The Unconscious structured like a Language

This paper is concerned with Jacques Lacan's statement: "The Unconscious is structured like a Language". It is in no sense intended to be a full investigation of the Lacanian labyrinth.[1] . It is rather a tentative venture into enemy territory. Since the difficult and the hostile are locked into a dual relation that only a return to the organic state resolves, it is imperative that we resort to various threads (filiations) to make sure of our place in the day light.

What I have not done, then, is to produce some kind of summary of work of a Lacanian kind done so far within Social Anthropology. There is a huge distance between Lacan's own fleeting references to Ethnography, to Mauss and to Levi-Strauss, and the clinical work carried out by Marie-Cecile and Edmond Ortigues in Dakar (1962-1966). There is a greater distance still between the Ortigues' conclusions in Oedipe Africain (1966:1973), and the devastating criticisms to which they are subjected in the Anti-Oedipe (1973) by Deleuze and Guettari. It is not that I feel that anyone should refrain from the application of what could be called Lacanian insights within Social Anthropology. Such a request would be absurd, given the fact that it was the early writings of Levi-Strauss that helped Lacan to 'depass' a phenomenological position, and move towards a 'structuralist' one.[2] However, I feel that it is imperative to place Lacanian Psycho-analysis within the social formation of which it is necessarily an ideol-ogical moment. This 'totalizing' strategy requires more, not less, intel-lectual rigour, and demands that we read a book such as Oedipe Africain symptomatically, with an acute attention to that which is not in the text itself, and yet cries out to be heard. A preliminary investigation of certain aspects of Lacanian thought is then, essential, before one can consider its descriptive powers in other Cultures.

If we are to think about other cultures it is obviously vital that we understand the Unconscious rules of formation that delimit the terrain upon which our knowledge claims scientificity for itself. I am thinking here of the work of such thinkers as Foucault and Derrida, who in their attempt to 'make strange' the very categories that are the scaffolding of our social being, necessarily resort to the shimmering surface of a poetics. It is simply not sufficient to be forewarned against the dragon of ethno-centricity as though the heraldry of one's good intentions were enough to restore all intentionality to a (transcendent) innocence. Against ethno-centricity, its opposite (lack of ethnocentricity) enters the lists, as if it were a saving grace, as if recognition of the sin were to lead to redemption. Whereas it is precisely our guilt that we see other Cultures through our own Social formation, and in the light or darkness of our own concrete historical relation with them.[3]

If Psychoanalysis is located within a social formation as much as any other form of knowledge, it is also a form that has the power to rise above its own complicity with the dominant ideology. If American Ego-psychology can be shown to have an almost completely normative ideological function (cf. O. Mannoni 1971: 180-190), the same cannot be too easily claimed for Freud's initial formulations in Vienna at the beginning of the century, nor for Lacan's brave theoretical inquiries from the 1930's until now. Since Psychoanalysis is concerned with the dialectical relation between persons, as both Imaginary and Symbolic (and Real) constructions, it is the key Science with which to unveil the ideological instance of a Social formation.[4] This was explicitly recognized by W. Reich as early as 1929 (W. Reich 1929/1972), and has been reiterated in a different way by Althusser. In a short paper on Lacan[5], Althusser has acknowledged his debt to him, and almost all his writings on ideology are permeated with what is in fact a Lacanian approach to 'the Imaginary' and to the

fetishisations that hinder thought's appropriation of 'the real'.

In this paper, I have laid a very limited stress on the Levi-Straussian nature of 'The Symbolic' and the Hegelian nature of 'The Imaginary'. What I have done is to read Freud through Lacanian spectacles, referring to those aspects of De Saussure and Jakobson that helped Lacan to clarify his concept of an Unconscious structured like a Language. It is an inadequate account insofar as it reduces the complexity of the Lacanian problematic in favour of a clarity which can only mislead. The answer to that is, of course, simple: to understand Lacan, there is no alternative but to read Lacan. But, in addition, (and this is the slant I have given to this paper) one should read Freud. As Lacan writes:

> "... on lit Freud comme on écrit dans la Psychanalyse;"
> (Ecrits 1966)

By which Lacan means that his return to Freud is a return to more than just the spirit, it is a return to the letter, to wit, to Freud's own use of Language and choice of terms. Lacan's obsessive concern with language is no more than a continuation of Freud's own, and any theme of Freud's (viz: "Where Id was, there Ego shall be") is played in the form of several different variations (Ecrits: 1966:416; 801).

Anna O. (Bertha von Pappenheim) dubbed Freud's therapeutic method "the talking cure", and it is there from the mouth from one who is to be cured, that Psychoanalysis founds its own specific discourse. There are of course, several other models in operation in the Psychoanalytic armoury, and these will be referred to in passing in this paper. Some of them have been passed over almost in silence (it would seem) by Lacan, and it is from these that a movement antithetical to Lacan has arisen within Lacanian Psychoanalysis.[6] But if so many analysts following Freud acquiesced in the repression of the function of the analysand's word in therapy, Lacan's theoretical interventions may I think be seen as a return of the repressed. His 'Discours du Rome', a highly polemical talk given to the Congress of Psychoanalysts in 1953, is specifically concerned with the word of the patient:

> "Whether it sees itself as an instrument of healing, of
> formation, or of exploration in depth, psychoanalysis
> has only a single intermediary: the patient's word."
> (1953/1968:9)

But the talking-cure is characterized not by bringing the symptom to consciousness: it is made word. It is the insistence of the letter that is in question not that of the subject's consciousness. Nor is it necessarily a question of the good faith or love of the analyst. The analyst does not direct the consciousness of the patient, it is not a question of moral guidance. He directs the cure, and in the analytic situation his own being (through transference and countertransference) is also put into question (Ecrits 1966:586).

This paper is concerned precisely with the capture of the human animal within 'the nets of the signifier' (Laplanche and Leclaire: 1961), so that he then becomes an animal gifted with speech. Gifted even in that despotic sense given to the word 'gift' by Marcel Mauss: the wretch is obliged both to receive the word, and reply to it. Both sender and receiver are compromised, in that the gift is syn-thetic, & constitutes a relation which inheres in neither person (persona), but derives from the symbolic totality which preceded and determined them. Neither word, nor 'copper', nor 'vaygu'a', nor phallus (as Lacanian signifier of desire),

can be finally appropriated. The search for their essence is an imaginary project, a fetishisation. Their essence resides only in their existence as circulating signs that bind social persons in relations that are nowhere.

Even as early as Studies on Hysteria (SE II), the clinical study that Freud wrote with Breuer, there are definite linguistic insights as regards the working of the psychic apparatus. However it is in The Interpretation of Dreams (SE IV-V) that we find a way forward to a linguistic formulation of the nature of the Unconscious. Thus, Freud makes a clear division between the manifest dream-text, and the latent dream-thoughts. The manifest dream-text is the text of the dream that the subject assembles on waking, whereas the latent dream-thoughts comprise the more complete dream underlying the former:

> "The dream-thoughts and the dream-content are presented
> to us like different versions of the same subject matter
> in two different languages" (SE IV: 277)

The Unconscious is presented here as a different language underlying the manifest language. The dream-content is described as a 'transcript' of the dream-thoughts 'into another mode of expression', and we are asked to 'compare the original and the translation'.

Condensation and Displacement

To make Freud's thought clear, we should concentrate, as he does, on the operations that link the manifest content of the dream to the latent dream-thoughts. The two key operations are those of Condensation and Displacement.

Let us take condensation first. If we compare the manifest content of the dream, as we assemble it upon waking, or again as it is told to the analyst, with the latent dream-thoughts that are teased out of the words and silences in the analysis itself, we find that the latent dream-thoughts are far more extensive than the manifest content. To put it simply, the manifest dream is laconic. It has been radically condensed. Many of the examples of dreams in The Interpretation of Dreams are approximately four or five lines long, whereas the dream-thought that Freud draws out of them, like the endless stream of silk scarves tied to each other that a magician draws from his hat, are often four or five pages long. Condensation is immense, so immense in fact that interpretation is never final. If we take any one element in the manifest dream, it is condensed or 'over-determined'. When we say that it is over-determined we mean that it has multiple connections with other elements in the latent dream-thoughts. Freud notes in his analysis of the dream about the 'botanical monograph', that the word 'botanical' led 'by numerous connecting paths, deeper and deeper into the tangle of dream-thoughts' (SE IV, pp. 169-176). Because the word 'botanical' is so heavily over-determined, it is described as 'a regular nodal point in the dream'. Elsewhere Freud uses the word 'Switch-word' to describe the same idea, and in this metaphor the idea of a 'points' system is evoked, where the word is seen as a kind of switch located at the intersection of several different tracks or pathways. Lacan makes much of these terms used by Freud, and provides several variant trans- lations (ie 'noeuds de signification', 'mots carrefours' etc.). The Lacanian Symbolic Order (derived from Levi-Strauss' Symbolic Function, and opposed to Freud's Die Symbolik) is characterized by the plurivalent nature of each signifier.

Displacement, the second key operation in the formation of dreams, refers to the fact that 'the dream is, as it were, differently centred from the dream-thoughts' (SE V: 305). Elements which are central to the

manifest content may be peripheral to the latent dream-thoughts. In the same way, elements which are crucial to the latent dream-thoughts may be completely absent from the manifest text. It is the work (the labour) done by the patient in his free association (and against the fact of his own resistance) that allows us to retrace the connections between the two systems. Displacement is a form of 'distortion', a distortion made necessary by the existence of 'censorship' between the different 'systems' of the mind.

