

The Linguistic *Dit-Mension* of Subjectivity

Paula Murphy

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to explore the overlapping of theories of language and subjectivity in the writings of French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. Lacan's particular brand of psychoanalysis takes its inspiration from Sigmund Freud, but Lacan has radicalized the discipline by opening it up to areas like linguistics, anthropology and philosophy. The subject as theorized by Lacan is consequently an individual whose identity is constructed through language itself, which both ensures the individual's socialization but simultaneously splits the subject by cutting him/her off from the real order of experience.

Considering this background to the development of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, this article questions anew the relationship between psychoanalysis and literary criticism. It is my contention that the link between the two centers around the crucial position of language within Lacan's thought. Showing how the purpose and mechanisms of the literary critic parallel those of the analyst within the situation of analysis, I will argue that the objective of both discourses is the uncovering of truth or meaning. However, both the analyst and the critic are also condemned to pursue their interpretations through language, as no metadiscourse is available. Since language in Lacanian psychoanalysis serves to disguise the unconscious, the truth cannot be found within language itself, but beyond it: in the interstices of signification, *inter-dit*. In this way, it becomes evident that the analysis of any piece of literature or art necessarily involves a response that is dictated primarily not by the words on the page or the paint on the canvas, but a message received by the subject which addresses the unconscious Other.

'Et ignotas animum dimittit in artes'

He sent his mind in search of knowledge that was hidden'¹ (Ovid 43 BC to 18 AD)

So I renounced and sadly see:

Where word breaks off no thing may be'² (Stefan Georg, 1919)

LA LETTRE VOLÉE

What makes psychoanalytic theory useful for the analysis of culture? How does the task of the cultural critic equate with that of the psychoanalyst? Many solutions have

already been proposed to these questions. Early use of psychoanalysis with literature produced what has come to be known as psycho-biography, with the critic analyzing the author, and the text functioning as the dream or the flow of free association through which the latent neuroses of the author could be uncovered. The theories of Lacan steered psychoanalytic criticism irreversibly onto the path of post-structuralism, yet while critics no longer analysed authors, recognizing that this method ignored the literary aspects of the text, they did analyse literary characters. Recent criticism has begun to question more thoroughly the exact nature of the relationship between the two discourses. Shoshana Felman argues that there is no longer a clear-cut definition between literature and psychoanalysis, and instead of positing the critic as analyst, which has traditionally been the case, she sees the author as analyst, recognizing that even the analyst's interpretation is not free from the actions of the unconscious, a point which Lacan is at pains to emphasise. Peter Brooks finds an analogy between literature and psychoanalysis in the concept of transference, equating the reader/text with the analyst/analysand: '[i]n the transference situation of reading as in the psychoanalytic transference, the reader must grasp not only what is said but always what the discourse intends, its implications, how it would work on him. He must, in Lacanian terms, 'refuse the text's demands in order to listen to its desire' (qtd. in Kaplan 1990, 6). Brooks moves closer to what I believe to be the fundamental link between the two discourses in his description of the concealed desire of the literary text as parallel to the analysand's unspoken desire in the situation of

analysis. It is precisely this site of silence that is the focus of Barbara Johnson's essay 'The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida', which critiques Derrida's reading of Lacan's analysis of *The Purloined Letter*.

In 'Le Facteur de la Vérité', Derrida criticizes Lacan for his blindness to the functioning of the signifier in the narration, and for making the signifier itself into the narrative's truth, thereby contradicting his own position on the endless play of the signifier by imposing a fixed meaning on the text. Derrida's title is a play on the double meaning of the French word *facteur*, which signifies both postman and factor. The title of the essay reveals its theme, which is the factor of truth, or the delivery of truth in psychoanalysis. Derrida correctly recognizes the importance of this seminar in Lacan's overall body of work. In the French one-volume version of *Ecrits* published in 1966, it was placed according to Lacan's wishes at the beginning of the book, the only piece which is displaced from the chronological sequence. Derrida rightly assumes that this strategic placement of the seminar reveals that it contains themes which consolidate many of Lacan's theoretical concerns. *The Purloined Letter* loses some of its meaning in translation: *la lettre volée* means both to steal and to fly. This refers to both the letter being stolen, as it is several times in Poe's story, and also to the meaning of the letter which flies off and cannot be pinned down. All of the characters in Poe's story are linked through their silence when the letter is in their possession: the Queen, the minister and the detective Dupin. If the letter is, as Lacan

