

INTERPRETATION IN REVERSE

Jacques-Alain Miller

— You're not saying anything?

— Oh I do, I do say something. I say that the age of interpretation is behind us.

This is what everyone says without yet knowing it. And that is why these *Journées* on interpretation needed an interpretation.

The age of interpretation is behind us. This is what Lacan knew but did not say: he alluded to it and we are just beginning to read it.

We say 'interpretation', we constantly have it on our lips, it assures us that the 'history' of psychoanalysis is pursued in us. But we say 'interpretation' as we say the 'unconscious' without any longer thinking of consciousness and of denying the latter. The 'unconscious', 'interpretation', these are the words of the tribe under the cover of which the new sense, advancing in disguise, creeps in.

What is the unconscious? Once one no longer relates it to consciousness, but to the function of speech in the field of language, how does one interpret its concept? Who does not know that the unconscious stands then entirely in the discrepancy which is repeated between what I want to say and what I do say — *as if* the signifier was deflecting the programmed trajectory of the signified, and this is what gives ground to interpretation — *as if* the signifier was interpreting, in its own fashion, what I want to say. It is in this discrepancy that Freud situated what he called the 'unconscious' — *as if* for this wanting-to-say of mine, which is my 'intention of signification', another wanting-to-say was substituted, which would be that of the signifier itself and which Lacan designated as 'the desire of the Other'.

How simple it is! How well known! But then why has the conclusion which inscribes itself from these statements [*ces dits*] taken such a long time in coming to light, namely the conclusion that interpretation is nothing but the unconscious, that interpretation is the unconscious itself?

Why is interpretation not included by Lacan among the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis, if not because of the fact that interpretation is included in the very concept of the unconscious? Is the equivalence between the unconscious and interpretation not what emerges at the end of the Seminar *Desire and its Interpretation*? In this paradox, unconscious desire *is* its interpretation. Is the equivalence unconscious/interpretation not what is restated in the form of the concept of the subject supposed to know? Will this be taken on board at last, as I say it once more today?

It is a lure, and even an impasse, to unilateralise interpretation on the side of the analyst, as his intervention, his action, his act, what he says [*son dit*], his saying [*son dire*]. No doubt people have been too overly fascinated by the 'speech act'¹ of the analyst to take any notice of the equivalence I mentioned between the unconscious and interpretation — the time-to-understand has unduly prolonged itself.

Analytic theories of interpretation merely testify to the narcissism of analysts. It is time to conclude. Interpretation is primarily that of the unconscious, in the subjective sense of the genitive; it is the unconscious that interprets. Analytical interpretation comes second, it finds itself on the

interpretation of the unconscious, hence the mistake of believing that it is the unconscious of the analyst which interprets.

Failing to start from the *a priori* that the unconscious interprets, one always comes, whatever one says, to make the unconscious an object-language and interpretation a metalanguage. However, interpretation is not stratified in relation to the unconscious; interpretation is not of another order, it is inscribed in the same register and is constitutive of this register. When the analyst takes over he does nothing other than what the unconscious does. He inscribed himself in the wake of the unconscious. He only makes interpretation pass from the *wild* state in which it shows itself to be in the unconscious to the *reasoned* [*raisonné*] state to which he attempts to bring it.

To resonate [*résonner*], to allude, to imply, to be silent, to be the oracle, to quote, to be enigmatic, to catch it in the half-saying, to reveal — but who does this? Who does that better than you do? Who handles this rhetoric as if by birth, while you struggle to learn its rudiments? Who, but the unconscious itself.

The whole theory of interpretation has only ever had one goal — to teach you to speak like the unconscious.

The minimal interpretation, the 'I agree with you but you said it first', what then is this? — if only to place quotation marks upon what is said [*le dit*], to decontextualise it, to make a new sense emerge. But is this not what the unconscious of the dream does, as Freud discovered it in what he named 'the day's residues'?

The unconscious interprets. And the analyst, if he interprets, interprets in its wake. What other path is opened to him in the end - if not that of identifying with the unconscious itself? It is the principle of a new narcissism, which is no longer that of a strong ego. 'You're not saying anything?' No doubt. To be silent is here a lesser evil. Because to interpret is all the unconscious ever did, and as a rule it does it better than the analyst. If the analyst is silent, it is because the unconscious interprets.

Yet, the unconscious also wants to be interpreted. It offers itself for interpretation. If the unconscious did not want to be interpreted, if the unconscious desire of the dream was not, in its deepest phase, a desire to be interpreted — Lacan says it — a desire to make sense, there would be no analyst.

