

Psychoanalytic interpretation and the pragmatics of language

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The Freudian creation

In *The Question of Lay Analysis*, Freud explains to his interlocutor, whom he ironically calls ‘an impartial person’, how the method of treatment that he created works. He says:

[You assume] that the patient’s remarks and associations are only distortions of what you are looking for — allusions, as it were, from which you have to guess what is hidden behind them. In a word, this material, whether it consists of memories, associations or dreams, has first to be *interpreted*. You will do this, of course, with an eye to the expectations you have formed as you listened, thanks to your special knowledge. “Interpret!” A nasty word! I dislike the sound of it; it robs me of all certainty. If everything depends on my interpretation who can guarantee that I interpret right? So after all everything *is* left to my caprice.’ (Freud 1926e, 219)

To this day, the lack of any type of guarantee and the arbitrary discretion of the analyst in his interpretation are stressed in critical arguments against psychoanalysis, and even, within the psychoanalytic movement, between rival psychoanalysts. We should act as Freud did, that is, accepting that this line of questioning is of interest to us and coincides, at least in part, with our own interrogations about the efficacy of psychoanalysis. We cannot simply reject them because they are attacks against psychoanalysis or our way of understanding psychoanalysis.

Freud arrived at the conclusion that interpretation is an effective instrument (*the* efficacious instrument of psychoanalysis) — effective in the treatment of the unconscious — only when he was able to give an account of both the conditions that make it possible (which we can identify with the components and rules that constitute the analytic discourse) and of its effects: the opening of the unconscious and the expansion of the analysand’s discourse. He concluded that a transference-relation must be established between analysand and analyst as a condition of the effectiveness of the interpretation; and that the establishment of the transference relation requires that the analyst occupies a certain position — one of sympathetic and non-judgmental listening, he said, comparable to the position of someone who, in the history of the patient, listened to the patient in the same way. The

introduction of the method of free-association is correlated with the assumption of a position of non-*mastery in the* transference relation. The rule of free-association implies that there is an unconscious knowledge. But this unconscious knowledge is in the patient and remains unconscious within the patient. No matter how much he knows, the analyst's knowledge does not include the unconscious knowledge in the patient. The analyst may be *supposed* to know, but does not effectively know what is in the patient's unconscious. The analyst's position of non-mastery (or *ignorantia docta*, 'informed' or 'educated ignorance') enables the application of the fundamental rule. Both analysand and analyst will *learn* from the analysand's production of statements which will reveal the orientation of his unconscious desire and his specific ways of enjoying himself. The term *production* should be emphasised in this context: what the analysand does is to produce knowledge as he freely associates. We speak, with Freud, of unconscious knowledge, a knowledge of which the subject does not have any awareness. This unconscious knowledge becomes conscious through the work of analysis; 'becoming conscious' means here *being realised in speech*; it does not necessarily mean awareness or insight, in so far as these terms denote the conscious apprehension of a piece of knowledge. There are many examples in analysis of the analysand's revealing for the first time significant ideas which are crucial in the mapping of his unconscious; this revelation has an immediate effect, but he remains completely unaware of the fact. For instance, Lacan refers to a case of astasia-abasia where the interpretation given to the patient that 'she had never felt supported by her father' had the immediate effect of eliminating her conversion symptom, before the patient had any time to consciously realise that her symptom was founded on an equivocal expression. Sometimes the analysand never becomes fully aware of what he has said with his own mouth, which does not prevent his spoken words and their resonances from having an effect in his life.

Freud distinguished the psychoanalytic interpretation from *constructions in analysis*. (Freud, 1937d) The latter have ultimately the same aim as interpretations, that is, to make the unconscious conscious, or to fill in memory gaps, as Freud defined the aim of psychoanalysis. But while interpretations are for Freud punctual interventions which have a localised target, that is, a formation of the unconscious (a symptom, a dream, a parapraxis, a single occurrence in the flow of free associations), constructions are, as the name indicates, hypothetical historical reconstructions that concern certain events or significant periods in the life of the patient, in the context of unconscious dramatic constellations, such as a

conjecture proposed by the analyst about the state of the patient during his childhood at the moment when his mother was pregnant with the sibling who later on would be the object of a very problematic relation. Constructions in analysis, Freud says in the essay that bears that title, are only instrumental, in that — like interpretations — their aim is to promote the work of analysis by eliciting further and original associations; but they are indispensable, he says, as the work of analysis usually stagnates without the orientation provided by the analyst's constructions. They operate as prompts inviting to associate further along particular orientations, areas of the patient's life that require exploration or proposing topics that have been conspicuously absent from the analysand's speech. Yet the lines of demarcation between interpretation and construction are not always clear. In both cases the aim is the revelation of truth. Constructions would be more speculative and less accurate, but in Freud's view they are still essential for the emergence of unconscious formations which are then the target of precise interpretations. In the example mentioned by Lacan and quoted before, it is not easy to decide whether it is a case of interpretation or construction. The effect was that of a very accurate interpretation — it hit the mark at the centre; but it could be argued that it started as a guess on the analyst's part concerning the history of the patient's relation with her father.