suggests, 'synonymous with the original, radical subject' (Lacan 1988, 196) then it is the subject's truth which is hidden, trapped in an endless play of signifiers, as '[o]nly in the dimension of truth can something be hidden' (Lacan 1988, 201-2). Both the analyst and the critic seek to uncover the truth or truths of the analyst's speech and the cultural text respectively, and both attempt to do so through the only medium available to them: language.

Lacan's now famous summary of Poe's story, 'a letter always reaches its destination' (Lacan 1988, 205) is open to many interpretations, but one of the most important for the purposes of this article is the primacy of the symbolic order in the construction of subjectivity. Each of the characters in Poe's story is changed in some way through his/her contact with the letter, and in a similar way, the symbolic order in Lacanian psychoanalysis shapes and manipulates subjectivity. If there is a truth that can be accessed therefore, it is a truth beyond the signifier. The last forty years of structuralist and post-structuralist theory have effectively dismantled the idea that any text contains a definable, indisputable truth that is possible to uncover: at least, any truth of authorial intention. The truth that I refer to is not to be found within language. Rather, it is a truth that is situated in an unsignifiable space outside of language. It is not to be found either in the speech of the analysand or on the written page, but is concealed in the interstices of language, in the blank spaces between the words: '*inter-dit*' (Lacan 1998, 119).

Derrida's criticisms of the seminar on *The Purloined Letter* fall into two strands. He argues firstly that Lacan ignores the constructed nature of the narrative, seeing the narrator as a neutral communicant of information, and regarding the story not as a piece of literature, but as an illustrative example with a pre-ordained message that Lacan uses didactically. Further, he argues that Lacan's analysis conceals the purpose of his argument, which is not just a comment on signification, but is also belies the fundamental structuring function of his theories of sexuality:

What does Dupin know? He knows that finally the letter *is found*, and knows where it must *be found* in order to return circularly, adequately to its proper place. This proper place ... is the place of castration: woman as the unveiled site of the lack of a penis, as the truth of the phallus, that is of castration. (Derrida 1987, 439).

According to Derrida, the signifier takes the place of the phallus in Lacan's analysis of the story. Like the letter which is indivisible and indestructible, so too is the phallus in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Derrida states that '[f]emininity is the truth of Truth (of castration, is the best figure of castration, because in the logic of the signifier it has always already been signified' (Derrida 1987, 442). Like the letter which always reaches its destination, so too the phallus is positioned in Lacanian theory as an originary signifier, master signifier or as Derrida would have it, a transcendental signifier. The dividing line between psychoanalysis and deconstruction falls between the insistence of psychoanalysis on certain fixed points of meaning, and the equal

insistence of deconstruction that signification has no fixity.

However, Johnson points out that deconstruction also has a transcendental signifier, which is its insistence on the openness and instability of meaning. Derrida thus copies ‘the gesture of blank-filling for which he is criticizing Lacan’ (qtd. in Kaplan 1990, 7). Moreover, Derrida ignores the context of Lacan’s reading. He is not posturing as a literary critic, but admittedly uses the text for his own purpose, which is the illustration of his theories. The truth that Derrida refers to, contained according to Lacan in the letter, is ‘a truth which is not to be divulged’ (Lacan 1988, 198). The seminar on *The Purloined Letter* begins this article for the same reason that it begins Lacan’s *Ecrits*: it contains in a succinct form many central issues of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory: language and subjectivity and the relationship between the two; how the mechanisms of language structure the subject in a literal manner and the interpolations of the two in Lacan’s formulations on language which uncover the dynamics of subjectivity and sexuality. This article will outline Lacan’s theory of language as the cornerstone of subjectivity, in order to propose that the mechanisms of signification in the speech of the analysand and the literary text link the functions of both analyst and critic in an unending and ultimately unfulfilling search for truth and/or meaning.

LANGUAGE: THE REAL THING?