Metaphor and Metonymy

According to De Saussure (1974), any linguistic sign involved two modes of arrangement, Combination and Selection. Combination refers to the fact that each sign is made up of constituent signs and can only occur with other signs. De Saussure stressed the linear nature of the signifying chain (1974:70) - in fact it is the second property he singles out for emphasis after the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign. It is combination that unites the links of the signifying chain, one to each other, and once they have been combined they are in a relation of contiguity to each other.

The axis of Combination is concerned with the Message. It is diachronic and can best be represented horizontally. It represents, in Saussurean terms, Speech rather than Language, event rather than structure.

The other mode of arrangement of a linguistic sign is known as Selection and it refers to the selection of signs from a set. Any selection from a set implies the possibility that another sign might be substituted in its place. This of course implies that Selection and Substitution are both aspects of the same operation.

The axis of Substitution is concerned with the code, and can best be represented as vertical. It represents Language rather than Speech, structure rather than event. It is vital to realize that, in normal speech, the two axes operate in conjunction. Combination and Selection together arrange linguistic signs. It is only in language disorders that we can clearly perceive the separate nature of the two modes of arrangement. Thus, it was through his study of the different kinds of Aphasia that Jakobson was able to distinguish one from the other (1963: 43-68). Indeed, the fact that both Jakobson and, after him, Barthes (1967:21) have reserved the term 'Idiolect' primarily to describe the language of the aphasic, a language marked by its skewed participation in the Symbolic Order (cf. Levi-Strauss 1950: xvi-xvii), should remind us that Aphasia shows us language in a state of disintegration.

From his study Jakobson concludes that there are basically two poles of language, the Metaphoric and the Metonymic, and that these two poles are linked to the two modes of arrangement of the linguistic sign. Depending upon the type of Aphasia concerned (Contiguity Disorder: Similarity Disorder), those suffering from it tended to produce a kind of language centred either on the Metaphoric or the Metonymic poles.

The concepts of Metaphor and Metonymy developed by Jakobson are used in a slightly altered form by Lacan in his model of the Unconscious structured like a Language. For Lacan, the Freudian concepts of Condensation and Displacement that we have already discussed, are directly homologous with the Jakobsonian concepts of Metaphor and Metonymy (Ecrits 1966: 495). Critics of Lacan have questioned the validity of the Metaphor/Metonymy distinction. Anthony Wilden (1972) argues that the two terms are in no way specific to language, but can be equated with (more general) processes present in all forms of communication:

"Metaphor and Metonymy are not primarily linguistic processes:
they are communicational processes. Selection from the code
and combination in the message must and do occur in any
communicational system whatsoever, whether in the genetic
code of the DNA molecule, or in the organism, or in the
life processes of bacteria, or in a social system". (1972:
350)

This is undeniable, but Jakobson in his study of Aphasia was
dealing quite specifically with language and its disintegration. In
that study he did isolate two poles of language, the metaphoric and the
metonymic. It may be that these two poles exist in all communication,
but the beauty of Jakobson's study was that it located the existence of
these two poles in language, and since one pole was damaged in each of
the different forms of aphasia, it provided a means of dividing parts of
a process that is unified in everyday speech. In studying social life
there are several possible epistemological confusions with regard to
'levels'. One can suncumb to the temptations of a 'micro-measurement'
that studies phenomena at a level that is below the level at which
'meaning' resides (Ardener 1971: 451-452). Since one of Lacan's finest
pieces of writing, the Seminar on The Purloined Letter by Edgar Alan Poe
(Ecrits 1966: pp. 11-61), is about precisely just such a misapprehension,
one has to be very cautious before accusing him of that kind of theoretical
inadequacy. Wilden does not exactly accuse Lacan of such a 'misapprehension',
but his claim that Lacan reduces the cultural to the ontological (1972: 479-
483) is a parallel critique that demands more substantiation than Wilden
offers. Indeed, at this point, Wilden's polemic seems to lean very heavily
on Fanon's critique of the application of European Psychoanalysis and
Psychiatry to other cultures. If Fanon's work (1970) is concerned with the
violence of reducing psychic phenomena that are actually relative to a
particular historical conjuncture to a supposedly transcendent ontological
reality, Wilden's appropriation of it does not blend easily with the general
systems theory approach of System and Structure (1972). Whatever one may
think of the Lacanian Symbolic, and however much one may regard it as
permeated by Imaginary fetishizations, it is nevertheless defined as a
tissue of meaning and not as a mechanism that determines. When I refer to
determination here I do not mean that fatal determination, that celestial
pre-ordination of which Lacan writes so often. I mean determination is-
suing from the (Marxist) real, a determination present in the real and its
productions, and one that underlies the overdetermination present in the
Symbolic. Hegelian and Idealist as Lacan finally is, it is an error to
confuse the tissue of signs that is the Symbolic with the exchange of
energy and information that characterizes organization at the eco-systemic
level. The Lacanian dialectic must be inverted, and each moment of the
Symbolic must be reckoned as being in the last instance determined by the
infrastructure. Wilden by subsuming the Symbolic so absolutely within
an ecosystemic perspective, obscures the level at which Ideology does over-
determine social reality and estranges people from the nature of the lives
they lead.

Phillipe's Dream

I want, in this section, to reach a deeper understanding of the lin-
guistic relations within the psychic apparatus, by taking a particular
dream and considering a Lacanian analysis of it. I want to do this in
order to demonstrate that we are dealing here not only with the construc-
tion of dreams, but also with the general workings of the Unconscious.
If we are dealing with the latter, then our conclusions are necessarily
relevant to all areas of Social Anthropology where the Unconscious is
described, invoked or dismissed. I do not mean by this that the Lacanian

model can necessarily be used in the analysis of other Cultures. I mean only to suggest that Lacan's reading of Freud is one that cannot be ignored, and one that is crucial to any evaluation of other psychoanalytical positions that concern Social Anthropology (ie Roheim, Kardiner, Jung, Fanon etc.)

The dream is taken from an article by Laplanche and Leclaire (1961). Their general theoretical position was, at that time close to that of Lacan (Ecrits 1966: 493-531). Ideally, of course, we should take an English example of this kind of approach, for the sake of verbal resonances, but I am not aware of the existence of any studies of this nature originally written in English. In the clinical situation, the dreamer, Phillipe had not only recounted another dream closely related to the one given below, but the material of the dream was lent further significance by certain items of obsessional behaviour present in the patient. I have made only minimal reference to the second dream, and to the patient's symptoms, as I wanted to carry out a fairly simple exposition.

Phillipe's Dream

The deserted square of a small town;
it is unfamiliar, I am looking for
something. Liliane appears, barefoot
- I don't know her - she says to me:
its a long time since I've seen such
fine sand. We are in a forest and
the trees seem curiously coloured,
with bright and simple colours. I
think to myself that there must be
plenty of animals in this forest,
and just as I am about to say it, a
Unicorn crosses our path; all three
of us walk towards a clearing that is
visible down below.

La place deserte d'une petite ville;
c'est insolite, je cherche quelque
chose. Apparait, pieds nus, Liliane
- que je ne connais pas - qui me
dit: il y a longtemps que j'ai vu
un sable aussi fin. Nous sommes en
foret et les arbres paraissent
evieusement colores, de teintes
vives et simples. Je pense qu'il y
a beaucoup d'animaux dans cette
foret, et comme je m'apprete a le
dire, une licorne croise notre
chemin; nous marchons tous les trois
vers une clairière que l'on devine
en contrebas.

This dream-text on its own tells us almost nothing. Without the free association of the dreamer it is worthless. This cannot be stressed too much.[7] In the text, the significance of the words present in it is not given to us, but is discovered in the process of analysis. The exact formation of the dream derives from several sources; (1) Events of the previous day, which in the context of the dream are described by Freud as 'daytime residues', (2) stimuli originating from within the body, in this case, the need to drink, the subject having eaten salted herrings the previous evening; (3) events from the past, and in particular, memories stretching far back into childhood. Freud describes dreams as 'hypermnemic', and insists on the permanence of the memory-trace within the psychic apparatus, although in his attempts to describe this fact he often found himself in great difficulties. As early as 1895, in The Project, he had stressed that no Psychology worthy of the name could be established unless it was securely founded on a theory of human memory. We shall see in the later part of this paper, how important Freud's concept of memory was to his understanding of the Unconscious, and how it can be interpreted in a manner that is explicitly opposed to the Lacanian position (Derrida: 1967/1972).

In this account I have chosen to treat the psychic and somatic residues of the previous day together.

(1) (2) Events of the previous day (Daytime residues)

There were various daytime residues, in the form of memory traces of what Phillipe had done the previous day, that contributed to the con-

struction of the dream. Phillipe had in fact taken a walk the previous day in the forest with his niece Anne. They had noticed at the bottom of the valley where the stream ran, traces of deer and does, where they came to drink. On this walk, Phillipe remarked that it was a long time since he had seen (il y a longtemps que J'ai vu) heather of such rich flaming colour. These daytime residues play a significant part in the dream, as can be ascertained by glancing back at the original text of Phillipe's dream.[8]

At the somatic level we notice that Phillipe had eaten some herrings that evening, and therefore had a <u>need</u> to <u>drink</u>. Dreams, it will be re-membered, are described by Freud as the guardians of sleep. In this case, the dream guards Phillipe's sleep against the organic fact of his thirst, against his physiological need to drink. The dream guards Phillipe's sleep by fulfilling a (repressed) wish. It cannot fulfil his need to drink: only some liquid can do that. The dream fulfils a (repressed) wish or <u>desire</u> to drink (a desire that is inscribed in one of the subject's memory systems), and subsumes the (temporary)organic need of the subject's body within its own (timeless) trajectory.