The question of the validity of interpretations and constructions is linked to the distinction that Lacan stressed that should be made between *truth* and *exactitude*. Edward Glover wrote a now classical article on the therapeutic effects of the inexact interpretation, which Lacan discusses in this connection. (Glover 1931; Lacan 2006, 496) Like any other statement, an interpretation may be inexact in relation to the reality that it presumes to represent and still touch on the truth. I once insisted to a patient that what she was saying concerning a number of men in her life suggested a wish to devour them. She objected to my interpretation, not without foundation, as I learnt later; but my words had still a resonance in the unconscious, and she embarked in a whole series of stories and fantasies involving devouring — but she was the one being devoured, a position that later the analysis revealed to have been significant in her life. Although my interpretation had been inaccurate, it had nevertheless had a positive effect: that of attracting her attention on the question of devouring and her oral cannibalism.

Freud did not say the last word on interpretation; and it is remarkable that, apart from the studies that Lacan dedicated to it throughout practically his entire working life and

in relation to a variety of problems, we must wonder whether the rest of psychoanalysis has paid the due attention to the question of the efficacy of interpretation, or how psychoanalysis works. Even if one adopts the position that the interpretation is not all that a psychoanalyst does and that the problem of the efficacy of psychoanalysis cannot be reduced to it, the question still remains as to the ways in which analytic interpretation is efficacious. We must bear in mind that the conception that one has of analytic interpretation is strictly correlated to the conception that one has of the principles and aims of psychoanalysis.

In its materiality, the interpretation is made entirely of words. Is its aim also something which would consist entirely of words? No doubt the patient is more ambitious when he comes to see an analyst: he expects more than words, even if he has trouble in saying what he expects; and even if he understands that in an analysis he is not going to get more than words, he still expects those words to be the right ones to obtain what he really wants, which is irreducible to words (or at least he thinks so): an alleviation of his suffering, some form of happiness, and the protection and preservation of his life, endangered as it is by an imprudent way of conducting it.

In *The Question of Lay Analysis*, Freud imagines what his interlocutor (the ‘impartial person’) sceptically thinks about the psychoanalytic method, in which the word is the sole instrument:

‘Nothing more than that? Words, words, words, as Prince Hamlet says.’ (Freud 1926e, 187)

And then Freud has the impartial person saying:

‘So it is a kind of magic,’ he comments: ‘you talk, and blow away his ailments.’

Freud reflects:

Quite true. It *would* be magic if it worked rather quicker. An essential attribute of a magician is speed — one might say suddenness — of success. But analytic treatments take months and even years: magic that is so slow loses its miraculous character. And incidentally do not let us despise the *word*. After all it is a powerful

instrument; it is the means by which we convey our feelings to one another, our method of influencing other people. Words can do unspeakable good and cause terrible wounds. No doubt 'in the beginning was the deed' ['Im Anfang war die Tat.' (Goethe, *Faust*, Part I, Scene 3)] and the word came later; in some circumstances it meant an advance in civilization when deeds were softened into words. But originally the word was magic — a magical act; and it has retained much of its ancient power. (Freud 1926e, 187-8)

The pragmatics of language

Psychoanalysis has not been alone in investigating the effects of the word. Over the last fifty years there has been a proliferation of studies (all of them of great interest for psychoanalysis) on the action of discourse in the fields of linguistics, logic and the philosophy of language. These studies are usually grouped under the title of *the pragmatics of language*, following the terminology proposed by Charles Morris (Morris 1938). Morris established a distinction between *syntactics*, which concerns itself with the rules that make possible the construction of correct verbal formulas; *semantics*, which studies the instruments that enable the interpretation of formulas that are syntactically correct and determine its correspondence with reality or other linguistic propositions; and *pragmatics*, concerned with the usage of those formulas by interlocutors with the purpose of acting one upon another. (Ducrot & Schaeffer 1995, 776-7). Although some authors emphasise that the pragmatics of language must be understood as the study of what, in the meaning of a statement, depends on the situation in which that statement is used and not only on the linguistic structure employed, others conceive of pragmatics not so much as the effect of the situation upon the word, but rather as the effect of the word upon the situation. (Ducrot and Schaeffer 1995, 133) This viewpoint converges with the psychoanalytic perspective, as far as the function and effects of interpretation are concerned: an interpretation is produced in a discursive context and makes no sense outside it; but it is meant to change that context, or at least the subject's position in it.

