The Unconscious and its Scribe

Rhetoric: from a psychoanalytic point of view

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Introduction

Just as Minerva emerged, helmed, from the head of Jupiter, so too was the art of dream interpretation born, fully armed, from Freud's pen. Analysts familiar with the *Traumdeutung* will find all sorts of hints as to how to interpret a good number of the dreams recounted to them, and it would not be wasted effort to pursue these hints, to refine, and sometimes to rectify them. But no matter how helpful these hints may be, until we have succeeded in showing that the real meaning of a dream is its interpretation, they will always seem a little arbitrary. *Deutung* is as much the interpretation of the dream text as its signifying capacity for we no more 'interpret' dreams than we do jokes, if by such a term is meant the exercise of an unfounded intuition or the application of an acquired theory or science. It is simply the conditions under which the dream unfolds which prevent us from defining its meaning as immediately as we do that of a joke — an immediacy which does not exclude our being momentarily struck dumb. The aim of the present book is to demonstrate that the mechanisms determining the signification of the joke and of the dream are identical.

Now, in dreams, it is invariably a question of a desire that is at stake. In this respect, the present book picks up the thread of *Pleasure and Being*.

In the last chapter of that book the idea was put forward what the function of the dream is not so much to realise the desire as to signify it.
Here, I propose to study more closely the mechanisms of this significativity, those that Freud terms the 'primary processes'. It is the study of dreams that will determine the course of the argument.

Freud's oft-repeated assertion that 'the dream is a writing' is far from being self-evident, and actually gives rise to a difficult problem, if one takes writing to be an invention, which is what we tend to do. Hence the first chapter, which is not meant to advance a new theory of writing, when there are already so many others, but to resolve this problem by showing that language would not be what it is if it did not imply (as a consequence and not, as Jacques Derrida's thesis seems to suggest, as an origin, essence, or formal cause) the possibility of writing.

Yet, in the deciphering of a dream, as in that of a rebus or a hieroglyph, we are usually faced with a fairly enigmatic message. If we resort to "free" associations, a meaning will loom up, and one that invariably surprises us, just as it would surprise the one who dreamed the dream. It is, in fact, an unexpected and always new signification, and only Ferdinand de Saussure's theory...
provides, in my opinion, an explanation of such a looming up of sigification (which is quite distinct from the generation of new propositions that Chomsky emphasises), provided that one interprets the bar between signifier and signified as a bar of separation and not of union. Hence my second chapter, which is a study of his theory, and in which I seek to show that an interpretation of this sort, which I owe to Lacan, is a legitimate one, despite Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's and Jean-Luc Nancy's opinion, that it represents a 'deviation' from the the Genevan master's thought.

As for the surprise that an unexpected signifier provokes, it is in jokes that we are most overcome by it. It is the mark of the relation between the joke and the unconscious, and of the autonomy of the signifier, inasmuch as it eludes the mastery of intentional discourse. That it is something of a 'find' is enough to show how one-sided it is to define metaphor as having no other meaning than that of a 'conscious deviation in the literal usage of a word-symbol'. The joke also serves to show that the 'idealisation' through which linguistics, according to Chomsky, would arrive at its 'scientific object', actually only presents us with a device which may still leave room for a machine for producing propositions, but not for a subject, i.e., for a subject that not only has to think and to transmit information, but also to situate itself in relation to a truth, that of its desire. Without a study of its verbal techniques (and we will have to show that the distinction between 'verbal techniques' and 'techniques of thought' is untenable) one could never arrive at an intelligible conception of the dream's primary processes, namely, condensation and displacement.

The first three chapters of this book thus provide the necessary foundation for a proper study of dreams, which I present in the latter part of the book, itself divided into three chapters.
The first is devoted to the problem of symbolism. This problem is particularly worthy of attention, not only on account of its pervasiveness (symbolism occurs in many other domains besides that of the dream), but also because to clarify it is necessarily, as we shall see, to identify the specific features of symbolism as distinct from metaphor.

The following chapter is entitled 'The decipherment of dreams'. Since the dream is a writing, how does it set about representing the terms which, in every language, represent relations, along with those whose semantic content is too abstract. This chapter does, in short, correspond to the sections of Freud's chapter on the dream work, entitled 'The means of representation in the dream' and 'Considerations respecting representability'.

But the deciphering of a hieroglyph may still, as I have just observed, leave us face to face with an enigmatic message. For instance: 'Take care that the chatterbox does not discover the pot of roses. For if he does ...'. It is quite obvious that 'the chatterbox' is a metonymy here (to whom does it refer?) and that "the pot of roses" is a metaphor (for what other signifier is it substituted?). Likewise, the odds are that a threat follows the 'For if he does ....', even if we remain 'in the dark' as to its precise content, on account of the censorship imposed upon this part of the message. The final chapter is devoted to the actual study of these processes of signification, i.e., metaphor, metonymy and the censor, and in relation to 'dream transposition' (Traumentstellung) in particular.

As well as surviving the title, François Wahl also assisted in the drafting of the different versions of this book. I am as much indebted to Martin Thom and Mrs N. Salem for their helpful suggestions and competent remarks.
Footnotes

Introduction


3. If the reader is curious as to the conception of dreams people have in circles in which Lacan's teaching is a dead letter, I would advise a reading of Leon L. Altman's *The Dream in Psychoanalysis*, New York, International Universities Press, 1969. Cf. also M. Edelson, *Language and interpretation in psychoanalysis*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1975, where the author advances a theory of interpretation based upon Chomsky's linguistics, but where the notion of the capture of the subject in the signifying chain is completely disregarded.
The dream and writing

Since men have always dreamed, it seems at first sight as strange for Freud to compare dreams to that dated convention we know as writing as it would be for someone to assert that men knew how to drive before the automobile was invented. However, the very strangeness of this comparison leads us to a thesis that will dissipate it, namely, that wherever there is language there is necessarily a form of writing. This thesis is confirmed, as I shall take some pains to demonstrate, by the history of writing.

1. In spite of the impressive body of materials that are available concerning the different systems of writing that have been unearthed and deciphered, those authors who consider the question of writing and its history are usually content to give a summary definition of writing and then to proceed with the work of classification that it entails. Thus, no matter how elaborate their study, it does not lead them to question or to modify their original definition. There is, as Derrida quite rightly emphasises, 'a contrast between the theoretical fragility of the reconstruction and the historical, archaeological, ethnological and philological richness of the information'.

Such definitions and classifications basically vary very little from one author to the next. 'Writing', Pévéri argues, 'is a method we use at the present time to fix articulated language, which is essentially transitory'. Most authors would in fact accept that writing was 'a visual and lasting representation of language, which enables one to transport it and to conserve it'.

Most, but not all. Galb, for instance, reckons that such definitions are too restrictive, in that they exclude every method of writing which does not consist in the transposition of a voice into visible marks. He prefers to define writing as 'a system of human intercommunication by means of conventional visible marks'.

But the difference is not so great as first appears. For if one were to ask Galb what it is that conventional signs, whether in a system of writing or in another
sort, actually communicate, he would answer 'meaning'.
But the perspective of a writer such as James Février is not fundamentally different. For he too reckons that the 'embryonic' forms of writing belong to other systems of expression than language, and are independent of it, which is why he describes these embryonic forms as 'autonomous'. In other words, if it is true for Gelb that there is writing wherever there is a system of communication by means of visible and conventional signs, setting aside the question of their dependende or independence with regard to articulated language, whilst Février treats this subordination as an integral aspect of language, it is nevertheless the case that both authors admit:

a). that language is just one of many means of expression;
b). that writing is not, in principle, tied to articulated language, even if it only becomes writing, properly speaking (Février) or in the strict sense (Gelb) once it is subordinated to it, i.e., once it is phoneticised — for this is what both authors take this subordination to mean. For both of them there is only a link between writing and articulated language insofar as the former is a phonetic writing.

2. Now, to treat articulated language as being just one of many systems of expression, including gesture or the use of drums, as being in fact a system that civilised man favours inasmuch as he thinks 'with concepts', as Février maintains, is a position that will hardly bear examination. To demonstrate this, I will begin by recalling the two forms of cryptography5, encoding and ciphering, for an examination of the various forms of encoding should prove instructive in the present context.

In order to write a secret message, one can use a code, i.e., a set of letters or words to which one arbitrarily attaches an exceed signification. For example, we might take the proper name 'Paul' to mean imminent arrest, while 'Peter' would have the opposite meaning. One can also use a cipher, i.e., a set of characters designating the letters. One can thus use the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 ...... to represent a, b, c, d ...... in which case 14, 15 is translated as 'no' and 25, 5, 19 as 'yes': or again one can write d for a and e for b, f for c, and so on, as Julius Caesar did, calling this method quantum elementarum literam.
The two methods may clearly be distinguished insofar as the code's elements refer to *significations*, whilst the cipher's elements refer to other *signifiers* or, more exactly, to letters, and follow a key, i.e., a more or less complicated law of correspondence.

The use of a drum as a 'means of expression' is nothing other than the use of a code adopted with a view to communicating messages. This is not hard to understand, for such messages are recurrent and liable to be repeated. You can take them or leave them, for it is the same 'Good morning' every morning, and the same 'Watch out!' in case of danger. Which is as much as to say that, like the sun, they have their own reality. Except that it is this latter that, during our sleep, advances towards the point from which it rises on our horizon, whilst we ourselves advance towards the same 'Good morning'.

Now speech, also makes it possible to establish a convention whereby one will utter one thing in order to say another. By which I do not simply mean that the code is a substitution, but above all that this latter, as an axis of language, enables conventions or associations to work in such a way that a particular term in the language, for instance the proper name 'Paul', can replace some other utterance, for instance 'Watch out!'

Once this domain of convention is broached, along with language, one can replace the agreed message or signification with an element which is not a part of the actual field of language: any visual or auditory element may fulfil this function, which does not mean that we are thenceforth in the domain of 'non-verbal' communication. When someone hears the sounds of the drum or bush telegraph he does not dance, he lends an ear; and this difference between a sound for dancing and a sound for speaking is, moreover, inscribed in the actual structure of the instrument. Likewise, it is in the language that they have in common that he announces to his fellows the message that he has received.
Here one might object that I have given too much prominence to the "language" nature of the message, and one might point to cases in which the sender and receiver of the bush telegraph do not in fact speak the same language — which would show that it is not the sentence as such which is transmitted, but the idea that it expresses. In fact this objection simply lays bare the postulate upon which the conception of language as just one of several systems of expression depends, namely, that there exists a content independent of every formal container. I have already implicitly answered this by showing that, far from being a code like the others, language is the principle of every code. This is clearly true of a sender and receiver speaking the same language. But if they speak two different languages, that merely goes to prove that the system employed by the natives depends on a sort of oral dictionary. In fact, the users of the bush telegraph go so far as to invent original words that do not exist in their respective languages but which may be translated into the language of each, and are called 'drum-words'. This, at any rate, is how it appears from the description given by an author who has studied this system at first hand:

When I asked the natives why the drum was beaten and what it was saying, they would call up the local 'drum-man', and he would translate the sound into a kind of sing-song, using certain set phrases and other words not found in the native vocabulary. When questioned he would say that it was a 'drum-word' meaning so-and-so.

2.b. Suppose we examine another system of expression and communication, 'the language of gestures'. Février quotes Jacques van Ginneken's thesis that

the first language, whose invention could well date from the ancient past, would be a language of gestures, and, more particularly, of hand gestures. Traces of this means of expression still survive, among the North American Indians as among the Chinese. Gestural language is highly conventional and social. It is only subsequently, in an epoch relatively close to our own, that articulated language must have appeared ....
This undeniably bold thesis was inspired by the works of P. Tchang Toheng Ming, who set out to identify the points at which Chinese writing had borrowed from gestural language like the character \[ \text{象} \], which would express the idea of 'friend' or of 'friendship' by reproducing, in its archaic form, two outstretched and open hands; the character \[ \text{八} \], 'eight', which would correspond to the gesture of parting thumb and index finger in order to signify 'eight'.

Février does not criticise this thesis inasmuch as it concerns the origin of language, for in this respect it does not seem to him to be 'entirely without interest'. It is the parallel argument regarding the development of writing which bears the brunt of his criticisms, for there it is asserted that writing preceded spoken language. Février demonstrates that this argument rests on two postulates, namely, that all primitive writing is largely given over to the imitation of gestural language, and that the very existence of this gestural language implies the non-existence of articulated language.

Once this has been clarified, Février has no difficulty in showing that the weakness of the first part of the argument is 'so obvious that it would hardly be elegant to insist upon it', whilst the second part 'is even less defensible than the first'.

Yet Février does not question the actual idea of a 'gestural language'. After a fleeting allusion to the famous chapter in *Pantagruel* (Book II, Chapter 25), 'which exercises all the ingenuity of the exegetes and brings them close to despair', and in which Rabelais has shown 'how Panurge made a fool of the Englishman, who argued with signs', Février adds that 'this gestural language has existed in all civilisations. It is the basis of the mimicry of deaf and dumb people, and is more ancient than the digital alphabet. It still flourishes among the North American Indians and amongst the Chinese'. This reference in turn to the mimicry of the deaf and dumb, and to the usages of certain peoples remains a little perplexing. Is it perhaps a reference to a language of gestures, and one that is supposed to be 'natural'?
Such a language has, from Antiquity to the present day, all too often been invoked. But two seventeenth century authors, Bonifacio (L’Arti de Semii) and John Bulwer (Chirologia, or the Natural Language of the Hand), best exemplify this approach. In an appendix to his relatively recent and extensively documented book, Universal Language Schemes in England and France 1600–1800, entitled Gesture as a Form of Universal Language, James Knowlson wonders how such an idea could have arisen, since one has only to think of the misunderstandings and frustrations that can result from efforts to express by means of gestures anything in the least complex or abstract to realize very clearly the limitations of this mode of communication. But there is nothing astonishing in this, he explains, if one notes that this notion was inspired in the first place by the remarkable variety and expressive capacity of the gestures that people were accustomed to learn and use in Renaissance rhetoric. A look at the images that Bulwer uses to decorate his work, images that serve to illustrate the so-called language, and that Knowlson reproduces, will suffice to convince the reader of this. But the critical point, Knowlson goes on to explain, is that Bulwer thinks that the language of signs differs from spoken languages in that it is a natural language. Since everything that is natural is universal, it follows from this that the language of gestures, which seemed to him to be the natural language of the beasts of Adam and of humanity in general before the confusion of Babel, is susceptible to being understood universally, without need of learning nor of translation. The notion of natural language therefore accorded perfectly with the efforts of so many seventeenth century scholars to find a universal script or writing, which, through the composition of its ‘words’, would act like a mirror and offer up the diverse qualities of natural things and of their relations, in such a way that language would not only be a means of acquiring knowledge; it would of itself be knowledge, since each ‘word’ would provide an accurate description of the thing signified.
People had first thought that they would find a model for such a writing in Chinese characters, but they then abandoned this notion, without therefore identifying any other basis for a universal language.

It is not at all surprising that these projects for a universal (or, more properly, a natural) language, for a language 'above' languages, in which each signifier would, so to speak, harmonise with the signified, should have failed. It is Rabelais who provides the most astute criticism of such ideas, though it is all but buried beneath the erudition and 'Bacchic gusto' of the Third Book of Pantagruel. This criticism may be summarised as follows: articulated language does not only deal with things that are too complicated and too abstract for gestural language, but also with things that have to do with the future; consequently, if a universal language existed in the sense suggested above, i.e., in the sense of a language that repulses error and in which every genuine signifier were to correspond with a genuine signified, the future too would be 'in the bag', and Panurge, who wants to get married but wants to be sure or, to be more precise, wants also to know what he in any case already believes (that he will be happy and will not be deceived), Panurge would not have to worry his head about knowing what it is that he wants, as Pantagruel exhorts him to do. He would merely have to consult the natural language of a deaf-mute and if possible one who had been born in that condition, since such a language could not lie.

Yet, curiously enough, it was actually the attempts made to educate deaf-mutes that helped to discredit the idea of a gestural language. For the educator does not have recourse to the gesture as an expressive availability that he liberates, but as one more means by which to introduce the subject into language:

For these early teachers of the deaf, however, the language of gesture had no importance per se; it represented nothing more than a convenient, though essential, step towards communicating by the more normal methods of speech and writing. Hence the idea that the gestures of the deaf man should be adopted universally by those who were able to speak would probably have appeared to them more than a little
2.d. Let me now take the argument a stage further. The fact that
the educator uses gesture as a necessary means for introducing
the deaf-mute into the domain of language, implies that if the
gesture is tied, just as the bush-telegraph is, to a particular
statement or message, it is not ... at all 'a means of expression'.
... because language itself is not. Consider what would seem
to be the commonest of all gestures, that of holding up one's
hand to one's open mouth. This gesture is not an expression of
hunger; it signifies a demand for food, which is something else
altogether. Consequently, this term 'means of expression' could
not properly be applied to systems adopted with a view to
transmitting these linguistic realities that are messages, such
as gestural language or drumming.

In fact, these latter are systems which we are bound to use
when the voice fails us, which (as Saussure puts it) is the only
genuine means of taking hold of these same realities
and transmitting them. We have recourse to them when the voice
turns out to be ineffective or is impeded in some way.

It may, for instance, be ineffective because the receiver
is too far away (one then uses other auditory or luminous signs)
or, again, because the sender and receiver do not speak the same
language, when they have to make themselves understood by means
of gestures. North American Indians make considerable use of
this latter system, but, by the very fact of its being used to
communicate messages, it cannot be set up without each of the
interlocutors referring to their own language, the one into which
they translate the gesture but which itself is not translated
at all.

One may well be prevented from having recourse to the voice,
whether because of a natural, congenital defect, as is the case
with certain deaf-mutes, or again because of a social
prohibition, as is the case with certain Australian tribes in
which widows 'are not allowed to utter a word during the period
of mourning' (Gelb). Gelb writes in English, a language which
does not distinguish between mot and parle. This distinction
should be borne in mind, for it is not, strictly speaking,
the utterance or the word (not) that is prohibited, but the
enunciation or the act of speech (énonciation). This distinction
enables us to identify the error which Gelb makes in maintaining
that gestures express the same things as words. ———>
In fact, gestures are acts of speech (parole), inasmuch as, like
them, they reiterate the same words or combinations of words,
in short, the same messages. And it is because they are acts
of speech that gestures can also lie. Anyone can see how stupid
Panurge is in this respect.

Recourse to the voice or to speech may also sometimes be
impeded because of the interest that sender and receiver may have
in not being understood by a third. They will then have to resort
to the cryptography to which I referred in the beginning

Thus, to suppose that articulated language constitutes one means
of expression among many rests upon a twofold confusion: between
language and code, on the one hand, and, on the other hand,
between words and acts of speech, or again between statement and
enunciation.

Our acts of speech mostly belong to the domain of the "dèjà
entendu", and simply employ the same words or the same combinations
of words, which I have also called messages. In this latter sense,
messages are often pre-given significations. Which, unless we
cling to the fiction of a thought independent of language, does
not mean that these significations can be expressed indifferently
by either phonemes or by luminous or auditory signs. For if these
significations exist outside of us it is in the form of possible
statements which are there, ready to hand, if I can put it like
that, and that others before us and with as much right as us,
have already reproduced an incalculable number of times, and
that enunciation actualises, even in gestural language.

3. Then there is the theoreticians' second assumption (cf. §1), namely, that
writing is not in principle tied to articulated language. We would seem to have implicitly
refuted this by showing that it is only in and through this language
that one can invent a system like the bush telegraph or
the 'language of gestures'. But we still have to refute it
explicitly, by examining more closely so-called 'autonomous' systems
of writing.
3. a. Let us set the 'tramps' cryptography', as d'Agapayeff so aptly terms it, to one side. It is quite clear that the very idea of a secret writing is only meaningful insofar as those who recognise themselves in the signs whose secret they guard share the same language (amongst themselves and in relation to others). The 'tramps' cryptography is a non-phonetic writing of French. But it is also clear that the same code principle can give rise to other writings apart from cryptographies. For example, if I own a house or field and want to prevent all strangers from entering, I simply have to erect a placard bearing the inscription 'No Entry'. But if I belonged to a society that was not familiar with writing, I would not even have to draw or engrave anything on the surface of an object; the object alone, whatever it was, would serve, provided that the members of the community were agreed as to the articulated signification to give it. So it is that 'in the islands of Malaysia people hang up divers e objects, called makatau, in the tilled fields, in order to forbid strangers access to these domains. Each of these objects signifies a different threat: a gourd indicates that hydropsy will strike whoever violates the prohibition; a stick that is notched, in such a way as to give a crude representation of scales, promises ichtyopsis ...'. Février, from whom I have taken this example, includes it among the 'permanent means of expression', but is fairly hesitant about so describing them, 'so shifting does the limit between symbolism, language and writing, in the extended sense, seem to me to be.'16. Actually, there is no call for such hesitation, for it is indeed a question of what the Germans term Gegenstandsschrift (writing with objects). A term that is all the more appropriate in that those who use this method neutralise the utilitarian function of the object in order to endow it with a message based upon an agreed code. In this sense, it acts as writing; which allows it to be distinguished (from itself, in its ordinary usage, one might say) as a makatau-object - a word whose habitual connotations one would have liked to know.
3.b. Now, if I want to indicate that this field or house belong to me, it is obviously not sufficient for me to put up a placard bearing the inscription 'This house is mine', or to use an object such as anyone might use. For each person is a 'me'; what distinguishes this 'me' from the others is the designation that specifies that it is so-and-so. One therefore has to devote a certain number of signs to designating the users, i.e., one has to invent signs which may be distinguished from other signs by the following peculiarity, namely, that the sign itself is a property, in the sense that we speak of 'proper names'. Here a mark, whether engraved or painted, on the surface of the object belonging to me (be it hut or stick or tool), will be more suitable than a real object. Which is why there is good reason to think that the use of distinctive marks must have existed well before the Gegenstandschrift, perhaps at the very edge of languague, inasmuch as this latter makes of the speaking subject something other than a mere sample of the species.

In fact, we know that Neanderthal man was familiar with ornamentation: 'Neanderthal sites commonly include natural pigments probably to serve as cosmetics for the dead in burial ceremonies as well as for the living, lumps of black manganese and red ochre, some sharpened like pencils and others scratched presumably to make powder'. Not only was he acquainted with the sepulchre but also, as we have just heard, with the burial ceremony; and there is no reason to suppose that his mourning was any the less profound than our own. The author whose work I have just cited describes (pp. 167-170) how a man was buried, after a particularly moving ceremony, in a deep cave: 'One spring day about 60,000 years ago, members of his family went out into the hills, picked masses of wild flowers, and made a bed of them on the ground, a resting pile for the deceased'. Which goes to show that, where ornamentation was concerned, our ancestor did not only recognize an appearance, he also played with this appearance in such a way as to make it conform to the requirements of an aesthetic ideal. No doubt he also
used it for prestige, and, occasionally, for the purposes of simulation. This also means that, if we consider the mortuary ceremonial and the nature of the objects surrounding the dead man, our ancestor also took the end of all ends, death, to be just an appearance.

Now, an error of the senses on its own is not enough to bring about the distinction between appearance and reality; at the very most it would give rise to a modification in behaviour. One could put it, as Saint Augustine does, that the error resides in the judgement bearing on the evidence of the senses, but language is then in with a say. For we could not describe appearances as deceitful if we were not liers ourselves. But once fact (in this case, the cessation of life) is become mere appearance, and once death, the absolute evil, has become deceitful, it would not be at all surprising to find a desire for knowledge arising out of it, and one that was all the more virulent for being fed on denegation. It would therefore not be at all surprising if, in order to satisfy his desire to see, to see what his life after death might be, Neanderthal man set out to produce representations of the beyond, which time, unfortunately, has obliterated, and which very probably bore some relation to magical formulae.

But it would have been still more astonishing if there had been no painted or engraved mark on the walls of the cave, or on a neighbouring stone, indicating that 'here lies such-and-such', since, beyond appearance, a name must be perpetuated, this being a thing without which grief would hardly be possible. Only those 'who died for their country' are dispatched to the other world stripped of all identity. In short, proper names have certainly been one of the most powerful factors in the recourse to writing, and not merely in its phoneticisation.
Besides, if writing as code transmits 'verbal' messages, there would be nothing surprising in the Gegenstandschrift already using certain objects as phonetic rebusses; such that one can say that a non-phonetic writing is not what it is, i.e., a writing, except insofar as it awaits phoneticisation. Here is an example:

Among the Yoruka ...... six cowrie shells first of all designate the number 'six' = efa. But since efa also has the sense of 'attracted' (from fa, to draw) a string with six cowrie shells sent by a young man to a girl means: 'I feel attracted to you, I love you'. Eight cowrie shells signifies 'eight' = ejo. This word also means 'O.K.' (from jo, to agree, to match): if the girl were to send eight cowrie shells to her suitor this would then be translated as follows: 'I feel the same as you, I accept'.

This example also sheds light on another fairly crucial question.

There are other things apart from those that we possess (houses, fields, tools, objects of exchange, of prestige, or objects in collections etc. ....), for there are also those that possess us, namely, our passions. It is even, to a large extent, because these latter possess us that we possess the former. But this does not stop our passions from being uttered too ('let him die!', 'I love you', 'my father has given me eternity' ....), If, however, someone were to stand before a woman and declare his love for her in a confident voice, she would probably find this both amusing and bizarre, as if she were listening to a gramophone. By which I mean that, in contrast to 'No Entry', which is addressed to no one in particular, and to whoever is outside the family, there are messages addressed exclusively to some other You, and which therefore require a very specific involvement, a certain 'presence', I would argue, in the actual statement.
But there are circumstances, apart from declarations of love, in which the subject can make its presence better felt by actually disappearing from the statement. 'In Africa, in the Upper Nile region', Février informs us, 'the Niam-Niam mark an enemy's entrance into their territory by putting a grain of maize and a chicken's feather on the road and, on the house pole, an arrow. All of which may be translated as follows: "If you touch our maize and our poultry, you are as good as dead".'

