⁶ *Seminar* B. XVI, op. cit. p. 14.

his search, Lacan modulates the sense he gives to the notion of *signifier*:⁴⁷ and after having said that he heard by language the different uses of vernacular tongues in their variety, he will distinguish the signifiers which he speaks, and which he uses to explain psychical phenomena, from the signifiers of vernacular tongues. These are much less stable than it seems and they have histories, even if that history is slower than that of the signifieds — if I am allowed this distinction and this orthography. And while he will make the notion of *signifier*, as he uses it, so abstract in order that it becomes more useful, he will in the same movement withdraw its generality, which otherwise would have been a great embarrassment.

Lacan will also clarify that: « The question arises whether the effect of sense in the real depends on the use of words --I refer to the use of the ordinary sense of the term— or only to their jaculation, if I may say so (it is a term in use concerning words); for a long time many things have been given that are worth thinking about, but nobody made the distinction between this use and that jaculation.⁴⁸ People believed that it was the words that were carrying meaning. Whereas, if we take the trouble to isolate the category of the signifier we can see that the jaculation keeps its sense, an isolable sense ».⁴⁹ Let's continue: it's not about saying that the consistency of this signifier (by which Lacan analyzes jaculation, as he calls it, playing evidently with the term)⁵⁰ may be other than symbolic or imaginary; in another language we could speak of the « fiction » of this consistency. But the problem posed is not that of the truth of the consistency, but of its real effect. Lacan had specified on the same page that by « sense effect » he meant that: « the interpretation implies quite a switch in the score of that sense effect. It is certain that the analytic interpretation carries in a way that goes further than speech. Speech is an

⁴⁷ Lacan does the same things with all his theses, so that he seems to do exactly the same thing -what is not right. How many times, for example, has the famous thesis about the mirror stage changed its content, the mirror being either a « real » mirror with glass and silvering, or the figure of the other, l'autre, with a little a, or l'Autre with a great A?

⁴⁸ That word, rare and sought-after, is listed in the *Trésor de la langue française* of Klincksieck which attributes to it the signification of « surge of enthusiasm, of fervor, of exalted effusion »; and the Latin etymology of *jaculatio*, that is the action of launching, of unchecking.

⁴⁹ *Seminar*, B. XXII, lecture of February 11, 1975.

⁵⁰ Because, of course, of its proximity with *ejaculation* -Lacan likes this sort of equivocation, of provocation perhaps; but also because his first name, *Jacques*, is included in this term -Lacan does not dislike this aspect of things.

object of elaboration for the analysand, but what the analyst tells —for he tells-- has effects of which it is not nothing to say that the transfer plays a role in it; it is not nothing but it does not clarify anything. The question would be to say how the interpretation has a scope and that it does not forcibly imply an enunciation. [. . .]. The due and requestable effect of sense of the analytic discourse is not imaginary. It must be real. And what I am dealing with this year is an attempt to more closely analyze what could be the real of a sense effect because, on the other side, it is clear that we are used to a sense effect that is carried by words and that does not go without reflection nor without imaginary modulations ».⁵¹

As clever as this connection is, it is difficult to save this sort of scientific practice, which gives a relevant nudge to the sense that it is convenient to grant to the term *signifier*, from the accusation of a certain « disloyalty »; but the important thing to consider is in what direction this retouching leads. And it is clear that it goes in the sense of a stabilization that supports the thesis considered from the side of the subject (or from the relationships that the subject maintains with the objects or with the other subjects) but not from the side of the signifier, even in a revised and corrected sense. When Lacan says that: « all consistency of the signifier is pure imagination », ⁵² it is not to say it is junk, but, quite on the contrary, it is to attribute to it an extreme solidity in spite of — and perhaps due to— its imaginary nature and to its lack of roots in tongues; these roots being rather in the body.⁵³

So what must be accepted is a singular sliding of the notion of *signifier* from the sense that Lacan originally gave to it when he took particular care to stress the scission in the sign of the signifier and the signified in the *Cours de linguistique générale* in order to pretend to escape the difficulties that the philosophies of languages encounter when trying to give a report of what

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ The text of the *Seminar* quoted in note 5, of May 4th 1972, ends like this: « It is only to the fact of speaking that can be related, in the actual state of our knowledge, that it is possible that what is speaking is what enjoys of himself as body [...]. Psychology, what is it? It is the identifying of what is understandable as obscured [...] because of a signifier that has marked a body point ».

they accept in the operation of interpretation.⁵⁴ We see that in order to make the signifier play its character of real in opposition to what it signifies, Lacan is obliged to give it back the ideality that Saussure had always granted to it. But then what have we won in reality on the side of the signifier in comparison to the signified if the former is no less ideal than the latter, the signified; in what otherwise is a version perfectly consistent with that given in the *Cours de linguistique générale*, whose author would probably have not tolerated the Lacanian use of a scission between a signifier more real than a signified? It is a strange and singular dialectic to be obliged to restore the ideality of the signifier in order that it could play its role or real effect.