The researchers on language have increasingly devoted themselves to the investigation of a common phenomenon of discourse:

[The fact that] most of our statements, while providing information about the world, institute or attempt to institute between the participants of discourse a particular type of relations, different according to the act of language actually executed [the effects of a command, for example, are different from those of a question] and according to the level of discourse chosen [for instance, reverential or colloquial] (Ducrot and Schaeffer 1995, 133 [my translation]).

Lacan recognised the contributions that the work of research on the pragmatics of discourse made to psychoanalysis during his life time; those contributions have increased since his death. I am referring to concepts and problems such as the differentiation between subject of the enunciation and subject of the statement, and correlatively, the deictic function (Benveniste 1971); the principle of charity (Quine 1960; Davidson 1984); the notion of radical interpretation that intervenes in every act of interlocution (Davidson 1984), the mechanisms and effects of the rhetorical figures, the relations between discourse and the different dimensions of truth, the articulation between the different forms of discourse and social practices, and quite a few other. They have contributed substantially to our understanding of the subject as a speaking being, of the clinical structures and of the conditions necessary for the effectiveness of the analytic discourse — including analytic interpretation, in so far as it is a form of speaking, and a form of acting *by* speaking: a form of acting upon the analysand's *jouissance* by speaking to him.

Although what follows is only schematic, I would nevertheless like to share some reflections on the contributions that psychoanalysis since Lacan has made to the study of the pragmatics of discourse, which are applied in the analytic discourse and which are, or can be, of interest and application in other discourses.

The pragmatics of analytic discourse

Lacan was the first in defining the psychoanalytic field as the *field of jouissance*; and he did so precisely in the context of his theses on the four discourses that analytic experience led him to identify (Lacan 1991). From this perspective, the most important Lacanian contribution to the pragmatics of language is the recognition of the different discourses as different modes of treatment of *jouissance* — *jouissance* as real matter oriented by discourse in so far as this is a social bond supported by a set of primordial statements. This is a major contribution to the

problematics within the frameworks of logic, linguistics and the philosophy of language, disciplines that have taught us exhaustively about the formal structure of language and discourse, but for which the functions of *jouissance* and the unconscious inscriptions of *jouissance* in discourse are not part of their conceptual and methodological interests. I am referring to the study of formulations that are common in ordinary discourse, and which constitute most of this discourse, such as ‘Come over here, I have to tell you something’, or ‘I love you’, which are puzzles, if not nightmares, for the specialist in logic or philosophy of language, precisely because the categories of propositional, modal or symbolic logic do not include the dimensions of *jouissance* and desire.

The recognition of *jouissance* as interior, not exterior, to discourse and the field of interpretation has its consequences for psychoanalytic praxis: in a sense, the same as for the linguist, such a recognition has complicated our lives — our working lives. But this is a salutary complication, since it has also enlightened our practice, showing the conditions and limits of its efficacy and orienting the use of interpretation. Since Lacan, we cannot simply conceive of interpretation as if it were external to *jouissance*, or as the translation of *jouissance* into ordinary speech — a translation that would operate as a reduction or appeasement of *jouissance*. Melanie Klein thought of interpretation as alleviating the patient’s anguish. Other psychoanalysts conceived of it as the vehicle for a permissible satisfaction of the maternal type. Others, as the intervention of a benign superego. Irrespective of the name assigned to it in all these cases, one can perceive, without ‘interpreting’ too much, that those conceptions imply that the interpretation itself is a form of *jouissance*, and that it would be compatible with the ethics of psychoanalysis in as much as it would make possible the realisation of the subject without transgressing the rules that govern professional relationships.

Since Lacan, interpretation is a delicate operation that, aiming at the cause of desire, unfolds in the field of *jouissance*, but is not reducible on that account to a particular form of satisfaction. Like the unconscious itself, its status is *ethical*. In the same way as the signifier cannot simply be opposed to *jouissance*, interpretation cannot be disassociated from *jouissance*. Interpretation ‘concerns the cause of desire’ (Lacan 1973). The cause of desire is in itself irreducible to the signifier, but it is also unthinkable unless it is in relation to the order of the signifier. This notion is already present in the Freudian concept of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, or inscription of *jouissance* in the unconscious.