Why is it that the Niam-Niam, when they could easily send a messenger after the potential enemy and transmit the same words in plain language, are committed to such a stratagem? It is because, uttered thus they would be threats, and here it is a question of forestalling, and not yet of threatening. In short, the Gegenstandschrift is not merely a procedure to which one resorts when the receiver is distant, and when their identity is not specified. It is also attributable to the requirements of speech or of what one might call its 'techniques', once a subject has to signify itself in the message without also designating itself there.

There are, nonetheless, very real limits to such a procedure, whether significations are to be transmitted or a subject is to signify itself.

3. d.

This procedure is so flawed that the reading of the message becomes altogether comparable to the reading of omens, i.e., open to the most contradictory interpretations. Herodotus's account of Darius I's campaign against the Scythians springs to mind here:

Darius at last was at his wit's end: henceon the Scythian princes, understanding how matters stood, despatched a herald to the Persian camp with presents for the king: these were, a bird, a mouse, a frog, and five arrows. The Persians asked the bearer to tell them what these gifts might mean, but he made answer that he had no orders except to deliver them and return again with all speed. If the Persians were wise, he added, they would find out the meaning for themselves. So when they heard this, they held a council to consider the matter.
Darius gave it as his opinion that the Scyths intended a surrender of themselves and their country, both land and water, into his hands. This he conceived to be the meaning of the gifts, because the mouse is an inhabitant of the earth, and eats the same food as man, while the frog passes his life in the water; the bird bears a great resemblance to the horse, and the arrows might signify the surrender of all their power. To the explanation of Darius, Gobryas ...... opposed another which was as follows: 'Unless, Persians, ye can turn into birds and fly up into the sky, or become mice and burrow under the ground, or make yourselves frogs, and take refuge in the fens, ye will never make escape from this land, but die pierced by our arrows'.

Events proved Gobryas right, and the odds are that the ambiguity of this message was a ruse on the part of those who had sent it, namely, the kings of the Scythians. There are in fact circumstances in which, for the subject, ambiguity is a shelter, and is not merely prudent but actually obligatory. But there are also circumstances in which safety lies in the lifting of the ambiguity, and it is hard to see how one can set about doing this when one is restricted to a writing in which there is no place for the symbol of negation.

The Gegenstandschrift's limitations are just as obvious on the other plane, that of statement or signification. It is hard to see how this method would by itself enable one to write a ritual formula, a song, or a proverb, or how one could use it to commemorate a lofty deed — all of which are absolutely essential to social life, inasmuch as the life of a society is not restricted to 'horizontal' exchanges between its members, but requires a movement of transmission. And even where exchanges between contemporaries are concerned, messages are sometimes unpredictable: how am I to let my own people know that I am in such and such a place and that I am in desperate need of their help? To remedy the deficiencies of the procedures studied so far (Gegenstandschrift and distinctive marks), recourse to pictography is, in some sense, ineluctable. But why do we talk of 'pictography'?
We can best proceed by consulting Dobhoffer, who gives the clearest answer to this question, and one to which most authors subscribe:

The defining feature of all representational writing, be it pictographic or ideographic, resides in the fact that one cannot discern any relation between graphic image and phonetic value, or the sonority of spoken language. A sequence of images can almost certainly be 'read' by any spectator, whatever their language, and no relation exists between the symbols represented and the sounds. The graphic signs are translated by articulated sounds but represent rather circles of thoughts, symbolised 'ideas'; they are not tied to any definite form of linguistic expression. 21

This answer is open to several objections. Firstly, the pictograph often, if not always, follows the sentence order of the language of the person who is writing; a stranger cannot be as sure of reading it as someone who speaks the same language. Moreover, the very fact that it is designed to be read (and there is no point in doing as Dobhoffer does, and putting this term between inverted commas) implies that a writing and not a drawing is involved. The fact that a stranger, whatever his language, may 'almost certainly' read it, only indicates that we have to deal with a writing method that is still independent of the phonemic structure of language, even if it is not wholly independent of its grammar. In short, a pictograph does not symbolise ideas but transposes sentences or statements. The idea of a man embracing a tree may constitute the theme of a drawing that one sets a pupil to do, but a proverb like 'The world is as vast as a baobab that one cannot embrace' cannot be drawn. One writes it, even if one uses the very same drawing in one's writing of it. The fact that the author of a pictograph writes a language, and does not communicate directly with 'circles of thoughts', becomes quite obvious once proper names are involved. We know that the use of pictographies, or the
the systems that are so named, is widespread among the North American Indians, and that persons are sometimes identified by their totemic emblem, or by the animal whose name they bear. 'Here', Métraux adds, 'we have a first hint of phoneticism, since these latter images are supposed to express a name or a part of the proper name. Thus the Cheyenne chief who is called "Tortoise-following-its-mate" will be represented by a character surmounted by two tortoises. "Little-man" will be identified by a silhouette of a child drawn above his head. A 'parishioner', as it were, a Cheyenne Indian, will read off the proper name immediately, without thinking of the common name that produces it, any more than one thinks of a man on horseback in 'Maurice Chevalier'. One can thus understand how proper names, with the passage 'from clans to empires', and the consequent explosion of systems of naming of the sort favoured by the Indians, became a decisive factor in the phoneticisation of writing.

But the most telling argument against the idea of a pictographic writing lies in the fact that he whom I will henceforth call the scribe only uses schematic, conventional images, i.e., images from which he eliminates everything which can reflect such-and-such an object, only retaining the minimum of features that would be necessary to evoke the word in general. 'It is interesting', Diringer writes, 'to note the degree of conventionalisation and geometricism which is already present in even those rock-paintings (petroglyphs) and rock-engravings (pictographs) which are intended to represent recognisable things: a man may be captured quite dynamically in three rapid strokes, a bird reduced to a triangle, two curved lines and a dozen straight ones: so that it is probably fruitless to pursue at any length the question as to whether or not straightforwardly geometrical embryo-writing "developed out of" representational drawing. Putting the question in this way poses a quite false dichotomy. The element of geometricism is present from the very beginning, and seems as natural a form of expression as a more "realistic" technique.

It is through this very conventionalisation and geometricisation that, without yet being phonetic, 'pictography' paved the way for phonetic writing.
One could, in fact, put it that to know how language is made one must first write it, and not vice versa. If pictography is the graphic transposition, the objectivisation of a narrative or of a discursive sequence, how can one fail to realise that, once this narrative is put before us in the form of schematic images, that the same unit, the same word, is repeated in the same sequence? Consider the following example of a pictography from Alaska, which is analysed by Gelb in the book cited above:

'A', the speaker, with the right hand indicating himself and with the left pointing in the direction taken; 'b', holding a boat-paddle, going by boat; 'c', the speaker holding the right hand to the side of the head, to denote sleep, and the left elevated with one finger erect to signify one night; 'd', a circle with two marks in the middle, signifying an island with huts upon it; 'e', same as 'd'; 'f', a circle to denote another island where they touched; 'g', same as 'c', with an additional finger elevated, signifying two nights; 'h', the speaker, with his harpoon .......... ; 'i' represents a sea-lion which the hunter, 'j', secured by shooting with bow and arrow; 'k', the boat with two persons in it, the paddles projecting downward, 'l', the winter habitation of the speaker.

No one has ever seen a guest seated both at their left and at their right, but such ubiquity does arise in 'pictography', where it is a characteristic of the word inasmuch as it appears before one's eyes at several places in the narrative. The scribe
does not therefore need to be a grammarian in order to write. But, by writing he becomes, or may become one. He becomes one inasmuch as pictographic images are not, let me repeat, drawings of objects, but a writing of sentences composed of words. Words which cause each thing to become just one example amongst many, since, by speaking, the subject appears to itself to be an example and, I would argue, an image of a man, a king or a hunter, if he is man, king or hunter; just as such-and-such a tree appears to him to be an example in which the universal is made manifest, i.e., an example of what is here and elsewhere, both single and multiple. It is not at all surprising that words can be rendered by images, since every thing, or at least every familiar thing, is the image or the projection, as it were, of a word. The schematic image of pictography is the eidos, inasmuch as its locus is not a sky of intelligibility, but a surface of inscription, be it of clay, papyrus or parchment.

4.c. If therefore, by writing, the scribe becomes (or may become) a grammarian, it is in the sense that pictography or, as it is more accurately called, synthetic writing, in laying a basis for awareness of the word as such, paves the way for the writing that is in fact called Wortschrift in Germany, a term which is also more appropriate than the current term ideography. I do not therefore mean to assert that the latter is the necessary result of the former, but that it is already contained within it as a possibility, much as one might say that a notion as modern as that or equivalence was already contained within the most primitive methods of calculation. One would cite here the example of a child who was between two and two and a half years old, and whom people would amuse by counting his fingers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. One day, as he was being taken for a walk in a public garden, two low-flying airplanes suddenly appeared, making the kind of din you would expect. I would be hard pressed to describe how amazed this child was, and how he was led to look from the airplanes to his fingers and back again, repeating with great excitement: 'thwo, thwo, thwo'.
Would it be too much to suppose that one of our ancestors, a palaeolithic hunter, must have felt a comparable surprise, some tens of thousands of years ago, when faced with a herd of five bison that he did not know how to count, but that he referred to the fingers of his hand? This supposition would be all the more plausible if we were to assume that, prior to the invention of seals, and prior to the invention even of distinctive signs, let alone of signatures, our hunter recognised himself and was probably recognised by others through the print of his hand.

What is certain is that, before its notion did emerge, equivalence had already dictated procedures in which we find it at work, as with the notched sticks which sometimes served as contracts. As Février observes:

Some years ago, when the bakers in some of the French provinces were selling bread on credit, they used to make a knife mark on two pieces of wood at once. The client kept one of these pieces of wood, the baker the other. If there was any dispute over the sum that was owed, one could thus refer to it at the end of the month. No deceit was possible; the client could not erase any of the notches and the baker could not add any. If he had ventured to do so, the joining of the two pieces of wood would have sufficed to unmask the fraud. A comparable system was at work in England up to the nineteenth century and served to attest to the payment of taxes. Couradé thought he could demonstrate that, in China, the notched stick had constituted the primitive form of contract, and that it would only have been at a later date, after the development of writing, that notches would have given way to characters in the strict sense. The character that designates 'contract' is formed out of the combination of two signs, one of which would originally have represented a notched stick and the other a knife.
But it is obvious that, instead of notches, one can equally well use knots, either to ensure that one remembers or to make calculations. Historians are agreed in considering these as methods of writing, even if they have to qualify them as embryonic. And we can specify that it is a question of methods that depend on writing as code, i.e., on a writing whose signs refer to significations that its users agree upon in advance, as is indicated by the fact that they are assimilated to the category of 'mnemotechnic techniques'. It is clear too that a society composed of a small enough number of individuals, such that they can all recognize each other, a society that makes the most of a system of naming as is in use among the North American Indians, and whose agricultural techniques did not require an advanced science of astronomy, may be satisfied with such methods, and with other analogous ones, alongside 'pictography'.

These provisos apart, the assertion that synthetic writing paved the way for analytic or so-called ideographic writing is borne out by the facts: it is from the treasury of signs that used to make sentences that the scribes borrowed those which they used to write down words. It is true that 'as opposed to what, for example, happened with the Egyptian hieroglyphic system, Sumerian pictographic writing did not remain unaltered. It was fairly rapidly modified and the primitive drawings became, little by little, unrecognizable'. But these are secondary, and to some extent accidental, modifications, since they are mainly attributable to the different materials employed by the Sumerian and Egyptian scribes.

5. The thing to stress is that the writing/words (Wortschrift) or, as Gelb calls it, logography, leads straight to phoneticisation and so inexorably that one can cast doubt on the possibility of such a writing existing without the rudiments of phoneticisation.

5.a. In fact, where a 'pictograph' like the Alaskan one reproduced above is concerned, the word is still immersed in the sentence, and the graphic sign is bound up with signification. But once this sign is detached, and once it takes on such unity and autonomy as the word actually has, i.e., once the scribe has become a 'logograph' who is aware that it is words that he is writing, he cannot help but
observe that the sign of the loaf that he uses to write *pain* (bread) for example, is homophonous with that of the tree that he uses to write *pin* (pine), whilst another sign, such as the one for disc., with which he writes words as different as 'sun', 'light', 'day', etc. is polyphonous. The way is thenceforth clear for phoneticisation.

For, inasmuch as it allows us to write in French, by means of the representation of a tree, not only the word *pin*, but also the words *pain*, *peint* (painted) etc.... homophony is, as Février (whose example this is) remarks, 'a rebus system'. Now, the rebus, as this same author adds, 'leads almost inevitably to phonetic writing. Instead of creating a full representation for each word, drawing, for example, a man with a large hat and floppy tie, it is simpler to juxtapose the drawing of a rat to that of a *pin*, thus giving *rapin* (apprentice painter). The Sumerians did it like this, for such a procedure made it easier for them to note prefixes, affixes, etc..... and these play such an important part in Sumerian writing. From the Archaic dynasty onwards, one can find transcriptions of phonetic complements, verbal prefixes and determinatives *'.

When the scribe wishes to distinguish a word from the whole set of words that is grouped under the same graphic sign, polyphony, in its turn, renders phonetic notation inevitable. The scribe may, for example, use the image of two , standing face to face, to write not only 'discord' but 'dispute', 'litigation', 'gossip', 'dialogue', etc. But if he wants to indicate that it is 'discord' that is involved, he can either, as Gelb observes*, choose complete phoneticisation, according to the rebus method, in which case he will use two signs, a disc and a cord, or partial phoneticisation, in which case he will add a cord to the usual character. In short, homophony
allows phoneticisation, and polyphony, inasmuch as the scribe needs to reduce it, actually helps to bring about phoneticisation.

5.b.

For the scribe to be forced to have recourse to phonetic notation, proper names must be involved, however little the society in question diverges from totemic systems of naming. So much so that this characteristic of proper names, that they oblige the scribe to embark upon phoneticisation, is what best allows us to define them. It is the basic property of proper names.

Without wishing to enter into a long digression here on the subject of proper names, I will simply recall the story of a six year old girl who had drawn a Queen and had divided her dress into compartments, putting in each compartment the name of an object that she valued... Sweets, sugar, and rings were included. Nor did she forget to write 'Me'. When asked if she were this Queen, she replied, obviously irritated by the question: 'Of course not, stupid, Queens are like that, they have funny names'. There could be no better demonstration of the fact that every word can serve as a proper name provided that one consider it only as a phonetic body. The proper name's defining feature is actually this autonomy of the phonological substance, and its status as a proper name is therefore completely unaffected by any reference to the signified. This is the only occasion that language takes it upon itself, if one can put it like this, to break up the unity of signifier and signified, or to separate them in order to make the former into the actual object that one gives (as is the case with Christian names) or that one transmits (as is the case with Surnames). The scholarly distinction between signifier and signified is here produced as an act, i.e., prior to all knowledge.

It was Leibniz who was the first to grasp how valuable this characteristic of proper names can be in the decipherment or, as he termed it, the decoding of unknown scripts. In a letter
dated January 1714, he writes:

In Palmyra and elsewhere in Syria and its neighbouring countries there exist many ancient double inscriptions, written partly in Greek and partly in the language and characters of the local people. These ought to be copied with the greatest care from the original stones. It might then prove possible to assemble the Alphabet and eventually to discover the nature of the language. For we have the Greek version, and there occur proper names, whose pronunciation must have been approximately the same in the native language as in the Greek.

5. c. What then does this phoneticisation of writing mean? What does it teach us? It basically teaches us that all writing is potentially phonetic, in the sense that we always write facts of language, i.e., proverbs, songs, narratives, magical formulae, prayers, warnings, threats, appeals or prohibitions, in short, all kinds of messages. To assert that, at a particular moment, writing has become phonetic or is on the way to becoming it, amounts to saying that it has become a phonetic science. Analytic writing (Wortschrift), inasmuch as it implied the rudiments of phoneticisation, marked the emergence of this science. The first scribes were the first phoneticians. 'Writing was always there, waiting to be phoneticised', as Lacan observes, in his seminar on identification.

Indeed, if this were not so, it would not be possible to answer the objection that Schaffer addresses to Lebas, and which runs as follows:

You say that it is not easy to write a pictogram on clay. But setting to one side this material question, cuneiforms have implied another intellectual process altogether. One disregards the image, one no longer draws like a child but invents an entirely abstract and complicated writing, requiring that one learn some three to five hundred signs, or even more, in the Archaic period. This passage from a very simple process that, moreover, all primitive peoples adopted, to such a scholarly and complicated writing, is a leap that is very difficult to explain, but which cannot simply be explained in terms of material difficulties.
There is a simple answer to this. We did not first draw and then write but, inasmuch as there was a reference to language, one had always been writing. In fact, historians have never come across an 'ideographic' writing. It is their evolutionist outlook or, quite simply, the notion of a 'childhood of humanity' that leads them to assign an origin to writing that is contrary to its purpose which is to be read, an origin that is not borne out by the facts. Which is why G.R. Driver is able to write as follows:

Whether these tablets from Uruk IV represent the actual first essays at writing is disputed; but the fact that many signs have ceased to be in any true sense pictures of the objects which they are intended to represent suggests that a stage in which all the signs in use were fully pictorial already lay far behind them.\(^{37}\)

Once the process of phoneticisation had begun, the subsequent evolution of writing would mainly have to depend upon the genius and structure of each language. It was not by chance that alphabetisation began among the Semitic languages, with the consonants being detached first. Roughly thirty centuries were to pass before Saussure was to show that it is through being difference that the letter operates.

6. The subject obviously does not need to know anything at all of this structure in order to make use of the letter, and still less to experience its effects. The Freudian unconscious demonstrates this only too clearly, and where the dream, in particular, is concerned, there is an abundance of examples illustrating all the processes of writing that we have observed above, from coded writing, synthetic writing (pictography) to writing of words (ideography). After all, Freud himself shows us the dreamer getting to grips with problems in every respect analogous to those that the scribes had to confront, phrasing this as Die Rücksicht Auf Darstellbarkeit, which may be translated as 'considerations respecting the exigencies of represent-
ation'. The writing of 'sun' should not pose any great difficulties for the scribe, since a disc will serve his purpose. The same goes for sunrise: ☀, and night likewise, since we say that it falls: ☽. For giving birth you simply have to add an egg to the image of a bird. For a slave, an image of a girl to that of a mountain, since it is beyond the mountains that one's territory that one will attack enemies and capture their women.

What of friendship? That would be two parallel lines, which, being crossed, would represent enmity. In short, to satisfy the exigencies of representation, the scribe thus had recourse, just as the dreamer does, to solutions that derive in the last analysis from metonymy and metaphor, and that he would tend to find in 'the treasury of language'. If I say 'tend to' it is because these same exigencies may well drive him to invent things. How could the Sumerian scribe write 'life' (ti) without first being aware of its homophony with 'arrow', which had the same pronunciation? A 'thread' would have done, if the expression 'the thread of life' had existed in Sumerian. But, even if it did not exist, he could have invented it. Indeed, a dreamer produced an oneric image that corresponded exactly to the French expression 'a thread on one's paw' (meaning that one is encumbered with a mistress). Yet the dreamer in question did not know French, although he was familiar with the expression 'the thread of life', which was current in his own language but did not have the slightest erotic connotation. This did not prevent him, however, from using this thread to signify the erotic tie.

By way of conclusion, one would note that most historians of writing begin by putting the cart before the horse. By which I mean that they put signification first, and whether it is in the brain or in thought hardly makes much difference. The point to note is that, in so doing, what they call 'articulated language' becomes just one system of signs among many, all of which can be employed to translate or exteriorise significations.
As far as we are concerned, the above discussion has shown the need to start out from the opposite position;

there is no writing. That is not the writing of a language.

I hope also to have shown, along the way, that language would not be language if it did not imply the possibility of writing. In fact, far from constituting an inside, significations surround us, along with the material signifiers which determine them. One could even put it that they embody us, inasmuch as our identities, or what language calls our 'being', take shape there. They can be repeated and transmitted, and we should not be surprised if this transmission should have been to a large extent, but not exclusively, achieved by way of what I will call representational or geometric image (rather than, say, drawing). Since they tend to concern, on the one hand, the objects involved in the exchange, and since, on the other, we can say that long before Socrates posed the problem of definition, and indeed long after him, men found the essence of a particular signification to which they were attached, for instance, courage, success or cunning, already inscribed in the images of the eagle, the tortoise or the snake 41.

It would have been astonishing if language's independence were of the same order as that of the objects that it itself transforms: either into exchange objects or into objects 'to think with' (to use one of Lévi-Strauss's expressions), i.e., an independence which is actually a dependence. It would have been astonishing if its all encompassing exteriority was that of an instrument at hand. Yet people have believed this. What is more, this belief was and still is presented as a scholarly argument. Language is said to be an instrument of communication. But once it comes out that "the dream is a writing", this thesis becomes untenable. For one is then faced with the question: who is the scribe?
He is seated and motionless, legs crossed, with stylus in hand and papyrus leaf spread out on his knees\(^{42}\); his whole being is concentrated, as it were, on this leaf. The rhythm of the sculpture develops by means of contours which, descending on each side, converge on the surface of the papyrus, from which they rise again to their point of departure. This does much to reinforce the impression of a gathering concentration which, in the end, can almost be felt. The expression on the face gives meaning to this concentration and stillness: the scribe is waiting. For what? For the moment of dictation. Which does not mean that this dictation is an order. There is no trace of intersubjectivity in this representation, and it is this fact that accounts for its extraordinary impact. The scribe is alone. Alone with this distant science, as distant as the elusive meaning of his gaze, but already there, on the white surface of the papyrus. The stylus will, at the required moment, simply let it appear.

The dream is this writing of a message come from elsewhere, from that place which Freud, employing Fechner’s expression, calls an ‘Other Scene’. For it does not come from he who, at the moment of waking, is once again inside a whole universe of ‘repeatable’ significations, nor from another, in relation to whom he might place himself as slave or as master. Hence, once awake, the dreamer will objectivise the Other, in the guise of a divinity whose message he will attempt to "read" as an omen. But this objectification is erroneous, for the Other as much eludes difference as it does resemblance. There is no other way to conceive of it than as Freud does, namely, as a locus other than the one in which the subject’s life unfolds, i.e., his relations with others. Likewise, it is clear that the Scribe is in no sense the man who is caught up in these relations, which, it should be noted, are effected through speech. How then is one to define him? The simplest approach is to define him in terms of his relation to the Other. And since this relation to the Other consists in a dictation, a speech that the subject declares to be that of the Other in him, this relation must also be a relation to language, i.e., the one that Freud specifies as unfolding according to a regime of 'primary processes'.

To examine these processes we need first to know what language is, and, with this in mind, I will now turn to the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure.
Footnotes
Chapter 1


9. Ibid., p. 15.

10. Ibid., p. 12.


15. In the tramps' code, studied by d'Agayeff, *op. cit.*, p. 65-67, we have a very interesting instance of this. The secret of this codes was jealously guarded, and it included, for instance, the sign ☐ drawn on the door of a 'bourgeois', which meant 'wretches, they offer work'.


20. The dream, as the reader will see, has more than one method for translating negation, and its interpretation has nothing to do with the interpretation of omens.


24. I.J. Gelb, loc. cit., p. 33-34.

25. Only a mad person will accuse another of theft when he hears a word that he has himself just uttered being taken up, a moment later, and repeated by a loud-speaker.

26. This identification of the subject with the imprint of its hand may perhaps explain why it was on their hands that our ancestors performed cruelties, indeed mutilations, to which writers accord a ritual character, and which probably represented an equivalent of circumcision. This latter was probably impracticable without doing serious damage to the organ, on account of the relative crudity of the means available.

27. J. Février, loc. cit., p. 27.

In fact, the specialists expect to find indications of phoneticisation at earlier and earlier dates: 'Although most of the Uruk inscriptions are as yet unreadable we can safely assume that the principle of phoneticisation was evolved very early. Falkenstein himself quotes as an example of phoneticisation the case of the ARROW sign, which is found in the second oldest stage of the writing (the so-called 'Uruk III stratum'). This sign stands in Sumerian for the word ti, 'arrow', and also for the word ti, 'life'. But since in the oldest stage of the writing (the so-called 'Uruk IV stratum') we find men, the word for 'crown' in Sumerian, written with the sign for "crown" plus the phonetic indicator on, and since possibly the divine name Sin, originally Suen, Suin, is written phonetically as su-en, it is probable that examples of this kind will be greatly increased when we reach a better understanding of the earliest stages of the Uruk writing.'

I.J. Gelb, loc. cit., p. 67.

32. For a summary of the various theories, see H. Zabec, What is the Name?, The Hague, Nijhof, 1968.
38. See G.R. Driver, as cited above.
39. Or of staging (mis en scène) as Lacan puts it, if one takes the dream's temporal dimension into account: as when it is a question of translating 'causality' by succession.
40. In actual fact, we here pass beyond 'considerations affecting representation', and touch on the intervention of metaphor as primary process. See below, op. cit. 00 – 00.
See the fine example of synthetic writing that Gelb reproduces and analyses in his book cited above, p. 29–30.

I have in mind the scribe in Cairo Museum.
II

On the systematicity of language
as opposed to the imaginary nature
of the word

The main features of the Saussurean conception of langue are set out in a series of now famous 'aphorisms', which Saussure himself defines in a manuscript note as being 'neither axioms, nor principles, nor theses, but delimitations, or limits between whose bounds truth is invariably located, and from which one can always begin'. These would presumably include the principle of the arbitrariness of the sign: the assertion that, in *la langue*, everything is difference; the distinctions between langue and parole, signifier and signified, synchrony and diachrony, syntagmatic and associative relations etc. But just because each of these 'aphorisms' is reciprocally illuminating, we are not therefore any the less obliged to consider the logical hierarchy in which they are ordered.