(3) Childhood Memories

(a) The first memory was of a Summer holiday when he was three years old: he tried to drink the water which was flowing in a fountain. He cupped his hands together and drank out of the hollow that his cupped hands formed. The fountain was in the Square (Place) of a small town and had a Unicorn (Licorne) engraved in the stone.

(b) The second memory was of a walk in the mountains when he was three years old. The walk was tied to the memory of imitating an older child cupping his hands, and blowing through them, imitating a siren call. This memory was also associated with the phrase 'Il y a longtemps que J'ai vu'.

(c) The third childhood memory was of an Atlantic Beach (Plage) and again the phrase 'il y a longtemps que J'ai vu un sable aussi fin'. This was associated with Liliane - a barefoot woman in the dream who said exactly that.

In the course of the analysis, Phillipe took apart the name Liliane, and separated it into the two components Lili and Anne. Anne, as we already know, was his niece, and Lili, his Mother's cousin. Lili had actually been with him on that Atlantic beach, when he was three years old, at the beginning of those same Summer holidays when he had been taken to the town with the fountain and the Unicorn engraved on it. It is im-portant to bear the French not the English words in mind, and to note the various homophones (between Lili and Licorne, Place and Plage etc.) These linguistic connections will be shown to be more and more signifi-cant as the work of interpretation advances.

We have already seen that, if, as Freud has said, all dreams are the fulfilment of a (repressed) wish, then this dream, from all angles, finds its centre, its unity in the need or the desire to drink. On that hot July day, when he was three, Phillipe had said again and again, and with great insistence 'J'ai soif' or 'Choif'. Lili, his mother's cousin, used to tease him, and say 'Alors, Phillipe J'ai soif', and it became a kind of formula, and the sign of a joking relationship between them: 'Phillipe-J'ai-Soif'.

At this point, this nodal point, we remark that Phillipe's thirst is (at the least) doubly determined. It derives organically from his _need_ to drink that night when he dreamt the dream, but it also derives psychically from the _desire_ to drink which the _demand_ emanating from the Symbolic has caused to be inscribed in him, in the waxen surface of his memory. Since dreams are hypermnemic (Freud), since they permit a privileged regression to that point at which childhood memory appears to constitute its unthinkable origins, we are concerned with the 'primal' (and therefore mythically constituted) formation of _desire_. We are concerned with the point of entrance of the 'drive' into psychical life. Dreams (and indeed lapses) are a privileged path, a royal road back to that (mythical) moment at which 'difference' is established and the global calibration of signifier to signified almost obscures the sovreignty of that transcendent signifier which actually operates as a redoubled fury in the very heart of objects.

As I have said, need has no place in psychical life. Only the 'representatives' or 'delegates' of need may enter the agencies of the mind. If we consider Phillipe's dream, we can identify the Ideational Representative of the oral drive, which is "the first to be distinguished in post-natal development" (1972:140). At the level of need, Phillipe was easy to feed and easily satisfied, but we are not concerned with need but with the fixation of drives to their ideational representatives. We are concerned with both Death and Sexuality, although the representation of the death-drive is most clearly discernible in the dream we have chosen not to consider. We find two representatives of the oral drive in the dream. One is a gesture, the other a formula. They are not present in the manifest content of the dream but can only be identified after free association.

The gesture which is 'registered' or 'inscribed' as an 'image' is the gesture of cupping the hands together in a conch shape to produce a siren call. We learn from the analysand that this gesture is tied to the cupping of the hands together at the fountain of the Unicorn, and thus signifies 'quenched thirst'. When I write that this gesture signifies 'quenched thirst', it is precisely the nature of this signification that is in question. What kind of relation is there between an acoustic chain present in the psychic apparatus, and any visual chains that are also there. This relation is especially crucial to any understanding of the structure of the Unconscious. Eugen Bär has remarked that:

> "the semantic ambiguity of a natural language could not exist without a more general type of semiology supporting it by instances such as moments of silence, blushes and gestures."
>
> (1971:246)

This more general semiology, which existence Lacan has emphatically denied, cannot yet be said to have been created. Those theorists, following Lacan, who have been concerned with just such a general semiology, have tended to do little more than extend certain metaphors already present in Freud's writings.

The second representative of the oral drive is the formula 'J'ai soif'. It is a kind of representative in this boiling hot summer of Phillipe's moi, his ego. Since the Lacanian ego is constructed out of a basic misrecognition, and is embroiled in an endless struggle for recognition from the other, it can be said to be synonymous with the death-drive.[9] The formula is also associated with Lili, as we saw in the narration of the third childhood memory (of the Atlantic Beach) elicited in the course of the analytic session. Since we are concerned with the oral drive, we are by definition concerned with the question of thirst,

and in this context it is important to note that the acoustic chain 'Li'
is common to both 'Licorne' and 'Lili', the woman who listens to his cry
of thirst and is in a position, it seems, to receive his word. It
seemed like that to Phillipe because Lili was seen by him to have an
'ideal' marriage to her husband, and thus symbolized a harmony and satis-
faction not present in Phillipe's Mother's marriage. A harmony and satis-
faction doubly associated with the acoustic chain 'li' in French: for 'li'
can be metonymically connected with 'lit', and Lili with 'lolo', which
signifies 'milk' or 'breast' in French baby talk.

The Unconscious structured like a Language

When Lacan claimed that the Unconscious was structured like a lang-
uage, he meant exactly what he said:

> 'I do not mean a structure to be situated in some sort
> of so-called generalized semiology drawn from the limbo
> of its periphery, but the structure of language as it
> manifests itself in the language which I might call
> positive, those which are actually spoken by the mass
> of human beings'. (Ecrits 1966:444)

There are certain objections to this statement implicit in Freud's writings,
I want to consider these objections before continuing the argument.

Freud talked of language existing in the Preconscious, and in the
Secondary Process (which is at work in the Preconscious), but the language
he saw as existing in the Unconscious was something very different. The
fact of there being no negation, no logic, no syntax and no time in the
Unconscious makes it hard for us to accord any process there the status
of a language as it is spoken 'by the mass of human beings'. Without
negation, it is hard to imagine the metacommunication that is vital to
any language.

There was a language in the Primary Process, Freud stressed (SE
XIV: 199), but it was the language of Psychosis, and of dreams in their
regression to the form of images:

> "In Schizophrenia words are subjected to the same process
> as that which makes the dream-images out of latent dream-
> thoughts - to what we have called the primary psychical
> process. They undergo condensation, and by means of
> displacement transfer their cathexes to one another in
> their entirety. The process may go so far that a single
> word, if it is specially suitable on account of its
> numerous connections, takes over the representation of
> a whole train of thought'. (SE XIV: 199).

Here, in the 1915 paper on 'The Unconscious' we clearly have some kind of
conception of an Unconscious structured like a language. As Ricoeur
points out (1970:400) 'the problem is to assign an appropriate meaning to
the word "like"'. Is language a privileged model that we compare with
the structure of the Unconscious? Or does the term 'a language' merely
mean that the Unconscious is semiologically structured, with language
a term of reference only because of its role in the Preconscious and the
Conscious?

Thing-Presentations and Word Presentations

In his analysis of the relations between the different systems of
the mind Freud introduced a new terminology in 1914/1915. He distinguished

sharply between what he called 'Thing-Presentation' (Sachvorstellung) and 'Word-Presentation' (Wortvorstellung). It is significant to note that the nuances of these terms were often lost in early translations, which saw 'vorstellung' as meaning 'idea' and not 'presentation'.

Thing-Presentations are essentially visual, they are perceptual entities, images or memory traces. Freud's description of them in The Ego and The Id as 'optical memory residues' shows in fact how little conflict there is between this new terminology and the terminology of 'inscription', whereas in 1915 he had been quite adamant that the new terminology rendered the old one redundant. Word-Presentations are essentially 'auditory' - 'The essence of a word is after all the memory-trace of a word that has been heard' (1961:21) - and in this sense are De Saussure's acoustic chain.

Freud expressed the relation between the Thing-Presentation and the Word-Presentation, and their participation in the different 'systems' in this way:

> 'The conscious presentation comprises the presentation of
> the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging
> to it, while the unconscious presentation is the present-
> ation of the thing alone'. (SE XIV:201)

The unconscious presentation is stated here to be 'The presentation of the thing alone'. In what sense can this kind of presentation be said to be linguistic? The linguistic sign has two basic components, the concept and the acoustic image.[10] What is the exact nature of the thing-presentation in relation to this? It should be clear by now that Freud was uncertain, and that not all of his statements are consistent with each other. He was at least clear in his own mind that the thing-presentation could not attain consciousness without being 'bound' to a word-presentation (and the Bioenergetic language of 'binding' is significant here):

> 'The locality at which the Repressed breaks through is the
> word-presentation and not the concept attached to it' (SE XIV)

Here, the Thing-Presentation would seem to be simply the Saussurean concept in the formula $\frac{concept}{acoustic\ image}$ $\frac{signified}{signifier}$, initially set out by De Saussure in the Cours (1974). However, Freud is clearly not happy with a simple two-tiered formula, and is always half aware that there is some kind of signifying chain in the Unconscious too. This paper is largely concerned with the different attempts that have been made to formulate clearly Freud's fleeting perceptions as to the relation between the Unconscious and Language. Both Psychoanalysis and Linguistics, once they are brought together, seem to demand certain modifications in each other.