For Lacan, subjectivity is firmly rooted in language.³ Freud's discovery of the unconscious, and Lacan's rereading of the unconscious as a system based on the relation of the subject to signification, has engendered such a radical displacement of twentieth century thought that he compares it to the Copernican revolution (Lacan 1989, 182). The Lacanian subject must be conceptualized outside of the boundaries of traditional Freudian psychoanalytic theory, although Lacan does use Freud as a starting point, stating that his writings on dreams and jokes are 'a deciphering of pure signifying di-mention [*dit-mension*]' (Lacan 1990, 9). In fact, Lacan's theorizations of the subject are without precedent in psychoanalysis as they are considerably influenced by philosophy. Elisabeth Roudinesco points out that in Freud's work, the concept of the subject is not crystallized, although he uses the term. Lacan however is,

[T]rying to introduce the concept [of the subject] as it has been used in classical philosophy rather than in psychology Man is the subject of knowledge and law. Lacan is trying to link not Freud's second topography of the id, the ego, and the super-ego with a theory of the I, but to connect together a philosophical theory of the subject and a theory of the subject of desire derived from Freud and from Hegel via Kojève' (Roudinesco 2003, 27).

Lacan's divergence from Freud at the most basic level is through his theorizations of the subject as subject of language in the most literal sense of the word. He/she is structured through the structures of language. Lacan constantly emphasises the alienation between language and reality and this is echoed in the alienation between

the subject and the imago in the mirror phase. Ragland-Sullivan describes this alienation by saying, '[l]anguage names things and thus murders them as full presences, creating an alienation between the word and the thing, an alienation that infers gaps or a ternarity into language itself' (Ragland-Sullivan and Brasher 1991, 4). Language can only stand in for the real thing. It creates reality: '[t]he concept... engenders the thing' (Lacan 1989, 72). In 'Encore' Lacan denies that there is any knowledge beyond the signifier, saying '[t]here is no such thing as a prediscursive reality. Every reality is founded and defined by a discourse' (Lacan 1998, 32). He draws on Saussurian linguistics which similarly highlights the gap between language and reality by seeking to prove that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. According to Saussure, it is the combination of the two components of the sign that produces meaning: '[a]lthough both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact' (Rice and Waugh 2001, 40).

Lacan's originality lies in his belief that the signifier acts independently of its signification, and moreover, that the subject him/herself is unaware of this. Lacan adopts the algorithm S/s, placing the signifier above the signified and positing language above reality.⁴ The bar between represents the slippage, or *glissement* in meaning, between the two: 'the distance of what is written' (Lacan 1998, 34).⁵ The signifier is assigned this place of prominence because '[w]ere it not for this bar above

which there are signifiers that pass, you could not see that signifiers are injected into the signified' (Lacan 1998, 34). In other words, were it not for the signifier, it would not be possible to understand that there *is* a signified. Because of this slippage in meaning between the signifier and the signified, it is impossible for language to accurately communicate thought concepts. The subject's 'surplus of signification masks a fundamental lack' (Zizek 1989, 175). The failure of representation of the signifier and the void that it opens is itself the subject of the signifier. The signifier is a palimpsest, ⁶ marked with its own failure. The void that opens up between signifier and signified is a microcosm of the subject's relationship with and to language. The subject cannot control his/her representation in the signifying chain (S1) since this signifier is controlled by another signifier (S2). It is in this way that the subject is an entity 'whose being is always elsewhere' (Lacan 1998, 142). It is within 'llanguage' that S1, the master signifier, is to be found. Lacan uses the term 'llanguage' to describe the language of the unconscious and to differentiate it from language that serves the purpose of communication: '[l]anguage is what we try to know concerning the function of llanguage' (Lacan 1998, 138). It is an unconscious phenomenon, and as its affects are felt in the unconscious realm, they are as such incapable of being articulated by the speaking being. The subject, unable to reconcile being at once the subject of enunciation and the subject of the enounced, disappears in the gap that opens up between S1 and S2: a disappearance that Lacan names aphanasis. These relations between the unconscious and linguistics form a crucial component of

Lacan's thought and are used in his formulations of the Oedipus complex, repression, condensation, the anal drive, identification, love, displacement, the symptom and desire to name but a few. For example, the symptom of the analysand is the end result of the substitution on the chain of signification from the original sexual trauma, and so can be successfully aligned with metaphor. Likewise, the endless chain of desire can be described as metonymic.