1. According to one of the most astute of Saussure's commentators, Jullien de Mauro, the first principle of the Genevan master's teaching is that of the arbitrariness of the sign. Saussure repeatedly asserts as much, as the following quotation demonstrates: 'We come back to the fundamental principle of the arbitrariness of the sign. If the sign were not arbitrary, we would not be able to say that in langue (*la langue*) there are only differences'. This dependence is not self-evident: if it were, writers such as Jacques Derrida would not have maintained the opposite. Its obviousness must therefore depend upon the meaning that the principle in question has for Saussure.

What, then, is it?

It would seem to run as follows. There is no reason to call a cow, or the idea of this animal (its concept), by the word *boeuf* rather than by the word *œuf*. Arbitrariness concerns the coupling of signifier with signified, and the distinction between the two is an altogether salient one, for the second stays the same on both sides of the frontier, whereas the first changes. But, even, if we stay on the same side of the linguistic frontier, arbitrariness still presides over their coupling, for 'one' could have called what is called *boeuf*, *œuf*, or *vice versa*. Only it then turns out that it is not the users of langue, what Saussure calls 'the speaking mass', who employ arbitrariness.
Arbitrary is not a thing of their choosing. He emphasizes this in a note (S.M., p. 50), entitled 'The psychologists' error regarding language, considered as a conventional and fixed form', a note which reads as follows: 'they disregard the socio-historical phenomenon which produces the whirlwind of signs in time, which thus prevents it from being made into either a fixed or conventional language since it is the ceaseless result of social action, imposed quite regardless of all choice'.

The argument so far allows us to subscribe to the meaning that Whitney, a linguist whom Saussure revered, gave to the words 'arbitrary', and "conventional":

In the true and proper meaning of the terms, then, every word handed down in every human language is an arbitrary and conventional sign: arbitrary, because any one of the thousand other words current among men, or of the tens of thousands which might be fabricated, could have been equally well learned and applied to this particular purpose; conventional, because the reason for the use of this rather than another lies solely in the fact that it is already used in the community to which the speaker belongs.

We can, up to this point in the argument, say that we are in agreement.

Only Whitney adds:

The word exists *thesei*, 'by attribution', and not *phasis*, 'by nature', in the sense that there is, either in the nature of things in general, or in the nature of the individual speaker who uses it, any reason that prescribes and determines it.

A statement which, while surreptitiously comparing langue to a speaking subject, implies the existence of an initial moment in which sound and meaning were separated, as also it implies, and this more decisively, a conception of language as labelling. Now, it is Saussure who has shown, in a quite matchless fashion, the error inherent as much in the actual supposition that there is an origin to language as in the conception of language that this supposition involves.
In fact, Saussure wrote the following note, entitled Origin of Language: 'There is no moment at which genesis differs in character from the life of language, and the main thing is to have understood the life. The question is an inane one, for anyone who has properly grasped what a semiological system is, and what its conditions of life are, prior to considering the conditions for its genesis (S.M., p. 49). Elsewhere (p. 38), we read that the problem of the origin of language is no different from that of its transformations. What these statements by Saussure entail is a 'universal principle', which he calls 'the mutability principle', and which to his mind represents the 'correlative' of the principle of continuity in time. He explains this latter principle as follows (S.M., p. 38): 'human speech is transmitted without interruption, even in the case of language change. What deceives us are the names given to distant states of language (Latin, French), and those expressions that G. Paris denounces, which imply that French comes from Latin, that there is a mother tongue etc. The death of a language is always the effect of non-linguistic causes: in itself language is impervious. And there is never a birth of a language; an attempt like Volapük (Esjeranto) shows us why: 1/ the absence of all initiative (each population being content with its own idiom), 2/ even if there were an initiative it would come up against the resistance of the masses. It would not suffice to define what one understands by birth: it is langue which is not defined in time.'

As Mauro emphasises, the principle of arbitrariness is only pertinent if one links it to the radical historicity of language: it therefore amounts to setting or situating the limit of arbitrariness for speaking subjects in the linguistic sign. Or, in Saussure's actual words: 'Language, not being founded on natural relations, cannot be corrected by reason - as marriage, for example, can: one can argue over monogamy or polygamy, but not over the use of s or of S, of cow or of vacca (S.M., p. 44). - Being a condition of reason, language could not in its turn be 'corrected' by reason. Only the autonomy and fictional
permanence of the ego allows the speaking subject to suppose that it was always there, before language, such that it could invent it (whether in conformity with the nature of things or by convention, it hardly matters). Together with the principle of the 'historicity of language', the principle of the absolute arbitrariness of the sign brings about a purification of these imaginary inductions. Language was not created, and cannot be defined in time, and the fact that every 'language state' is a product of history does not mean that language itself is.

After all, in spite of his insistence upon the 'radical historicity of language', Saussure is nonetheless, as Culler rightly calls him, 'the father of structuralism'.

2.

Indeed, as I have already had occasion to point out, it is also in Ferdinand de Saussure's work that we find the most trenchant critique of language as labelling, a conception which also lays claim to being that of its 'origin'. He does this at many points in his work, but in particular in a manuscript note that I quote in full from Tullio de Mauro's edition, notwithstanding its length:

Most people who think about the problem of language only do so in terms of the notion of labelling (nomenclature). In Chapter IV of Genesis we see Adam giving names ..... Philosophers of language formulate or advance conceptions which, for the most part, remind us of our first father Adam calling the various animals to him and giving each of them their names. Three things are invariably missing from a philosopher's account of what language is:

1). First, a truth that I now treat as self-evident, that names do not constitute the basis of language. It is accident if the linguistic sign happens to correspond to a definite object for the senses like a horse, fire, the sun, rather than an idea like ἡ ὅταν, 'he put'. However important the former case is, there is no obvious reason, in fact quite the opposite, to treat it as what defines language.
Those who argue in this fashion are doubtless misled, to some extent, by the nature of the example.

But implicit in this there is a tendency to define the ultimate identity of language in a way that we can neither disregard nor let pass, namely, that it is a labelling of objects. Of objects that are given, first of all. First the object, then the sign: and therefore (and this is something that I will always deny) an external basis is attributed to the sign and language is represented by the following relation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\{ & \quad \text{objects} \quad \} \\
\star & \quad a \\
\star & \quad b \\
\star & \quad c
\end{align*}
\]

whilst the true representation is: \(a \rightarrow b \rightarrow c\), regardless of any knowledge of an actual relation such as \(\star \rightarrow a\), founded upon an object.

If an object could, wherever it was, be the term to which the sign was fixed, linguistics would straightway cease to be what it essentially is: likewise the human mind, as should be obvious from the present discussion. But of the objections that I would level at the traditional manner of tackling language when one wishes to treat it philosophically, this is only an incidental one. - It is unfortunate, certainly, that this idea of designated objects should intrude from the start, as if it were a primate element of language, when it really has nothing to do with it. But this was simply the result of an ill-chosen example, and by replacing \(\text{Horse}, \text{Pferd}\) or \(\text{Pferd}\) with something like \(\text{\ldots}\), one is no longer in a position to be tempted to reduce language to something external.

There is a second, and far more serious, error into which philosophers tend to fall, which consists in
supposing

2) That once an object is designated by name it is as a whole that it will be transmitted, irrespective of other phenomena that might be involved! That is to say, if an alteration occurs it is supposed only to affect the name, as when *fraxinus* is thought to become *frène*. Yet so it is with the idea also. The marriage of an idea and a name already gave us quite enough to think about without this unexpected and totally unknown factor, TIME, intervening in this philosophical combination. But there would as yet be nothing particularly striking in all this, nothing characteristic of and peculiar to language, if there were only these two kinds of alteration, and this first kind of dissociation, through which the idea leaves the sign, spontaneously, whether the latter alters or not. The two things remain, up to this point, as separate entities. What is characteristic is the countless cases in which it is alteration of the sign which changes the actual idea, and where one sees straightaway that there was no difference at all, from moment to moment, between the sum of ideas distinguished and the sum of distinctive signs.

Two signs, through phonetic alteration, intermingle: the idea will also, to a determined degree (determined by the ensemble of other elements), intermingle.

A single sign is differentiated through the same blind process: infallibly, it attaches a meaning to this newly emergent difference.

These are but examples, but I would straightaway note how utterly meaningless it would be to start out from the relation between an idea and a sign, irrespective of time, irrespective of that transmission which alone teaches us, experimentally, what 'the sign' is worth. Saussure does not therefore just dismantle the perspective that the labelling theory (if one can call it that) of language adopts, nor does he just subordinate the signified to the signifier, for he also goes on
to elicit an order \((a - b - c)\) appropriate to this latter. Thus, along with the principle of the continuity of \textit{langue} or, if one prefers, with the dismantling of the myth of the creation of \textit{langue} (in what language did \textit{God} ask \textit{Adam} to name the creatures?), the principle of the \textit{absolute} arbitrariness of the sign leads on to the idea of a \textit{system} in which all is relation, and, thereby, becomes the principle of \textit{relative} arbitrariness, since 'the solidarity of terms in the \textit{system} may be considered a \textit{limitation} upon arbitrariness' (S.M., p. 32). Which is as much as to say that the meaning of this principle totally alters. The vice, denounced by Saussure, no longer lies in the answer (whatever it is) that one may give to the question 'why such-and-such a sound for such-and-such a meaning?', as was the case with Whitney, but in the actual question, insofar as it effects an imaginary isolation of \(a\) from its relation to \(b\) or to \(c\), and rests upon an 'abstract' distinction between nature and convention.

But we can then say that it is no longer as sound but as not-\(b\) or not-\(c\) that \(a\) assumes, when the occasion arises, the function (an accidental one, as Saussure is careful to emphasise) of designating an object. Considered in conjunction with the principle of continuity, the principle of arbitrariness signifies that 'everything in \textit{langue} is difference'. The effects of the imaginary are quite excluded from the kind of theoretical approach that is advanced here.

Is Saussure's teaching wholly successful in effecting this purification of the imaginary?

3.

Before answering this question we ought to examine the interpretation that one of the two editors of the \textit{Course in General Linguistics}, Charles Bally\textsuperscript{10}, gives of the principle of arbitrariness.
According to Bally, arbitrariness dominates the whole of language. 'In other words,' he writes, 'the linguistic sign is arbitrary in its signifier and in its signified.' This sentence alone is enough to give us pause, for other writers, including Godel, reckon (and apparently with greater justification) that arbitrariness is not a property of the signifier, nor of the signified, considered one without the other, but of their link. What concerns us here is the manner in which Bally, once this separation between signifier and signified is achieved (and no matter how insistently one subsequently emphasises their link), will cling to it in order to demonstrate the arbitrariness of the signified. Here is how Bally expresses it:

The arbitrariness of the signified is no less certain but harder to demonstrate. We believe that the notion of green simply derives from sensory perception; in fact it is imposed upon us by the language which opposes it to blue, yellow, etc. ...... and it is these rigid classes that allow us to put some order into our colour sensations. There are languages which have no word for green ...... It is not that speaking subjects are deprived of perceptions of green, but that the green that is perceived is not conceived as such ...... The concept that rises up in us when we pronounce the word woman is fashioned, not by reality, but by associations which bind this word to other words .... Thus each language, through its system of concept and of relations between concepts, covers the world in a sort of cloak cross-ruled with whimsical patterns, which obscure the contours of the most perceptible objects, to such an extent that not only does each language deform perceived reality in a different manner, it also compels us to perceive this reality itself through its deforming prism.
This argument is clearly meant to show that perceived reality, or reality considered as a norm, presents itself to us as variously cross-ruled and distorted, depending upon the whims of the language which is imposed upon us by social constraint, by schooling, or indeed by orthographic, lexical and grammatical authority. The reality of this constraint is, however, open to question. Has an English person ever been known to suffer from the fact that his language obliges him to put the adjective before the noun? Or a French person from the principle that adjective ..., and noun must agree? But the important point is that, interpreted thus, the Saussurean principle would imply nothing more than a sociological relativism characteristic of the American school of anthropology (Boas, Sapir and Whorf).

But is precisely, I would argue, this reference to reality considered as a norm that we had to suspend in order to arrive at a correct evaluation of the Saussurean principle, inasmuch as it concerns, in the last analysis, not the relation of language to an extra-linguistic reality, but the structure of language considered in itself.

3.b. **Language considered in itself**, I have written, but in considering it thus do I not risk treating it as a whole? Since 'language is nothing outside of its power to signify', as Saussure so forcefully asserts, we would then be forced to posit a totality for the signifier and a totality for the signified: two 'wholes' which thus come to be separated like the 'lower and higher waters'. The idea that the signifier determines the signified will then yield to the idea that the signifier only serves to order 'the amorphous mass of thought'. For want of having fully explained...
the principle of the determination of the signified by the signifier, the idea of an 'extra-linguistic reality' would thus seem to be bound to return, in spite of the devastating criticisms that Saussure had made of this same notion.

Now just as language is nothing outside of its power to signify, so too is the signified nothing outside this power that language has. Let us then explicitly state a clapse of sussuring that the signifier signifies nothing .... outside of its power of signification. The 'whole' of signification is not a totality, but a pure signification, empty of all content. [As opposed to 'the amorphous mass of thought', this 'pure significativity', as Saussure also puts it, is a fact that I would go so far as to say is a part of everyone's experience].

A single example, since it is borrowed from Saussure himself, will suffice:

Whilst out walking I smile to myself, as it were, and silently make a notch in a tree, as if for pleasure. The person accompanying me retains the idea of this notch, and it is beyond doubt that she associates two or three ideas with this notch from this moment on, whilst I myself had no other idea but to amuse myself.

What can else this mean but that something as simple as a notch will suffice to bring about the presence of signification in its pure state, i.e., to put it bluntly, to open up the void of what it is that the Other means? In short simply by putting it back in its place, that of the Other, we can better perceive that the signifier does by its nature project pure signification ahead of itself; so much so that it is through this very projection, where it is signified that nothing is actually signified, that we recognise it as signifier, and not just as something that belongs to the world of already established significations. [Which is why what Saussure calls 'sens net' can only emerge within a given of a particular language, out of the relation between one signifier and another, all the more so since we have refused the separation between two 'wholes'.

We know how insistently Saussure returned to the schema of the sign, and with good reason. For it raises a problem which, in the light of the above discussion, we may now formulate as
follows: how does a particular signification come to be placed under a signifier that is empty as such of all signification except that of this same emptiness? We know Saussure's answer: such a signification occurs by virtue of the double syntagmatic and associative relation that links this signifier to the other signifiers belonging to the same system. This is so much the case that there are no two vocabularies that can be directly superimposed from one language to another. There are languages in which, as Saussure observes, one cannot say (as one can in French), *s'asseoir au soleil*.

It is therefore in order to denounce the illusion to which the word "considered as an isolated and absolute whole" (S.M., p.90) gives rise that Saussure brings back the schema of the sign. "For the relation between signifier and signified to be given in itself", he writes, "the signifier would have to be determined in advance, which it is not... The schema is therefore only one way of expressing the existence of a certain value that is circumscribed in the system by opposition to other terms: It is not initial in the language (S.M., p.91)."

Here one should add that, no matter how many significations are given, attested or accepted for a particular signifier (and there is no language without a discourse whose anteriority in relation to speaking subjects is that of language itself), one still cannot rule out the possibility of an unexpected signified coming and sliding under this same signifier. Thus, an author as acute as Tullio de Mauro has interpreted this availability of the signifier to all meanings as constituting a danger for communication. In fact, this concern to 'save communication', whether one knows it or no, is aimed at nothing less than the liquidation of speaking, which defines subjects which amounts to throwing out the baby with the bath-water. In order to demonstrate this, I will devote some space to the link between this 'dangerous' openness of the signifier to every meaning and its definition as sure difference.
4. a. On its own, \( a \) is not a signifier and creates no signification. Nor is anything created by it if one simply puts \( b \) next to it. It is only by emptying \( a \) of all its qualities, of everything by means of which it renders itself present as a perceptible figure, and, therefore, of everything that gives it an identity with itself, that one can grasp the relation that opposes it to \( b \), not as \( a \), but as not-\( a \), and therefore makes it a term in a system. Godel has salvaged a valuable note (S.M., pp. I93-I94) in which Saussure illustrates, through a reference to writing, this distinction between difference and opposition, a note that he discusses in the following terms: 'The Saussurean notion of opposition therefore implies at once difference and relation. Difference, in itself, is certainly a negative characteristic: if \( a \) is different from \( b \), that simply amounts to saying that \( a \) is not \( b \), whatever the degree of coincidence; but the moment a relation exists in some other way between \( a \) and \( b \), they are members of a same system, and difference becomes opposition (S.M., p. I97)'. This commentary shows fairly conclusively that we cannot be satisfied with describing difference as a 'negative characteristic' which is secondarily attributed to \( a \), which would already be there as subject of the attribution. It is much closer to being a difference which is not the perceptible difference by means of which one judges that \( a \) is not \( b \). Everything happens as if the substance of language depended on what language itself brings out: what is first is logical difference, non-identity as such, hence relation. Which is why, inasmuch as it is essentially not-\( b \) or pure difference, \( a \) remains unaffected by every perceptible representation, provided that it is not confused with that of \( b \): since, likewise, \( b \) is not-\( a \). Strictly speaking, neither of the two terms may be said to be 'identical to itself': since the identity or the being of this 'itself' only resides in its non-identity with the other. Where the signifier is concerned, it is logical difference that dictates perceptible difference, and is far from being a translation of it, or a consequence. Here we touch upon a crucial point, and, without considering it we would have no chance of effectively tackling the problem which,
The reader will recall the many examples Saussure employs in his attempts to give a more precise definition of the specific characteristics of the identity of the sign: the game of chess, the 8.25 train, the street that has been rebuilt. There does not seem to be much doubt about the conclusions that he draws from these examples.

Suppose we consider a house: it may be distinguished from every other house through those of its characteristics which constitute its difference, but it is not itself this difference. In fact it is indifferent to what surrounds it: it remains standing even if one destroys the whole town, just as one can destroy it on its own without affecting any of the other houses. Nor do its relations with the other buildings modify it in any way either. The fact that it is higher than another house does not add anything to its own height. It is adhesive, identical to itself, and knows neither scission nor multiplicity.

On the other hand, the street is defined by its place in an urban system. One cannot even say that it is what the others are not, if by that one implies that it possesses an attribute of which the others would be deprived. It is far more that its being is defined by difference itself, outside of which it is only a set of houses that one may destroy and rebuild. Which is to say that, as being without substance ('non-existent thing', as Saussure puts it), its identity is without an identical, as its unity is without a One.

We can now answer the question that Saussure was the first to put: in the sentence - 'Gentlemen, it's war, I tell you, it's war, Gentlemen!' - is it the same word 'Gentlemen' that recurs?

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the word 'Gentlemen' is one word, yet what is one, here, is oppositional difference, non-identity with the others. One can put this another way and state that this difference defines a unity that can certainly be delimited, but that this unity is not that of a One, or, as Saussure again would put it, of 'something positive'. This unity, for which the best symbol is
certainly Saussure's empty brackets can appear in several places without it therefore being possible to say that its appearance here is identical to its appearance over there, nor that it is identical to itself in both of its appearances. To say that the 'same' word is involved is simply to say that the same opposition is involved at the level of langue - with 'Ladies', for instance.

The word retains, however, its availability for the determination of new signifieds, following the double relations in which speech holds it.

Suppose I announce the news as follows: 'Gentlemen, it's war'. Have I realised the import of what I am announcing? May be.

So, I repeat: 'I tell you it's war, you fools!' For this is clearly what the second 'Gentlemen' means. The same word is indeed involved, but, bound through speech into new relations, an unexpected signified results from it. Uttered at the end of the sentence, after 'I tell you', 'Gentlemen' is the signifier of my incomprehension, or of my pre-comprehension in the face of the event that I have just announced; whereas, at the beginning of the sentence, it designates beings of a specific sex whom I address according to a code of politeness.

It is a fact that the linguistic sign, being a part of langue, represents the union of a signifier and a signified. Saussure's genius consists in his not having taken this for granted. All the principles of his teaching and his main theses are designed to explain the sign as result, since 'it does not inaugurate langue' (S.M., p. 91). To put it clearly, the bar that features in the schema of the sign does indeed represent a union, but it is not this union of signifier and signified which is the principle but, rather, as Lacan maintains, their separation. Not in the spatial sense, of the parallel existence, on either side of the bar, of a signifier and a signified. It is rather the case that this latter is come, and what the bar represents that which, along with the signifier, appears as much an appeal as a resistance to the signified. It is, in short, a bar to be crossed.
In other words, this separation is not such as would be situated between words and ideas, for Saussure's teaching is expressly designed to show us how 'mythical' such a conception is, in that it is wholly dependent upon the imaginary isolation of the word as an 'absolute', and not as a term in a system. It is, on the contrary, a question of a separation which depends upon the discovery, beneath the apparent 'positivity' of the word, of its structure as signifier and, by the same token, of the mechanisms that generate the signified: and that we may encounter again whenever a new or simply unexpected meaning slides under even the most common of signifiers. This is so much the case that one can confidently assert that it is indeed because **langue** is as Saussure has defined it, that creative speech is possible.

5.

It is then all the more astonishing to note that the preeminence of the signifier represents, for as informed a linguist as Tullio De Mauro, an impasse in the Saussurean system.

5. a.

According to De Mauro, the problem for Saussure would be the same as was raised by Aristotle in Book IV of the *Metaphysics*, and is the key question for any reflection on linguistic facts. It consists in deciding what makes a word a word, a sentence a sentence, and any linguistic reality a linguistic reality. For Saussure, a linguist who was involved in diachronic analysis and at the same time the 'creator' of synchronic linguistics, the problem (Mauro maintains) has two dimensions.

In diachronic analysis, it may be formulated as follows: What is it that enables us to assert, for example, that the Latin word *cantare* becomes *chanter* in French, or that *caldium* becomes *chaud*? Does not saying that an entity has been transformed amount to saying that something in it has remained the same?

Because my presentation of Saussure's account will have to be a brief one, I will only consider the synchronic plane, where the problem is phrased as follows: 'On what does the identity ... of a word, for instance *Gentlemen*, pronounced twice, depend?'
Two solutions to this problem, Mauro says, have been advanced. There are the formalists, who say that the identity of a linguistic form is guaranteed by the identity or similarity if the acoustic materials of which it is made, and there are the champions of content, who say that a word is, and remains, the same because it always denotes the same thing or always expresses the same concept. This second solution has been, from Aristotle to Wittgenstein, the dominant one: and Aristotle saw this stability of the semantic link of the sound with the thing designated as a radical refutation of the objections made by sceptics as to the principle of identity.

Saussure, Mauro asserts, rejects the first solution because 'the same phoneme' is never identical on the purely acoustic plane: he likewise rejects the second, for signifieds change too. He advances a third and novel solution: a sign is neither purely a signified nor purely a signifier, in the sense that it is in neither of these two ways that we come to perceive it as sign. But this definition of the sign, Mauro observes, does not resolve the problem of its identity. What is it that guarantees that a particular union of syllables and of a signified remains unchanged, whilst syllables and signifieds may suffer oscillations?

- 'Saussure then tries to find a solution by asserting that the reality of a linguistic entity is its value'.

- 'The problem of identity, however, is thereby yet again deferred. For if one refers to value in order to shed light on what identity is, one would have to have shed light on the value of a form'.

- 'It is in order to answer this very problem, and not out of an abstract need to conceive of things in a geometrising manner, that Saussure elaborates the most famous of his theories: the theory of the system'.

5.6. But, Mauro reckons, 'If the value, and therefore the identity and linguistic usefulness of a form depend upon the system into which the form is inserted, various paradoxical and antinomic consequences ensue'. The one that is of especial interest to us here is formulated as follows:

Given a variation, even a minimal one, in the social heritage of two individuals ...... one is liable to conclude, and indeed one does conclude if one wishes to remain faithful to Saussurean premises, that two individuals always speak different languages for .... even the words that seem to be held in common, because of phonid resemblances or because they denote approximately the same things, are in reality words with a different signified, since they are inserted into two different networks of relations.

And indeed, the solitude of the speaker, the linguistic solipsism that is explicitly upheld by the philosopher and conservative Wittgenstein, is implicit not only in the philosophy of the idealist and spiritualistic Croce, but also in the general linguistics of Saussure. The Saussurean speaker also strings together words that are perfectly endowed with signifieds, but he too finds no way of establishing how this signified is transmitted to the others: on the contrary, everything leads one to believe that he is in no position at all to transmit the signified to the others, but that he only transmits the sonorous vibrations of his words.
This whole analysis, as outlined above, would be tenable if its point of departure was. But it is not. It was not in a 'philosophical' or, as I was going to say, in an 'imperative' sense that Saussure had set himself the problem of giving words a meaning that remains unchanged: the question that Saussure raised, and doubtless for the first time, was, on the contrary, that of knowing how a meaning is produced.

5. c.

And what, the reader will ask, becomes of communication? And how, without communication, can there be a community?

The answer is simple. The community that holds between speaking subjects is indeed founded by language. The very fact of belonging to the same language leads two subjects to feel themselves to be in a community, even if they were saying nothing, or even, if they were speaking in order to say nothing. With speech, misunderstanding, if not dissension, often ensues: 'as if they were not speaking the same language'. Is one to suppose that linguists theorise as if they had no experience of speech? One would only have to consult this experience in order to realise that if subjects do speak with what has been transmitted to them name-

ly: words already endowed with an average meaning, these, however, are simply 'over-bid' cards, as Saussure calls them. Cards for a game in which the ace does not have the same value with a Queen as with a Jack.
Admittedly, no one is happy with the ensuing misunderstandings. But when one wishes to remedy this by giving words an unchanging meaning, is one doing anything but formulate a wish, and a hopeless one at that? Which is not to say that this wish is without any effect, since it vitiates the whole theory of langue. And how can one help but emphasise here, when faced with zeal to 'guarantee' or indeed, to 'save' communication, that it was actually the doctrinaire solipsist, Bishop Berkeley, who, as Richards has observed, took pleasure in speaking of 'naked ideas, without disguise', and in constantly inviting his reader to separate them from the apparel that 'encumbered' them? 'Someone that words encumber': this would clearly be a fairly apt definition of the solipsist; and, at this point in the argument I would add, of the pre-Saussurean linguist also.