The interpretation as a means of production

As Freud conceived of it, analytic interpretation is, in the first place, a form of *deciphering*. This deciphering is the deciphering of a subject (the subject of the unconscious) and not simply of a text. There is already here a radical difference between psychoanalytic interpretation and interpretation from the logico-linguistic perspective. From the logico-linguistic perspective, interpretation concerns the form and content of the statements, as well as the acts of enunciation. At this level of the analysis, we cannot say that the subject is foreclosed, and a good deal of the studies in pragmatics over the last few years is devoted precisely to the subjective support of interpretation as being structurally necessary. In these studies, the term ‘interpretation’ designates an operation of translation or deciphering that in principle appears as including a whole series of interpretative modalities, in which analytic interpretation could be inserted, at least in relation to some essential features. From the logical perspective, whether it is from the point of view of the sender or from that of the receiver all exchange of messages requires that the interlocutors translate, or according to Donald Davidson’s conception, *radically interpret* what they hear in terms of their own language (even if that is the same language that the interlocutor employs). This implies the recognition of different levels of subjectivity: in ordinary, living discourse, from the common code each speaking being — which is a member of a particular linguistic universe — selects his messages according to singular determinants. But this logico-linguistic subjectivity is a reduced subjectivity: it does not include the subject as subject of the unconscious, the subject of equivocity and enigma, the subject of the lack and the excess of both the signifier and *jouissance*.

The principle of charity, a concept developed by Willard Quine and Donald Davidson, states that in all discursive acts each of the interlocutors attributes to the Other the intention of telling the truth on the basis of the best available knowledge. We agree that this is a premise of discourse, and we could consider it as equivalent to the definition of the Other as the treasure of the signifier. But we also know, since Freud, that this premise is not the only one that governs discourse (any discourse). The attribution of the intention of always telling the truth implies an effort to attribute to the Other, and to oneself, subjective unification and the reduction or simple elimination of equivocity. Analytic experience shows, on the contrary, that the subject tells the truth when he speaks, but he still remains ignorant of what he is saying (he tells the truth without knowing it); and in telling the truth he does

not unify himself but on the contrary splits himself even more. This is the radical equivocality of discourse, which constitutes the subject by dividing him.

If there is a principle of charity that supports discourse, there is also a 'beyond the charity principle', correlative of the beyond the pleasure principle, whose effect is not so much that the interlocutors assume that the Other tells the truth, but rather that truth (the sister of *jouissance*, as Lacan says) erupts in discourse without considerations, without charity, without love for the neighbour (which is what 'charity', from the Latin *caritas*, means), even if it may concern other forms of love.

In other words, analytic interpretation, although *apophantic*, that is, truthfully assertive, is nevertheless founded on equivocality, at the three levels that Lacan identified: homophonic, grammatical and logical equivocality (Lacan 1973, 47). It employs the same *performative* linguistic instruments — that is, instruments that not only transform real situations but which are also *formative* of the subject — used by the joke, the uncanny (as a literary or artistic genre) and the hysterical conversion, among other manifestations of the unconscious. If I mention these three it is because they illustrate very well a point that I will discuss later.

J.L. Austin coined the term 'performative' to designate those statements which have the value of acts that transform a real situation and/or the subject's position in it. (Austin 1962) For example, 'I promise to return your book tomorrow'; 'I declare you husband and wife'; 'You can count on me'. Austin distinguishes performative from *constative* statements, that is, statements which are merely descriptive: 'That is a nice building'; 'The patient arrived on time'. From a psychoanalytic perspective, we would have to question such a distinction, since a merely descriptive statement without any performative intention may well have effects on somebody and not be as innocent as it sounds, if one takes into account the position of the subjects affected by it in the concrete experience of discourse where it is pronounced: calling a building 'nice', and depending on who says it to whom, may result in the preservation of the building, or otherwise; and the news that the patient arrived on time may affect significantly the judgement of the clinician waiting for him.

If the interpretation acts efficaciously on the analysand *qua* speaking being it is because *it gets incarnated* and *embodied* in the analysand's living body (a set of problems to which Colette Soler devoted a good part of her course of 2003-2004). That is how

interpretation works on *jouissance*: within its own field and within the limits imposed by the regime of excess and loss that governs human *jouissance*.

Interpretation is between enigma and quotation

In his *Seminar XVII*, on the other side (or the reverse) of psychoanalysis, Lacan says that interpretation is between enigma and quotation. (Lacan 1991, 39-42) An enigma is an enunciation which does not appear to be a full statement; it is almost a pure act of enunciation without anything being clearly enunciated. The speaker enunciates a signifier, S_1 , but this signifier does not refer to a second signifier, as it normally occurs with utterances. Instead of an S_2 one gets a question mark, and that is why an enigma produces perplexity. We occasionally encounter enigmatic pieces of discourse; but it is in psychosis where the signifier frequently becomes enigmatic, as it is unchained, or lacking in anchoring points (and perplexity is consequently a common state in psychosis).

Consider the analytic interpretation *par excellence*: ‘Hmmm!’ It can mean quite a few things: an indication of approval or, on the contrary, of disapproval; an invitation to elaborate; the acknowledgement that one has understood something, or whatever else the analysand may make of it. However, ubiquitous as it is, that formidable interpretation, ‘Hmmm!’ is probably insufficient to conduct a whole analysis.