Lacan's linguistic schema posits a signifying chain that floats above the signified, engendering 'an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier' (Lacan 1989, 170), and opening a gap in meaning and a division in subjectivity, as has been discussed. However, there must be something which binds signifiers to signifieds, otherwise language would be totally meaningless. What stabilizes the incessant *glissement* of signifiers are certain anchoring points which Lacan calls *points de capiton*. The literal translation of this term is 'upholstery buttons', an appropriate metaphor for the anchoring of this otherwise endless sliding of signification. The *points de capiton* stop the sliding, at least temporarily: they are the points at which 'signifier and signified are knotted together' (Lacan 1993, 268). A certain number of *points de caption* are necessary for the subject to be psychologically stable. If the subject has no anchoring points, then the result is psychosis. Although signification is anchored at particular sites within the system of language, this does not endow signification as a whole with any reliability. On the contrary, the subject only rarely

comes close to complete, meaningful articulation, which Lacan calls full speech.

FULL AND EMPTY SPEECH

That Lacan places so much emphasis on the importance of language is hardly surprising, since the practice of psychoanalysis has only one medium: speech itself. He differentiates between two types of speech which he names full speech and empty speech. The basic methodology of psychoanalysis requires the analyst to uncover what the subject is not saying, in order to find the root of his/her psychological problem. Empty speech is the analysand's speech to the analyst, where the subject 'loses himself in the machinations of language' (Lacan 1987, 50). The void or empty speech of the analysand can only be probed by speech itself, so despite the inability of language to communicate what is contained within this void, it is nevertheless the only means by which the analyst can access it, albeit in a metonymic sense. Empty speech is nothing less than 'the appeal of the void, in the ambiguous gap of an attempted seduction of the other' (Lacan 1989, 44). Full speech then, is found in the symptom(s) of the analysand, signifying a signified that is repressed from the subject's consciousness. This is full speech because it 'includes the discourse of the other in the secret of its cipher' (Lacan 1989, 76).⁷ Full speech aims at truth, 'the truth such as it becomes established in the recognition of one person by another' (Lacan 1987, 107). Truth is therefore not pre-existing, but is formed within a dialectic.

The speaker's own subjectivity is also constituted within this dialectic. Because of the gap between language and reality, language and the unconscious, and the constructive power of language itself, Lacan radically denies the informative function of language. Rather, he believes that the function of language is to seek a response from the other, thereby confirming the speaker's own subjectivity:

What constitutes me as subject is my question. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me. I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. (Lacan 1989, 94)

Like the signifier that can only be defined in relation to another signifier in Lacan's version of Saussurian linguistics, so too the subject (S1), can only be defined in relation to another subject (S2), and so cannot exist outside of the chain of signification. Here, as in so many cases, Lacan traces a correlation between language and subjectivity, and he defines this process by his own neologism, 'linguistricks' which means 'everything that, given the definition of language, follows regarding the foundation of the subject' (Lacan 1998, 15). The impossibility of communication is not necessarily felt by the subject as a frustration, and this is precisely because of the ability of language to mould the discourse of the unconscious into an articulation that can fit into the system of the symbolic order. Since the real is beyond symbolization in any case, real thoughts and desires become metamorphosed when translated into

language, and more importantly that metamorphosis *becomes* what the subject believes to be a real thought. In this way, language constructs and manipulates our unconscious thoughts, until ‘the fact that one says remains forgotten behind what is heard’ (Lacan 1998, 15): when a thought is articulated, the actual thought is then forgotten as it takes on a different meaning through its translation into language. In his formulations of metaphor and metonymy he once again practices linguistricks.