5.d It is altogether surprising that the chimerical character of "naked ideas" should have been denounced by a rhetorician such as Richards, if one is prepared to define rhetoric, not as the art of persuasion, but as the study of the manner and the paths by which the signifier determines the signified, or, what amounts to the same, by which the subject crosses the bar which separates the signifier (as pure significativity) from the signified (as sens net).

As the reader will see, it is to such a study that examination of the primary processes belongs. I shall first undertake this examination at the level where such processes appear without the complications brought above by the very nature of the dream as writing or as staying: i.e., at the level of the jobe.
Chapter 11  Footnotes

1. See R. Godel, Les Sources Manuscrites du Cours de Linguistique Générale de F. de Saussure, Geneva, Droz, 1969, p. For all subsequent references to this work I will use the abbreviation S.M. Everything that is underlined in the quotations is also underlined in the original text.


5. An historicity which, in Saussure’s eyes, would justify the inclusion of linguistic studies in a literature faculty, and which he explains in a note dating from his first three lectures at the University of Geneva (November, 1891), in the following terms (S.M., p. 58):

'The science of language is not a natural but a historical science. Everything in language is history, i.e., it is an object of historical and not of abstract analysis, it is composed of facts and not of laws, and everything which seems organic in language is in reality contingent and completely accidental. We have first of all to distinguish between language in history and the history of language...'

6. A fifteenth century commentator objected to the then prevalent doctrine, according to which language is instituted through an act of imposition, in the following terms: It might be that the Latin language, like the world, was eternal, which would leave no room for an initial act of designation. In a sense, one could argue that Saussure ‘repeats’ this commentator. See R.J. Ashworth, Language and Logic in the Post-Medieval Period, Dordrecht, Ed. Reidel, 1974, p. 42.


10. See ‘La contrainte sociale dans le langage’, an article that first appeared in 1927 in the Journal de Psychologie, and was subsequently

11. The arbitrariness of the signifier does not seem to pose him any problems, and the difference between languages is taken to be sufficient evidence for this, on its own.

12. C. Bally, op. cit.

13. In his lecture at the College de France, (Lecon, Paris, Seuil, 1978), Roland Barthes actually asserted that langue was fascist. All that one can reasonably say, in response to such an assertion, is that it must be a question of a fascism without a Führer.

14. The very example chosen by Bally that of the signifier "woman", shows quite clearly that, whilst reality may provide on occasion, and "accidentally", a referent for the signifier, we still have a question to answer: what is a woman? and here reality is no help at all.

15. As Engler (from whom I take this note) puts it. Cf. 'Théorie et critique d'un principe Saussurien: l'arbitraire du signe', in Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure, 19, 1963, p. 63.

16. It would seem that the word 'meaning' is indeed the one best fitted to illustrate this property of the signifier. Or this, at least, is what one would gather from some of Richards' remarks in The Philosophy of Rhetoric: 'Anyone who publishes a book with the word "Meaning" in its title becomes the recipient of a farmmail of a peculiar character. In comes a dribble of letters ever after from people who are quite unmistakeably lunatics. Indeed it seems that the subject is a dangerous one' (Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 42). It is a pity that Richards did not publish an anthology of these letters, for then we would have probably noticed that much writing has no other function than to fill the void that the signifier has hollowed out - like the legendary madman who spent hours to reach his destination, because he was looking for ... the sense.

17. It is perhaps a pity that one cannot say in some other language "j'étais assis au soleil comme à ma porte". But, in this respect, things are quite fair, "each population being content with its own idiom".
18. A problem that apparently doesn't arise for Frege, who writes: 'Identity is a relation which presents itself to us in so specific a form that it is inconceivable that varied forms of this form could arise'. Grundgesetze, vol. II, p. 254. Quoted in P.T. Geach, Logic Matters, Oxford, Blackwell, 1972, p. 238.


20. See p. 0-0, above.

21. This conclusion accords with Wittgenstein's assertion that 'A function may not serve as its own argument'. For if it were, one would write it in the form $F(f)$. Now, 'what occupies these two positions is not one symbol but two'. Cf. Proposition 3 333, in Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, tr. by D.F. Pears, B.F. McGuinness, London, Routledge. See also H.O. Mounce, Wittgenstein's Tractatus, Oxford, Blackwell, 1981, p. 56.

22. Saussure is quite indefatigable in his attempts to refute such a conception. Let me quote just one of many notes on this point: 'There are not: a) ideas ..... b.) signs for these ideas; there is nothing at all distinct in thought prior to the linguistic sign' (S.M. p. 133, n. 1).

23. Any comparison between the Saussurean distinction between signifier and signified and some such distinction in the Stoics or in Saint Augustine is quite erroneous. Why, otherwise, would we have had to wait so long for structural linguistics to be established?


27. T. De Mauro, loc. cit., p. 126.


29. T. De Mauro, loc. cit., p. 130.

31. Which, to stick to the same metaphor, makes the opening deal particularly important.

32. Words that De Mauro quite frequently uses.


34. A definition which is lent Hegel's authority, in that he shows us, from the first chapter of the Phenomenology, the one on sense-certainty, how, taken seriously, solipsism abandons discourse.
Chapter III

A note on technique: rhetoric and the joke

Having dismissed the appeal to 'natural speech', Richards has been equally forthright in denouncing a rhetoric in which, absurd and absurd though it may seem, it is never doubted that words each possess meaning along with the mental attitudes and sensations which accord with an observation of speech. As he has elaborated this claim, Richards has noted that the whole world of significations is constructed out of 'insignificant' elements, and that the signification is words, which would cease to be amenable to significations if they each did not in fact have an intrinsic meaning.

But Richards does not stop at this negative observation; he extends it to the positive observation that meaning is not 'given in advance', and that we may (and we are willing to), as would Saussureans, that is, in contrast to Peircean, that meaning places itself under the words.

In his view of words we must search for what he has called 'constancies' under which the 'meaning' has been placed.

With this observation as to the reproductive nature of the determination of meaning, Richards goes on to make a dialectical criticism of the basis of 'reason'. This criticism is formulated in terms of 'true' fundamentals, which he sees as a basis that is only achieved against making an 'under'. This idea leads Richards to conclude, for the notion of meaning as 'true', of 'fundamental', is only ever accomplished by 'constant', present in the discourse of science, in that of 'true' is not 'true' for instance, the notion of a 'movement of meaning'. Unfortunately, this latter notion is vitiated by 'inconsistent' reasoning in which it is contained.

Indeed, in the case of 'the simplest sense', this 'movement of meaning' becomes for Richards virtually synonymous with the diversity of parts of which the sentence is composed. 'In the cat is on the mat, we begin with cat and end with mat'. Now, it seems fair to note that,
in the case of this example, when one comes to the end of the sentence, *mat* turns *cat* into a being cut, so to speak, from the same cloth. It is a cat which, on the mat, is in its element, in short, a cat quite unique of its kind, without therefore being ineffable, since it is an effect of assonance. You only have to read Victorian limericks, not to mention T.S. Eliot's cat poems, to appreciate just how a signifier that is apparently so simple, since it is part of what one can call the domestic zoology of most human societies, is nevertheless still a signifier (or unsignifier), i.e., open to all meanings.

At the other end of the scale, in the loftiest poetry, the 'movement of meaning' would tend rather to indicate a fleeting and elusive meaning. Here is how Richards expresses this:

At the other end of the scale the whole meaning of the sentence shifts, and with it any meanings we may try to ascribe to the individual words. In the extreme case it will go on moving as long as we bring fresh wits to study it. When Octavius Caesar is gazing down at Cleopatra dead, he says:

She looks like sleep
As she would catch another. | Antony
In her strong toils of grace.

'Her strong toils of grace'. Where, in terms of what entries in what possible dictionary, do the meanings here of *toil* and *grace* come to rest?

Granted. But, if there is a meaning that it would be vain to look for in dictionaries, is this to say that it is irrecoverable? Richards's commentary may seem a little summary, if not off-hand, but I would not therefore deny that poetry has an inexhaustible meaning. The odds are that, just like dreams, poetry has a navel that opens out on to the unknown, on to 'the kernel of being'. From this kernel, however, there is no reason why a "sens over" cannot, on occasion, come to be heard. Suppose we reconsider the quotation:
She looks like sleep. Yet it is a deceptive appearance, for she is sleep itself. Dead? Certainly, and yet drawn into a concentration such as no living person could ever realise, since life always entails some dispersion. With what aim?

As she would catch. To catch is not to seize, nor to take, nor to halt, nor to clasp, nor to hold, nor to keep, nor to trap, or rather it is all these things, and also to surprise, to snatch, to deceive, to hit upon, to snare. It is, in short, everything that evokes the métis of the hunter⁵, in which it is not hard to identify the very image of desire, more especially as Shakespeare did not hesitate to put these words into the mouth of the living Cleopatra:

Give me mine angle; well to the river: there,
My music playing far off, I will betray
Tawny-finn'd fishes; my bended hook shall pierce
Their slimy jaws; and, as I draw them up,
I'll think them every one an Antony,
And say 'Ah, ha! you're caught.' ⁶

One would think that her death did nothing more than fixe in its definitive form this hunt, whose aim is always the same Antony, at once single and multiple.

Another Antony. Never was there another so marked by sameness, and this same is yet another. For we are not told that the wish is to trap Antony again. It is more that he is forgotten, by the same grace with which she forgets herself ...... so that all that remains of her should be this supreme effort driven towards him, the same and other Authority. A grace which is not, therefore, that of her feminine forms (for which Shakespeare's Octavius had an almost Christian, an almost saintly abhorrence), but a new grace - that of desire beyond duration. So "all-powerful" is this grace that Octavius, who has always opposed Cleopatra's every demand, could not do otherwise than satisfy it⁷.
Still intent upon developing the notion that he has advanced of the
'movement of meaning', Richards emphasises that the
word functions as a cross-roads for multiple significations – a fact
whose relation to Freudian over-determination he does not fail to
note – and that this multiplicity depends upon its relations of
similarity or contrast with the other terms in the language. The
proof being that
the force of a word, or the feeling we have that no other word
could have replaced it, does necessarily implicate the structure of
language in its entirety.

Richards again appeals to Antony and Cleopatra. The moment Cleopatra
takes hold of the asp, she addresses it as follows:

_Come, thou mortal wretch,
With they sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate,
Of life at once untie: poor venomous fool,
Be angry, and dispatch!_9

Richards does not fail, of course, to note the multiple significations
attaching to 'mortal' as also to 'knot' (the homophone 'not', in
particular). But his main purpose in quoting these lines is to
protest against the sort of simplification that would cause one to
interpret intrinsicate as meaning just intricate. In fact, this term
carries a whole gamut of significations: 'familiar', 'intimate',
'secret', 'private', 'innermost', 'essential', that which
constitutes the very nature and being of a thing – not counting all
the philosophical and medical meanings that were current in Shakespeare's
time. 'What the word does', Richards concludes, 'is exhausted by no
one of these meanings and its force comes from all of them and more!10.

Does this not imply that the force, 'the movement of meaning', comes
down in the last analysis to what the entire system of langue contains?
After the lines quoted above, Richards advances a comparison that
implies that this is indeed his thesis: 'As the movement of my hand uses nearly the whole skeletal system of the muscles and is supported by them, so a phrase may take its powers from an immense system of supporting uses of other words in other contexts.'

But is this not to rid ourselves of meaning, and thereby of the subject, in order to hand it back to language 'in its entirety', after having looked in vain in the dictionaries? Now, it is indeed thanks to the multiple significations which Richards lists, and which constitute the attested contexts of the main signifiers in Shakespeare's lines, that a meaning emerges from these same lines, and one that could not be clearer: the fatal asp is the very image of what it is called to unknot; in appealing to it, Cleopatra appeals to herself.

I. d.

In short, if one excepts definitions, which are a special case, it is clearly true that the idea of a meaning which is fixed or which 'remains unchanged' is, as Richards maintains, a fiction with respect to what actually occurs in speech. But it is nevertheless the case that the 'movement of meaning' is not, as Richards also implies, a pure movement in which no meaning is determined, any more than it is the flick of the finger which sets all meanings going. This movement consists rather in a retroactive fastening (bouclage), such that the meaning of a sentence, and of its elements, is only settled at the end: a mode of determination of the before by the after which is peculiar to meaning, and which Lacan compares to the point de capiton.

If I have lingered over the above questions, it is not only because the joke has in common with poetry the characteristic of being a form of speech very far removed from intentional discourse, in which no unexpected signification will ordinarily arise; but above all because, in that it has the function of determining signification, the signifier has, in either case, the closest links with the unconscious. This, at any rate, is the implication
of the passage that Richards appends to the one I have already quoted, regarding the particular effect of the word 'meaning':

Indeed, it seems that the subject is a dangerous one. Intense preoccupation with the sources of our meanings is disturbing, increasing our sense that our beliefs are a veil and an artificial veil between ourselves and something that otherwise than through a veil we cannot know.

A text in which the subject is located, as ignorance, on one side of the veil, the veil of its beliefs. It is therefore from the side of the unknown (Unbewusste) that there arises, in the guise of a find, the signifier which yields the unexpected meaning.

I want now to consider the mechanisms by which meaning is produced in the particular case of the joke.

2. Two questions arise regarding the joke. One concerns the technique whereby a Witz is as it is, i.e., a spiritual and nicely turned saying, rather than a banal one. The other concerns the reasons as to why it provokes laughter. These two questions are connected, but independent, for where there is a joke there is technique, but they are also separate, for where there is technique there is certainly wit, but not necessarily a joke. This latter is defined by the laughter it provokes, and it is this characteristic which informs the following definition: a joke is technique insofar as it u-covers the comical.

One can therefore justify a separate study of technique because it constitutes the necessary, although not the sufficient, condition for a joke. Indeed, Freud devotes the first part of his work to just such a study.
2. a. The method he adopts is that of 'reduction'. A method which would seem, at first glance, to be incontrovertible, for how is one to elicit the properties and vagaries of wit if not by comparing what is spiritual with what is not? This method does, however, have its disadvantages. In fact, as the non-spiritual version is often, if not always, longer than the spiritual one, the term 'condensation', which ought in principle to designate a kind of technique, undergoes an unwarranted extension and soon becomes synonymous with what Freud calls 'a tendency to economy', a tendency that is characteristic of wit in general. Everything, as a consequence, becomes condensation, and sometimes through what he calls Verkürzung, i.e., ellipsis. A term whose use here brings Saussure's reservations to mind: 'Ellipsis: this word seems to presuppose that one knows a priori how many terms ought to make up a sentence. If one thinks in general terms, one comes to see that nothing whatsoever is ellipsis, signs always being adequate to what they express. Conversely, no word has a meaning without ellipsis; but why then speak (as Fréal does) of ellipsis, as if there were some norm below which these words are elliptical (.....) Ellipsis is nothing other than the surplus of value' (S.M., p. 50).

This method is also inconvenient because it leads us to imagine 'the work of wit' as a work of transformation that results in than one and the same thing (in this case, thought) changes expression. So it is that the Aristotelian analysis of
change or of becoming, which is basically an analysis of the implications of the assertion that something changes, leads one to posit a 'basic matter' from which all determinations and all direct intelligibility are withdrawn, which is tantamount to giving signification a priority over the signifier.

Now the first example analysed by Freud, which he places under the heading of 'substitution with composite words,' causes us rather to conceive of the work of wit as being a work of production and not as one of transformation.

This was the joke that Heine attributed to Hirsch-Hyacinth, a lapsus that caused him to say 'famillionaire' when he had meant to say 'familiar.' We are clearly dealing here with an incongruous word that did not exist before, but whose production, by way of a compression which Freud illustrates typographically, had been made possible through an assonance between the two words already belonging to the language, 'familiar' and 'millionaire.' A meaning did however succeed in 'slipping', as Lacan puts it, beneath this unexpected word, thanks to its arising where another ('familiar') was expected. As far as this meaning is concerned, one could not reduce it to a thought of Hirsch-Hyacinth's, that 'famillionaire' simply translated. What was actually at stake was something that Hirsch-Hyacinth on no account wished to think about, which, however, we all know, and which he himself was not unaware of: there is a family of millionaires in which there is no place for a half-starved seller of lottery tickets, nor for an unknown poet, even if he is a nephew. One can even say, following Lacan, that, with the substitution of 'famillionaire' for 'familiar,' a new figure (and one born this century) makes his appearance: that of the fat-milllionaire.

The same conclusion may be drawn from another example that Freud analyses, that of the sovereign called Leopold, whom all Europe dubbed Cleopold, on account of his infatuation with Cleo. If this example makes us laugh, it is definitely not because of the 'historical' references, which are no longer current, but because it touches a sensitive spot. Who, after all, would claim that infatuation is the prerogative of crowned heads?
With the substitution of the composite figure 'Cleopold' for 'Leopold', a timeless figure, if not an Aristophanesque one, that of the lovesick person, appears in all its truth, which, it has to be said, is comic. In calling Leopold Cleopold, the meaning of his infatuation suddenly emerges, by means of a technique that may readily be superimposed upon Lacan's formula for metaphor:

\[
\frac{S}{S'} \rightarrow \frac{s}{s}\left(\frac{I}{A}\right)
\]

in which \( S = \) Cleopold, \( S' = \) Leopold, \( x = \) the meaning his infatuation. A meaning emerges, or at any rate makes itself felt, through the substitution of a signifier that is registered the subject, in as far as it is a 'find', as 'the signifier of the Other'.

2. b. These two jokes turn on a technique that Freud calls 'condensation (in the sense of compression) with substitution'. He maintains that the composite word is not always, as here, alien to the 'code'. Consider the joke that a young man makes when faced with a friend's astonishment at his wearing a wedding-ring on his finger: 'What? Are you married?' To which he replies: 'Trauring aber wahr'. Without being, 'like "famillionaire", an unintelligible and otherwise non-existent structure', Trauring (alliance) does however, in Freud's opinion, embody two components, '"hering" (wedding-ring) changed into "Trauring" and the sentence Trauring, aber wahr (sad, but true)'.

In fact there is neither condensation nor substitution in this spiritual repartee. Its technique does not consist in the substitution of Trauring for Traurig, but in the combination of the former with 'aber wahr', in such a manner that the latter is necessarily implied – and all the more so given that the two only differ by a single letter. This example, like any other, bears out the fact that the technique is 'all' in the sense, in that to signify is not the same as to state. For to say that marriage is sad or that it is not is simply, in either case, to profess an opinion:
whereas having recourse to allusion is the mark of a gay spirit, and one that is content to avoid misrepresentation without making claims to knowledge. It is therefore clear that a joke's technique does not consist in transforming a non-spiritual version of a thought into a spiritual one, as the reduction method has it, but in an exploitation of language's hidden resources, not forgetting its most worn clichés.


We find what is fundamentally the same technique in a fourth joke analysed by Freud:

Herr N.'s attention was drawn one day to the figure of a writer who had become well-known from a series of undeniably boring essays which he had contributed to a Vienna daily paper. All of these essays dealt with small episodes in the relations of the first Napoleon with Austria. The author had red hair. As soon as Herr N. heard his name mentioned he asked: Is not that the roter Faden that runs through the history of the Napoleonic?

In order to explain the techniques of this biting commentary, which is nonetheless a joke of the very highest quality, Freud employs the 'reduction' method, reckoning that it proceeds from two components: a depreciatory judgement upon the writer, on the one hand, and on the other, a recollection of the famous simile with which Goethe introduces the extracts from 'Ottilie's diary' in his Elective Affinities. But to identify the verbal bridge that facilitates the fusion of these two elements, neither of which would have provoked any laughter on their own, Freud also has to presume a transformation of Faden (thread), as in Goethe's metaphor, into fad (boring).

The fact is, however, that Faden (a word that one would probably render as "bloody nuisance") is by far more resonant than fad. Herr N.'s trick consisted rather in having succeeded, thanks to this Faden, in blurring out the insult while placing it in a context which gave the impression that it had issued from Goethe's own mouth. The presence of this feint had, moreover, been emphasised from the start: 'Is not that the red Faden ..., when everyone knows that it can only be him. In other words, the technique consists in Herr N. once again exploiting the homophonic connection between Faden and Faden in order to give free rein to his thought while appearing to be doing nothing more than repeat Goethe's metaphor, or at least its
popular version. A new exploitation of the resources of the language is again involved but, this time, in so much as that it carries the mark of its greatest poet.
In *Traurig aber wahr*, the distance lies rather between what is said and what is signified, and not between what one says and what one pretends to say. But, in either case, the technique may easily be symbolised by Lacan's formula for metonymy:

\[ f \ (S \ldots \hat{S}) \neq S \ (\ldots) S \]

which I would interpret as follows: it is the connection between a signifier $S$ and another signifier $\hat{S}$ which enables a distance between $S$ and its accepted meaning to be preserved; conversely, without this distance, reference from $S$ to $\hat{S}$ would not be possible. One should note that the connection between $S$ and $\hat{S}$ is not always based upon homophony or alliteration. It often depends upon there being a signification (for instance, that of a sail) which always refers to another signification (for instance, that of a boat). It is the lack of a clear conception of the determination of the signified—by the signifier (a conception which requires that one consider the signifier generating the new meaning as the signifier of the Other in the subject and which therefore, implies the division of this latter) which prevents the rhetoricians from deriving any benefit from Lacan's formulae, even though the latter do in fact provide rhetoric with its mathemes.

2. c.

These four examples might lead us to link substitution to condensation (in the sense of formation of composite words), and all the more so that where such a condensation has failed, (2. c.), we have not found substitution either, but a technique relying upon the connection between signifiers.

But such a correlation would be inexact. For Freud cites a host of examples whose technique he describes as 'condensation accompanied by slight modification' (p. 25) (without, therefore, creation of composite words), the most striking one again being a joke by Herr N. concerning a gentleman whose sole qualification for the post of Minister of Agriculture was his own experience and status as a farmer. When he gave up his office in order to devote his time to his lands,
Herr N. declared: 'Like Cincinnatus, he has gone back to his place before the plough'. Now, the point of this joke clearly does not lie in the fact that we hear 'behind' this 'before' 'hear'. What we are given to hear rather, is that this character's true place is there. It is therefore the substitution of 'before' for 'behind' that makes the gentleman Minister's incompetence equivalent to the ox's incompetence in steering a plough.

Conversely, there is nothing to prevent a technique which depends upon a connection between signifiers adapting itself to the formation of a composite word. This is the case with one of Karl Kraus's jokes, which 'presents itself in the guise of a misprint', as Freud says (p. 27). Kraus wrote of a so-called journalist, a habitual blackmailer, that: he had travelled to one of the Balkan States by Orient-(er)presszug. Erpresszug clearly arises from the compression of Expresszug (express train) and Erpressung (blackmail). But it is no less obvious that this joke's edge derives from the combination with Orient, along the lines of Orient-expresszug (Orient-express), and that the word which was extraneous to the code, the misprint, was constructed in order to allow another word to be heard.

2.d.

What would be truly astonishing, however, would be to find a joke whose meaningful effect derived from something other than its relations 'with what surrounds it', whether on the axis of substitution (if we hold to Jakobson's terminology), or on that of condensation, for there are no others.

It is now clear how much we can simplify Freud's synoptic table of joke techniques (p. 42), which are so 'confusingly' diverse, and which I reproduce below:

I. Condensation:
   (a) with formation of composite word,
   (b) with modification.

II. Multiple use of the same material:
   (c) as a whole and in parts,
   (d) in a different order,
   (e) with slight modification,
(f) of the same words full and empty.

III. Double meaning:
   (g) meaning as a name and a thing,
   (h) metaphorical and literal meanings,
   (i) double meaning proper (play upon words),
   (j) double entendre,
   (h) double meaning with an allusion.

In fact, analysis of the many examples Freud considers would be bound
to show that a good number of those that he lists under the rubric of
condensation, with its two subdivisions (a. with formation of composite
words, b. with modification), derive from substitution and
thereby shed some light upon the meaning of a desire, be it positive
(like that of the millionaire for H.H., or of Cleo for King Leopold)
or negative (like that of M.N. with regard to the gentleman minister):
whilst the great majority of the jokes that he lists under the two
rubrics of 'multiple use of the same material' (four subdivisions) and
of 'double meaning' (five subdivisions) exploit variability of meaning
according to context, so as to let one hear what is otherwise
left unsaid.

3. Freud's discovery does nevertheless lead him to locate or to
discover a new technique, that of displacement, and to distinguish it
from the 'verbal' technique whose forms he has studied thitherto, and
in a manner that is reminiscent of the classical distinction between:
'verbal figures' and 'figures of thought'. Let us retrace his path here.

3. a. Freud pauses to consider a fresh example, and one that, once
again, he borrows from Heine. The poet Soulié observed how
deferentially one of the financial kings of Paris was treated, as
if such 'kings of gold' were 'golden calves', whom people compare with
Midas - and not merely on account of their wealth. To which Heine
replied, 'as though by way of correction': 'Oh, he must be older than
that by now!' At first glance, this is simply a case of double meaning.
Were it not for the fact, Freud observes, that the word with a double
meaning steps in, as it happens, not in Heine's spiritual answer, but in Soulié's somewhat mediocre observation.

In order to discover this answer's technique, Freud again invokes the reduction method, paraphrasing Heine's answer as follows: 'Oh, he's not a calf any longer; he's a full-grown ox'. But the strange thing is that, even in this reduced form (and 'no other reduction of Heine's not is possible') the joke is still a spiritual one. It is clear which problem Freud now has to face. Hitherto, he has maintained that technique was 'the whole of wit'. But here we have to do with a joke whose technique has been suppressed but which has not therefore lost its spiritual quality.

So Freud temporarily sets it to one side, and applies himself to the story of the two Jews who meet in the neighbourhood of the bath-house: 'Have you taken a bath?' - 'What? Is there one missing?' But this joke merely exacerbates the difficulty, since, on this occasion, 'this answer cannot be robbed of being a joke by any extension or modification, so long as its sense is not interfered with'.