The original formula of De Saussure places the signified above the signifier, thus:

$$\frac{Concept}{Acoustic\ image}\quad (tree)$$
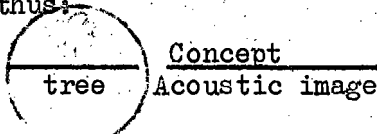
Lacan, for reasons related to the nature of Repression and the Unconscious, reverses this formula:

$$\frac{Acoustic\ image}{Concept}\quad (tree)$$
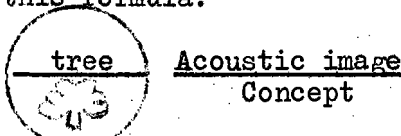
Using the symbols 'S' and 's' to represent signifier and signified, Lacan

writes the formula in this way:

$$\frac{S}{s} \frac{(\underline{signifier})}{(signified)}.$$

The formula is inverted because Lacan holds that the signifier has priority over the signified, and that meaning is constituted through the relation between signifiers (Ecrits 1966:498). Like Levi-Strauss (1950), Lacan would argue that meaning is created by a chain of signifiers, that, in its globability, created meaning 'd'un seul coup'. When the two global registers (S/s) were created in that mythical cruci-formation to which myths (collectively) and dreams (individually) bear witness, a 'supplementary ration' was necessary to support Symbolic thought in its operations (Levi-Strauss 1950: xlix). For given that the two registers are created simultaneously 'comme deux blocs complémentaires';[11] human thought, impelled by the desire for recognition from the other, can only appropriate otherness through a 'suplus of signification' that underpins its operations. The wandering of the mind that, in the shape of 'the floating signifier', draws from the actual the fuel necessary to feed the symbolic, is also that wandering that subverts any constant 'bi-univocal' relation between signifier and signified. This is completely in accord with De Saussure's rejection of language as 'a name-giving system' (1974:16) or 'a list of words, each corresponding to the thing it names' (1974:65). Such a theory of 'labelling' would imply that the signified was a thing in itself rather than a concept, and that implication would be anathema to Lacan as to De Saussure.

Lacan is, however, actually concerned to modify De Saussure. He rejects the Saussurean illustration of the relation existing between signifier and signified because it suggests to us that 'the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified' (Ecrits 1966:498). Lacan insists that 'the signifier intrudes into the signified' (Ecrits 1966:500). By this, he means that 'meaning' inheres in (metonymic and metaphoric) relations between signifiers, which are both everywhere and nowhere (since relations are 'nowhere'). Rather than being a 'representation', 'meaning' in Lacanian Psychoanalysis seems to be a question of 'production'. Meaning is produced out of a difference that separates 'the letter' (ie. 'the essentially localized structure of the signifier') from 'a necessary topological substratum' which Lacan compares to an infinite series of interlocking rings in a necklace where each necklace is itself also a ring in another necklace (Ecrits 1966:501-502). How are we to understand this metaphor?

Wilden argues that when Lacan refers to 'a necessary topological substratum' he means to imply the phonological level of the Unconscious. If Lacan is concerned here with that level at which phonemes can finally be dissolved into distinctive features, and Lacan's text is not absolutely clear on this point, then it is illuminating to relate it to Levi-Strauss' programmatic statements on the relation between Structural Linguistics and Social Anthropology (1972: Ch. 2, 3, 4, 9, 11). Even as Levi-Strauss was formulating the parallel between the phonemic structure of language, and the structures of 'languages' such as kinship rules and myths, he realized that the analogy was a flawed one. Even if it was possible to reduce social 'languages' to unconscious systems of relations, the units one was concerned with remained words and not 'distinctive features', and as Levi-Strauss noted: "there are no necessary relationships at vocabulary level" (1972: 35/36).

The relation, then, between linguistic terms and kinship terms, is not simple. If they are formally the same, if they can both be said

to be produced by a Symbolic Function (1972:203), yet they are finally
terms existing at a different level. This is partly because any language
beyond the reduced language of Psychosis is necessarily always already
in a social world organized in terms of certain key-signifiers. The
clumsiness of expression here is partly due to the impossibility of
describing a language in a reduced state. Lacan's version of the Fort!
Da! game played by Freud's grandson (Beyond the Pleasure Principle pp.
8-10) treats it as an initial entrance into a Jakobsonian world of phonemic
oppositions. The corellation between the presence and absence of the
child's mother, and the child's 'symbolic' use of the two phonemes (o/a)
to locate himself within such a 'difference', has been quite fiercely
attacked (Wilden 1972:147-152). Here I want only to note how it is that
Lacanian Psychoanalysis is concerned to describe the quite specific
entrance of the child into the Symbolic Order, a re-capitulation of that
vertiginous 'moment' in which the two reigsters (S/s) were created in
their globality (Levi-Strauss:1950). Of course Lacan is always in a place
from which he stresses the 'exteriority' of the Symbolic Order, whether
it be the circulation of value in a Melanesian chain of islands, or the
same circulation between boudoirs and hotel-rooms in 19th Century Paris.
Indeed, Lacan would consider the couple Exteriority/Interiority to be
quite spurious, as can be seen by noting his various references to Levi-
Strauss. The 'already-there' quality of the Symbolic Order is invariably
affirmed, the Freudian Oedipus re-inserted as a mere moment of a wider
system that is either present or absent:

> "The marriage tie is presided over by a preferential order
> whose law implying the kinship names, like Language,
> is imperative for the group in its forms, but unconscious
> in its structure." (1966: 276-277 Wilden's translation).

Lacan, in typical style, then proceeds to dissolve any specificity
that European post-Industrial kinship organization may appear to have, by
situating it within the wider modalities of alliance and descent as they
have been described in the ethnography:

> "This is precisely where the Oedipus complex - insofar
> as we continue to recognize it as covering the whole
> field of our experience with its signification - may
> be said, in this connection, to mark the limits that our
> discipline assigns to subjectivity: that is to say what the
> subject can know of his unconscious participation in the
> movement of the complex structures of marriage ties, by
> verifying the symbolic effects in his individual exist-
> ence of the tangential movement towards incest which has
> manifested itself ever since the coming of a universal
> community," (1966:277 Wilden's translation)

This seems acceptable enough, but in another context (1966:219), in which
Lacan is re-analysing the case of Dora, this dissolution itself begins to
appear suspect. The cycle of exchange of presents, with all their under-
tones of cynical sexual purchase, that envelops Dora in a structure of bad
faith that she also fails to discern, cannot be so easily wrenched from
the specific historical context. I mention this case because it is not
so often that Lacan's Levi-Straussian formulations can be considered in a
concrete historical context, and it is only then that one can decide to
what extent Lacan is guilty of the "violence of reducing the cultural
(ie historical) to the ontological". (Wilden 1972)

Moreover, if Lacan learnt so much from the early Levi-Strauss, he
rarely attempted a formal analysis of the kinds practised by Levi-Strauss
in the early essays on myth and on kinship. It is partly for this reason

(a reason related to Psychoanalysis as a therapy concerned with the
structure of intersubjectivity) that Lacan has never been so absolutely
tied to a Structuralist formulation in terms of binary oppositions.
Certainly the Oedipus has been correlated with the now largely discredited
'atom of kinship', but the con-fusions of the Imaginary and the Symbolic
that the subject is caught within in the Psychoanalytic discourse, have
tended to help Lacan to avoid adopting a reductive position. This is not
a defence that would be accepted by Wilden (1972) or Deleuze and Guettari
(1973). My own position on this is related to my (as yet) incomplete
situation of <u>Oedipe Africain</u> (1966:1973) with regard to Lacanian Psycho-
analysis and Social Anthropology. It is there, in formulating a critique
of the work of the Ortigues, rather than in momentary allusions to Levi-
Strauss in Lacan's writings, that some resolution of these matters is to
be found.

Lacan justifies his emphasis on the signifier by referring us to De
Saussure and to certain of his explanations of the arbitrariness of the
linguistic sign. De Saussure talked of 'le glissement incessant du sig-
nifié sous le signifiant' ('the incessant sliding of the signified beneath
the signifier') and this point has been much stressed by Lacan (Ecrits
1966:502-503). For Lacan, the signified becomes less and less important
simply because it e-ludes us, it slips playfully away from us. The in-
trusion of the signifier into the signified can also be phrased in terms
of the subversion of the subject that Lacanian theory demands. Just as
it is impossible to allow the subject to bathe in the radiance of his
own thought, as it constitutes him as present to himself, so also is it
dubious to regard language and thought as being in the service of some
perfectly calibrated celestial machine. It is not that Lacan fails to
distinguish between thought and language (Bär 1971: 246). He is concerned
however with the (metonymic) movement of language and the progressive-
regressive movement of desire that is invested in it, with the (meta-
phorical) blossoming as the chain is momentarily suspended, and that which
is suspended from it, intrudes.