Let us enter the paradox. The unconscious interprets, and it wants to be interpreted. There is contradiction here only for a rudimentary concept of interpretation. In effect, interpretation always calls for interpretation.

Let us say it otherwise: to interpret is to decipher. But to decipher is to cipher again. The movement only stops on a satisfaction.

Freud says nothing but this when he inscribes the dream as discourse in the register of the primary process, as a wish-fulfilment. And Lacan deciphers it for us by saying that *jouissance* lies in ciphering.

But then — how does *jouissance* lie in ciphering? What is its being in ciphering? And where does it dwell in ciphering?

Let's say it abruptly, as befits these brief communications which make the style and the spice of these *Journées* — there is nothing in the structure of language which would enable us to respond accurately to the question I pose, without adjusting its structure.

Last year I wore out the audience of my course by making it follow the meandering to which Lacan forced himself in order to integrate the Freudian libido within the structure of language and precisely in the place of the signified, giving to *jouissance*, if I may say so, the very being of sense.

Jouissance, sens joui [enjoyed sense] — the homophony with which he surprises us in his *Télévision* lies at the very basis of the programme inaugurated, if not by *Function and Field of Speech and Language*, at least by his deciphering in *The Agency of the Letter*. This programme is to reduce libido to the being of sense.

I scanned the main moments of this elaboration; there are five of them. At the end is the very disqualification of object *a*.

Thus what Lacan baptised as object *a* is indeed the ultimate waste of a grandiose endeavour, namely that of integrating *jouissance* into the structure of language, even if it meant broadening the latter to the structure of discourse.

Beyond this, another dimension opens up, where the structure of language is itself relativised and merely appears as an elaboration of knowledge [*savoir*] on *lalangue*. The term 'signifier' fails to grasp what is at stake, since it is designed to grasp the effect of the signified and struggles to account for the product of *jouissance*.

From then on, interpretation will never be what it was. The age of interpretation, in which Freud turned the universal discourse upside down by means of interpretation, is over.

Freud started with the dream, which has lent itself to interpretation from time immemorial. He went on to the symptom, conceived on the model of the dream, as a message to decipher. On his way he had already encountered negative therapeutic reaction, masochism and fantasy.

What Lacan continues to call 'interpretation' is no longer the same, if only because it is not indexed on the symptom but on the fantasy. And do we not keep saying that the fantasy is not to be interpreted but to be constructed?

The fantasy is a phrase which one enjoys [*qui se jouit*], a ciphered message which harbours *jouissance*. The symptom itself is to be thought from the fantasy, that which Lacan calls the 'sinthome'.

A practice which targets the sinthome in the subject does not interpret in the same mode as the unconscious. To interpret in the mode of the unconscious is to remain in the service of the pleasure principle. To put oneself in the service of the reality principle does not change anything, since the reality principle itself is in the service of the pleasure principle.

To interpret in the service of the pleasure principle — you needn't look anywhere else for the principle of interminable analysis. This is not what Lacan calls 'the way of a true awakening for the subject'.

It remains for us to say what interpreting beyond the pleasure principle could be — interpreting against the grain of the unconscious. There, the word 'interpretation' is only valid as a place-holder for another, which cannot be silence.

Just as we must abandon the symptom as reference in favour of fantasy, think the symptom from the fantasy, so we must abandon here neurosis in favour of psychosis, think neurosis from psychosis.

The signifier as such, that is to say as cipher [*chiffre*], as separated from the effects of signification, calls for interpretation as such. The signifier on its own is always an enigma and this is why it craves for interpretation. This interpretation necessitates the implication of another signifier, from which a new sense emerges.

This is the structure I highlighted a month ago in the clinical section of Buenos Aires, at a colloquium on delusion and the elementary phenomenon.

The elementary phenomenon demonstrates, in a particularly pure form, the presence of the signifier all alone, in sufferance — in anticipation of the other signifier that would give it a meaning — and as a rule there appears the binary signifier of knowledge which does not conceal here its delusional nature. One says it perfectly well — the delusion of interpretation.

This is the way of all interpretation: interpretation has the structure of delusion, and this is why Freud does not hesitate to place on the same level, without stratifying, the delusion of Schreber and the theory of the libido.

If the interpretation that the analyst has to offer to the patient is of the order of delusion, then indeed, no doubt one is better off to remain silent. A maxim of prudence.

There is another way, which is neither that of delusion, nor that of the silence of prudence. This way, we will carry on calling it 'interpretation', although it has no longer anything to do with the system of interpretation, save for being its reverse side.