Freud therefore cites a third example: the Jewish story of 'salmon mayonnaise', a story I will consider below. According to Freud, this story sheds light on the technique involved in all three cases: it lies 'in the diversion of the train of thought, the displacement of the psychical emphasis on to a topic other than the opening one' (p. 51). The same example (salmon mayonnaise) then shows 'that a displacement joke is to a high degree independent of verbal expression. It depends not on words but on the train of thought' (p. 52).

3. b. Suppose we reconsider the crucial example, that of Heine's answer to Soulié. Is Freud's analysis correct? It would not seem so. For supposing Heine had answered: 'Look at him! you'll see that he is an ox!', or, more clearly still, 'Had you looked at him, you would have seem that he is already an adult ox and you would have spared me these clichés!', he would no longer be making a joke but would be rebuffing Soulié for being a 'poet' seduced by phrases, if not by gold. A joke such as the one that greeted one of the first
acts of Napoleon III's reign, his confiscation of the goods of the Orleans family - 'C'est le premier vol de l'aigle' - is a 'frank' one, in the sense that it is indeed Napoleon III who comes off worst. Heine's answer involves an additional subtlety, however, a kind of mystification, which lies in making us believe that it is the Parisian Midas who comes off worse, when it is really Soulié. But the technique involved is fundamentally analogous to that employed in the joke of the courtier whose wit Louis XV wished to put to the test, by serving him himself, at the first available opportunity, as a 'subject'. 'The king is not a subject', the courtier answered. A subject of what? Of a jest, of course. What the courtier had therefore not said he had nevertheless succeeded in signifying. What is particular to Heine's joke is simply that it shows that, just as we do not need to have signification first, in order to give it a spiritual form afterwards, so too do we have no need to articulate this signification in order to laugh, in fact quite the opposite. Which is moreover, the reason why we may follow Lacan in speaking of an 'effect of meaning' which is not, or at least not yet, a fully developed signification.
The fact that the example of 'taking a bath' resists all reduction, far from being a problem here, confirms the assessment that the 'work' of wit is not one of transformation but of discovery.

Let us now proceed to the third example given by Freud in the course of his discussion of 'displacement', the story of 'salmon mayonnaise':

An impoverished individual borrowed 25 florins from a prosperous acquaintance, with many asseverations of his necessitous circumstances. The very same day his benefactor met him again in a restaurant with a plate of salmon mayonnaise in front of him. The benefactor reproached him: 'What? You borrow money from me and then order yourself salmon mayonnaise? Is that what you've used my money for?' 'I don't understand you', replied the object of the attack: 'if I haven't any money I can't eat salmon mayonnaise, and if I have some money I mustn't eat salmon mayonnaise, Well then, when am I to eat salmon mayonnaise?'

It is clearly the illogical character of the poor person's answer that strikes us here, and it is probably because logic was at stake that Freud saw it as being a 'pure example', pure of all verbal technique. But you only have to glance at Aristotle's De Sophistis Elenchis to appreciate how much an argument's sophism depends on words. It is clear, as it happens, that the poor person's answer may be compared with the sort of sophistical refutation that, relying on the ambiguity of the when, uses it as an adverb of time whilst, in the benefactor's reproach, it is the equivalent of a conditional (when you are poor, you should not treat yourself to salmon mayonnaise). Moreover, as Freud's analysis proceeds, he does not fail to emphasise this word when. If this example therefore raises a problem, it does not so much reside in its technique as in the following question: how is it that
something that is only apparently logical hides not what is false, as tradition has it, but what is altogether true? Or, to put it another way, how is that a truth, the very one that concerns the poor person in the joke, and one that is so laughable and derisory, comes to light by way of a sophism?

The answer lies in the distinction between what is said and what in this saying, in which the sophism is articulated, is signified. This distinction in turn implies that truth, such as we encounter it in unconscious formations, is not to be measured in terms of things, but itself constitutes the thing which, without being in discourse, is, however, signified in it; in other words, it implies the distinction between the process of the statement and that of the enunciation. That is given to be heard in the story of the salmon mayonnaise is, that which, in the request for twenty-five florins formulated by the 'skint gourmet', has been left unsaid through the very fact of the submission of his request to the signifiers of the Other (represented here by the rich friend); and what is it that was left unsaid? the desire.

A large number of the examples that Freud goes on to cite do in fact turn on the same metonymic technique, which consists in utilising a term in such a way that it diverges (displacement) from the original speaker's usage of it, but which, by that very means, allows a signification in which one is 'glad to throw away one's mask' to be heard. I say 'a large number', but it is true that we also encounter examples in which we discern no verbal technique. But does this justify speaking of a technique of thought, independent of words?
4.a. Suppose we consider the following example:

A Schnorrer (Jewish beggar) approached a wealthy baron with a request for the grant of some assistance for his journey to Ostend. The doctors, he said, had recommended him sea-bathing to restore his health. 'Very well', said the rich man, 'I'll give you something towards it. But must you go precisely to Ostend, which is the most expensive of all sea-bathing resorts?' - 'Herr Baron', was the reproachful reply, 'I consider nothing too expensive for my health'.

Here we have a story that is surely bereft of surprise...... save at the end, when we burst out laughing. But is this not to say that a quasi-dramatic construction is involved here, and one whose terms do not diverge from their habitual usage, but which are nevertheless destined, as an ensemble, to function as a metonymy in which we may hear why it is that we are laughing, namely, the kind of error over identity to which we are all liable, quite unknowingly, to succumb? It is actually impossible to be both the one who demands and the one to whom the demand is addressed, but this real impossibility is resolved in the imaginary by way of identification, whose metonymic evocation accounts for the comic effect of this example.

4.b. Because he concentrates on the content of the examples which he reproduces, Freud multiplies the subdivisions of the forms of displacement (as he had already done for jokes with a verbal technique): faulty reasoning, indirect representation, comparison, outbidding etc. But however much such subdivisions, which are reminiscent of the 'classificatory mania' of classical rhetoric, are multiplied, they will never be exhaustive, for wit ever produces new ones. On the other hand, recourse to structural notions that were unavailable to Freud allows us to trace back the determination of this 'new', of the effect of meaning, to one or other of two mechanisms - metonymy or metaphor.
We should note, however (and all we have to do here is to consult our stock of favourite jokes), that metonymy is by far the most common mechanism involved in the production of comic effects. It was an error over identity or concerning identification that enabled us to pinpoint the comic element in the error over identity or concerning identity. Now, to say identity is to say object.

4.c. I will explain this remark by quoting one of Freud's examples in its entirety, along with his analysis of it:

Itzig had been declared fit for service in the artillery. He was clearly an intelligent lad, but intractable and without any interest in the service. One of his superior officers, who was friendly disposed to him, took him on one side and said to him: 'Itzig, you're no use to us. I'll give you a piece of advice: buy yourself a cannon and make yourself independent!'

This advice, which may raise a hearty laugh, is obvious nonsense. Cannons are not to be bought and an individual cannot make himself independent as a military unit — set himself up in business, as it were. But it is impossible to doubt for a moment that the advice is not mere nonsense but a joking nonsense — an excellent joke. How then is the nonsense turned into a joke?

Not much reflection is needed. We can infer from the authorities' comments indicated above in the introduction (p. 12) that there is sense behind joking nonsense such as this, and that it is this sense that makes the nonsense into a joke. The sense in our example is easy to find. The officer who gives Artilleryman Itzig this nonsensical advice is only making himself out to be stupid to show Itzig how stupidly he himself is behaving. He enters into Itzig's stupidity and makes it clear to him by taking it as the basis of a suggestion which would fit in with Itzig's wishes: if Itzig possessed a cannon of his own and carried out military duties on his own account, how useful his intelligence and ambition would be to him! In what good order he would keep his cannon and how
familiar he would make himself with its mechanism
so as to meet the competition of the other
possessors of cannons. 27

Here Freud is not merely answering the question that he had asked
himself concerning the manner in which nonsense makes sense, he is also
indicating an important mainspring of the comic. The comic sentiment
answers to the appearance of an object whose possession alone
constitutes, in the subject’s eyes, the sole good to which it aspires,
regardless of the use to which it is put; Itzig likes arms, but does
not like to use them. His place, he has been told, is not in the army,
but among the owners of cannons; which is as much as to say that his
identification, his heart, is with the latter, and not with the
'scientific'. An object which one merely desires to possess is an
object whose function is to be a guarantee of ideality, a sign through
which the ego is given some assurance 28.
But this object which arouses so much passim this token object, token of being, does not only assume the form of a common object, be it cannon or pebble. It may also be an organ, such as the eye which 'peeps' (Rück) from Cracow to Lemberg. So much so that one can say that the subject lies entirely in this slang 'peeping', in that it indicates how intimate its link with the object in question is. This comic object may even take the pure form of demand or command, which is in fact the case with the example that Freud cites just after the story of Itzig:

'Never to be born would be the best thing for mortal men.' 'But', adds the philosophical comment in Fliegende Blätter, 'this happens to scarcely one person in a hundred thousand'.

All these objects whose appearance provokes a sense of the comic are not objects for desire. It is rather desire which is their hostage, desire for the object.

It is not by chance that so many writers have emphasised the affinity between laughter and anxiety. For the object which provokes a sense of the comic also provokes, to the extent that the subject is close to grasping its identification with it, a sense of depersonalisation. Since it is equally true that the subject is and is not this object, the latter presents itself as... the root of identity and strangeness at once.

The mechanisms which govern the formation of the joke are also at work in the dream. But the dream work differs from the joke work in two respects: 1. there is an intensive recourse to symbols, which calls to mind the use to which they are put in the formation of conversion symptoms; 2. the obligation the dream has, as writing, to stage ideas (and those of relations, in particular) which are ill-adapted to representation.

I will begin with the question of symbolism, the study of which will allow us the better to define the nature of metaphor.
Footnotes: Chapter III


3. Here is one such:

A man from Peru
Did not know what to do
He sat on a mat
And played with the cat
Then sent the result to the zoo.


6. Act II, Scene V.

7. See the end of the tragedy:

'She shall be buried by her Antony' .

8. Which is all the more praiseworthy in a work whose first edition dates from April 1936.


12. It is tempting to add that she likewise exhorts the dearest thing: that buries itself in her entrails - but one would then have to read the whole scene, the dialogues with the clown, and the subsequent ones, in particular.


16. I would still regard this example in the same light if it were taken to be a 'spiritual' joke of Heine's, rather than a lapsus put into the mouth of one of his characters. For this would not alter its basic nature, namely, that it is something of a find, and one in which a kind of misrecognition is laid bare. It goes without saying that Heine's relations with his uncle the millionaire Salmon Heine were permeated by such misconceptions.

17. Or again, as the signifier which arises on the other side of the veil, cf. p. 70 above.


20. The German Ochts, Strachey observes in a footnote, is equivalent to the English 'ass'.

21. The pun turns on 'voll', which means both flight and theft. It is therefore both the first flight and the first theft of the Imperial eagle.


23. 'The arguments are not so different', Aristotle writes, 'as some philosophers claim, when they say that some address themselves to the name (πρὸς τὸν ονόμα) and others to thought itself (πρὸς τὴν διάνοια)', quoted by Jean Cousin, in his edition of Book IX of Quintilian's Institution Oratoire, Paris, Ed. Les Belles Lettres, 1978, p. 132.

24. Brentano is close to this distinction when he considers the definition of truth as adequate. See Jan Srzniicki, Franz Brentano's Analysis of Truth, The Hague, Nijhoff, 1965. See also Safouan, 'L'analyse de la vérité chez Brentano et la question de l'enseignement em psychanalyse', in Lettres de l'Ecole Freudiennne, No. 27.

25. The Freudian conception of 'esprit', considered not as Geist but as Witz, is likely to put us on the track of a realm which, without being ideal, nonetheless has nothing to do with the order of needs in which individual activity is, according to Marx, rooted. It also puts us on the track of a reason which is likewise at odds with the discourse in which these needs are articulated and apparently confront each other.
28. "Friends, how I've pined
All this time, hearing you
through my little chink!
But I am unable
to sing, so what can I do?
I am being watched by these men, for what
I've been wanting to do for a long time
is to go with you to the voting-urns
and do some harm to someone!
Now, Zeus, thou mighty thunderer,
turn me forthwith into smoke
or into Proxinedes, or Mr. McBraggart,
that lying climber-vine.
Deign, Ochord, to be gracious to me
and pity my plight: either speedily
bake me with a boiling thunderbolt,
and then pick me up, blow off the ashes
and dip me in hot vineur-Črine;
or else turn me to stone, the stone on which
they count the jurors' votes".

Wasps, edited with translation and notes by Alan H. Sommerstein;
29. S.E. VII: p. 63-64.
30. A.N. Prior, The object of thought, edited by P.T. Geach
Chapter 4
Symbolism in Psychoanalysis

1. Jones 'found the key to the solution of the problem of symbolism by comparing it with metaphor, but his conception of the latter, in that it is firmly attached to the Aristotelian tradition, to be revised. This conception may be summarised in three theses.

The first is that 'the simile is the simplest figure of speech: it logically antedates even the metaphor, and certainly the adjective'.

The second is that 'a prominent motive for metaphor-making seems to be to heighten appreciation on the hearer's part by calling to his mind another image more easily apprehended or comprehended, usually one more familiar in respect of the attribute implied (though by no means necessarily in other respects); or, to present the obverse of the same idea, a metaphor serves to eke out the relative paucity of attributive description'.

The third concerns the decay of metaphor: once it is employed in a simile, the image tends to acquire an objective reality, i.e., a proper or literal meaning, in place of subjective reality or figurative meaning, which are lost in the previous stages. So it is that 'acuity of mind' no longer makes us think of a sharp knife. In decaying thus or, as Jones prefers to put it, in evolving, metaphor also undergoes an extension. To show just how far a word can move away from its primitive usage, Jones cites, as an example, the current usages of the word 'head'.

l. a.

We have every reason to suspect the first thesis, which has it that 'simile is the simplest figure of speech'. Just as the reduction of a joke blunts its edge, so too, one could not treat metaphor as simile without altering its meaning and destroying its effect.

If one were solemnly to say 'he strove against his ill fortune as he would have warded off blows', one would by no means be unveiling the logical structure of metaphor but, on the contrary, one would be making a false assertion that proved how ignorant one was of the subject under discussion. For no one knows from which quarter the blows of fortune will fall, and it is the very inequality, indeed inanity, of any struggle in which fortune is one's adversary that
is crystallized in the fact that the speaker substitutes 'bloos' for calamities or 'bad surprises', for instance—a substitution which in turn determines the choice of the verb 'ward off'. This inequality is such that one can...
say that 'ward off the blows of fortune' is nothing else but a 'figure of speech', a 'manner of speaking', but nonetheless an indispensable way of indicating, in some sense by antiphrasis, what it is that our relation to fortune truly involves: namely, that one is not, where the unstoppable is concerned, warding off anything at all. One may do what one can to disentangle oneself from the blows of fortune afterwards, but one cannot ward them off.

Likewise, to say that 'X is a lion' is not simply to say that he is 'courageous like a lion', it is also to signify that courage is his natural endowment which never betrays him, to the extent of allaying him to another species. The weight of the image which captivates the subject of the enunciation is not the same in simile as in metaphor, for the latter betrays a conviction and an idealisation that are stronger by far. Jones himself reckons that the evolution of thought proceeds from the more concrete to the more abstract. Now, if we consider their respective effects, the most concrete would tend to belong rather, as Lacan has observed, to metaphor than to simile or to image; it is therefore, contrary to what Jones was saying, the former that ought 'logically' to have precedence.

I. b. The second thesis, which has it that a prominent motive for metaphor-making is that it ekes out the paucity of attributive description, also calls for some comment.

The reader will recall that, for Jones, this paucity would explain why the simile or comparison would precede not only metaphor but 'certainly the adjective'. 'In some primitive languages', he writes, '— e.g., Tasmanian — there are no adjectives, similes being used in their stead .........'. Even if one were to treat this fact as uncontroversial, it would make more sense to see it as a proof that a language may do without the grammatical category of adjective, rather than seeing it as an index of some 'primitive mentality'. When Jones applies the same conception to dreams (in that they show a marked predilection for imaged impressions), he forgets that in this respect they are simply following the requirements that staging imposes. One would like, moreover, to know if the Tasmanians habitually say 'X is like a lion', as the thesis respecting
the priority of simile would require, or whether, on the contrary, they say 'X is a lion'. The important thing to note, however, is that the mainspring of metaphor resides elsewhere than in the paucity of attribution identified by Jones.

Where then is it? To answer this question, I will consider a metaphor in current use among a people who, in terms of their level of 'technological' development, may assuredly be reckoned amongst the most 'primitive'. I refer to the Fang, a people living in West Africa, who belong to a neo-Bantu culture and practice forest agriculture. Their most characteristic institution is the 'palabra' house; it is a place of incessant activity, be it artisanal production, ritual performances in the evening, daily discussions and debates concerning marriages, divorces, debts, brothers' rights, territorial claims, inheritances etc. Since it is an egalitarian society, decisions in these matters rest not with chiefs, but with men who have a reputation (ewôga), which means an authority that they assume because people listen to them (wôke, listen). They undoubtedly have this authority because they are intelligent, persuasive, and eloquent, but the Fang, although they possess these words, prefer to put it that they are not the sort who would 'break palabras' (a buk adzô), but, rather, cut them up (a kik adzô). What we actually have here is a metaphorical description of juridical techniques, and one which refers whoever hears it to the forest, and to the work that is done there. The difference between breaking and cutting up, which is clear enough to us, is endowed with even more meaning for the Fang. For each man, if he wishes to provide for his own needs, and for those of his dependants, must work the forest with skill, i.e., he must be an artisan who knows how, not to break, but to cut with care the raffias, limes, and the other fibres of the palm-trees, and of all the other trees of the forest. One can well understand why it is that they should borrow metaphors from this domain.
But why this recourse to metaphor, when 'proper' words are not wanting? Are we to suppose that the mainspring of metaphor consists in the 'imaged' character of the difference between breaking and cutting up? Certainly not. This would clearly be an unsatisfactory answer. For when a subject, no matter what cultural level he belongs to, says 'X is a wise man', or, 'X has good judgment', or even 'X is a good judge', what is he thereby doing if not giving a testimony regarding X? A testimony certainly has weight. But it has still more weight if one has any proof that the witness knows what he is talking about, if indeed, he knows what it is to be a good judge. Now, such knowledge, even if it cannot be articulated, can at any rate be signified by means of metaphor: to judge well is not to break but to cut up, i.e., to conform to the order of things. Metaphor's function is something more than, as Jones puts it, 'to eke out the relative paucity of attributive description'. Like substitution, metaphor intervenes because it is the obligatory road for any advance towards meaning.

Inasmuch as it presupposes a distinction between proper and figurative meaning, Jones' third thesis — the one concerning decay — is fundamentally only a consequence, couched in evolutionist terms, of the Aristotelian definition of metaphor. I have already dwelt at great length on Saussure's refutation of the idea of a prior meaning, 'given in advance', of a language whose terms would be fashioned according to the differences between things, and made to designate them, and so will not repeat it here. But one cannot help but wonder if there was once a time when the 'depths of the sea', before even designating a measure, did not denote the other dimension by which man measured his despair: if, again, there was ever a time in which 'head' was not used to say 'chief'. One only has to leaf through Dhorme's classic work, L'Emploi Métaphorique des Noms des Parties du Corps Propre en Hébreu et en Akkadien, in order to realise that no object, be it a product of nature or of industry, may be grasped by man except through the image of his own body. Yet this imaginary intervention would be inconceivable if human beings, far from themselves being the ones who one fine day had forged the words that were to name the parts of the body,
had not received their image, already fragmented, from language, or from its locus, the Other. The very fragmentation that Freud identified so early in hysterical symptoms is also that which causes the names of parts of the body to be lent to the objects which people the world. At the end of their journey, however, these names return to human beings. If the eye lends its name to the lake, the latter will not fail to render it the same metaphorical service. Wine is 'the blood of the wine'. But, much to my surprise, I have also encountered the inverse metaphor, which underlay an analysand's symptom and was its repressed and pathogenic content. Through this metaphor an almost eucharistic wish was seeking expression, namely, that his blood was the wine of the person with whom he was then preoccupied - a drink which she much favoured.

2. d.

Two conclusions follow from this discussion:

The first is that no reference to the object, no law of signification (such as the one that holds that metaphorical extension proceeds from the concrete to the abstract, or the one that has it that it proceeds from things belonging to the body to things belonging to the world) orders substitution between signifiers. One would be as little justified in tying metaphor to resemblance as in explaining totemism in terms of the resemblance between the peoples who gives themselves the name of a particular animal and the animal itself.

The second is that the order of the signifier conveys the imaginary symbiosis between man and the world. But this symbiosis, in which man lends his own forms to the world and receives them from it, is a screen rather than knowledge, if by this last term one understands some sort of purchase upon the real.

I ought to emphasize here, at the risk of a digression, that the prejudice that metaphor is subordinate to a law of the signified is responsible for a crucial error, namely, that of conceiving of phantasy as the expression of a tendency towards omnipotence and not as the index of a lack in being. A brief examination of Ella Sharpe's theory of metaphor should help to demonstrate this.
Ella Sharpe no more questions the Aristotelian definition of metaphor than Jones does. Indeed, she explicitly acknowledges it. Likewise, and for motives not dissimilar to those of Jones, and which consist in her desire to cut short any spiritualist 'divagations', she assigns metaphorical translation a meaning which moves from the physical to the spiritual, from real experience to abstract ideas.

Her translation of, for instance, an urethral metaphor, like 'flood with words', by 'urinate' does admittedly result in her interpretations encountering insurmountable resistances. These resistances do not in any way shake her conviction of having hit upon something: for, sooner or later, she ends up by eliciting a confession of a chancy. But she does not notice that she only succeeds in obtaining this confession by using expressions that belong to the same metaphorical domain.

Whence, then — to ask a question on her behalf — does the peculiar efficacy of metaphor derive? I would begin by noting that to translate 'flow of words' as 'flow of urine' is to suppose that 'flow' is only properly used in relation to urine (which is already, I would note in passing, a phantasy), and then only by extension in relation to words. It is therefore not at all surprising that her interpretation should provoke the resistances that she describes (and here we also touch upon the reasons why, according to Jones, the interpretation of symbols encounters resistance; he even regards it as one of their defining properties), since, by proceeding as she at first does, she takes the 'concrete' object to constitute the pole of desire. Is she therefore altogether wrong? No. The fact is that the insistence of liquid metaphors sometimes betrays a phantasy that one should describe not as 'urethral' but rather as 'Gulliverian', as analysts may verify for themselves by proceeding to do what Ella Sharpe does next. I use the term 'Gulliverian' in order to highlight the fact that the jet of urine's involvement in this phantasy is not so much in terms of what it really is, but rather
as a significant element in a montage in which the subject deceives itself as to its impotence regarding the Other (where omnipotence (where omnipotence is located) What is actually signified is the subject's lack of power, if not the derisory quality of this same power. It is this lack, therefore, which determines metaphorical substitution or, more precisely, what I have called the imaginary symbiosis between man and the world, and not a resemblance which is only self-evident insofar as, sharing the same error as the subject, one takes the moon to be made of green cheese. The very method employed by Ella Sharpe proves, contrary to what she assumes regarding the relation of wish to the object, the essential indeed, the urimordial affinity between phantasy and fiction. Which is why phantasy only comes to light through the landing of metaphor, since only this landing whether in the form of a reprise or as a confirmation of the metaphor uttered by the analysand, points to a lack.

3. The prejudice which subordinates the signifier to the signified, along with a kind of taste for the 'concrete' (which delights in locating this 'concrete' in the affective, as opposed to the intellectual), also prevents Jones from taking his distance from certain erroneous views expounded by Hans Sachs and Otto Rank, with respect to symbolism. In order to rectify these errors, I want now to summarise Jones' commentaries respecting the attributes which constitute, according to these authors, the distinctive features of symbolism:

1. The psychoanalytic symbol represents an unconscious material. 'By this', Jones writes, 'it is meant not so much that the concepts symbolised are not known to the individual, for most often they are, as that the affect investing the concept is in a state of regression, and so is the unconscious'. Now, if it is true that the subject usually knows the concept symbolised (in the same sense as the waiter in the famous example 'knew' Schopenhauer, i.e., he knew his name), what it does not know is not so much the affect as the substantive character of the concept symbolised (for instance, that of its own body) with respect to another one (that of a house), which thenceforth gives rise to every kind of affect, each of which is equally incomprehensible.
Jones' next sentence is therefore a more felicitous one. 'Further', he continues, 'the process of symbolisation is carried out unconsciously, and the individual is quite unaware of the meaning of the symbol he has employed: indeed, is often unaware of the fact that he has employed one at all, since he takes the symbol for reality'. Which is as much as to say that the 'process of symbolisation' is equivalent to the symbol breaking into the real, and that knowledge or perception of this real, just as contains nothing that would distinguish it from an hallucination, likewise contains nothing which allows us to discover it as symbol, i.e., to discover that it is involved in a wish (which, in the example of the house, might be the wish to 're-build oneself'). In this respect, Jones is clearly right to say that this is perhaps 'the characteristic that most sharply distinguishes true symbolism from the other processes to which the name is often applied'.

2. The symbol possesses a constant meaning. - Jones is fairly hesitant about this attribute: which goes to show that Rank and Sachs' conception was too little differentiated from those that rely on the so-called 'cipher' method (which may also be termed 'hermeneutic'), for which Arthemodorus of Ephesus' work provides the most famous model.

However, Jones' proposed modification, to the effect that 'a given symbol may have two or occasionally even more meanings: for instance, in dreams a room may symbolise either a woman or a womb', is by no means definitive. For a given symbol, in a given context, has only one meaning - which does not prevent it from having as many different meanings as there are different contexts. Furthermore, it is the context which allows one to judge whether a particular term is a symbol or not.