In the section on the mutability of the linguistic sign (1974: 74-78),
De Saussure writes of a loosening of the bond between the acoustic image
and the concept, of a shift in the relationship between the two. His
examples are of changes between Old German and Modern German, or between
Classical Latin and French (viz: the Latin 'necare', <u>to kill</u>, becomes the
French 'noyer', <u>to drown</u>). These are obviously changes taking place over
long periods of time, indeed whole centuries. The inference, however, as
far as Lacan is concerned, is quite clear:

> "Language is radically powerless to defend itself against
> the forces which <u>from one moment to the next</u> are shifting
> the relationship between the signified and the signifier".
> (1974:75 mv italics)

It is the 'change from one moment to the next' in the relation between
signifier and signified that allows Lacan to superimpose Saussurean lin-
guistics on the Freudian dream-text. The dream-text is a finely spun
web (note that the Latin word 'textum' = 'web') of linguistic inter-
connections: yet analysis cannot exhaust it. Analysis of a dream is
indeed 'interminable'. However, at certain points, the work is halted,
comes up against 'nodal points' which are, in Freud's words, 'un-
plummable'. For Lacan, these nodal points are points at which the two
registers (S:s) are anchored to each other: he describes them as
'points de capiton', as raised buttons on a mattress or armchair. These
'points de capiton' are the place at which need is re-presented in psy-
chical life, and in achoring the two 'chains' to each other 'they bring

to a halt the otherwise indefinite sliding of meaning' (Ecrits 1966:805).
Lacan compares the analyst to a fisherman who is fishing 'in the flow of
the pre-text', but who cannot hope to catch the actual movement of the
fish. The signified is marked here with a bar (viz $\emptyset$) because it is
always disappearing into the organic, into the 'insondable'. If Lacan[12]
here does seem to confuse the Saussurean concept with the thing itself
this is only because, in defining the real as that which is real for the
subject, Lacan would align himself here with Benveniste and (1966: 49-56)
circumscribe Edmund, the bastard son, within the hegemony of the dog-
star he answers even in his denial of it. The real is an orphan un-
conscious: the real is a necklace threaded with stars.

Lacan's treatment of the Saussurean signifier/signified relation is
highly idiosyncratic. It hinges around the significance of the bar separ-
ating the two registers. Insofar as De Saussure is concerned with Syn-
chronic relations alone[13], the bar is simply that which separates the
acoustic chain from the concept. When De Saussure talks of the linear
nature of the signifier, he stresses that the signifying chain is linear
because it can only unfold in one dimension, that of time (1974:70). The
Freudian Unconscious is timeless: this is one of its most basic properties,
and that on its own would seem to render the presence of a linear chain in
the unconscious unlikely. Indeed, given the various kinds of regression
involved in the dream-work, and given the presence of Thing-Presentation
in the Unconscious , we would seem to be far closer to De Saussure's
consideration of semiological systems that are visual. Visual signifiers
can 'offer simultaneous groupings in several dimensions' (1974:70), De
Saussure writes, and here one is immediately reminded of Freud's descrip-
tion of the 'transcription' of signs from system to system (1954: 173-175).
This is really the 'kernel' of the problem, and must be approached with
great caution. For Lacan, the language that is present in the Unconscious
is that which is spoken by the 'mass of human beings'. On the other hand,
Freud himself, in his description of the memory-system, repeatedly invoked
the metaphor of a script, of writing, present in the Unconscious. In
this context, his references to pictographic and ideographic scripts in
the Interpretation of Dreams should be taken quite seriously. The point
is this: we can think of the Unconscious in terms of a spoken language
or a written language, or in terms of both. Each of these decisions would
still allow for that necessary continuity between Unconscious and Pre-
conscious. In discussing Lacan's position it is, I think, dangerous,
to place him too simply within the kind of logocentrism attacked by
Derrida (1967/1972). This is Wilden's argument (1972: 396fn.) and I
think it represents an over-simplification both of Derrida and of Lacan.
The highly complicated argument and diagrams that try to evoke the
process that Lacan calls 'capitonnage' (Ecrits 1966:804-809) are, I
would argue (and insofar as I understand Lacan's text), against any
complicity with the utopian plenitude of an absolutely present origin,
whether as signifier, subject, or both. If Lacan's final point of
reference is with phonology, nevertheless, in his insistence that the
signifying chain is to be read backwards as well as forwards, is indeed
finally sealed up in its meaning by that which is not yet and is yet
retroactively already there, he is not so far from defining the psychic
as 'text' (Ecrits 1966:805).

As I have said, the bar in Lacan's system represents the repression
of the signified. In De Saussure it has no such value, but is simply the
line that separates the two chains. However, Psychoanalysis is continually
concerned with the fact that the relations between the different agencies
of the mind are a kind of flawed semiology. The Preconscious and the Un-
conscious are both related and separated at the same time. There is a
'censorship' separating them, and yet communication between them does
exist. Indeed it must, if we are to avoid that 'Psychoparallelism'

against which Freud warned us. If certain passages (following the image
of Russian censorship) are blacked out, there are aspects (ie 'derivatives')
of the original text that can still be deciphered in spite of the obliterations
on either side. Thus, the pure linearity of the signifying chain,
as De Saussure described it, has to be modified so as to include the in-
trusions of another chain that lies beneath it and insists that it be
read:

> "There is in effect no signifying chain which does not
> have attached to the punctuation of each of its units
> a whole articulation of relevant context suspended
> vertically from that point" (Ecrits 1966:503) (Jan Miel's
> translation)

This 'other' chain that lies beneath, and is suspended vertically ('si
l'on peut dire':Lacan) from particular points, is composed of signifiers
that have fallen to the rank of signifieds. To understand exactly what
is meant by this, we have to look at the connection between Metaphor and
Repression.

Metaphor and Repression

In Metaphor, as Lacan sees it, a new signifier replaces (re-places)
the original one. The original signifier then falls to the rank of the
signified (Ecrits 1966:708). If we represent the new signifier as S',
we can explain the process diagrammatically:

STAGE I: STAGE II:

$\underline{S}$ (original signifer) $\underline{S}'$ (new signifier)
s (original signified)   S (original signifier fallen
                                                     to the rank of the
                                                     signified)

To understand this diagram, we must remember that we are concerned not just
with the structure of language, and not just with a bar between signifier
and signified, but with Repression. In a language without Repression,
things would be as the linguist describes them, but since Freud, we have
learnt that intrusions into the text of everyday life make STAGE I $\underline{S}$ a
purely hypothetical case: s

> 'In a language without metaphors, there would
> indeed be relations of signifier to signified
> (rapports de signifiant à signifié) which may
> be symbolized by $\underline{S}$; but there would be no
> equivocation, nor any unconscious to decipher'.
> (Ricoeur:1970:401)

Indeed, there is no 'original plenitude except in the 'pre-texte' and ques-
tions about the 'pre-texte' receive only mythical answers. Lacan des-
cribes Repression as a snag or rip or rent in the cloth of experience, and
such snags make it difficult to sustain a Structural Linguistics constructed
solely on the basis of a bar separating an acoustic chain from a con-
ceptual one. The general Freudian category of 'distortion' would seem
to demand some kind of acknowledgement, for it was Freud's achievement
in the monographs on dreams, jokes, and parapraxes, to show that there was
a locus of language to which the conscious subject was, in Lacan's
word 'excentric'.

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Repression, for Lacan, 'is' metaphor. The snag in the tissue marks the place where the original signifier is, as it were, vertically suspended. It has been 'displaced' and has fallen to the rank of the signified. However, although it has fallen (and the topographic nuance is, I think, faithful to the process) it persists as a repressed signifier itself. This persistence (and insistence) of a repressed chain is precisely what give poetry, that most metaphorical of arts, the quality of saying what it says as much by what is not there as by what is. To hear the thing that is not said beneath the thing that is, the basic attitude is one of phenomeno-logical suspension of the kind described by Bachelard in his theory of reading, and attitude not so far removed from that advocated by Freud: 'the evenly suspended attention'.

There is a slight problem involved in equating metaphor and Re-pression. It is this. If metaphor is seen as equated with repression, the existence of a repressed chain suggests that, from the whole para-digmatic axis, only two elements are actually involved: (1) the new sig-nifer(S') and (2) the original signifier fallen to the rank of the sig-nified (S). Thus, whereas the paradigmatic axis is defined by the pos-sible substitution of all its elements, one from another, the idea of re-pression seems to endow certain signifiers with a more privileged posi-tion than that of others along the paradigmatic axis. I think there is an answer to this. The quote from Ricoeur above (1970:401) reminded us that there is no language without metaphor. Similarly, we must remember that except in the form of aphasia described by Jakobson as Contiguity Disorder, there is no language without metonymy. Since metonymy connects both the message and the code, it is the metonymic movement of language that connects the repressed chain of signification to the rest of the elements in the code. In Lacanian terms, this movement is the movement of Desire, and it is quite literally the 'restlessness' of this desire that Psychoanalysis imputes to language. If Lacan's position is valid it represents a kind of subversion of the study of language (cf. Ecrits 1966:467). It is within the practice of Psychoanalysis that Lacan's under-standing of the workings of language is situated, and those linguists who criticize Lacan from the point of view of 'normal' language are really missing the point. By this I mean that it may be more meaningful for us to reverse Lacan's aphorism: 'Language is structured like the Unconscious'. Lacan's wilful obscurity (and it is, in no ironical sense, precisely that) is based on his belief that theory and practice should be united, and the primacy of the signifier over the signified results in a masking of sense that only diligent work can unveil.