METAPHOR AND METONYMY

Lacan looks to Freud’s ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’ for the roots of his theory that the unconscious is structured like a language. Freud likens the dream to a rebus, and he identifies *Entstellung*, meaning distortion or transposition, as the precondition for the functioning of the dream. Lacan equates *Entstellung* with ‘the sliding of the signified under the signifier, which is always active in discourse’ (Lacan 1989, 177). The action of this sliding is of course, unconscious. As usual, Lacan uses this reading of Freud as a starting point for a much larger theory, beginning by stating that the very topography of the unconscious can be defined by the algorithm S/s (Lacan 1989, 181). Lacan follows Roman Jakobson in the latter’s major article of 1956, in positing two directly opposed axes of language: the metaphoric axis, which involves the substitution of one term for another, and the metonymic axis, which involves the combination of linguistic terms. Lacan expresses the signification that occurs in both

metaphor and metonymy with two mathematical equations. The equation that describes metonymy is written:

$$f(S...S')S = S(-)s$$

with f S referring to the signifying function, and the two s's in brackets referring to the connection between signifier and signifier, present in metonymy. On the right hand side of the equation, there is the signifier, 'S' and the signified, 's'. The bar in brackets represents the 'resistance of signification that is constituted' (Lacan 1989, 181). The formula as a whole articulates the fact that the signifying function of the connection of one signifier with another is congruent with the maintenance of the bar. According to Lacan, in metonymy, the bar is not crossed so no new signified is produced. In metaphor however, the bar is crossed and Lacan expresses this with the formula:

$$f(S/S)S = S (+)s$$

Here S/S represents the substitution of one signifier for another that is evident in metaphor. This equation expresses the fact that the signifying function of the substitution of one signifier with another (metaphor) is congruent with the crossing of the bar between the signifier and signified. Thus, it is only through metaphor that Lacan believes that a new signified can be created.

The purpose of these formulations is to underscore the inherent resistance to signification in language, and point out that this resistance can only be overcome through metaphor, where one signified is injected into another, producing a new signified. Metaphor and metonymy are used by Lacan in a number of different contexts. For example, the most important metaphor in human development is the paternal metaphor, where the desire for the mother is replaced by the Name-of-the-Father in the Oedipus complex. He also links metonymy to displacement and metaphor to condensation in the dream process, and the mechanisms of identification and love can also be conceptualized in this way, since both involve processes of substitution. Although Lacan's theorizations concerning language have now been filtered throughout post-structuralist criticism, this should not dilute their radical nature. Language, so long considered the supreme system of communication; a system which in its complexity proves the superiority of humans over other animals, is now seen as disguising and resisting articulation. The signifying chain allows the subject 'to use it in order to signify something quite other than what it says...it is no less than the function of indicating the place of this subject in the search for the true' (Lacan 1989, 172).

THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUE

Lacan offers little solution to the problems that he poses however. What is this ‘true’ that the subject is in search of? And how can he/she access this truth? If there can be no real communication in language, he declares that neither is there a metalanguage through which speaking beings can communicate: ‘No formalization of language is transmissible without the use of language itself’ (Lacan 1998, 119). Even the Greek symbols that Lacan himself uses can only be explained and conceptualized through language. ‘(N)o signification can be sustained other than by reference to another signification’ (Lacan 1989, 165): the structuralist belief that there is no inherent meaning in the sign but only differential meaning, forming an endless web of signifiers that are almost completely separate from the signifieds they represent. Heideggerian philosophy is very much in evidence in Lacan’s work, and nowhere more so than in Lacan’s theorizations of language. Heidegger too admits that as humans, we are to some extent trapped within language, and however much we try to control it, it is paradoxically language which constructs us:

In order to be who we are, we human beings remain committed to and within the being of language, and can never step out of it and look at it from somewhere else. Thus we always see the nature of language only *to the extent to which language itself has us in view*, has appropriated us to itself. (Heidegger 1971, 134, my italics)

Although much of Lacan’s theories about the influence of language on the subject are

heavily influenced by both structuralist linguistics and existentialist philosophy, his originality lies in the application of these concepts to a broader analysis of the subject. Lacan's beliefs on the fundamental role of language in subjectivity have quite radical consequences when taken to their logical limit, which he openly acknowledges. His theories call into question the very notion of being or existing. He cites Plato saying, '[f]orm is the knowledge of being. The discourse of being presumes that being is, and that's what holds it' (Lacan 1998, 119). Likewise in Lacanian linguistics, it is language itself that creates and forms our reality. As Heidegger articulates, even as we look at language, it is language that is looking at us, constructing our identity and defining our subjectivity.