Suppose we take the symbol of the bull (taureau in 're-ch'), which is ostensibly very familiar, and which we encounter as an image in dreams. We have no right to decide in advance that what we are dealing with is a mnemonic allusion, a rebus (tore + eau), or indeed, a symbol. We will be almost certain, however, that this image has the latter value when the associative context of the dream implies a wish which would be formulated as follows: 'smaller than a blade of grass, but a bull nonetheless!'. On this occasion the reader will observe that
the 'associative context' may be extended until it includes the whole analysis, as is the case with those 'inaugural dreams' whose interpretation only becomes possible at the end - as if the whole analysis had no other function than to supply the context that the interpretation required.

The example of the wish, cited above, brings out two further points: a) the psychoanalytic 'interpretation' of a symbol, like that of a metaphor, does not consist in supplying some equivalent for it, but an interpretation by means of symbols; b) when Jones emphasises the resistance that interpretation of the symbol encounters, he is not altogether in the wrong, for even when it is restored to the form intimated above, as a wish in which phallic identification is so energetically expressed, there is little chance of the analysant acknowledging it without a fair amount of embarrassment. We must again admit what there is in this embarrassment, as in this resistance, that is legitimate. In that it is a metaphor of the subject, the symbol is literally the 'umbilical' signifier which links the subject to 'the kernel of being' whilst at the same time separating it from it: since this kernel, in the last instance, consists of a lack of being.

Now, inasmuch as interpretation produces meaning, it entails on the part of the one who gives it, a claim to confront the subject with an image of its own being .... which it cannot help but refuse, which is as it should be since, at the level of the image, it is absence.
3. - The symbol is independent of individual conditioning factors. To this independence Jones opposes, in quite a subtle way, a non-dependence. What does he mean by this? That 'the individual has not an unlimited range of choice in the creation of a given symbol'. This may be interpreted in two different ways, both of which are equally valid: a) symbolisation does not refer to just any theme; b) the symbol precedes or anticipates any knowledge that the subject may have regarding its meaning. On the other hand, the subject 'can choose what symbol out of the many possible ones shall be used to represent a given idea; more than this, he can sometimes, for individual reasons, represent a given idea by a symbol that no one else has used as a symbol'. I have already cited the example of a dreamer who re-invented the symbol of the piece of string, where it represented, not the link connecting him to life, which was the value this term had in his own language, but woman's desire, or his being tied to this same desire. Fundamentally, symbols work as jokes do, in that one may repeat or invent them but, once found, they are common property. What the subject 'cannot do', Jones writes, 'is to give a regular symbol a different meaning from anyone else; he can merely choose his symbols or make new ones, and even in the latter case they have the same meaning as they would with other people who might use them.

This liberty the 'individual' enjoys to create symbols is rightly considered by Jones to be very important, for it gives the lie to those authors, Jung among them, who, because of the 'curious independence of symbolic meanings', claim that anthropological symbolism is inherited as such and see in this an explanation of its stereotyped nature. Jones holds 'to the
contrary view that symbolism has to be re-created afresh out of individual material, and that the stereotypy is due to the uniformity of the human mind in regard to the particular tendencies that furnish the source of symbolism — i.e., to the uniformity of the fundamental and perennial interests of mankind. This is an acceptable assertion, but the real question lies in knowing how we ought to conceive of these 'fundamental and perennial interests'. Can one deduce them from humanity's relation to reality, or do they express a specific 'subversion' of the subject, and one that results from its relation to the signifier?

4. The symbol is a knot of linguistic connections. — Jones' statements regarding these connections are all too reminiscent of the thesis that Theodore Thass — Thiennmann has recently advanced, in a very lengthy work of his. According to this author, the interpretation of symbols, an interpretation which relies primarily on the study of etymology, allows us to uncover an universal language, which, however primitive, schizophrenic even, nonetheless represents a certain relation to the real. It constitutes, in short, a form of knowledge. [In fact, the study of etymology sometimes serves to attest to the symbolic value of a word, not by revealing 'comparisons between two ideas which it would not occur to our conscious minds to bring together', as Jones puts it, but rather by demonstrating the homophonie link or links that tie the word symbol to another word, which, in a given epoch, had the same meaning as is involved in the repression. Jones' own example shows this quite clearly. What accounts for the English word Punchinello having the value of a phallic symbol? Is it the physical characteristics of the figure suggested by this word: a long, hooked nose, an elongated chin, a hunchback, a projecting stomach, and a pointed cap? Even Jones does not go this far: at the most he takes it to be an index confirming the interpretation. Nor does the symbolism of Punchinello depend on the four ideas which, according to Jones, its Latin and English
roots evoke: 1. a caressing name for male offspring, equivalent to "little man", 2. a projecting part of the body, 3. the notion of piercing or penetrating, and 4. that of shortness and stoutness. But once the Latin nullus, the Neapolitan Pollecanella (little Turkey cock) or the English 'punch' are involved we are concerned with signifiers that are already recognised phallic metaphors; and it is indeed this that lends weight to our conception of Punchinello as a symbol of the phallus, when the context in other respects demands it.

5. Phylogenetic parallels. - By this, Jones understands 'the remarkable ubiquity of the same symbols, which are to be found, not only in different fields of thought, dreams, wit, insanity, poetry, etc., among a given class and a given level of civilization, but among different races and at different epochs of the world's history.' To account for this ubiquity (of the phallic symbolism of the snake, for example), he repeats his assertion that symbolism is an 'association completely foreign to consciousness'. Once this 'strangeness' has been admitted, Jones will, in attempting to account for it, be led to invoke a primitive mentality and to compare the unconscious to it. This is contrary to what psychoanalytic experience teaches us, for it tends rather to corroborate Freud's assertion, that there is no radical distinction, in terms of their 'intellectuality', between unconscious and conscious thoughts.

3a. However, it is to Jones that we owe the shift which allows us to grasp the real significance of this primitivity. Having admitted that the number of symbols may be counted by thousands, he observes, not without some astonishment, that the number of ideas symbolised is by contrast very limited: 'All symbols represent ideas of the self and the immediate blood relatives, or of the phenomena of birth, love, and death.' Now we are here dealing with ideas 'whose most concrete aspect consists in the network of the signifier in which the subject must already be captured in order to constitute itself in it: as representative of a sex, indeed as dead, for these ideas may only pass as primary if one abandons all parallelism with the development of needs.'
The Freudian unconscious, so long as one does not confuse it with a set of meanings given in advance, which would constitute a supposed knowledge (but would in fact be nothing more than a set of prejudices), rests upon an acknowledgement of the priority of the signifier over the signified. Hence the conclusion drawn by Lacan in the text quoted above, as in so many others, and which may be summarised in terms of what he calls a 'subversion of the subject': while, at the level of the image, there is no subject, one does, nevertheless, EX-SIST — and, as I would put it, as a (non-specular) representation of a thing — on another chain from that upon which it articulates its demand, or upon which it itself is articulated as demand. In tying desire to a 'necessarily lost' object, Freud is only asserting what anyone may observe for themselves, namely, that human sexuality, with its 'polymorphous' character, is rooted in this rupture whose mythological equivalent we find in the Symposium, where Aristophanes describes the body of man, and that of woman also, as a body that suffers from a lack which is incommensurable with need.

4. It is precisely because Jones mis-recognised close link of human sexuality with the lost object was unable to provide a satisfactory explanation for the prevalence of sexual symbols in the domain of psychoanalysis.
repression. Repression would then be a mechanism at the service of the reality principle. Now, in fact, nothing serves as a surer proof of the presence of repression than a random object (for instance, pen and white paper, in the inhibition of the act of writing) functioning as a sexual symbol.

Moreover, in as much as morality and society are, for Jones, the agents of repression, one cannot help but wonder where these agents were during the 'pan-sexualist' period of language. By which I mean to point out that, if one considers all repression as a secondary repression, whilst at the same time attributing it to the action of morality and society, one is there upon faced with the mystery of the genesis of 'culture'.

We have seem what Lacan's resolution of this problem is: the fact that a Wunschvorstellung: EX-SISTS on

another chain, can only be the effect of the capture of the subject within the signifying chain. Inasmuch as social activity produces objects whose multiplicity and variety have nothing to do with what the satisfaction of needs requires, it tends to colonise the field of the Thing or of the lost object. As for morality, in the sense of a social morality which is based upon a notion of the 'general interest', it is only too clear that it leaves 'the discontent of civilisation' intact. What is more, it rests upon a representation, for this discontent is in fact the subject.

5. Insofar as he allows that both symbol and metaphor are forms of knowledge, Jones does not succeed in taking as radical a distance from Jungianism as he might perhaps have wished. I shall now consider in more detail his account of the difference between symbol and metaphor.

For Jones, metaphor is based upon the perception of a resemblance; it arises out of a simile; and this simile remains transparent and explicit, in spite of the metaphorical transfer – a phenomenon that we express by pointing to what we call the elided signifier of the metaphor.
The symbol is also based upon the perception of a resemblance, but one that actually amounts to an identification: one of the terms of the simile is absorbed by the other, and to such an extent that the simile itself is obscured and the subject no longer realises that it is employing a symbol — and here we would talk in terms of a repressed signifier. But, in either case, a cognitive operation is implied, which we summarise by saying that S (the metaphor or the symbol) represents S (the elided or repressed signifier).

Now, we have already seen how erroneous it was, when discussing Aristotle's famous example, to state that 'the evening of life' represents old age or designates it: the substitution of 'the evening of life' for 'old age' hints at a meaning of 'old age' which may perhaps only be fully grasped by those for whom night is truly darkness. To confuse a metaphor's meaning with what is merely its latent signifier, or indeed with the presumed signified of this signifier, is to presuppose that the signifier is originally subordinate to the signified — as if significations were as old as the world itself, and as if no new signification could then be produced!

Now, the engendering of a new signification implies that, up until the moment at which this latter was engendered, a hole existed in the field of the signified. And it is indeed in this same hole (and not in the 'act of knowledge') that we may locate the subject — which we may thereby identify with the rupture between the signifier and the signified. S represents this subject, and, I would add, represents it for the other signifier S which interpellates it.

So long as one remains within the age-old tradition, which has it that the subject is synonymous with the 'subject of knowledge', and that every representation is a representation of 'something positive' or of a being, one will stand little chance of separating oneself from Jungianism. Jones' work is proof of this.

For, after all, Jung, like Jones, admits that if the sign represents something known, the same cannot be said for the symbol. Which does not prevent the soul, in his terms, from representing itself in the symbol: this
is how, for instance, it reads its own cure in the symbol of the Mandala. The real separation from Jungianism therefore turns, as to Lacan puts it, on the relation of the subject to the signifier. For, either one starts with a subject that represents itself, and therefore knows itself, even though one gives this knowledge the 'unconscious' as its last sacrament; or one starts with the signifier, inasmuch as it fragments the subject, whilst allowing an ever elusive unity to be delineated. Either one starts with unity and identity, or else one starts with what the signifier determines as loss of the both of them.

5. a. A loss which is however implied, as has been noted, in what Freud calls Wunschvorstellung, a term that is usually translated as 'representation of desire'. Still, one should point out that this representation does not represent an object, it is rather the lack of being which is inscribed within this same 'representation'.  

With reference to the text by Jacques Lacan quoted above (cf. p. 0-0-0), I would conclude by saying that we would never discern the domain of metaphor by considering the constituted, since it is the unconstituted that is constituted in metaphor, an unconstituted that first comes in through the symbol.  

Considered in this light, the progress of an analysis consists in the movement which leads the subject to recognise the hidden metaphors behind the symbols of its dreams and its symptoms. Which is the meaning here of the dictum: Wo Es war, Soll Ich werden.
Chapter 4: Footnotes.


3. Which does not mean that the poet's art may not sometimes produce a simile that is more striking than a metaphor, as the following line from Burns testifies: 'My love is like a red, red rose'. Thanks to the repetition of 'red', this simile becomes more effective than the metaphor 'Love is a rose'. Wheelwright, from whom I borrow this example, sees it as justifying the abandonment of the very distinction between metaphor and 'simile'. See Metaphor and Reality, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1964, p. 71.


5. For the material discussed below, see James W. Fernandez, 'Persuasions and Performances', in Myth, Symbol and Culture, a collective work edited by Clifford Geertz, New York, Norton, 1972, p. 39 ff. I would also mention another article by the same author, 'The performance of ritual metaphors' (in The Social Use of Metaphor, a collective work edited by J. David Sapir and J. Christopher Crocker, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977, pp. 100-131), where he contends, on the one hand, that only metaphor teaches us something new, and, on the other hand, that metaphor is an error or a false attribution - which quite clearly demonstrates that, since Aristotle, the question of metaphor has not shifted an inch.

6. Which does not imply any mental backwardness, since it is the actual question of logic, defined as the art of conducting one's thought well, which is involved.

7. The reader will find an almost folkloric example of the manner in which apprehending the meaning of a metaphor depends on its contexts, in The Land of the Fetish, by A.B. Ellis, a work that was first published in 1883 and reprinted in 1979 by the Negro University Press, Westrop, Connecticut, pp. 289 ff. In analysis it is primarily free association that supplies such contexts.
8. Which does not mean a meaning that withstands examination. It may be that the result is very often error, nonsense even. Susam Sontag has recently showed just how much the metaphor of illness has vitiated political philosophy. See Illness as Metaphor, London, Allen and Lane, 1979, pp. 76 ff.


10. Let me also emphasise here how much, in spite of our other differences, I would defend the manner in which Jones establishes a distinction between symbol and metaphor. As a matter of fact, in 'the blood of the vine', the underlying signifier — 'wine' — is simply elided; when the analysand speaks of wine in the context to which I have just alluded, the underlying signifier — 'blood' — is a repressed signifier, the very one which returns in the symptom.


12. The reader will recall that it was Jones who introduced the term 'Rationalisation', with all its pejorative connotations, into analytic theory.

13. E. Jones, loc. cit., p. 139.

14. E. Jones, loc. cit., p. 139.

15. M. Jones, loc. cit., p. 139.

16. E. Jones, loc. cit., p. 139.

17. The dream referred to here contained an allusion to a childhood memory: a walk in a meadow during which the little girl measured herself against blades of grass that were higher than she was.

18. This is obviously not the case when it is the subject who produces the interpretation: for then it is a question of discovering the error in which it was, and not of denouncing.

19. Cf. p. 0--0 above, regarding the subject's relation to the object, inasmuch as it is and is not that object at the same time.

20. E. Jones, loc. cit., p. 140.
it is, however, by proceeding with imaginary reproachments of this sort, that Jones would want to see as the prerogative of the unconscious and of the primitive mentality, that Robert Fliess (in his work on symbolism) tries to explain analytic symbolisms. He would doubtless have made good use of Britz's recent work (The Half-Open Door, Odense University Press, 1977), in which the author, using in the main literary texts, establishes the symbolic meaning of the half-open door in Roman funerary sculpture.


30. E. Jones, loc. cit., p. 145, underlined in the original. I would point out, as Jones does, that these are only 'chapter headings'. The self, for instance, covers either the whole body or any part of it; ideas referring to birth include those of giving birth and of conception, as well as that of the subject's own birth, etc.

32. For the distinction between the function of representation inasmuch as it 'delivers' an object, and its function inasmuch as it motivates a search, cf. Pleasure and Being, London, MacMillans, 1983, p. 30.

Cf. also Francois Wahl's La Structure en Philosophie, the concluding essay of Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme, edited by Wahl himself, Paris, Seuil, 1968, p. 131.

33. It often happens in the course of an analysis that the subject discovers a forgetting, a miscognition or a deformation of his own history of which it had until then been unaware. Such discoveries announce the arrival of a new theme, and one which is often at first represented by symbols.
Chapter 5

The Decoding of Dreams: syntax and abstract signification

As writing, dreams are subject to 'the considerations of staging'. Hence the question which is posed in the first part of this chapter, and which Freud phrases as follows: 'What representation do dreams provide for "if", "because", "just as", "although", "either-or", and all the other conjunctions without which we cannot understand sentences or speeches?'

The actual phrasing of this question quite clearly indicates that for Freud it is a question not only of the relations with which the logic of propositions is concerned, but of all the conjunctions which a 'natural' language places at the subject's disposal, and which logic, owing to the difficulty there is in reducing them to 'truth values', finds it hard to tame. One could also add other conjunctions to the sequence enumerated by Freud, namely, 'and', 'but', 'since', 'the more .... the more', 'the more .... the less', 'rather than', 'the proof being that', 'to the extent that', etc. I shall consider these relations as they occur in our experience.

1.1. It is easy to imagine how difficult a scribe without phonetic writing would find it to render these terms. There is therefore nothing surprising about Freud's answer:

In the first place, dreams take into account in a general way the connection which undeniably exists between all the portions of the dream-thoughts by combining the whole material into a single situation or event. They reproduce logical connection by simultaneity in time. Here they are acting like the painter who, in a picture of the School of Athens or of Parnassus represents in one group all the philosophers or all the poets. It is true that they were never assembled in a single hall or on a single mountain-top: but they certainly form a group in the conceptual sense.

Dreams carry this method of reproduction down to details. Whenever they show us two elements close together, this guarantees that there is some specially intimate connection between what corresponds
to them among the dream-thoughts. In the same way, in our system of writing, 'ab' means that the two letters are to be pronounced in a single syllable. If a gap is left between the 'a' and the 'b', it means that the 'a' is the last letter of one word and the 'b' is the first of the next one. So, too, collocations in dreams do not consist of any chance, disconnected portions of the dream-material, but of portions which are fairly connected in the dream-thoughts as well.

The comparison with the painter's task is not meant to be taken literally. I myself have never come across a dream which juxtaposes different elements in order to indicate the concept under which these elements may be subsumed. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that simultaneity serves to represent (but one could as well say—to dispense with) every kind of logical, or more precisely, grammatical relation, in a manner that one would not at first suspect. Here, by way of example, is a fragment of a dream:

I was preparing to make love to X. At that moment I realised that an eye was watching us. Then I stopped. —After......

Several sessions later, this eye was described as a blind eye, which brought to mind the association that 'love is blind'. This was enough to indicate what this fragment meant: 'rather than lose love, I will renounce my desire'.

1.2. This recourse to simultaneity in time (Gleichzeitigkeit) obliges us to point out how great a difference there is between dream writing and every other form, a difference which justifies the comparison between it and staging: a writing takes time without using it for the purposes of signification. This difference is still more apparent in the case of succession, which the dream uses to express causal relations (Kausalbeziehungen) and this following two methods 'which are in essence the same'. Here is the first:

Suppose the dream-thoughts run like this: 'Since this was so and so, such and such was bound to happen. Then the commoner method of representation
would be to introduce the dependent clause
as an introductory dream and to add the
principal clause as the main dream. If I have
interpreted aright, the temporal sequence may
be reversed. But the more extensive part of
the dream always corresponds to the principal
clause.\(^5\)

In fact, what is essential to this procedure is the division of the
dream into two successive parts, irrespective of their relative length
(which does not mean, as Freud is careful to specify, that every division
of a dream into two parts serves to express a relation). One may compare
the interval between these two parts to the comma which, according to
a certain rules of punctuation, is intercalated between dependent and
main clause; this apart, the scribe leaves it up to the interpreter
to choose the conjunction most appropriate to the context because,
since, when, as, given that, therefore, also, consequently, which is
why etc.

Save only in cases where the dependent clause employs a saying or
proverb in current use. A Canadian dreamer who - like the patient
who had given Freud a "beautiful example" to illustrate that method -
wanting to explain the course of his life by the modesty of his
origins, may represent himself in a preliminary dream as eating a
bun by reference to the saying, apparently current in Quebec: 'When one is
born for a bun...'

The second method is described by Freud in these terms:

The other method of representing a causal relation
is adapted to less extensive material and consists
in one image in the dream, whether of a person or
thing, being transformed into another. The existence
of a causal relation is only to be taken seriously
if the transformation actually occurs before our eyes
and not if we merely notice that one thing has
appeared in the place of another.\(^6\)
It is also worth noting that not every transformation signifies causality. If a small worm is transformed into a giant one, which devours and devastates everything in its path, this may simply correspond to the 'terrifying' wish to 'eat everything', a wish that is fairly frequently encountered in the subterranean labyrinths hollowed out by oral demand. I would, moreover, be inclined to specify that transformation does not strictly speaking express a causal relation, but only the content of the subordinate clause. When this transformation assumes a 'miraculous' or absurd form, the conjunction often signifies a refutation: if the toad becomes an elephant, then you will succeed.

Are there other methods for expressing the conjunction 'if' in dreams? Indeed, the appearance in a dream of a man with a feminine attribute may indicate a thought which could be paraphrased as follows: 'If Mr. So-and-So were a woman ...', and it was undoubtedly because Freud saw all 'composite images' as expressing relations of resemblance that he failed to note this. Which is not to imply that composite images, like transformations, only express the content of the subordinate clause.

Succession is therefore indeed the sole method which constantly serves in dreams to express 'causal relations'. Generally speaking, an interpreter will have no trouble in discovering whether successive dreams translate such relations or whether they simply signify the same thoughts more and more emphatically. Where the latter is the case, there tend to be several dreams with no link between them other than that of having taken place 'in the course of the same night'; whereas a separation which takes the form of a short interval emphasised as such in the narrative of the dream, definitely indicates a link between the two parts of the same dream. If there is, however, any remaining doubt, the associations are not slow to dispel it, by indicating if it is a question of a sequence or if it is indeed a repetition of the same theme.
36. It is regarding these latent thoughts that Freud says that they display as much variety as our conscious thoughts, and have as much 'intellectuality' as they do.

37. On the relation between the question of truth and that of the division of the subject between the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation, cf. M. Saouan, 'La question de l'enseignement et l'analyse de la vérité chez Franz Brentano', in Lettres de l'Ecole Freudienne, No. 27.

38. Quoted in the frontispiece to Die Traumdeutung.


40. Loc. cit., p. 338

41. This was an association produced whilst narrating the dream.


43. This example comes from the first dream that Freud uses to illustrate the 'Considerations of Representability' (Die Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit). The section thus titled continues the preceding one, with respect to the means of representation of logical relations.

1.3. The relation which Freud examines next is that of the alternative. He is quite categorical about this:

The alternative 'either-or' cannot be expressed in dreams in any way whatever. Both of the alternatives are usually inserted in the text of the dream as though they were equally valid.

As proof of this, he recalls the dream of Irma's injection, which attributed her illness to a series of incompatible, if not contradictory causes. Now, we cannot concur with this: it is clear that this 'proof' implies a normative judgement concerning the 'mentality' of dreams. Where it is a question of mutually exclusive arguments, the dream ought to have separated them by 'wither/or/er' instead of adding them together. One wonders why, when the leading thought in this dream apparently consisted in pleading innocence at any price.

Freud's argument would hold, on the other hand, if the latent thought of the dream actually took of the form of an alternative. In which case, the question then arises: does this form find the means to express itself in the manifest dream? And which? The answer, contrary to what Freud says, is not therefore in doubt: the presence of an alternative in the manifest dream always indicates the existence of an alternative at the level of the dream-thought.
Freud based his case upon an example which has undoubtedly become the most celebrated in the whole psychoanalytic literature on dreams:

During the night before my father's funeral I had a dream of a printed notice, placard or poster — rather like the notices forbidding one to smoke in railway waiting-rooms — on which appeared either

'You are requested to close the eyes'
or,

'You are requested to close an eye'.

I usually wrote this in the form:

'You are requested to close the eye(s)'.

Each of these two versions had a meaning of its own and led in a different direction when the dream was interpreted. I had chosen the simplest possible ritual for the funeral, for I knew my father's own views on such ceremonies. But some other members of the family were not sympathetic to such puritanical simplicity and thought we should be disgraced in the eyes of those who attended the funeral. Hence one of the versions: 'You are requested to close an eye', i.e., to 'wink at' or 'overlook'. Here it is particularly easy to see the meaning of the vagueness expressed by 'either-or'. The dream-work failed to establish a unified wording for the dream-thoughts which could at the same time be ambiguous, and the two main lines of thought consequently began to diverge even in the manifest content of the dream...
Now, we have good reason to be surprised by this failure of the dream to find its own form, not least because of the habitual facility, if not licence, that dreams show in the formation of images and composite words. Fortunately, the interpretation of Freud's example does not require a whole range of associations, for it reproduces a contemporary German saying, in which 'to close an eye' is 'to show indulgence'. Now, one cannot ask one's fellow both to accord pardon and to remain blind about a thing. Which is precisely the meaning of this dream.

Although dreams in which alternatives occur are relatively infrequent, they are of considerable importance in analysis. This is precisely because the desire that is signified in them is, in the end, the desire to make a choice - which does not rule out those cases in which the alternative is accompanied by a negation, whether represented or not in the dream; to choose is out of the question.

It is probably because he maintained these dreams do not know negation in general that Freud ruled out the possibility of their having any means of representing alternatives. But, just as he had asserted that "No" seems not to exist so far as dreams are concerned, and had then proceeded to indicate a host of methods for expressing this relation, so here too he concludes, just prior to tackling negation, by outlining a method: 'In a few instances the difficulty of representing an alternative is got over by dividing the dream into two pieces of equal length.' He gives no example of this, and I personally know of no dream employing this method.

1.4. It goes without saying that the thoughts staged by the dream are not limited simply to those propositions known as declarative and assertive. Not only do they present as many varieties as we have waking thoughts (demands, wishes, regrets, denials, etc. ....) but they also allow of a like number of nuances of signification, nuances which vary in the case of negation, depending upon the various brands of it in a particular language, and notably in French, which has pas, point, goutte, rien, guère, personne, jamais, etc.
One may question a dream's ability to render the distinction between 'John is not hurrying' and 'John never hurries'. In fact, such difficulties are easily resolved, at least in principle, in those cases in which the mark of negation is the homophone of another word, which may itself be represented. One cannot rule out the possibility of the image of a drop (goutte) of blood having a conjuratory meaning in a dream, for instance, 'Du sang, il n'y aura goutte', 'Of blood, there won't be any, a drop'. I recall an analysand having a dream of which he no longer remembered anything ....... save that 'Tintin' was involved. A moment later, he told a story that one of his relatives had narrated the day before. It is not hard to imagine what sort of reception he had given to this narrative, i.e., 'Tintin', which in colloquial French means 'nothing doing'.