It remains to weigh the charge laid by Lacan against those who fill the texts with sense: the accusation of adopting a religious attitude. After having said on January 5, 1980 that: « the sense is always religious », he will say again a little later in his lecture of March 18, 1980 that: « religion is the original home of meaning »; for that it is one of the modes of filling the voids of language and « a way to come to terms with its faults ».⁵⁵ But, here again, it's a case of the 'biter bit'. Because we could wonder if considering desire in terms of void, aspiration, and filling is not already a metaphorical theorization of a religious nature, as Deleuze has said; nicely turning the argument against Lacan.

In both his denunciation of the religious discourse as the discourse of sense and in his attempt to make a place for psychoanalytic discourse among the other discourses, we clearly see a Lévi-Straussian inspiration; even though the break-up between Lacan and Lévi-Strauss dated back to 1965. In the case of the situation of the analytic discourse, how could we not see that it aims to echo what Lévi-Strauss had established in *Myth and Meaning* when the author shows that if the language consists in phonemes, words, and sentences then music is a part of language,

⁵⁴ Let's deal, in note, and only succinctly, with a consideration on which we have no time to expand. However contradictory the notion of *interpretation* is there is no *conflict of interpretations* in the sense considered by Ricoeur: since the thoughts depend on the play of the signifiers that structure the objects rather than they take the part of the signs that say the truth about them; the topos of the right thoughts and of the mistaken thoughts they allowed is not the most relevant place of oppositions. The true opposition is between the subject philosophies and the philosophies that situate the structuration in signs or in the signifiers of signs. « The term [of interpretation] is used wrongly and through since we are told about conflict of interpretations. At most, the interpretations complement each other; [...] What is important is that there is the *falsum*, with the ambiguity that, around this word, can occur the fall of the wrong; I mean the contrary of the true. Occasionally, the false of interpretation can have the ability to move the discourse » (*Seminar*, B. XVII, op. cit., p. 157).

⁵⁵ The Book VII of the *Seminar* had focused on that point: « The religion consists in all modes to avoid the void » (*op. cit.*, p. 155) while « respecting » that void.

presenting substantial equivalences to phonemes, even though music has no words, whereas the myth presents equivalents to words and sentences, though it has no equivalent with the phonemes.⁵⁶ As for the charge of mysticism made against those who are searching for a sense behind the sense, it comes back every time to the question which is for Lévi-Strauss to criticize the deciphering of myths by those he calls « the philosophers » and who cannot be content with a rigorous construction without making it emphatically consonant with some sense that is pretending to already be there; and being so, waiting for someone to relate or confront it.

IV. In concluding this circuit in which three or four words — sense, interpretation, understanding, and translation, and their associated terms— have introduced themselves, we are faced with a large number of contradictions on the part of those who claim the foundational role of sense, whether it is hidden or has hidden itself, and those who refuse to believe that notions of sense, interpretation, and translation are self-evident; or who finally accept them only after having denied them. To the extravagant narcissism of the interpreter who imagines that his reading is better than the text he interprets, as if the sense had been hidden for him, we have opposed those who far from the haughtiness and contradictions of those who believe in interpretation, sense, comprehension, and translation believe that it was in the word itself, devoid of its inner worlds of meaning that lies the solving of the problem of the first thesis. We need to oppose to that last solution which wanted to see in the word the real itself the realization that this solution was neither without cost nor difficulty; in any case, we must acknowledge that that kind of solution demands that the people who sustain it must trim a large part of what must be called extravagances. How can we support the claim that the interpretation does not aim at all at significations? Doesn't Lacan confess --it is true that it is in the first Book of a *Seminar* that contains 27 Books and that spans 27 years from 1953 to 1980-- that even though thought would be a production of signifiers and would produce itself only against those signifiers, « it would not be a reason for not trying to understand why so evidently erroneous speeches were proffered ».⁵⁷ We cannot entirely sacrifice signification. How, then, can we not arrive at a more apagogic

⁵⁶ *Myth and Meaning*, Schocken Books, New York, 1995, p. 52. The text was first published in 1979.