Truth is one of the most central notions in Lacan's theory, but it is also one of the most ambiguous. It always refers to the truth about unconscious desire, and the aim of analysis is to reveal this truth in the analysand. Lacan does appear to believe that we can have some access to this censored knowledge of truth. This knowledge is to be found '*inter-dit*' (Lacan 1998, 119), between the words or between the lines: '[i]t is with the appearance of language that the truth emerges' (Lacan 1989, 190) says Lacan, although he is not referring to the language of everyday speech utterances here, but to the clues contained within and between those utterances which lead us back to the unconscious, the discourse of the Other. Foucault's statement about the 'truth' of the writings of the founders of discursive practices like Marx and Freud can

be applied to every discourse. He states that the return 'is always a return to a text in itself: specifically, to a primary and unadorned text with a particular attention to those things registered in the interstices of the text, its gaps and absences. We return to those empty spaces that have been masked by omission or concealed with a false and misleading plenitude' (Foucault, qtd. in Rabaté 2003, 8). The truth of unconscious desire does not exist in a pre-formed verbal state, waiting to be uncovered. On the contrary, Lacan insists that the truth is 'gradually constructed in the dialectical movement of the treatment itself' (Evans 1996, 215). That the subject comes to remember the formative moments of his life is not in itself particularly important: 'it is less a matter of remembering than of rewriting history' (Lacan 1987, 14), and this remembering must be 're-experienced with the help of empty spaces' (Lacan 1987, 66). This aligns with Lacan's notion that language creates reality: not just in the sense that language structures thoughts as they are being verbalised or written, but also in the sense that the act of remembering which must be done through language, actively constructs history. In articulating past experiences, we are forced to narrate our own histories, and these constructions are never fully accurate. As Lacan states, '[i]ntegration into history evidently brings with it the forgetting of an entire world of shadows which are not transposed into symbolic existence' (Lacan 1987, 192). Remembering inevitably entails an element of forgetting.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

In his essay ‘The Third Meaning’ Roland Barthes articulates a similar ambiguity of signification. In this essay, he describes an image from *Ivan the Terrible*. The details of the image matter little, as his enquiry could as easily be applied to any piece of literary or visual art. The image operates on two ascertainable levels. The first level is informative, which includes the visual information that is imparted from the image, in this case ‘the setting, the costumes, the characters, their relations’ (Sontag 2000, 317). The image also operates on a symbolic level: in the image, gold is pouring down on a young czar’s head, symbolizing ‘the imperial ritual of baptism by gold’ (Sontag 2000, 317). In addition to this straight-forward symbolism, Barthes also lists the symbolism of the image in relation to the overall theme of gold in *Ivan the Terrible*, as well as Eisenteinian symbolism and historical symbolism. Yet there is something missing from this analysis: the image speaks to him in a way that seems to defy signification:

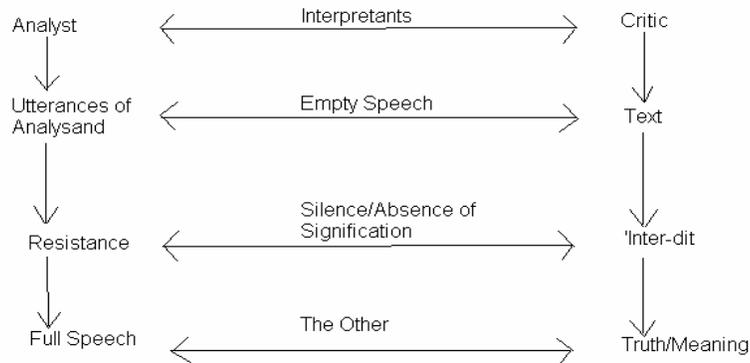
I read, I receive (and probably even first and foremost) a third meaning — evident, erratic, obstinate. I do not know what its signified is, at least I am unable to give it a name, but I can see clearly the traits, the signifying accidents of which this — consequently incomplete — sign is composed. (Sontag 2000, 318)