But what then are we to make of Freud's assertion that the dream shows 'a particular preference for combining contraries into a unity or for representing them as one and the same thing'? In support of this assertion, Freud quotes a dream in which 'the same branch which was carried like a lily and as though by an innocent girl was at the same time an allusion to the Dame aux Camélias .....'. But what is so surprising about a woman imagining herself to be both Maria and the Dame aux Camélias, if such is her desire? Since it is a faithful scribe, the dream can have no 'preference', and simply transcribes the subject's own preferences as to the choice of its colours. This folding back of the dream thoughts on to the representations of being, which are under the sway as we know, of the pleasure principle alone, may indeed be termed 'regression'. But one cannot help observing that such a regression has nothing to do with a regression to a more primitive stage, which is how Freud (who refers here to Karl Abel's Der Gegensinn der Urworte, 1884) understood it.

1.4.a. Emile Benveniste, in his 'Remarks upon the function of language in the Freudian discovery', made the most devastating criticisms of this work, focussing as much upon its methodology as upon its first principles. As regards Abel's methods, they are so random or are based upon such superficial comparisons that Benveniste has no
difficulty in showing that they are generally mistaken. As regards his first principles, Benveniste writes as follows: "To imagine a stage of language, which is defined both as "primordial" and as real and "historical", in which a particular object would be named, as being both itself and at the same time some other thing, and in which the relation expressed would be one of enduring contradiction, a non-relational relation, in which everything would be both itself and other than itself, and therefore neither itself nor another thing, to imagine all this would be to imagine something purely chimerical."13

This criticism may well have laid bare Abel's geneticist or evolutionist framework, and consequently that of Freud, but its approach to the problem of words with antithetical meanings does however leave the problem itself, as Lacan has observed, quite unresolved, inasmuch as there is hardly a single language, whether primitive or not, which does not contain such words.

These words are, as is well known, particularly common in Arabic, where the same word will signify, for instance, 'buy' and 'sell', 'weak' and 'strong', 'double' and 'half', and even 'land' and 'sea'. But what we tend too often to overlook is the fact that one also finds alongside a word having two antithetical meanings (bahr = 'sea' and 'land'), another word for 'land' (ard) in relation to which bahr means just 'sea'.15 Moreover, it is not, strictly speaking, words with antithetical meanings that are so common in classical Arabic, but triads: there is nahar ('day') and lail ('night'), and then there is qarime which may be used indiscriminately for either. Likewise for black and white, 'doubt and certainty, fellow' and rival, one who asks and one who does not ask, masculine and feminine, menstruation and 'purity', etc. Observations such as these are indispensable to the solution of our problem, inasmuch as they show that, in passing from the level of phonemes to that of words, we do not pass into a domain of meanings which imposes its law of non-contradiction, but that the meaning of a word, once more, depends upon its double relation with 'what surrounds it'. This structure becomes still more apparent when we pass to the subsequent level of inclusiveness, that of the sentence, in which each term derives its meaning as much from its context as from what Lacan calls its 'vertical connections'. In other words, the solution of the problem of words with antithetical meanings does not reside, as Benveniste would have us suppose, in the fact that a word utters an object conceived as a focus for relations, with itself and with others,
but in the fact that, at whatever level one puts oneself, the
signified still depends upon the relations in which the signifier is
involved. In short, this solution is the one that Lacan, following
what one might call 'Lichtenberg's method' (after the author of the
famous Aphorisms), implies but does not spell out when he writes:
'Track down its spoor (that of the signifier) there where it tracks
us down,'16 Indeed, it is to this sentence that he appends the note
in which he re-poses to Benveniste the question of words
with antithetical meanings.

Freud's geneticist prejudice did not in fact prevent him from 'correcting'
his previous assertion, namely, that 'the dream cannot express a no'17.
In the Traumdeutung, as we shall see (1.6. sq.), he points to a whole range of
methods for representing this relation.

I. 5. The more Freud restricts the place of negation in dreams, the
more, on the other hand, he favours the relation of similarity
'One and only one of these logical relations', Freud writes, 'is very
highly favoured by the mechanism of dream-formation; namely, the
relation of similarity, consonance or approximation - the relation of
"just as". This relation, unlike any other, is capable of being
represented in dreams in a variety of ways'18.

I. 5. a. These means turn out to be, in actual fact, the various forms
of one and the same method, which consists in forming composite images,
but which does not only serve to express the relation of similarity
Admittedly, the image of a person or of a place in which A appears
with an attribute belonging to B (identification), or an image composed
of A's and B's image (composition) can serve to represent 'A has hostile
feelings towards me and so has B'. But the same image may equally well
be intended to represent not their similarity, but what one can call
their commutativity: A is B, which does not mean that he resembles
him, any more than to assert that 'John is a Tartuffe'
simply means that he is a hypocrite, but that he is another incarnation of hypocrisy. Or again, it may be that A is identified with B not on account of an attribute that they have in common, but precisely because of their contrast—in which case the relation is more like a 'but', i.e., 'no longer virgin but still innocent'. Which does not, moreover, prevent the same relation 'but' from going quite unrepresented. Thus, an analysand dreamed of a pepper-plant whose leaves seemed to have the form of a shell-fish; but when I touched them, I realized that it was not so'. This is a dream in which the dreamer's thoughts about women were fairly eloquently expressed: 'attractive, but not aphrodisiac'. Since it is the narrative of the dream which anyway provides the key to the image, the dream can allow itself such 'idleness' in the representation of relations.

1.5b Moreover, Freud went on to modify his opinion concerning the representation of the relation of similarity by composite images. A few lines further on, he writes: ' ........ identification or the construction of composite figures serves various purposes in dreams: firstly to represent an element common to both persons, secondly to represent a displaced common element, and thirdly, too, to express a merely wishful common element' \(^{19}\). I will not stress overmuch 'to represent a displaced common element', for all too often we observe a superficial element covering up another, much less innocent one. The important point to note is that an apparent failure in the formation of composite images occurs where identification, in the strict sense of the term, is involved. Freud speaks of cases in which identification (as a means of representation in the dream, and therefore to be firmly distinguished, as Strachey does, from the identification through which identity is constructed) and composition miscarry:

If so, the scene in the dream is attributed to one of the persons concerned, while the other (and usually the more important one) appears as an attendant figure without any other function. The dreamer may describe the position in such a phrase as 'My mother was there as well' (Stekel). An element of this kind in the dream-content may be compared to the 'determinatives' used in hieroglyphic script, which are not meant to be pronounced but serve merely
But rather than seeing this as a 'failure', we ought to discern in this 'determinative' an index accentuating 'unvoiced' identification. For example, 'My mother was there as well' might well indicate that some other feminine figure featuring in the dream did so quoad matrem. Freud, in speaking of the failure of this method, is actually pointing to a method which translates the relation of identification.

1. 5. c. The formation of composite images may also serve to represent that relation which is phrased as 'instead of'. Desire has such an affinity with regret that nothing is commoner than wishes that assume the form of a wish for substitution, whether accompanied by an explicit negation or not ('if I were King', 'if I were King and not a beggar'). In such cases, the person or place to be exchanged often appears in the dream with an attribute belonging to the desired person or place. Freud cites the case of Irma, who appears in the dream in a position that reminds him of the other patient that he would like to have had in her place. Or again, in order to render the thought 'its a pity one has to make children with these wretches and not with her!', an analysand's dream employs this same method: her (male) friend is there represented as marked with a 'unary trait' which belonged only to her preferred (female) friend. I would note in passing that nothing would be more inappropriate than to speak of such a subject in terms of 'homosexuality', unless one were to recall that the desire in question is essentially constituted out of the impossibility the subject feels at the idea of satisfying it. The fact of recalling this serves to show, rather, that this thought is the sign of an irrevocably heterosexual orientation. There is nothing contradictory in adding that, to the extent that the ties of love were reserved for the (female) friend, the latter was then able to subsist in the interpretation, while the (male) lover was aufgehoben, and only subsumed as an 'example' of a man, a 'representative' of his sex. In fact, the associations following this dream essentially revolved around an enumeration of the dreamer's grievances against men, described as 'wretches'. These grievances did not, any more than the qualification 'wretch', figure in the dream. Hence that extremely important observation regarding dream writing, namely, its 'telegraphic' character. We shall see that a good part of what Freud describes under the heading of 'condensation' only serves to emphasise this quality.
1. 6. If Freud had had to deal with French-speaking patients, he would assuredly not have failed to note the method alluded to above, whereby the dream goes a long way towards phoneticised writing or the rebus in order to represent negation, and he himself identified a very ingenious procedure for expressing 'just the reverse' or 'quite the contrary'. It is easy enough to describe this method if one notes that our customary way of saying, for example, 'he isn't poor, quite the contrary', may be replaced with no great harm done by 'he is rich', followed by the denial, 'on the contrary'. One of Freud's patients had a dream, to which we shall have occasion to return (the 'lovely dream'), which occurred in a place with many people in it, some up above, on the top floor, and the others down below: the dreamer's brother was among the former, while the dreamer himself was among the latter. Now, the truth was 'quite the reverse', for the brother had been ruined and had therefore lost his place in 'high' society, whilst the patient had held on to his fortune. This inversion was quickly denounced in later parts of the dream in which, contrary to the introductory scene from Daudet's Sarito and indeed, against all probability, the dreamer climbed a path with great difficulty at first and then with greater and greater ease.

I do not recall ever having encountered examples of this ilk, but anyone who is familiar with dream interpretation will be sure to recognise in this method (which basically consists in employing an altogether obvious inversion in order to indicate another) the signature of the dream. I have, on the other hand, come across a number of dreams in which the accumulation of 'provocative' inversions had the meaning of a sarcastic commentary on the part of the dreamer regarding the fact that, when a small boy, he was often taken for a girl: 'Why not then call North "south", white "black", etc.?'

1. 7. Freud also points to two methods intended to represent the negation of the verbs 'to be able to' and 'to wish'. The dream represents 'I cannot' by a situation in which the dreamer features as incapable of acting, whereas 'I don't wish to' is translated by a feeling of inhibition which prevents the dreamer from carrying out the act. In fact, this
'I don't wish to' always refers to a desire which arouses anxiety: which is why, as Freud actually observes, the impediment so often has a slightly anxious feel to it. To which I would add that the detour most often employed in representing the negation of the verb 'to be' consists in replacing this same negation with an assertion to the contrary, with 'he isn't small' thus becoming 'he is big'. One dream made so subtle a use of this method that one of its characters appeared in it with another's attribute, but without this attribute being in any way specified ('it was John, but it was someone else!'): from this one inferred that the character in question was never what he claimed to be.

The negation of the verb is made all the easier through its often being a denegation: 'It is not I who am guilty or who carried out a particular act, but so-and-so'. In order to represent the whole phrase, it is sufficient to impute to the latter what was expelled from the ego.

One can see, in the light of the above remarks, how right Freud was to assert that one never knows a priori if one ought to interpret a dream image as positive or negative. But this assertion does not mean that the dream does not know of any 'no': if there is a failure it is not in principle but in fact, for a dream works with the means that are to hand.

1.8. In everyday life, negation is practically never reduced to a simple hallmarking with the negative operator. Negation may often, if we set aside denegation, take the form of derision, sarcasm, irony, passionate refutation, e.t.c. In short, it assumes polemical forms which may be expressed by an 'its absurd', 'that's ridiculous', 'mad', or even 'you must be joking', 'my hat', 'tell me another', 'amen', etc. - in every one of these expressions the contradiction, rather than bearing on the proposition, takes the Other for its target (an Other that may, if I deem something that I have just said to be absurd, be myself). So it is with the dream-thoughts. What is the usual procedure for translating this form of negation when the discursive forms involved are so various?
'A dream', Freud writes, 'is made absurd ..... if a judgement that something "is absurd" is among the elements included in the the dream-thoughts - that is to say, if any one of the dreamer's unconscious trains of thought has criticism or ridicule as its motive. Absurdity is accordingly one of the methods by which the dream-work represents a contradiction - alongside such other methods as the reversal in the dream-content of some material relation in the dream-thoughts, or the exploitation of the sensation of motor inhibition. Absurdity in a dream, however, is not to be translated by a simple "no"; it is intended to reproduce the mood of the dream-thoughts, which combines derision or laughter with the contradiction. It is only with such an aim in view that the dream-work produces anything ridiculous. Here once again it is giving a manifest form to a portion of the latent content.\footnote{23}

Truth to tell, there are dreams whose apparent absurdity is simply due to the fact that they effect a word-for-word translation of current expressions, which are 'absurd' and yet perfectly intelligible (or which, being intelligible, have nothing absurd about them) e.g., 'Death has made him yet greater', 'he has his head in the air', etc.\footnote{24}.

The 'its absurd' is generally translated either through the dream taking pleasure in piling up absurdities at its leisure, or through a judgement of absurdity comprising a part of the dream's narrative - or through a remark that draws attention to a particular absurdity.

Freud's first example, 'the dream of a patient who had lost his father six years earlier', provides a good illustration of this latter method:

\begin{quote}
His father had met with a grave calamity. He had been travelling by the night train, which had been derailed. The carriage seats were forced together and his head was compressed from side to side. The dreamer then saw him lying in bed with a wound over his left eyebrow which ran in a vertical direction. He was surprised at his father's having met with a calamity (since he was already dead, as he added in telling me the dream). How clear his eyes were! \footnote{25}
\end{quote}
I would willingly say that the interpretation of this dream would simply consist in adding, after the remark that the father was 'already dead,' 'but it is absurd that he is.' This interpretation becomes all the more plausible if you consider that the associations indicate that the last phrase in the dream, immediately following the dreamer's astonished remark, calls for an inversion which often signifies, as we have seen, 'quite the reverse':

When the patient was four years old he had been present when a pistol, accidentally loaded, had been discharged and had blackened his father's eyes. (the eyes are so clear). This phrase, *Die augen sind so klar*, leaves us, moreover, in a state of some uncertainty (not knowing to whom, precisely, these eyes that are so clear belong). Is this pure chance, or does the dream indeed have these ironical traits?

Another dream about a dead father, dreamed by Freud, will serve to illustrate the first method, the one which consists in displaying the absurdities involved in so flagrant a manner that the dreamer will not have to emphasise them himself:

I received a communication from the town council of my birthplace concerning the fees due for someone's maintenance in the hospital in the year 1851, which had been necessitated by an attack he had had in my house. I was amused by this since, in the first place, I was not yet alive in 1851 and, in the second place, my father, to whom it might have related, was already dead. I went to him in the next room, where he was lying on his bed, and told him about it. To my surprise, he recollected that in 1851 he had once not drunk and had had to be locked up or detained. It was at a time at which he had been working for the house of ?.... 'So you used to drink as well?' I asked. 'Did you get married soon after that?' I calculated that, of course, I was born in 1856, which seemed to be the year which immediately followed the year in question.

Since it would be out of the question to cite all the associations that Freud gives respecting the different elements of this dream, I will simply recall a few of the more important points:

I/. 'The dead father' does not refer to he whom the subject had had one day to bury, but it tends rather to signify an ideal borne by those who presented themselves, at different stages of
his existence, as 'seniors', i.e., Meynert, Breuer, etc.

2/. The number 51, in isolation, represented in Freud's eyes the fateful age, at which men seem to be most vulnerable. 'I have known colleagues', Freud writes, 'who have died suddenly at that stage, and amongst them one who, after long delays, had been appointed to a professorship only a few days before his death'.

3/. The interval which 'doesn't count', four or five years, 'was the length of time during which I made my fiancée wait for our marriage' and it was also, by a chance coincidence which was eagerly exploited by the dream-thoughts, the length of time during which I made my patient of longest standing wait for a complete recovery'. I will not lay too much stress on this 'chance', but 'to make wait', in this context, is quite clearly synonymous with 'to wait'.

4/. The phrase 'I went to him in the next room', 'correctly reproduced the circumstances in which I informed my father of my having become engaged to be married without consulting him'.

If we turn back to the dream itself, we shall find that the phrase terminating it represents the dreamer's answer to the question put previously concerning his father's marriage. And what follows from this answer or from this absurd calculation? That nothing has come to separate that time when the dreamer was not from the time when he was born. The absurdities that the dream 'displays' represent what Freud calls the dreamer's 'disposition', i.e., the energy with which he repudiates the 'origin':

Nor is it by any means a matter of chance that our first examples of absurdity in dreams related to a dead father. In such cases, the conditions for creating absurd dreams are found together in characteristic fashion. The authority wielded by a father provokes criticism from his children at an early age, and the severity of the demands he makes upon them leads them, for their own relief, to keep their eyes open to any weakness of their father's; but the filial piety called up in our minds by the figure of a father, particularly after his death, tightens the censorship which prohibits any such criticism from being consciously expressed.
In actual fact, what the subject finds so hard to tolerate in his father is the display of this final 'weakness' in which it is signified that he is no more, namely, dead. The father's desire is no easier to bear ... since it is his own desire that the subject experiences in the father's desire.

1.9. There is indeed a kind of negation that bears out Freud's assertion that dreams do not know of a 'no'. Wartburg and Zumthor present the following examples of it: Erenes garde qu'on ne vous rende la pareille, il craint qu'on ne vienne pas, and treat them as forms of 'semi-negation'. Semi-negation, because the presence of the article ne does not reverse the meaning of the proposition. Other grammarians have termed this ne as 'expletive'. As Lacan has so often observed, this is a perfectly defensible opinion, so long as (or because) one only takes into consideration what the subject means, in the sense that je crains qu'il ne vienne is equivalent to je crains qu'il vienne, but is no longer defensible once one considers not the meaning uttered, but the relation of the subject to this utterance. Admittedly, the subject would not be able to articulate this relation at the very moment in which it utters what it means. But this relation does still signify. From this perspective, which is the one which interests the analyst most, the so-called 'expletive' ne would seem rather to be a trace – arising in the course of the utterance – of what is unfolding at the level of the enunciation. A trace in which the subject's relation as subject of the enunciation to what it states or to what it means, is signified as a relation of divergence, discordance or even of conflict: je crains qu'il ne vienne ...... mais qu'il vienne donc et qu'on en finisse!

What I fear is also what I desire, and suddenly I fear that he will not come.

Now, the negation in question here presupposes the presence of the subject or of its intentions in the act of speech, ... this condition is absent in the dream, for there the dreamer falls back into a simple desire to sleep, leaving, so to speak, the signifier to make its own way. The dream cannot therefore represent this form of negation.
19a. This explanation of the dream's incapacity to represent the so-called 'expletive' ne, since it only represents a 'material', i.e., a discourse that no actual speaker sustains, is simply, if will think about it, a 'repetition' of what Freud asserts so categorically regarding the question of intellectual activity in dreams:

My reply (put briefly) is as follows: Everything that appears in dreams as the ostensible activity of the function of judgement is to be regarded not as an intellectual achievement of the dream-work but as intellectually belonging to the material of the dream-thoughts and as having been lifted from them into the manifest content of the dream as a ready-made structure. I can even carry this assertion further. Event the judgments made after waking upon a dream that has been remembered, and the feelings called up in us by the reproduction of such a dream, form part, to a great extent, of the latent content of the dream and are to be included in its interpretation. 34

We have already seen that a judgement that something is absurd, a remark or expression of like astonishment, far from testifying to an application of faculty of judgement, is on the contrary an integral part of the manifest dream: and the very one that betrays its most urgent meaning. Nor is there any lack of examples that will bear out Freud's second remark: it turns out that the very words that the subject employs in order to describe his dream, to comment upon it or to criticise it, do themselves constitute an integral part of the dream, and therein is signified much more than what the subject says. This remark thus shows that waking-up does not imply a radical break with the dream,
for the subject may well awake from sleep, but it will not therefore necessarily wake up from the dream. On the other hand, in waking up from the dream, it wakes up from sleep, which the dream precisely is meant to protect. The only desire that the dream fulfills is that of sleeping.

But does not the appearance of the I in the dream, which is moreover a fairly common occurrence, bear out the existence of a reflexive activity? By no means. The fact is that the dreamer remembers his or her dream as if it were a message sent by an Other, to such an extent that it would not be misleading to begin the narrative of a dream by 'A dream told me that I was in such-and-such a place ..... etc.' This message clearly concerns the subject; considered from this perspective, the fact 'that the dreamer's own ego appears several times, or in several forms, in a dream is at bottom no more remarkable than that the ego should be contained in a conscious thought several times or in different places or connections - e.g. in the sentence
"when I think what a healthy child I was".\(^\text{35}\)

But nor does the appearance of the I in the dream mean that the dream sets about thinking there where the subject is no longer thinking, as if there were another subject within the subject; the dream merely transcribes a material whose elements are borrowed from the conscious of the preconscious. It is simply that the narrative of the dream, in which these elements are combined, turns out to have a meaning which goes beyond what it states. What is thus signified, the subject may not articulate. This signification, which it would be improper to hypostatise outside of the act or moment in which it makes itself understood, constitutes what Freud calls 'the latent thought of the dream'\(^\text{36}\) - a thought that no 'I think' may

In short, the dream, just like a lapsus or a joke, testifies to the existence of an autonomous function of the signifier which is different, divergent even, from that of intentional discourse. This function is neither communication nor communion; it serves, rather, to make the truth heard\(^\text{37}\). In that it is produced in sleep, the dream highlights the strict subordination of the signifier to this function.

\textit{Flectere si nequeo superos,}  
\textit{Acheronta movebo}\(^\text{38}\).

I. IO. Freud asserts that:

Dreams are completely egoistical. Whenever my own ego does not appear in the content of the dream, but only some extraneous person, I may safely assume that my own ego lies concealed, by identification, behind this other person ......\(^\text{39}\)

This is, to put it mildly, an exaggeration, and Freud went on to reconsider this point in an article dated I923. There he confirms that things do sometimes work like this, as in the dream in which a woman dreamed that she was 'seated in a room, with a friend, dressed in a kimono. A man comes back in and exclaims: "Good heavens, isn't this the young girl that I saw before so prettily dressed?" To interpret this, you simply have to replace 'dressed' with 'undressed', for, during
a certain period of her childhood, the dreamer had shared her father's bedroom, and had had to draw apart her clothes when asleep — for her father's pleasure. Her friend thus represented her as an object, and the fact of the dreamer assuming the two forms is no more extraordinary, let me emphasise in passing, than the fact of two persons appearing in the following sentence: 'Would that I might see myself prettily undressed before his eyes!' But it would be absurd, Freud specifies, to suppose that it always works like this.

Consider the following example: an analysand spent whole sessions describing her relationship with her little sister, whom she had utterly appropriated, considering her to be hers' and hers' alone. The expression 'hers' alone' featured so often was that she herself was bound to suspect that a denegation involved. It was in such a context that she told of a dream in which 'Mr. Y., a colleague for whom she had little respect, had been confirmed in his post as director'. A dream which in some sense suggested that the denegation was being undermined and which 'confirmed' the one to whom the child in truth belonged, and who, whether esteemed or not, was assuredly other.

This said, Freud's assertion that 'dreams are completely egotistical' remains a fundamentally correct one, if one takes that to mean that they always involve a particular positioning of the subject in being.

1. 11. Freud concludes 'The means of representation in dreams' with a rather clever argument, which serves to support the thesis that a dream is the hallucinatory fulfilment of a desire:

The dream-work makes use of dreaming as a form of repudiation, and so confirms the discovery that dreams are wish-fulfilments.

We ought, however, to follow Freud's account of this argument in detail, and not hurry through it. In fact, the dream within the dream,
constitutes a staging of the saying 'it's only a dream'. In other words, what the dream uses for the purposes of denegation is not the actual fact of the dream but rather the saying 'only a dream', inasmuch as it denies the reality of what is involved - in return for which this reality is simply affirmed the more.

1. 12.

It would be of interest here to consider a question which Freud does not raise: what is the meaning of the distinction, in the dream itself, between dream and reality? Here is an example:

I went to the house of my friend Raymonde (this is a feminine version of my father's Christian name) and I wanted to tell her of an event which took place whilst I was going to her house. But while I was narrating it to her, I realised that this event could not conceivably have happened in reality, and must have occurred in a dream: since I told her that this event had happened whilst I was crossing ....... Square; a Square which is not in Paris but in the town of ....... The distinction between dream and reality struck me as only too obvious, and I was very annoyed at having confused them.

The meaning of this dream (and I am convinced that the reader would share my certainty if I were to relate what the analysand had made known to me elsewhere) is as follows: it is only in phantasy that Raymonde and Raymond are two versions of the same signified. In other words, the distinction between dream and reality is equivalent to a distinction between 'words and things', for it is in the former that we first 'think' the latter.

2. Recourse, not only to current sayings, but also to those images that proliferate in proverbs, songs, riddles, poems, slang forms, in other words, in 'the treasury of the language', is obligatory if one is to transcribe abstract significations. There are dreams
that are so completely dependent upon this method that one may decipher them without appealing to the dreamer's free associations. It is easy to see why dreams should show such a predilection for imaged expressions:

A thing that is pictorial is, from the point of view of a dream, a thing that is capable of being represented: it can be introduced into a situation in which abstract expressions offer the same kind of difficulties to representation in dreams as a political leading article in a newspaper would offer to an illustrator.

How would one 'illustrate', say, 'a secret love'? The lines of a popular song may be of some help here:

Kein feuer, keine kohle
Kann brennen so heiss,
Als wie himliche liebe
Von der niemand Nichts weiss.

So it is that the sentence 'my sister has passed her secret love on to me' may easily be rendered by an image of the sister handing the dreamer a piece of coal.

2. 1. The method thus consists in exchanging 'one form of expression against another', or in replacing 'an abstract expression' by 'a concrete expression' having the same meaning. We must follow Freud in distinguishing between this situation and one in which a 'dream element' (a word or an expression) is substituted for another although it does not have the same meaning. It is true that Freud describes these two kinds of substitution as being the result of a work of displacement along the path traced by the associative chains, which I shall have occasion to examine more closely below. The really vital thing, however, is the distinction itself:

in one case ....... one element is replaced by another, while the outcome in another case may be that a single element has its verbal form replaced by another.
It goes without saying that, in this latter case, it is not hard
for us to grasp that an exchange has taken place, nor to grasp,
by the same token, the meaning of the oneiric image, provided that
the dreamer's language is fairly familiar to us. But by what sign
do we recognize a substitution of the other sort, and how do we find
the repressed signifier?