The analytic interpretation is in between enigma and quotation. In the case of the quotation, there is a statement that makes sense, that is not enigmatic; but a certain ambiguity is created as to who is the subject of the enunciation. For example, in quoting Freud or Lacan one may well be working through an idea that one has borrowed from Freud or Lacan, but one may also quote them in order to merge with them and get their support and prestige.

A psychoanalytic interpretation is very often a quotation, a repetition which is not tautological of what the analysand has said in order to stress that *he* said what he said. But one can also quote the analysand as a way of inviting him to elaborate, making of a statement which may be more or less clear, more or less ambiguous, an enigma, something curious and intriguing: a signifier in need of a second signifier so as to determine what the statement is about.

Vacillating between being an enigmatic enunciation and a quoted statement, the analytic interpretation is nevertheless precise, not vague; it is *apophantic*, or assertive of the

truth, not a mere guess. But it is *dialectical*: it engages the analyst in a dialogue with the analysand which is creative in the sense of being a production, a co-production.

The model of the analytic interpretation continues to be the interpretation of the dream as established by Freud: the interpretation of the dream is the *analysis* of the dream. The analysis of the dream involves the production of new utterances associated to the preceding ones. The text of the dream is literally quoted, word by word, and each of its components is treated as an enigma in need of further elucidation; elucidation which is nothing else but the ideas that, in the dreamer, are connected to the manifest content of the dream. These associations are the representations of the life and works of the dreamer, and the interpretation of the dream is, in fact, the interpretation of the dreamer, of the subject of the unconscious taken as the discourse of the Other, as the inscriptions or marks left on the subject by primordial, formative encounters with the Other. If interpretation is a translation, then the translation that takes place in analysis is the work of analysis of the analysand, punctuated by the analyst's interventions that aim at ensuring that the translation does not miss anything important. This work of translation is in reality a work of *deciphering*. The model for the interpretation of the unconscious is not the translation of a text written in one natural language into another; say, of a German text into English. This is because the unconscious inscriptions, which are a form of writing, are idiosyncratic and cryptic, structured like a natural language but not identical to it. The means of representation that the unconscious employs are based on the common pool of ordinary language and its written forms; but their idiosyncrasy makes them resistant to functioning as discourse, which involves a social bond and shared significations. They are like hieroglyphs in need of deciphering; and it was when Freud realised that this is the case that he could claim that he had discovered the secret of the dream, which is also the secret, cryptic language of the unconscious. Melanie Klein recommended that the analyst become acquainted with the highly idiosyncratic terms used within the family to designate the things that are primordial in the life of the child: the different types of food, excrement, and the names of the different parts of the body. Each of us has been brought up in this intrafamilial language (*lalangue*, as Lacan calls it), which is also, as a rule, a language that designates prohibited and mysterious things. In the analysis of an adult these terms reappear in the formations of the unconscious. The work of deciphering is made harder by the fact that they reappear mixed up with the rest of the vocabulary of conventional discourse.

In quoting enigmatically, the analyst's interpretation draws the analysand's attention towards the *cause* of his desire. That analytic interpretation concerns the cause of desire is another definition proposed by Lacan in *L'étourdit* (Lacan 1973). Interpretation *concerns* the cause of desire without being able to *name* it, in the sense of giving a proper name to a localised, identifiable, positive entity. That the cause of desire, the object *a*, is an empty cause, a lost cause, explains why the enigmatic character of the interpretation is structurally necessary, not merely contingent, since the subject of the unconscious will never be able to localise his cause in a given signifier, a given object or any other particular thing. On the other hand, that the interpretation concerns the cause of desire means that this cause which cannot be named can nevertheless be circumscribed (Lacan 1977, 254). That is why quoting the analysand's words is necessary, in so far as quoting implies respect for the literality of the signifier. When taken literally, the signifiers uttered by a speaking being become the documentation of his history, the testimony of his living experience, the milestones of his desire, which lives in a permanent state of displacement; they are also the names of his *jouissance* — since *jouissance*, unlike desire, can be named: the compulsive manifestations of the drives can be recognised and identified.