He calls this the third meaning or the obtuse meaning. Like full speech and truth in the analyst and critic diagram, the obtuse meaning ‘is not in the language system’ (Sontag 2000, 325). Likewise, it is ‘not situated structurally, a semantologist would not agree

as to its objective existence' (Sontag 2000, 326). Barthes deems 'obtuse' an appropriate adjective for this meaning since the definition of an obtuse angle is one that is more than 100 degrees. Likewise he states that, 'the third meaning also seems to me greater than the pure, upright, secant, legal perpendicular of the narrative' (Sontag 2000, 320). Barthes is attempting to articulate the indefinable impact that an image had on him, but he could just as easily be talking about a scene from a film, a poem, or a work of art. The 'third meaning' is the concept of *inter-dit*, but Barthes' theory is lacking an analysis of the operations of its signification, which it is possible to find in Lacan's work.

Lacan's theory makes it possible to explain why works of art are capable of exacting an emotional response in the subject. It cannot be explained by the actual combination of words on the page or paint on the canvas, rather it is a message received from behind the canvas, from between the lines: *inter-dit*, that addresses the Other. An elaboration of this analogy between the subject and the text, and the analyst and the analysand reveals the relationship between literary criticism and psychoanalytic analysis that should make Lacanian theory indispensable as a theoretical model. What links the discourses of psychoanalytic theory and cultural criticism at the most fundamental level is the interpretation of language in a search for truth. Both discourses are also confined to interpret language through language, since there is no metadiscourse. The similar mechanisms of cultural criticism and psychoanalysis can

be expressed in the following diagram.



Starting from the top, both the analyst and the critic act as interpretants of a particular discourse: in the analyst's case, it is the utterances of the analysand, and in the critic's case it is the text. According to Lacanian theory, the utterances of the analysand constitute empty speech, as does the literary text. In the case of the analysand, the discourse creates an increasing level of resistance on the approach to the pathogenic nucleus, becoming stronger the closer the discourse comes to the centre of the nucleus where the source of the original trauma lies.⁸ At the moment the speech of revelation is *not* said, resistance is produced, and this resistance is inversely proportional to the distance from the repressed nucleus (Lacan 1987, 22). The source of resistance lies in the ego, strictly located in the imaginary order,⁹ which constructs an obstacle to the 'speech which insists' (Lacan 1988, 321), the speech of the Other. It is useful here to

note that the ego always has a relationship with the other, and the ‘other’ in this case is both a reflection and a projection of the ego (Evans 1996, 133). It represents both the counterpart of the subject and also the specular image, so both ego and other reside in the imaginary order. As the ego is the source of resistance, and as it is so intimately connected to the specular image, *méconnaissance* is its fundamental function (Lacan 1987, 53). The source of speech is the big Other, which is situated within the symbolic order.¹⁰ The radical alterity of the big Other allows Lacan to emphasize that language is beyond one’s conscious control, it literally comes from an ‘Other’ place, which is why ‘the unconscious is the discourse of the Other’ (Lacan 1989, 16).

There is a certain residual layer of resistance, even after the reduction of the resistances that may be essential, according to Lacan. Both resistance in psychoanalysis then, and Lacan’s theory of *inter-dit* in language constitute a space of silence where there is an absence of signification. In the written or visual text, the overall meaning cannot be ascribed to a particular word or image, or even a combination of words or images. The ‘truth’ or meaning of a visual or literary text would seem to emerge from a space beyond the page or the canvas. For Lacan, it is precisely in what is incapable of being articulated that the truth resides. For example, the most significant dream for analysis would be the dream that the subject has totally forgotten, or about which they could not speak (Lacan 1987, 45). Likewise, because

of the inability of language to communicate meaning, it is in the silences between the words of the text that the truth lies. 'Speech never has a single meaning', he states, '[a]ll speech possesses a beyond' (Lacan 1987, 242), and this beyond is silence.