Another approach to the problem of the fixity that the metaphor/repression equation seems to ascribe to the workings of language, is that developed by Laplanche and Leclaire (1961) in their analysis of Phillipe's dream. They argue that the persistence and insistence of a repressed chain demands representation in terms of 4 levels instead of the 2 levels shown to us by De Saussure.

These four levels, divided up into what Laplanche and Leclaire call the Preconscious and Unconscious Chain, can be represented like this:

$$\frac{S'}{s}$$
                The Preconscious Chain

$$\frac{S}{S}$$
                The Unconscious Chain

This formula does give a highly useful representation of the relation between the Preconscious and the Unconscious, and it does allow us to make a close correlation, topographically represented, between metaphor and repression. In fact this diagram's meaning cannot be grasped until we have looked at Freud's writings on the nature of Repression. We will also have to discuss the question of the (fictitious) origin of the Unconscious and its relations to language. Until we have tackled this, the meaning of the lower half of the diagram, where we have a signified that is apparently its own signifier, can only elude us.

Repression

If the formulation of the concept of the Unconscious was the crucial event in the history of Freudian Psychoanalysis, Repression was also a concept that was indispensable to it. Stekel, be it noted, abandoned the concept of the Unconscious, and also Repression too - 'the cornerstone on which the whole structure of Psychoanalysis rests' (SE XIV:16). In discussing this 'cornerstone', my key points of reference are to the two papers on the Unconscious and on Repression of 1915 (SE XIV)

In talking about Repression we are concerned with relations between the systems of the mind as Freud defined them - between the Unconscious and the Preconscious, and between the Preconscious and the Conscious. We have already looked at the relations between these systems in terms of presentations, in terms of 'word-presentations' and 'thing-presentations', and have shown how persuasively the terminology of Structural Linguistics has been used to describe these concepts.

The fact is that Repression, although described by Freud at one point as 'a failure in translation', demands some kind of use of energetic terms. The initial definition in the 1915 paper - that 'the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance from the conscious' (SE XIV:147) - is quite a mild expression of the force with which a censorship must be invested.

Freud divides Repression into two phases, (1) Primal Repression and (2) Repression Proper. Since Repression Proper (or After Repression) is the kind we are usually concerned with, I have chosen to treat that first.

Repression Proper

In Repression Proper, the presentation which is repressed is affected by two different 'forces'. It is, first of all, repulsed by the Preconscious system, and 'cathexis' is withdrawn. Secondly it is attracted by a chain already existing in the Unconscious (the repressed chain of signification ie. S in the diagram above). Thus, a repressed chain to
      S
which it is attracted. Some explanation then has to be made for primal repression. To understand the relation between 'Repression Proper' and this 'Primal Repression' it has to be accepted that our reconstruction of it is necessarily a fictitious one. This is not as problematic as it might seem. We can only treat an origin as a fiction because an origin is an entity that eludes the structures of thought, that we would use to contain it, precisely because the origin of our structures of thought is the dark side of those structures, and it is in opposition to that dark side, through repression of it, that those structures claim their right to exist.

Primal Repression

However, Freud was intensely preoccupied with the problem of origins, a preoccupation that on occasion overrides his more Saussurean concerns.

In the case of Primal Repression, since it is so closely concerned with
the 'entrance' of the drive into psychical life, it is especially inter-
esting to Freud. If this primal repression happens - at least as a mythi-
cal event - then we have to postulate a kind of mythical state prior to
the splitting up of the mind into systems. This mythical state is
apprehended not through experimental psychology, nor through psycho-
linguistics, but through the archaeology of the subject that Psych-
analysis lays bare for us. A mythical event cannot be proven as true or
false: it is irreducible to that kind of measurement.

Briefly, what happens in the Primal Repression is this. The psy-
chical (or ideational) representative is refused entrance to the psychic
apparatus. A _fixation_ is then established - 'the representative in question
persists unaltered from then onwards, and the instinct (drive) remains
attached to it ' (SE XIV:148). With this fixation, the instinct (drive)
accedes to the level of the signifier, or: 'is caught in nets of the sig-
nifier'(Laplanche and Leclaire: 1961). The idea of fixation expressed
here, since it so explicitly suggests an immutability, can be compared
to Freud's model of the mind as a 'writing-machine' on to whose mnemic
systems traces are 'inscribed' or 'registered'.

It is the ideational representatives of sexuality and of death that
are fixed in Primal Repression. Ernest Jones' claim that there are certain
limited symbolisms relating to life, death, one's kinsmen, and one's
body, (1916/1923), can only be related to the domain of Primal Repression,
a privileged arena whre the hieroglyphs are not washed away with each tide.
It is the privileged nature of this arena that lends substance to the
arguments of Derrida (1967/1972) and of Deleuze and Guettari (1973)
regarding the primacy of the written (the traced) over the spoken. When
I have described the primal repression in more strictly Lacanian terms,
I will return to this question of the trace and writing, and the prob-
lematic relation between the phonetic and the 'grammatic'.

In the case of Phillipe, whose dream we have been considering, the
formula '(J'ai) soif' becomes the representative of his need - it re-
presents the oral drive. With the primal repression, the Unconscious is
mythically constituted. It is the Unconscious Chain created at this
point that underlies and supports language. The psychoanalytical evi-
dence suggests that this Unconscious chain is constituted through the
agency of certain 'key-signifiers'. These key signifiers, operating as
hinges between the Universe of Rules and that of blind need, structure
human language. Here is how Laplanche and Leclaire conceive of key-
signifiers:

> 'Dans le schéma de la metaphore, il est necessaire
> ici de concevoir l'existence de certains 'signifiants-
> clés', placés en position metaphorisants, et auxquels
> est dévolué, par leur poids particulier, la propriété
> de mettre en ordre tout le systéme du language humain'.
> (1961:116)

The key-signifier we are concerned with here, (J'ai) soif (Choif) is then
the one that because of its 'particular weight' organizes Phillipe's inser-
tion into the Symbolic Order, the order of language. The myth can be re-
constructed.

Prior to his entrance into the Symbolic Order - and we can note, in
passing, the importance of the presence of the _Je_ in the formula, which,
in grammatical terms is a shifter and through its particular weight, its
duplex structure, organizes language (Jakobson: 1963) - we can imagine

Phillipe as a child who simply existed within the non-signifying world of
his own need. In this (mythical) time, to have thirst is simply to engulf
in a blind need which is then satisfied. Suddenly, with Lili's joking
remark 'Phillipe-J'ai-soif', the world becomes significant, and what had
been a blind instinctual impulse is caught 'in the nets of the signifier'.
This is illustrated diagrammatically:

Lili says:

        Phillipe,   S'
           J'ai SOIF

                                   s

Undifferentiated
instinctual (drive)
energy   S

         ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯→ soif
                  soif

                                 S
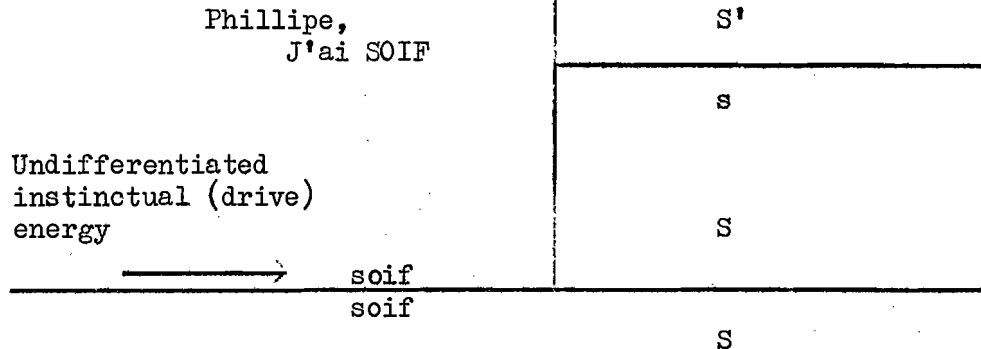
Thus '(J'ai) soif' is one of the 'kernels' of Phillipe's Unconscious. The
work of analysis, in its untiring elimination of the outer husk, will
always come up against this 'knot of signification'. It is a 'point of
umbilication' (Lacan) because it is so radically over-determined. Thus,
it should be noted that Phillipe's memory is of Lili saying 'J'ai soif'.
His insertion into the Symbolic Order occurs, then, through the mediation
of another whose name (Lili/'lolo': breast, milk in French baby talk)
invokes his dual relation with his mother. However, it is also significant
that the name 'Lili' was not Phillipe's aunt's name at all, but merely the
affectionate nickname by which she was known by her husband, and by her
husband alone. Thus, the desire to drink, around which Phillipe's dream
is organized, is multiply over-determined. Besides the desire to drink,
we are concerned with Phillipe's desire for Lili, Lili's own desire to
drink, and finally, and most significantly, Lili's desire for her husband.
Since Phillipe was one of those children who said 'moi-je' (ie. he had not
mastered the use of 'shifters') the formula 'Jai soif' signified the dizzy
moment in which he was to move away from a situation of narcissism,
where Lili/lolo was merely an extension of his being, to a Symbolic Order
which placed the other under the sliding mark of the Other (L'Autre).
If it was Lili who was the mediating force in this transformation, that
would have been because it would make sense that an other should break
the spell of the dual relation with the mother and open up an order
organized in terms of an Oedipal structure of three separate persons.
In such a structure, being is not a narcissistic closure (ie. 'moi-je'),
but a locus of subjectivity which cannot be appropriated. However,
regression from the Symbolic to the Imaginary is always possible. For,
as need is transformed into desire through demand, the radical lack of
being of the child whose organism has been altered (from a calyx of bright,
only partially centralized slivers of light, into the fused silver of a
total mirror-recognition), is re-inscribed at the level of the signifier
whose aleatory movement alone invokes the flaw it labours to conceal.