From metaphor to metonymy

As a response to the analysand's discourse, the analyst's interpretation produces a metaphoric effect. What the analyst says comes to signify what the analysand said beforehand and gives it a new meaning; or, at least, it has the effect of inducing a new meaning in the associations produced by the analysand after the interpretation. The metaphoric effects of the interpretation operate in the same sense as the formations of the unconscious themselves. In all of them (the neurotic symptom, the dream, the parapraxes and the joke) the metaphoric effect is present. [S'/S ; $S'/S \rightarrow S + s$; $S' + s'$]. This is the creative effect, or surplus of signification, involved in the formations of the unconscious. They are signifying substitutions, and 'extra' meaning is produced out of the operation of substitution itself: a conversion symptom adds a new meaning to the organ or bodily function affected. It makes the organ or function operate as a signifier, something for which the organ or somatic function are not naturally prepared. As a signifier, the conversion symptom adds meaning to whatever representation the organ had previously.

I had a patient who, among other symptoms, suffered from hysterical astasia-abasia. This symptom could be traced back to her mother's admonishing words: 'You will always need a crutch' (originally in Spanish, a language in which the word for 'crutch', *muleta*, does not usually have the connotations that the term has in English). She needed a crutch literally, to support herself and not fall to the ground; so that she was constantly holding onto people's shoulders and arms. She never took a decision, however trivial, without first seeking the moral support of someone. Her legs could well have been defined according to the terms of the *Oxford Dictionary*, but her unconscious had added a repertoire of extra meanings that only the work of analysis could decipher.

Similarly, the dream images do not operate as images, but as signifiers, representing something other than what they appear to represent, and as written expressions they enter into combinations to also produce original significations.

Analytic interpretation operates in an analogous manner: it has the effect of a creative metaphor. In the case of my patient, telling her, 'You are the woman with the crutch... but also without it', added metaphoric sense to her being as subject. This addition is not to be confused with an inflation of the ego. In this case, for instance, the addition of a certain sense (a woman who is somebody only if she has a crutch), is also a loss, in the sense of being a representation of her real castration: the crutch that she desperately needs is in the place of what she lacks.

Is the analytic interpretation, then, equivalent to the formations of the unconscious: a symptom, dream, parapraxis, or joke? Yes and no. It is equivalent to a formation of the unconscious as far as its linguistic and discursive structure is concerned; but the interpretation is actually uttered by the analyst, a real Other for the analysand; it is a piece of deciphering and a response to the unconscious which effectively *undoes* the working of the unconscious: the interpretation spoils the dream, and the joke, and the symptom, and the parapraxis, in exposing the trickery involved in their production.

Now, the effects and aims of analytic interpretation are not confined to the metaphoric axis of discourse and the production of meaning. The interpretation is also metonymic: grounded in the symbolic order and constituted by signifiers, it aims at the cause of desire, which is beyond the order of the signifiers. Freud defines the neurotic symptom as a compromise formation inscribed in a symbolic formula; such definition emphasises the metaphoric affiliation of the symptom. But when Freud defines the symptom as 'the sexual

life of the neurotic', he is referring to it not only as a metaphor, but also as a real thing — a thing in the register of the real, compulsively pursuing a secret form of satisfaction which is metonymically displaced in relation to the repressed inscription of a lost satisfaction. The interpretation, a piece of symbolic work, metonymically refers to a real lost object outside the order of the symbolic.

Interpretation and transference

Lacan postulated that in the analytic discourse the analyst functions as a semblance of the cause of desire: $a \rightarrow \mathcal{S}$. If interpretation concerns the cause of desire, as Lacan also proposed, then we can deduce logically that the analyst's interpretation somehow concerns his own position in the analytic experience. The notion is not originally Lacanian; since Freud the idea that interpretation should include the function, the presence, the figure or some other attribute of the analyst has been well established as a principle of psychoanalytic technique. But there are differences of interpretation regarding the place of the analyst in the interpretation transmitted to the analysand. Melanie Klein and her school introduced the systematic inclusion of a reference to the analyst in all interpretations; and James Strachey and others maintained that the correct interpretation is that which includes both the transference relation and the so called 'extratransferential' material, that is, references to both the 'here and now' of the living experience of analysis and the patient's history (not only the history in the sense of a reconstruction of the past, but also the current history of the patient outside the walls of the consulting room). This approach is not without merit, as it exposes the transference relation and makes of it an object for analysis. Such an exposure would presumably reduce or eliminate the inevitable effects of suggestion that the analysand-analyst relation generates. But the problem with this approach, favoured by the neo-Kleinian group of analysts, is that it unwittingly places the analyst in two positions: as object of the transference relation, well within it, but also as standing outside that relation. In this conception, the interpretation called of the transference would be a sort of metalinguistic operation: the analyst would interpret from outside the relation whatever goes on inside the relation; and the inside of the relation includes him. But, as Lacan indicated, there is no metalanguage, there is no Other of the Other. Except in confined sections of specialised, artificial languages, it is impossible to use language and simultaneously be outside language.

Whatever the conception one has of the interpretation of the transference relation, the fact is that it is only *within* that relation that something can be said about it.