Lacan's theorizations are not without their problems and contradictions however. He problematically maintains that full speech can be found in the symptom(s) of the subject, which include the discourse of the Other in their code, while on the other hand, he claims that a residual layer of resistance is always present, suggesting that there can never be 'full' speech in the true sense. In any case, it is apparent that from the silences of resistance and *inter-dit* emerge full (or almost full) speech in the analysand and truth/meaning from the literary text or visual artwork. Of course, the ultimate paradox of language and linguistics in Lacan is that the only medium to articulate truth is through language itself, and so it can never be articulated fully, but always at a certain remove. In the words of Lacan himself, 'I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there's no way, to say it all. Saying the whole truth is materially impossible: words fail. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real' (Lacan 1990, 3).

REFERENCES

- Derrida, Jacques, 1987. *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, Jacques, 1997. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Evans, Dylan, 1996. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Georg, Stefan, 1919. 'The Word' in *On the Way to Language*, Martin Heidegger. New York: Harper and Rowe, 1971.
- Heidegger, Martin, 1971. *Unterwegs die Sprache*. Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske. [*On the Way to Language*]. Translated by Peter Hertz. New York: Harper and Rowe.
- Kaplan, E. Ann, 1990. *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. New York: Routledge.
- Lacan, Jacques, 1987. *The Seminar, Book I, Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-4*. Translated by John Forrester. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Lacan, Jacques, 1988. *The Seminar. Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-55*. Translated by Sylvana Tomaselli, notes by John Forrester. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lacan, Jacques, 1989. *Ecrits: a Selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. London: Routledge.
- Lacan, Jacques, 1993. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book III: The Psychoses 1955-1956*. Edited by Jacques-Allain Miller. New York: Norton.
- Lacan, Jacques, 1998. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XX: Encore 1972-1973*. Edited by Jacques-Allain Miller. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: Norton.
- Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. A.J.E. Collins and B.J. Hayes. London: University Tutorial Press.
- Rabaté, Jean-Michel, ed., 2003. *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ragland-Sullivan, Ellie and Bracher, Mark, eds., 1991. *Lacan and the Subject of Language*. London: Routledge.
- Rice, Philip and Patricia Waugh, 2001. *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (fourth edition). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Roudinesco, Elisabeth, 2003. 'The mirror stage: an obliterated archive' in *The Cambridge*

Companion to Lacan. ed. by Jean-Michel Rabaté. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [pp. 25-34].

Sontag, Susan, ed., 2000. *A Barthes Reader*. London: Vintage.

Silverman, Kaja, 1983. *The Subject of Semiotics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Zizek, Slavoj, 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.

NOTES

¹ Ovid, 43 B.C.- 18 A.D. This quote is also the epigram at the beginning of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

² George, Stefan, 1919, 'The Word', qtd. in Martin Heidegger's *On the Way to Language*.

³ Beneviste also notes the constructive nature of language in subjectivity, particularly in relation to the personal pronoun. 'The speaking subject enjoys the status of the referent whereas the subject of speech functions instead as a signifier' (Silverman 1983, 34).

⁴ Lacan accredits this algorithm to Saussure, although he acknowledges that it was never expressed in precisely this form in any of Saussure's writings (Lacan 1989, 165).

⁵ Derrida also critiques Saussurian linguistics. Unlike Lacan, he does not reverse the primary and secondary positions of the signifier and signified within the sign, but insists that both are secondary, ensuring the principal of deferral upon which all forms of signification depends: '[t]here is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language. The advent of writing is the advent of this play' (Derrida 1997, 7).

⁶ A palimpsest is a manuscript that has been written over two or more times, each time erasing what has been written before, although traces of the original writing may still be visible.

⁷ Although 'other' is spelt with a lower case 'o' in the translated seminar, it is likely that 'Other' is what is meant, since it is the unconscious Other, and not the other in the form of a person or image that full speech derives from.

⁸ The pathogenic nucleus is the centre of the repressed psychological trauma.

⁹ In Schema L, resistance is the imaginary axis a-a' which resists the speech of the Other on the axis A-S.

¹⁰ Both the little other and the big Other have different meanings in different contexts, so the explanation I give here is by no means complete, but it is the explanation which is relevant to this particular context.

Copyright © 2004 Minerva

All rights are reserved, but fair and good faith use with full attribution may be made of this work for educational or scholarly purposes.

Paula Murphy is currently completing a doctoral thesis in the English Department, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

Email: paula_murphy56@hotmail.com