⁵⁷ *Seminar*, B. I, op. cit., p. 192.

conception in the ‘Pascalian style’ that aims to bring truth only by denying errors — towards which Lacan often seems to shift his discourse?⁵⁸ Lacan is repeatedly forced to make a place for interpretation and its signification even though he would have wanted to sustain a radically dynamic discourse to a discourse of signification.⁵⁹

The worst thing we may have seen in attempting to arrange that antithetic, is that each camp, both that of the thesis and that of the antithesis, is not a single block, as the adversaries of the one or the other side imagine. In the party that has our sympathy we can see that there is a difference — even though it would be reduced to nothing by the supporters of sense, interpretation, and comprehension-- between ending up saying, as Lacan says: « La pensée est jouissance »⁶⁰ and taking thought as a power as Foucault does. The practical projection of those formulations gives rise to a singular opposition. It would have been difficult to believe at a certain period of their life that the most anti-Sartrian of the two philosophers could serve liberating causes and that the other who had challenged affectivity so much— so far as not granting to it the slightest meaning in his work-- would end up identifying thought with

⁵⁸ We can give of this, in the text of the *Seminar*, a good example, B. XI, p. 236: « The interpretation has not its last spring in bringing to us the significations of the path on which moves the mind that we have in front of us. That scope is nothing but a prelude. Interpretation does not as much aim at the sense as it wants to reduce the signifiers in their nonsense in order that we could find the determinants of all the behavior of the subject ». Lacan may well speak of the « non-sense character of the chain of signifiers »; but this nonsense character is sustainable only by being submitted to a reduction by the intelligence, which -it is true- functions only through a non-sense foundation. We must take care however: that negation is not of an Hegelian type. It is rather of the kind of reject, trash, and rest on the Euclidean division that does not fall just: « What is begot from the play of signifiers, to know: what is sense, that is to say the signified, is here to be located as a fall of that play. The sense is not only an effect, but an effect that gets upset and, also, a cumulative effect. In this prospect, culture takes the part of an economy founded on the structure of the object a, to know, of trash. It is as trash, excrement of the subjective relation, that we must inscribe what made the matter of dictionaries, what is said to be the bundle of senses that are concentrated around a signifier during a certain practice, recordable to have become common » (*Seminar*, B. XVI, op. cit., p. 317).

⁵⁹ In one of the most prudent books of the *Seminar*, because one of the most didactic, the XIth, Lacan does not hesitate to make room for notions of *interpretation* and of *sense*: « It is not because I have said that the effect of the interpretation is to isolate, in the subject, a kernel of non-sense that the interpretation is itself a non-sense. The interpretation is a signification which is not just any interpretation. It comes here instead of \underline{s} [of the signifier] and reverses the relation that makes the signifier to have for effect, in the language, the signified. It has for effect to bring out an irreducible signifier. We have to interpret at the level of \underline{s} , that is not open to any sense, that cannot be any sense, that is a signification, only approximative, without any doubt. What is here is rich and complex, when it comes to the subject's unconscious, intended to bring out irreducible signifying, non-sensical elements, made of non-senses » (*op. cit.*, p. 278). And, little farther: « The interpretation is not open to all senses. It is not any interpretation [on the pretext it would be enough that it would have an effect]. It is a significative interpretation that must not be missed. That does not prevent that it is not that signification that is essential for the advent of the subject. What is essential is that he sees, beyond that signification, to which signifier - its irreducible, traumatic sense- he is, as subject, subject to » (*op. cit.*, p. 279).

⁶⁰ *Seminar*, B. XX, op. cit., p. 66.

jouissance; which — even if there is some distinction between *jouissance* and some affect of pleasure-- did not coincide forcibly with the expected result. Lastly, those who came initially from the side of sense — there is sense, it is necessary that there be sense— happened to be the most prone to skepticism while the one (Foucault) who, because of his philosophical skill, saw himself most threatened by sophistics ends up making himself the champion of freedom; where the other who jumped into the arena with the least philosophy, at least at the beginning, as Lévi-Strauss highlighted when he spoke of Lacan, saw himself perhaps defending the most sophisticated positions like finding the most signification in what is least understandable and in what seems to be the most incomprehensible; the summit of understanding being to make what is the less comprehensible— for our happiness by the way because we do not hold the sophisticated positions for the least philosophical ones, far from it.

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