Why not apply to the interpretation of the transference the same principle that Freud fruitfully applied to the interpretation of all the formations and manifestations of the unconscious? As I mentioned beforehand, the interpretation of the dream is the *analysis* of the dream, for which purpose the initiative is left to the analysand/dreamer. Similarly, I would speak of the interpretation of the transference as the *analysis of the transference relation*, again, leaving the initiative to the analysand, rather than telling the analysand what I mean for him, what I represent for him, or what I am for him in the transference relation. He can tell me what I am for him much more accurately than what I can reconstruct; of course, I am there to make sure that he does analyse properly, that he does not omit anything that should be analysed, and also to indicate that there is something in need of analysis (what Lacan called once ‘intervention in the transference’), that is, when the enactments of the reality of the unconscious (which is how Lacan defines the transference) are not being addressed by the patient, thus becoming the focus of resistances.

Unlike other colleagues, we — Lacanian psychoanalysts — do not believe that the manifestations of the countertransference are reliable sources for the formulation of interpretations. They are prejudicial and/or symptomatic expressions in the analyst, which are to be analysed, but elsewhere, in the analyst’s own analysis.

A different matter is the concept of the *desire of the analyst*, which is an originally Lacanian concept that in a sense represents a response and a correction to the theory of the countertransference as a tool in analysis. The desire of the analyst is the motor of the transference and of the direction given to the treatment, and is the support for the position of *ignorantia docta* that befits the analyst: a desire to know not to be confused with the wish to possess knowledge and exhibit it to the patient.

Interpretation and truth

An analytic interpretation represents the truth: it is in the name of truth that an analyst speaks. Of course, he cannot tell the whole truth (truth can only be half-said, according to the well know Lacanian formula); but, fragmentary as his verbalisation may be, enigmatic as it may be, it still stands for a truthful piece of discourse. Nobody goes to an analyst to be

told lies. As I said before, truth is not synonymous with exactitude; but it does not exclude it either. Sometimes telling the truth in analysis requires a degree of exactitude:

‘And how many glasses did you say you drank?’

‘Two, or nine, I don’t remember’.

Of course he did not remember. But when it comes to drinking, as when it is a matter of certain crucial historical events in the patient’s life, it is necessary to be exact, not so much for the sake of accuracy, but simply in order to tell the truth. As the analysis progresses, the analysand becomes more inquisitive about his own history; and this involves the accuracy necessary to challenge and correct family myths, entrenched prejudices and screen memories.

In the same way as we have learnt from the research on the pragmatics of language, we can verify that the different theories of truth have something to offer to psychoanalysis: they compete with each other, but in reality each of them addresses a different dimension of truth. We cannot discard any of them: the so called ‘correspondence’ theory of some philosophers of language; the pragmatist theory; Heidegger’s conception of truth as *aletheia*, or ‘unconcealment’; Badiou’s theory of truth as occurring in events: we can identify in them notions applicable to psychoanalysis, which in concrete terms means the different ways in which analytic interpretation touches on truth.

From Heidegger, Lacan borrowed the idea that truth is only truth when it is manifest, not when it is merely latent. That is the concept of truth as *aletheia*, or ‘un-hiddenness’, ‘un-concealment’, the negation of a state of potential truth but also of latent obscurity. The notion suits very well the revelations that take place in analysis in the course of free association. What Lacan has emphasised in this connection is that truth is very much a matter of *dire*, of saying — the act of saying. He distinguished between interpretation and act: the interpretation involves a deciphering of the unconscious, while the psychoanalytic act is a response to the unconscious. But an act is not simply an action: it is grounded in the symbolic order; it has the sanction of discourse and its rules. In this sense, I would say that underlying a psychoanalytic act there is an interpretation of the patient’s subjective position. An act does not elucidate a formation of the unconscious, as an interpretation may well do; but it is still the result of an interpretative construction. To accept a patient in analysis is a psychoanalytic act; also, sometimes, to increase the fees. These acts are supported by the

general strategy of the treatment, even if they are not specifically derived from a particular manifestation of the unconscious. It is a response to the unconscious and its enactments whose effects will be understood later in the analysis.

Interpretation is performative

As I said from the beginning, Interpretation is performative, not merely constative; a production, not a mere translation that would not affect the original text. It affects the text (the signifying chain) and the subject who is subjected to the chain. It is a production of knowledge that corresponds to the master signifiers (S_1) that rule the subject without his knowledge or consent. The analysand is a co-producer, and he knows very well that whatever he says is open to... interpretation.

The discourse of the unconscious itself is performative: it is a master discourse composed of commands, the master signifiers which result in neurotic conversions, compulsions and phobias. Sometimes it has salutary effect, as in the case of the joke; sometimes, effects of anguish, as in the uncanny. In all cases, it is important to note, these performative effects are *bodily* effects: they affect the subject's position not only in terms of his dramatic relations with others, but also directly upon the integrity of his body.