Indeed, if the formula '(J'ai) soif' is able to act as the kernel
of the dream, if it is so heavily over-determined, it is because even
primal repression does not finally cut off the 'derivatives' of the re-
pressed representative of the drive. If there is sufficient 'distortion'
for the 'derivatives' to overcome the censorship then they have free
access to the preconscious and conscious, and in the process of free
association Freud notes (SE XIV: 149-150) that the analysand goes on

spinning associative threads 'till he is brought up against some thought, the relation of which to what is repressed becomes so obvious that he is compelled to repeat his attempt at repression'.
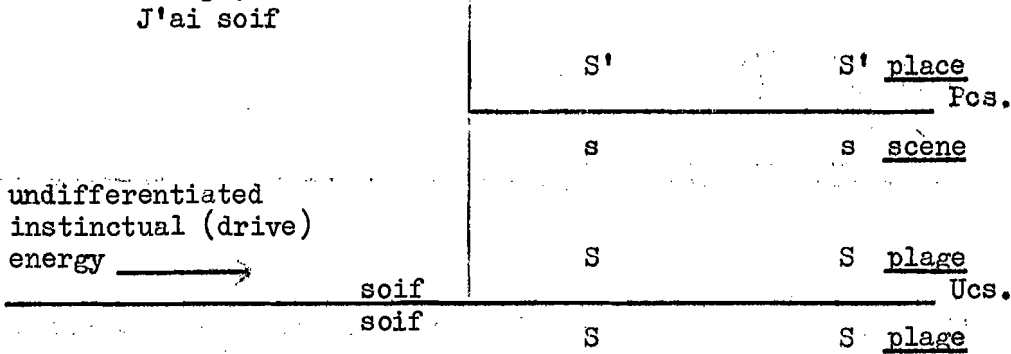
In Phillipe's dream we can identify some of the derivatives of the instinctual representative '(J'ai) soif'. In the manifest text of Phillipe's dream the word 'place' appears. Here is how this particular signifier can be related diagrammatically to what is suspended vertically from it:

```
Lili says:
      Phillipe,
          J'ai soif
                                  S'              S' place
                                  _____ Pcs.

                                  s               s scène

undifferentiated
instinctual (drive)
energy _____,               S               S plage
_____                   _____ Ucs.
            soif
            soif
                                  S               S plage
```

In this diagram we are concerned with the four-tiered formula again, and with metaphor (repression) as the superimposition of signifiers. The new signifier (place) is superimposed on to the original signifier plage, which has fallen to the rank of the signified. The signified is the scene (scène) where the action takes place and here of course it is 'confused' with the original signifier plage. Our problem is one of conceptualizing a four-tiered system in terms of a terminology rooted in a two-tiered signifer/signified system. As we have already noted, since all language involves metaphor (repression), there will be no language that is not underpinned by a repressed chain of signification. The radical condensation that we detect in the dream-work is in fact then, the result of the crossing of the Saussurean bar between the language of conscious and preconscious and that operating in the repressed chain. Condensation operates, as it were, vertically, between a signifier and another signifier that has fallen to the rank of the signified. Condensation is then a feature of language that is never completely there, but exists somewhere between the work of distortion and the work of interpretation, the latter in its guile simply reversing the former:

> "The creative spark of the metaphor does not spring
> from the conjunction of two images, that is of two
> signifiers actually actualized. It springs from two
> signifiers one of which has taken the place of the
> other in the signifying chain, the hidden signifier
> then remaining present through its (metonymic)
> relation to the rest of the chain'.
>   (Lacan:Ecrits 1966:507; Miel's
>   translation).

The important point to note here is that the operations of metaphor and metonymy are mutually interdependent, as was emphasized in the discussion on Jakobson. If metaphor creates a superimposition of signifiers, metonymy effects a continual sliding of signifiers: it is 'the one slope of the effective field of the signifier in the constitution of meaning' ('le premier versant du champ effectif que le signifiant constitue, pour que le sens y prenne place' Ecrits 1966:506). The point is that metonymy,

for Lacan, concerns only the relations between signifiers, it does not concern the signified at all, for the signified is continually slipping away from underneath.

We can understand the nature of metonymy better by returning to the diagrammatic representation of Phillipe's dream. I have already attempted a description of the (fiction of) primal repression. I have also shown how it is that a signifier such as place exists by virtue of a signifier that it has displaced - plage. Or, to put it in another way, we have seen how the original signifier plage is in a metaphorising position with regard to the signifying chain 'above' it. Since we are concerned with what Freud calls the 'derivatives' of the repressed instinctual (drive) representative, we need to trace the connections between the right and left hand side of the diagram.

Freud's initial point in separating out the two different kinds of repression was quite simply a logical one. If it was argued that, for repression to occur, the 'presentation' (signifier) had not only to be repulsed by the Preconscious, but also to be attracted by a chain already existing in the Unconscious, then a Primal Repression had to be hypothesised. The associative chains connect the already existing chain in the Unconscious to the (distorted) derivatives of the repressed instinctual representative around which the Unconscious chain is organized.

Thus, when we have undone the work of distortion we find the original signifier/signified relation plage. The last syllable 'ge' is phonetically
      scene
related to the 'je' in the 'J'ai soif' of the Unconscious chain. We can postulate a metonymic sliding to the left of the diagram, from plage to
                                                                          plage
-ge to je and so to (J'ai) soif. Here, then, is the completed diagram,
-ge   je

Lili says:
    Phillipe,
    J'ai soif
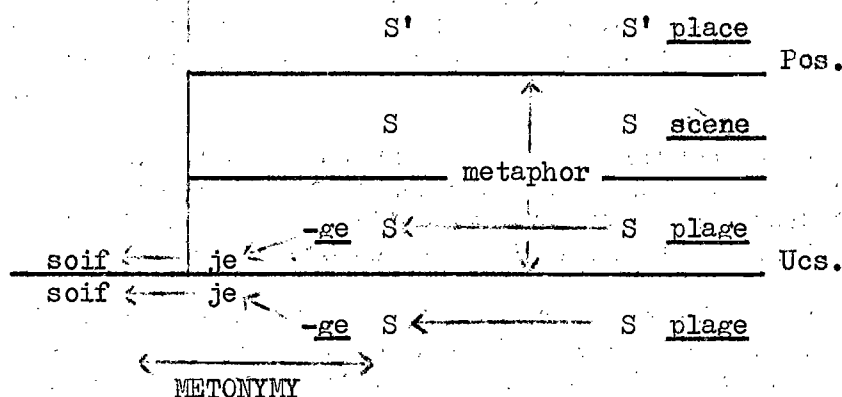
Conclusion

One crucial question remains to be considered. I cannot answer it, I can only highlight my own confusions, and my feeling that the Lacanian problematic is, at this point, seriously flawed. The crucial question, and one that I have not ceased to ask in different ways throughout the paper is this: What is the nature of the 'language' ($\underline{S}$) in the Unconscious
                                                                      S
Chain? Here is how Laplanche and Leclaire conclude:

"The 'words' that compose it are elements drawn from the
realm of the imaginary - notably from visual informa-
tion - but promoted to the dignity of signifiers."
(1972:182)

What seems clear then is that we have to think of a Primal Unconscious
(established by Primal Repression), and also an Unconscious which is the
domain of After Repression. It seems to me that the Primary/Secondary
Process distinction[14] is not adequate to contain the series of 'levels'
that this demands.

To understand the distinction between these two forms of Unconscious,
I want to consider briefly a paper written by Benveniste on the relation
between Psychoanalysis and Language. He offers two meanings of the word
'symbolic' the first one as defining 'the most manifest property of Language',
that it 'symbolizes' things in their absence. Lacan's own account of the
Fort! Da! game, and the phoneticization of the real involved in the child's
use of toys as signifiers, corresponds to precisely this sense of the
word 'symbolic'.

Benveniste compares this most basic property of natural language
with "the symbolism of the Unconscious discovered by Freud, which offers
characteristics quite specific to itself" (1966:85). We are concerned
here with the heritage of Stekel, a dangerous heritage as Freud had been
quick to point out (SE IV). We are concerned with a 'fixed Symbolism'.
(Die Symbolik). A careful reading of The Intepretation of Dreams and
an attention to the dates at which certain passages were added, will
reveal a gradual transformation in Freud's thought. The sections on
fixed Symbolism were more and more extended, until his express warnings
against the over-indulgent use of them, are all but buried under a mound
of suggestions (for possibly universal symbolisms) from his co-workers,
and indeed from himself. However, in a note dated 1909, Freud insists
that the consideration of Symbols should never be carried out separately
from free association:

"I should like to utter an express warning against over-
estimating the importance of symbols in dream-interpreta-
tion, against restricting the work of translating dreams
merely to translating symbols, and against abandoning
the technique of making use of the dreamer's associations"
(SE IV)

If the free association can be considered to be that work done by the
analysand in following the threads in the manifest dream-text to the
latent dream-thoughts, it would still seem to be in the domain of After-
Repression. What, then of the fixed Symbolism?