With this question I shall conclude my analysis of the means of
representation in the dream and take up that of the processes which
determine its signification, the primary processes.
Footnotes: Chapter V

1. SE IV: p. 312.

2. The comparison between the dream work and the scribe's task is here to be taken literally. One can, moreover, wonder whether dreams did not play some part in the invention of the rebus, for one cannot rule out the possibility, in prehistoric times, of certain quick-witted persons having learnt how to decipher oneiric images according to what Freud calls their 'symbolic relation', i.e., their linguistic relation. Aristander, who interpreted Alexander the Great's famous dream of a satyr (Σατύρος) dancing upon a shield, by dividing the word 'satyr' into Σατύρος (=Tyre is thine'), was certainly not the first to have thought of this method.

3. loc. cit., p. 314.

4. loc. cit., p. 315.

5. loc. cit., p. 315.

6. loc. cit., p. 315.

7. loc. cit., p. 316.

8. loc. cit., p. 316.

9. The same cannot be said for Freud's other example, the Via Secerno dream. However, without having an interpretation,

Villa

I would point out that in his letter of 28 April 1897 (Letter 60) to Fliess, Freud reports that he has recently succeeded in extracting a patient's secret from her: the name of the person who had traumatized and seduced her, and who was none other than her father. Now, a short time afterwards, Freud began to express doubts regarding her 'aetiology', i.e., the seduction by the father; for the very frequency of these 'facts' led him to suspect them. This dream therefore concerned the hysteric's secret: is it a secret that she confesses, or rather a secret which is confessed?

10. loc. cit., p. 315.

11. This shows us that the 'means of representation' are not methods sketched out in advance by God knows who, and which a dream would simply put to use. One cannot emphasize too much that a
dream is rather in the position of a scribe who has to transcribe a given message in the form of a rebus, and who, with this purpose, must constantly improvise solutions, 'draw up plans'.


15. In fact, in the various modern Arabic dialects, words with two opposed meanings tend now to be restricted to just the one meaning.


17. **loc. cit.**, p. 326-327.


24. Freud's second example belongs rather to this category.


27. An ambiguity which Strachey's translation - 'How clear his eyes were' - resolves!


32. **loc. cit.**, p. 435.


34. **loc. cit.**, p. 445.

35. **loc. cit.**, p. 323.
Chapter VI

The primary processes in the dream

If dreams are tied to the exigencies of staging, they are, on the other hand, freed from the criteria of intelligibility which govern the exchange of speech with others. Which is why it is that, in dreams, we are often faced with a message whose wording may be somewhat vague. For example: 'Things did not turn out as he said'. We then have to ask ourselves: 'What things?', 'To whom does this pronoun he refer?' 'What precisely did he say?', 'Was it a lie that was involved, or a rectification?' and, last but not least, 'Why did one come to write such a message?'

It is to answer such questions as these that we appeal to an analysand's free associations.

1. In fact, the central element in the manifest dream, the one that causes the dreamer to wonder why he dreamed of that, generally turns out to be an irrelevant one, which is as distant as can be from the dreamer's preoccupations and habitual concerns. Now, thanks to the free associations, we often, if not always, succeed in discovering that there is more than one chain linking the irrelevant element to another theme; we invariably find that this latter theme was provoked by an event of the previous day, or that the events of the previous day have recalled it to mind. We will also find that the theme, far from being an anodyne one, is one that is of crucial concern to the dreamer. He will either recognise the importance of the theme treated by the dream immediately, the instant that, thanks to the free associations, he discovers it, or else he will find that he comes to recognise it after the event ('the thing was more important than I thought, or than I wished to think'.

Freud accounts for this discrepancy between the content of the manifest dream and that of the latent content as follows. The dream effects a 'displacement' that deprives the dream theme of its intensity, so as to channel it in a multiplicity of associative
directions which lead, one and all, to the element, which is in fact irrelevant, in the manifest dream. This multiplicity of directions or paths, this 'fabric of thoughts', reminds Freud of the weaver's masterpiece:

...... a thousand threads one treadle throws,
Where fly the shuttles hither and thither,
Unseem the threads are knit together,
And an infinite combination grows.

Freud calls this multiplicity of directions or of associative chains 'over-determination' and, inasmuch as it opens out on to one and the same element, which 'represents' the whole, he also calls it 'condensation'. 'Over-determination' and 'condensation' are two virtually synonymous terms: the only difference being that the former designates the multiplicity of associative chains, whereas the latter emphasises their convergence. We can therefore sum up Freud's account as follows: the dream-work consists of a displacement for which the in some sense mechanical condition is condensation — another condition (in the sense of motive or end) being that it should avoid the censor. Should we take this description at face value?

1.a. I think not. For it often happens that the dreamer remains 'obsessed' by the irrelevant but central element in the manifest dream, say the Tour de France, until he discovers why it is that he had been dreaming about it. By 'obsessed' I mean that the element in question keeps on cropping up in his mind, on any and every occasion, and often by way of the most artificial verbal associations. Whenever, for instance, he sees or hears a word beginning with the syllable bi— he cannot help thinking of a bicycle, and therefore of the Tour de France. The irrelevant element thus appears to the subject to be like an enigmatic signifier which insists upon saying something (what?) regarding something else which is of the utmost importance.
to the subject (but what is it?), and it is clear that if he or she finds an answer to the second question he will stand a much greater chance of finding an answer to the first. Now all these superficial associations, which provide a bridge between the irrelevant element and certain impressions that arise after the dream, have played no part in the formation of the dream itself. Why is this not also true of those superficial associations which are linked to the impressions or events of the previous day? This question is easily answered if we recall a point also stressed by Freud, namely, that every superficial association conceals a deeper one. The irrelevant but central element in the manifest dream invariably has very meaningful links with the dream's crucial theme. But what are we then to make of the insistence of this element in valueless associations?

I would answer this question, and thereby hope to shed some light on the most meaningful links in the dream, in the following terms: where the dream narrative leaves us in no doubt as to the metaphorical character of an element in the manifest dream (as in this dream fragment: 'the window was black, I mean that it was surrounded by a black tissue, even the curtains were black, a window in mourning, in short ...'), this same element will invariably feature several times in the analysand's free associations. From which one may conclude that the insistence or frequency of one and the same dream element, apparent in any number of different kinds of association, is the actual sign of metaphorical substitution which were were seeking (p. 600); inasmuch as it is conditioned by condensation, displacement designates, rather, the reasons which determine the choice of metaphor.

All the dreams quoted by Freud to illustrate 'condensation' bear out this point. Suppose we consider the first, the dream of the botanical monograph:

I had written a monograph on an (unspecified) genus of plants. The book lay before me and I was at the moment turning over a folded coloured plate. Bound up in the copy there was a dried specimen of the plant.
As soon as the memory of his conversation with Königstein the previous evening came back to him, Freud was in no doubt whatsoever that there was a very strong link between this same conversation and the botanical monograph. Not because it had been interrupted by the arrival of Professor Gärtnert, and his wife Flora, for had Freud had a purely anodyne conversation with his colleague Königstein he would not have had this dream, even if their conversation been interrupted in the same way: conversely, the odds are that this conversation would have given rise to a dream, even if it had been interrupted in some other manner.

Königstein, whom Freud (as we know) had previously rebuked for having neglected his (Freud's) observations regarding the anesthetic properties of cocaine, thereby allowing Dr. Karl Koller to take all the credit for their discovery, had in the course of this conversation touched upon a subject which 'deeply moved' Freud each time an allusion was made to it. His colleague reproached him, much as his father had been wont to do, for yielding too much to his phantasies. The botanical monograph is, beyond a shadow of a doubt, an allusion to the monograph on cocaine that Freud had once written, and with which he was no longer concerned. But what does this ghost mean?

When it is a question in a dream not simply of reproaches, but of reproaches from all quarters, from one's wife, one's colleagues, and finally from one's father, we have reason to suppose that the dream places the subject in question, not at the level of its acts, but at the level of its desires. As nothing was further from Freud's mind at the time of this dream than the idea of writing a botanical monograph, he concluded that this monograph hid another 'hare' a conclusion which accords with my own line of argument, namely, that the insistence of the signifier botanical must be the sign of a metaphorical substitution.

Freud was in fact involved, at this point in his life, in the writing of an altogether different sort of book, the Traumdeutung. And from his associations we discover that he was not the only person who had
been thinking of it. For, the previous day, his friend Fliess had written to him from Berlin: 'I am thinking a great deal about your book on dreams. I see it in front of me, finished, and I am leafing through it'. It is thus not hard to see why the botanical monograph should have been substituted for the *Traumdeutung*, for this substitution contains the very meaning or function of the work that Freud's *transference* transference with Fliess had occasioned: Freud was writing that work as an other (Fliess) and for this other. This is not belied by the fact that, the day after the dream, Freud, without knowing why, fell into a daydream which revolved around the theme (which he thought that he had forgotten) of the 'unknown author' of the discovery of the anaesthetic properties of cocaine. For, as well as being the author, he could also be said to be the victim, since this daydream also concerned an eye operation which he, like his father before him, would have to undergo.

In the second example, a lovely dream, the connection between the manifest element in the dream and the latent thought assumes a material form somehow. It featured a modest inn, which conjured up the hotel in which the dreamer, instead of going away for his holidays, preferred to put up (abgestiegen, literally, 'stepped down') for some time so as to remain 'in the vicinity of' his lady friend. The dream placed this inn in the very same street in which his friend lived, which was inaccurate. The fact that a play was being performed in this inn reminded him once again of this same woman, who was an actress. Finally, the hotel in which Freud's analysand had put up had been transformed by a cab-driver's words into an inn:

> When he left the hotel he had said to his cab-driver: 'Anyhow I'm lucky not to have picked up any vermin.' (This, incidentally, was another of his phobias). To this the driver had replied: 'How could anyone put up at such a place! It's not a hotel, it's only an inn.'

This inn was immediately associated in his mind with these lines from one
of Uhland's riddles:

Bei einem Wirt wundermild,
Da war ich jüngst zu Gaste.

I was lately a guest at an inn
With a most gentle host.

The host in this riddle is an apple-tree. Some other lines them came to be associated with this couplet:

FAUST (dancing with the Young Witch):

A lovely dream came once to me,
And I beheld an apple-tree.
On which two lovely apples shone;
They charmed me so, I climbed thereon.

YOUNG WITCH:

Apples have been desired by you,
Since first in Paradise they grew;
And I am moved with joy to know
That such within my garden grew.

This apple-tree and these apples left Freud in no doubt, especially as the lovely breasts had been among the charms that had attracted the dreamer to 'his actress'.

Once again, then, we have to do with a substitution. By putting an object which does not exist (the inn to which nothing corresponds in reality) in place of the object which, in this same reality, moves the analysand the most, this substitution provides us with what might be called the secret of the 'charm' which chains the dreamer to his friend. It is not simply a breast, but a breast of the kind that the analysand rediscoveres as much in the nursery rhymes of his childhood as in his dreams of paradise; a lack for which poetry alone will provide the 'figures' and which is
also signified in the same dream as organising itself around the signifier (which, for its part, exists) of the object which had really been lost, which was formerly the object of fraternal jealousy, and whose 'spectacular' structure is illuminated by St. Augustine's famous description of it, as Lacan has so often reminded us."
Here is Freud's third example, the dream of a 'patient' of his in which themes of cruelty and sensuality are strangely intertwined:

She called to mind that she had two may-beetles in a box and that she must set them free or they would suffocate. She opened the box and the may-beetles were in an exhausted state. One of them flew out of the open window; but the other was crushed by the casement while she was shutting it at someone's request (signs of disgust).

Let me remind the reader of the main associations to which the may-beetles gave rise: the cruelty to animals, may-beetles included, that the dreamer's daughter had shown as a child (she was fourteen at the time of the dream); Käthen von Heilbronn's words (from the play by Kleist):

Verliebt ja ein Käfer bist du mir.

Your are madly [lit., like a beetle] in love with me.

May-beetle or Maikäfer reminded the analysand of her birth and of her marriage, for she had been born in May and married in May; the most powerful aphrodisiac, ... cantharides (commonly known as 'Spanish fly'), was prepared from crushed beetleg; some days before, while going about her business, the dreamer was horrified to find herself thinking of addressing her husband with the imperative 'Go hang yourself!', for she had read a few hours earlier that when a man is hanged he gets a powerful erection.
This 'Go and hang yourself!' apparently conceals the wish 'Desire me at any price!' But we have no reason to accept Freud's own interpretation of this imperative: 'The wish for an erection was what had emerged from repression in this horrifying disguise. "Go and hang yourself!" was equivalent to: "Get yourself an erection at any price!"'.

For there was nothing repressed about either her husband's impotence or the frustration of her desire. Three days after her marriage, the dreamer wrote to her parents to say how happy she was, when she was nothing of the sort. Besides, why would she want her husband to have an erection at any price, if she were not the cause of it? The wish which this 'Go and hang yourself' conceals may more properly be translated as: 'May he stiffen in my sight (and upon seeing me) at any price!'

Can one then talk of a substitution of Maikäfer for the dreamer? One can indeed, except that she was not, as we have just seen, Maikäfer for her husband (and up to this point no dream is required). On the other hand, what she was not for her husband she was for her daughter, for her husband was on a journey at the time of her dream and it was her four-year-old child who was sleeping with her. Maikäfer was thus as much a metaphor for her in relation to her daughter as it was for her daughter in relation to her. Therein, if one may put it like this, lay her tenderness and her cruelty, a 'cruelty' that the child was probably calling for by displaying her own.

The above observations confirm a fact emphasised by Freud, namely, that the manifest dream unfolds around 'another centre' than the one with which the dreamer is concerned. Which is also why he talks of a 'displacement' that is 'one of the chief methods' in what he terms Traumenstellung or Dream distortion.

Freud holds that this distortion is dictated by the censor. Now, what I have just said about the metaphorical character of condensation, or, more precisely, of the element that is marked by it (botanical, inn, May-beetle), suggests another interpretation of the distance
between the two centres. This distance, which separates the unknown 
(unbewusste) thought of the dream from its manifest text, in which 
this thought is signified, would then simply be the actual mark of 
the division of the subject. Does this mean that dream distortion 
has no relation to the censor?

2. Before answering this question, we ought to limit 'displacement' 
to the strict meaning which Freud, recalling the adage Is fecit 
cui profuit, assigns to it when he terms it a mechanism in the service of 
the censor. Considered from this point of view, displacement and 
'metonymy' would be synonymous.

2. a. Suppose we consider the following example: I dreamed of a woman 
who was out walking with a little dog. This woman reminded the 
analysand of another, whom he had met at a reception but had hardly 
attracted him at all. Perhaps he dreamed this dream, he observed, 
because he had seen the Russian film 'The woman with the little dog'. 
A few moments later, he said how surprised he had been at finding 
himself apply the insulting description 'What a dog!' to a man for 
whom he in fact had a great deal of admiration. This was as far as 
it went. And yet I know that the dreamer's sister, whom he had not 
seen for ages, had a small dog which never left 
her side. 'The girl with the small dog' would describe her perfectly.

Almost all the examples that Freud gives of 'composite images 
intended to deceive the censor' are metonymic allusions of this sort. 
How is one to account for the analysand's failure to discern the 
meaning of the allusion, when it would seem to be obvious enough 
to the casual listener? To answer this, I would point out that, 
for him, his sister was not only a desired object, she was also the 
actual object which had imposed upon his desire its 'indestructible' 
form. For what he desired was also what he abhorred the most, to be 
this enigmatic dog, for whom, unknowingly he had a great deal of 
admiration, and to which she was so attached.

Moreover, the jokes whose technique I have termed 'metonymic' have 
their equivalents in the Traumdeutung. Indeed, the reader will find 
one on almost every page. If Freud does not treat them as examples 
of 'displacement' it is undoubtedly because he gives most space to
considerations respecting the possibilities of representation. In fact, the first time that he compares dreams and jokes (a comparison which he subsequently makes several times, emphasising the untranslateable character of dreams, and therefore of his own book) it is in the context of Alexander the Great's dream, in which Satyr = Sa Tyre ('Tyre is thine')\(^\text{15}\). Now, a rebus is not a metonymy; the two are ever so clearly distinguished by their respective aims. A rebus, even if its craftiness does make us smile, is a procedure which aims at transcription. Metonymy, however, is a detour imposed by the censor.
2.6. From this perspective, displacement can be seen as the procedure par excellence for allowing one to hear what ought not to be said—often thanks to the material links between the signifiers. First there is homophony, which dreams use a great deal in order to deceive the censor, as when, for instance, the phrase décor minable [shabby-looking décor] is used in place of des corps minables [pitiful bodies]. Alliteration is also used.; you might, for instance, find the phrase une partie de tennis [a game of tennis] being used to represent another partie [part (of the body) and therefore, through alliteration, and substitution of p for t, penis]. Double meanings occur too; thus, the sentence un feu pour 'feu Monsieur Untel' [a light (feu) for 'the late (feu) Mr. So-and-so'] is uttered when the gentleman in question is still living. We also find displacement, in the sense of 'deviation', as when someone says il calait un bateau [he sank a boat] in order not to say that il calait à ses examens [he flunked his exams]; there is word play also, for instance un cadavre macéré [a macerated corpse] for un cadavre m'a serré [a corpse embraced me], and sometimes dreams use a common name instead of a proper name, a procedure which, given that dreams are not slow to modify the latter a little for pejorative purposes, is only too frequent.
2.c. Every 'verbal association' is not a displacement. We sometimes find that one verbal form recalls another one, which 'rhymes' with it. The dream of the three fates is the best example of this. The dream calls to mind Freud's memory, at the age of six, of learning from his mother, that he owed a death to nature. There are a thousand and one forms by means of which one can approach the theme of debt, but because one of the three fates, the one who was most central to the memories that the dream evoked, was called Pélagie, it assumed the form of plagiarism.

2.d. Conversely, every displacement is not a verbal association. Sometimes, the links between signifiers depend upon reverberations between significations. Here is another example that bears out what I said above respecting alternatives:

I did not know if he wanted to put on a roof or to take off a roof. This phrase, which belongs to the dream narrative, refers to a memory which gave the analysant every reason for suspecting the intentions of the person who took care of her during part of her childhood, and whose fear of her uncovering herself in her sleep went so far that he would wake up several times in the night to check: did he want to put on the cover or to remove the cover?

2.e. A dreamer's 'verbal associations' are not merely cut from the same cloth as jokes are, but, for this very same reason, they also resemble the 'superficial' associations that played little part in its formation. Which is perhaps another reason why Freud did not identify them as being a key mechanism in the formation of dreams. Yet the difference between the superficial associations and the metonymies of a dream is attested by the fact that, once the meaning of the latter has been discovered, the dreamer will inevitably be somewhat surprised: 'I would never have thought of that!'. Which surely goes to show that, between the unconscious thought and what
is articulated in our day-to-day speech there is not merely 'distance' but what we have to deal, rather, with two domains that are exterior to each other, an exteriority such that the very notion of distance does not really do justice to it. Once again we have to do with *Traumentstellung*, a notion that I shall now examine more closely.

3. In the chapter bearing the above title, Freud says of the dream of Irma's injection that 'at first sight... gave no impression that it represented a wish of the dreamer's as fulfilled' 17. One then cannot help but ask, as one would of all dreams: why is an analysis necessary? In other words, why does a dream not say straight out what it has to say? It is this very phenomenon, the fact that dreams do not say what they have to say, that Freud calls *Traumentstellung*. This gives rise to a second question: what is the origin of this phenomenon?

It is in order to answer these questions that Freud considers the dream *My friend R. was my uncle*, a dream which consists in two thoughts and two images, each image following on from a thought, although he only reports the first half of the dream, 'since the other half has no connection with the purpose for which [he is] describing the dream'.

* — My friend R. was my uncle. — I had a great feeling of
a great feeling of tenderness for him.

I saw before me his face, somewhat changed. It was as though it had been drawn out lengthways. A yellow beard that surrounded it especially clearly.

We know where the interpretation of this dream, or what we have of it, led Freud, namely, to a thought so injurious to his colleagues and rivals for the title of Professor Extraordinarius that he could hardly credit it:

I felt obliged to proceed still further with my interpretation of the dream; I felt I had not yet finished dealing with it satisfactorily. I was still uneasy over the light-heartedness with which I had degraded two of my respected colleagues in order to keep open my own path to a professorship ....

In both these cases [i.e., the present dream and the dream of Irma's injection] what my dreams had expressed was only my wish that it might be so.

Some have discerned a denegation in this passage, as if the title of Professor must be in itself, without reference to anything else, the supreme good. It has to be said, moreover, that Freud gives them good reason to think this. For why was there this wish? Why did R. have to be an imbecile, and N. a criminal? Because, if such had been the case, there would have been nothing to stop him from 'hoping' to be elected Professor. But this desire was actually a conscious desire, and here we may recall, as Freud does, what we are told in Hamlet:

There needs no ghost, my Lord, come from the grave, to tell us this.
should help us to arrive at a more exact understanding of the
the relation between censorship and the **Traumzentstellung**.

3.a. The dream's desire, its unconscious thought, is signified
from the very point where it is madness, a madness of which the
real other, being the one from whom the subject actually
borrows the elements with which it speaks, and to whom it is
bound by the tie of language, would refuse to hear. The
censor is not at the origin of the **Traumzentstellung**, but it is
nevertheless the case that whatever testifies to the existence
of primary repression testifies to that of the censor also.

To put it more precisely, the censored dream-thought comes
from a locus which no I inhabits. Indeed, it is this absence of
an I which is the defining feature of the primary processes.\(^24\)
This locus is that of the Other, a locus from which 'the
operations of language derive'. Insofar as other
speaking subjects come to occupy this locus of
the Other, the place of censorship in Freud's sense, may be
described as the space between two subjects where something
is said by being unsaid.\(^25\)

The Freudian censor shows us that this locus is:

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..... the very one in which the transparency of
the classical subject is divided and undergoes
the effects of 'fading' which define the
Freudian subject as occluded by an ever purer
signifier.\(^{26}\)
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3.b. Indeed, what makes Freud's comparison between the dream
censor and the political one so telling is the manner in which
it illuminates the fact that, for the purposes of signification,
the dream does not merely exploit the links between signifiers,
upon which metonymy depends, but that it also makes uses of that
aspect of the signifier which causes the censor to fail, in the
most radical sense of the term, namely, 'Russian censorship',
i.e., that it gives itself away just where it is effaced.
Was the following dream, a patient of Freud's asked him, the fulfilment of a desire?

I saw Karl lying before me dead. He was lying in his little coffin with his hands folded and with candles all round - in fact just like little Otto, whose death to me.

The analysand tried to interpret it in accordance with Freud's own theory: '... Does the dream mean that I would rather Karl were dead than Otto whom I was so much fonder of?'. Freud, however, rejected this interpretation out of hand. We learn from an account of the highlights of her love life that, in spite of a breach which she had not chosen but which was due to the intervention of her elder sister, the mother of Karl and Otto, 'whose motives were never fully explained', she was unable to break free of her attachment to the man who [had] made a lasting impression on her heart'. Whenever it was announced that the object of her affection, who was by profession a literary man, was to give a lecture anywhere, she was invariably in the audience;

Freud also knew 'that the Professor was going to a particular concert and that she intended to go to it as well so as to enjoy a glimpse of him once more'. Freud made an inspired guess and asked her if she remembered anything that had happened at the time of Otto's death.

Her answer was not long in coming:

Of course; the Professor came to see us again after a long absence, and I saw him once more beside little Otto's coffin.
And so Freud interpreted her dream as a dream of impatience, which anticipated was by a few hours the glimpse she was to have of the Professor. Which is an interpretation that an analyst would have no hesitation in rejecting, if he did not recall a host of 'moderated' or prudent interpretations from his own practice.

What is signified in this dream, in spite of or, rather, thanks to the censorship, is not sacrifice but the thought of the sacrifice that the dreamer would make in order to find the Professor once more, as before, beside Otto's coffin. No price, even if it were Charles' death, would be too high. In other words, this dream signifies the unconditional nature of the patient's unavowed love, but also the vanity, in all senses of the term, of that love. Is there not in this a message without of any common measure with the few anticipated moments, which the manifest dream does not even trouble to bestow upon the analysand, since the professor does not actually appear in it?

In the psychoanalytic sense of the term, the censor testifies to the oppression the subject of the unconscious undergoes, inasmuch as it constitutes the first effect of the signifying relation, an effect which precedes the complicity by which social relations are defined.
Chapter VI  Footnotes

1. S. Freud, _loc. cit._, p. 283.

2. Wo ein tritt tausend fäden regt,
   Die Schilfkleine herüber schiessen,
   Die Fäden ungeschehen fließen,
   Ein Schlag tausend Verbindungen schlägt.
   


8. _loc. cit._, p. 287.


12. This is reminiscent of the following lines from _The Magic Flute_, which Freud's analysand herself mentioned, _loc. cit._, p. 291:

   Fear not, to love I'll ne'er compel thee;
   Yet 'tis too soon to set thee free.


14. Consult the analytic index of the Standard Edition of the _Traumdeutung_, the entries _play upon words_, _puns_, _jokes_, _switch words_, _alliteration_, etc.

15. S. Freud, _loc. cit._, p. 99m1. Alexander's desire may well have been to hear this confirmed by a fortune-teller, so as to assert his privileged relations with the gods.

16. S. Freud, _loc. cit._, p. 204.


18. S. Freud, _loc. cit._, p. 137.


24. Some writers refuse to consider metaphor and metonymy as primary processes because they see them as conscious mechanisms, whereas the primary processes are unconscious. They fail thereby to notice that the same objection might be levelled at Freud's assertion that the dream is a writing. Such an objection simply serves to show their limited understanding of the reality of the unconscious.