The phenomena that I have just mentioned are compelling instances of the power of the word and the impact of its resonances (cf. Lacan's 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis'; Lacan 2006, 197-268). The unconscious is transindividual (rather than collective) because, although entirely unique and singular, and effectively affecting to one individual and one individual only, it is made of the marks (inscriptions) left by the experiences of a collective *living* discourse, with each significant other adding his own idiosyncratic usage to the common linguistic pool.

Classically, rhetorical persuasion, based on 'common sense' or popular opinion, was opposed to demonstration, based on *episteme*, 'scientific' or 'truthful' knowledge. Interpretation is not a scientific demonstration or explanation, but it aims at causes; it does not appeal to suggestibility (rhetorical persuasion). The causes in question are desire and *jouissance*: they delimit the field of analytic interpretation.

Desire and its interpretation

Desire *is* its interpretation, Lacan argues in *Seminar VI*, on desire and its interpretation. The unconscious functions by *procuration*, by constantly delegating its desiring capacity, displacing or transferring it at every opportunity offered by the signifying constellations which the vicissitudes of life provide for the subject. The unconscious ‘reads’, that is, interprets those opportunities provided by contingent encounters with others and object; it is a transference machine; every opportunity for the fulfilment of desire is at the same time an occasion for its *un*fulfilment, for something left to be desired (this is patent in the dream, the symptom, the symptomatic act). The movement that desire is (Freud defines it as a movement) translates the reality that the subject faces in terms of the signifiers that have already marked its historical trajectory. Those signifiers are the script for the fundamental fantasy, which is the support and dramatic staging for the presentation of desire: $\$ \diamond a$

Desire emerges in the gap created by the alienation of the need into the demand: that which is left to be desired. For the satisfaction of his vital needs, the subject is at the mercy of the Other’s interpretation. Mothers are the first interpreters, not analysts. The subject creates his own desire by speaking to the Other, which puts him in a position of subjection to the Other’s desire. The cry, the first call of the baby is, Freud says, what comes to represent ‘the initial helplessness of human beings [which] is the *primal source* of all moral motives’ (Freud 1950a, 318). By being listened to, the uttered demand is always satisfied, even if the need that it attempts to represent is not satisfied. Most people come to analysis to get just that: the satisfaction of the demand to being listened to; nothing else. They are not particularly interested in fulfilling, let alone getting to know, their desire. Our interpretation should fix this state of affairs, as ignoring or rejecting one’s desire condemns the subject to a life of pretences.

Interpretation proceeds by way of equivocation

The same as the unconscious, analytic interpretation, Lacan proposes, proceeds by way of equivocation, and he distinguishes the three levels of equivocation that experience has demonstrated: homophonic, grammatical and logical. Psychoanalysis pursues the truth but, unlike formal logic, does not find the truth in the seemingly coherent and consistent statements of a unified subject, but in the erratic, equivocal utterances of a speaking being who does not want what he desires. (Lacan 1973)

The analytic interpretation highlights the equivocality: it does not attempt to reduce it; on the contrary, the revelation of the truth is better assisted by punctuating and cutting through the analysand's speech. Lacan also characterised the function of interpretation as one of punctuation and cut, in the grammatical, logical and topological senses.

The ethics of interpretation

There is an ethics of psychoanalysis and therefore there is an ethics of interpretation. By this I mean that the effects of interpretation, which is a certain treatment of *jouissance*, have to be considered in their ethical dimension; the treatment of *jouissance*, or how to make it compatible with life (in the happy expression of our friend Vicente Mira). The ethical dimension simply concerns what is good for the subject; our problem being, as Lacan discusses at length in his seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis, that we do not have, and the patient does not have either, a proper model, a reliable set of parameters for what should be good for him. There is no Sovereign Good in the field of psychoanalysis, the field of *jouissance*. Which does not mean that there is no orientation possible in this field. On the contrary; but it means that, as Freud remarks in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (Freud 1930a, 83), that each one must find his own formula for his salvation. The analyst is there to assist, not to interfere with the analysand's enterprise. For that purpose, Lacan suggests, the analyst should be a saint, not one of those impossible beings idealised by the Church, but the real creatures who have been prepared to occupy the place of trash, of an object that eventually needs to be discarded. (Lacan 1990, 15-16)

The interpretation registers the losses of *jouissance* as well as its excesses: working-through in analysis requires that the losses be made explicit and sanctioned as acts, as positive actions with ethical support.

In this way, psychoanalytic interpretation contributes to the socialisation of *jouissance*, helping it to enter into the circuit of discourse and the creation of social bonds.

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