Ernest Jones, in one of the key papers on the subject, claimed
that "all symbols represent ideas of the self and the immediate blood
relatives, or of the phenomena of birth, love and death" (1923:169).
Since Lacan's whole work has been concerned with an emphasis on the lack
of fixity in language, he has naturally militated against a too great
reliance on any theories of fixed Symbolism, Stekelian theories that
Freud had effectively rejected in his initial discussions of archaic
methods of dream interpretation. Even the symptom is shown to be partici-
pant in the chain of signifiers, if only negatively, in a frozen violence
that both hides and reveals the text suspended from it (Ecrits 1966:259).
However, in an interesting tribute to Ernest Jones (1966:697-717), we
find certain clues to Lacan's theoretical position. In general, as I
hope I have shown in this paper, Lacan is far more concerned with Le
Symbolique than with a fixed symbolism. Indeed, insofar as he accepts

a fixed symbolism he seems to equate it with those 'key-signifiers' that organise the insertion of the subject into language as the primal repression happens. Lacan writes of symbols in terms of primary ideas:

> "Ces idées primaires designent les points ou le
> sujet disparaît sous l'être du significant: cu'il
> s'agisse, enseffet, d'être soi, d'être un père,
> d'être né, d'être aime, ou d'être mort" (1966:709)

Thus, Phillipe, and his 'disappearance' beneath the signifier 'soif'. However, if these 'primary ideas' are crucial to the insertion of the subject into the Symbolic Order, can they really be said to be 'signifiers' themselves? Are they not, rather, as much part of the Imaginary as the Symbolic, thing-presentations in face 'elevated to the dignity of signifiers'? If they are Imaginary elements, are they not, as Benveniste argues, 'Infra-linguistic', because they have their source 'in a region deeper than that in which education instills the mechanism of language' (1966:86)? Certainly, the domain of primal repression in its timelessness and lack of syntax, and in the production of desire that operates there (in the shape of Kleinian partial objects) would seem to be 'infra-linguistic'. Whether it is possible, however, to imagine a language of inscriptions, a system of writing, of traces, at this instance of the Unconscious, which nevertheless insists so strongly because it persists, and because all 'derivatives' are traced back to it, is another question. 'What must the psychic be' Derrida asks 'for it to be a text?' (1967/1972)

Almost everyone discussing Lacan's conceptualization of the Unconscious (15) has explicitly or implicitly produced this question that demands an answer: an answer that loses itself in the unplummable. What is this domain, this 'infra-linguistic' domain, this Unconscious chain that gives language 'ballast', this 'landscape of writing'? If we try to enter the (mythical) time before primal repression, its phenomenology, its libidinal production beneath the law of the Symbolic Father, do we find a scrambling of several codes, an interpenetration of several 'chains', as Deleuze and Guettari argue? (1973:47-48). For Derrida also, a writer concerned to emphasise the metaphor of writing in Freud's writings against the general hegemony of the Logos within the European tradition, the Unconscious is marked by a 'writing' that pre-exists the phonetic - "not of a 'writing' that simply transcribes the stony echo of muted words, but of a preverbal lithography: metaphonetic, non-linguistic, a-logical" (1972:85). There is much evidence for such a system of writing in Freud's works, and it is especially insistent when he considers the question of memory. This writing is perhaps a writing 'straight out of the real', infra-linguistic certainly, meta-phonetic, clearly, the infant's actually but latterly celestial appropriation of every grove and stream. No quarter, then. Convulsive beauty: the phonemic operator. That the signifier marks the polymorphous meadows with a heraldic quartering, and imaginary figures blaze still against the squaring of content (the ellipse, the flow of the pre-text), continuing.

It should be clear that there is far more at stake in this debate than I have developed here. Whilst an adherence to phonology allows us to slide all too easily into an idealism, an insistence on the image of inscription, of écriture, places us firmly within historical materialism, and makes possible a conception of the Lacanian Symbolic as an exterior register inscribed in the actual 'discursive practice' of the social formation. The Lacanian Symbolic is always already there, it does precede and determine any possible 'presence' of any possible 'subject'. Yet, since Psychoanalysis has been concerned with ontogenesis, with a personal myth of origin rather than a collective one, it will always tend to fall back into an idealism. Dangerous myth of origin, then, the Fort! Da! game. Dangerous to locate the materiality of the two registers only in the tension between an original disappearance and a play of binary oppositions supplementing the lack:

"Through that which takes on body only by being the trace
of a nothingness and whose support from that moment on
cannot be impaired, the concept, saving the duration of
what passes by, engenders the thing". (Ecrits 1966:276;
Wilden's translation)

If, ontogenetically, the latter is only a symptom of a nothingness (an
absence of the other pregnant with the threat located in the Other),
it has to be said that the Symbolic cannot be so easily emptied of the
Real (in the Marxist sense) that must, in the last instance, determine
it. This is no 'realist imbecility' (1966: 25), for it does not allow
the level at which meaning resides to elude it. It is merely an in-
sistence that the 'law' of the Symbolic be reinserted within the differ-
ential histories of the culture that made Psychoanalysis and Ethnography
possible, and the cultures that were subjected to the actual violence of
its gaze.

                                            Martin Thom

Notes

1. Given the massive amount of material by Lacan that is still to be
    published, every reading is necessarily a very fragmentary one.

2. As Annette Lavers has emphasised (Semiotika 1971), the break in Lacan's
    thought should not be over-emphasised. Indeed, Psychoanalysis as
    a practice is so permeated with the Imaginary (ie. la parole vide
    as symptomatic of méconnaissance) that it is unlikely to fall prey
    to the lure of an absolutely seamless Symbolic, a Symbolic that
    would be in that measure itself an Imaginary (ie. an Ideological)
    imposition. The Hegelian category of Desire that Lacan has utilized
    so convincingly to illuminate Freud's thought tends to militate against
    any 'structuralist' closure of the phenomenological dimension.

3. Thus, Levi-Strauss (1950), in a paper that was both influenced by
    Lacan, and in turn influenced him, argued that the old phenomenological
    problem of the opposition between self and other could be resolved by
    resorting to the Unconscious. This statement (which calls to mind
    both Surrealism and the Lacanian conception of 'truth') is applied
    to the ethnographic situation in an Idealist manner. Idealist
    because it dehistoricizes the encounter between self and other, and
    resolves it by reference to a transcendent domain where a human
    essence is eternally in residence.

4. This is where I differ from Wilden (1972). He rejects the idea that
    there is 'anything particularly specific about psychoanalysis except
    insofar as it is a historical product of a certain type of socio-
    economic system' (1972:450). It is very hard to situate Wilden poli-
    tically, but I consider that his emphasis on the digital, logocentric,
    phallocentric, patriarchal etc. nature of Lacanian Psychoanalysis
    blinds him to the power that inheres in it to unmask ideologies,
    including that which is ideological in its own construction.

5. viz. "Freud and Lacan" in Lenin and Philosophy 1971, pp. 189-221.

6. The tone is deliberately hesitant. Reading Lacan from a distance,
    with no real knowledge of his writings beyond the Ecrits, any other
    attitude than caution would be foolish. I am referring to Laplanche's

6. 1965 postscript to the 1961 article (written jointly with Leclaire), to his book, <u>La Vie et Mort en Psychanalyse</u> (1970), and also, in slightly different fields, to Derrida (1967/1972), and Deleuze and Guettari (1973).

7. Much Anthropological field-work has been marred by its insensitivity to the free associations of the dreamer (cf. <u>The Dream in Primitive Culture</u>: Lincoln 1935:99). Even so Lacanian a work as <u>Oedipe Africain</u> is not absolutely sensitive to the linguistic situation.

8. The use of the word 'text' here is merely a recognition of the fact that Phillipe's 'dream-text' is presented typographically. This is in no way meant to pre-judge the status of the dream as 'text', for this paper is in fact centrally concerned with the rival claims of a linguistics based on phonetics, and a 'graphematics still to come' (Derrida 1972:104).

9. Indeed, it was the ego-drives that were transformed into the death-drives in <u>Beyond the Pleasure Principle</u> (SE XVIII).

10. But c.f. Benveniste 1939: 49-56.

11. The phrase is from Levi-Strauss (1950), but Lacan also refers to the S/s relation as being that of two registers, 'le mot registre désignant ici deux enchainements pris dans leur globalité' (Ecrits 1966:444). He insists that there is no bi-univocal (ie term to term) relation involved, but only that of register to register.

12. But cf. Ecrits 1966:705 - 'le rapport du réel au pensée n'est pas celui du signifié au signifiant'.

13. De Saussure was quite sensitive about the <u>methodological</u> necessity of separating the study of Synchronic from Diachronic relations. It was not, finally, an <u>ontological</u> judgement (cf. Ardener 1971: xxxviii-xxxix).

14. Wilden's (1972) superimposition of the analog/digital distinction on to the Primary/Secondary Process distinction seems to me also far too blunt a strategy. If I have not discussed the general conclusions of the 1972 book with regard to Lacan, it is because I am not happy with the way the analog/digital distinction is used, and it seems to me that there is a certain violence present in the reduction of the Lacanian to the Batesonian. Having said that, I should add that I consider the translation and commentaries in <u>the Language of the Self</u> to be very fine, and that I no longer have any way of ascertaining how much of my limited understanding of Lacan is due to Wilden's work.

15. i.e. Laplanche and Leclaire: 1961: Derrida 1967/1972; Bar;1971; Deleuze and Guettari: 1973.

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