To say it with the succinctness demanded by these *Journées*, the other way consists in withholding S_2 , in not bringing it in — so as to encircle S_1 . It amounts to bringing the subject back to his primarily elementary signifiers, on which he has, in his neurosis, had a delusion.

The unary signifier, as such nonsensical, means that the elementary phenomenon is primordial. The reverse of interpretation consists in encircling the signifier as the elementary phenomenon of the subject, and as it was before it was articulated in the formation of the unconscious which gives it a sense of delusion.

When interpretation emulates the unconscious, when it mobilises the subtlest resources of rhetoric, when it moulds itself onto the structure of the formations of the unconscious — it feeds this delusion instead of starving it.

If there is deciphering here, it is a deciphering which does not produce sense.

Psychosis, here as elsewhere, strips the structure bare. Just as mental automatism reveals the fundamental xenopathy of speech, so the elementary phenomenon is there to manifest the original state

of the subject's relation to *lalangue*. The subject knows that what is said [*le dit*] concerns him, that there is some signification, although he does not know which one.

This is why, precisely at this point, advancing in this other dimension of interpretation, Lacan appeals to *Finnegans Wake*, namely to a text which unceasingly plays on the relations between speech and writing, sound and sense, a text, woven of condensations, equivocations, homophonies, which nevertheless has nothing to do with the old unconscious. In it every quilting point is rendered obsolete. This is why, despite heroic efforts, this text lends itself to neither interpretation nor translation. For it is not itself an interpretation, and enchantingly brings the subject back from reading to perplexity as the elementary phenomenon of the subject in *lalangue*.

Let's say that in the text S_1 always absorbs S_2 . The words which would translate its sense into another language are as if devoured in advance by this very text, as if it was translating itself, and, by virtue of this, the relation of signifier and signified does not take the form of the unconscious. You will never be able to separate what Joyce wanted to say from what he said — integral transmission, but in a mode which is the reverse of the matheme.

The *zero effect* of the elementary phenomenon is obtained here through an *aleph effect*, which opens to the infinity of the semantic, or, better, to the flight of sense.

What we still call 'interpretation', although analytic practice is always increasingly post-interpretative, is revealing no doubt, but of what if not of an irreducible opacity in the relation of the subject to *lalangue*. And this is why interpretation — this post-interpretation — is no longer, to be precise, a punctuation.

Punctuation belongs to the system of signification; it is still semantic; it still produces a quilting point. This is why the post-interpretative practice which, every day a little more, takes over interpretation, indexes itself not on punctuation but on the cut.

Let us for the time being give an image to this cut, that of a separation between S_1 and S_2 , the very one that is inscribed on the inferior line of the matheme of the 'analytic discourse': $S_2 - S_1$.

The consequences of it are fundamental for the very construction of what we call the analytic session.

The question is not to know whether the session is long or short, silent or chatty. Either the session is a semantic unity, in which S_2 comes to punctuate the elaboration — delusion in the service of the Name-of-the-Father — (many sessions are like that), or the analytic session is an a-semantic unity bringing the subject back to the opacity of his *jouissance*. This supposes that it be cut before it closes on itself.

Here therefore I oppose the path of elaboration to the path of perplexity. Don't worry about elaboration, there will always be too much of it.

I thus propose that these *Journées* reflect on this: interpretation that is properly analytic — let's keep the word — functions against the grain of the unconscious.

There follows a summary of one of Jacques-Alain Miller's responses to the questions from the audience.

We start from the diagnosis posed by Serge Cottet — 'the decline of interpretation' — which hit the bull's eye after I picked up on it last year in his presentation at the Clinical Section. He signalled the difficulties which he situated in the order of a certain symptom. I attempted to illuminate this term 'decline', this shady face, which took us in the syntagma 'grandeur and decadence'. I place what can be situated at first sight as a decline of interpretation in a positive light. I sublimate this decline of interpretation into a post-interpretative practice. When did this practice start? With Freud himself, one cannot fail to notice it.

NOTE

I announced this communication in the programme for the *Journées* under the title *The Other Side of Interpretation*, it was presented in three phases: "Interpretation is dead. It will not be resuscitated. If the practice is contemporary, it is ineluctably post-interpretative although it does not really know it yet". Designed to take the average view by surprise, this oral communication aimed to produce an effect of surprise, and so it did and more. Thus success — or maybe not — for one, turning from port to starboard, 'drowned the fish'. Cf. on this topic my first thought *The Forgetting of Interpretation*, published in *La lettre mensuelle*, No 144, December 1995, p. 1-2.

This text was established by C. Bonningue and was reread by myself: I have made few amendments. — J.-A. M.

Translated by Véronique Voruz and Bogdan Wolf

1. In English in the text.

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