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2019

## Jacques Lacan and Language

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### Recommended Citation

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## Jacques Lacan and Language

John Shannon Hendrix

According to Jacques Marie Emile Lacan in *Écrits*, the metonymic chain in language produces signification at a point which is the “anchoring point,” the *point de capiton* or button hole, which occurs retroactively, after the phrase is completed, and is the point at which the network of signifiers in the metonymic chain corresponds to a network of signifiers in the concept, the idea of mouth or river, for example, and thus accomplishes signification. The metonymic chain accomplishes this without “crossing the bar” into meaning, or the signified; the idea of mouth or river is not present in the metonym itself. When I speak I can only communicate something to you at the point at which what I say matches what you anticipate what I will say, thus communication occurs retroactively. The anchoring point is the point at which meaning or an idea is produced in the *glissement*, the sliding of the signifiers (p. 303),<sup>1</sup> but it is also the point at which absence is made present in signification, the absent subject which is seen as a signifier representing itself to other signifiers. When the functioning of the linguistic structure allows me to communicate an idea, it is the linguistic structure, the symbolic order, the Other or the unconscious, which allows me to communicate the idea, and my presence or existence as a speaking subject is negated. It is a trace or gap in language; my absence in language reveals the presence of the unconscious in absence, the presence of the Other into which I am inserted in the symbolic order. My imaginary ego in conscious thought, my identification with my image and images in general, prevents me from seeing myself as an absence in language, prevents me from experiencing my unconscious.

This type of production in language was labelled by Lacan “*signifiance*,” as opposed to significance or signifying, a type of production in language which does not cross the bar, the point of resistance, between the signifier and the signified in language, from the Saussurean model. *Signifiance* contains the presence of the irrational and the unconscious, and the absence of the signified, and thus the absence of the subject, and the absence of being, though it is predicated on the presence of that absence. As the concept of the metonym in language corresponds to the process of displacement (*Verschiebung*) in Freudian dream work, in the relation between dream thoughts and dream images, the dialectic of the rational and irrational corresponds to the

dialectic of conscious and unconscious thought. The unconscious should not be correlated with the irrational thought; the irrationality of dreams is a product of the reading of dreams in conscious thought, not of the unconscious processes which produce them. The presence of the irrational in the rational contributes to the Lacanian concept of the unconscious, as a gap in rational thought, and the unconscious is structured like a language; it is through this concept that psychoanalysis, or the philosophy of the structure of the psyche, or the philosophy of the identity of the human subject, and in particular its identity in language and perception, and the study of the mechanisms of conscious and unconscious thought, correspond. Lacanian psychoanalysis can be seen as a philosophy of intellect, and a structural one at that.

Unconscious thought is seen as a different form of thought than conscious thought, and exhibits aspects of the irrational in relation to the rational. The linguistic structure of the dream image of Sigmund Freud is seen as diffuse, clumsy and awkward; it is missing the organization of conscious reason, while its forms are mimetic of it. If the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, in Lacanian terms, if the unconscious is the network of language and rules into which the subject is inserted, it is only so in so far as it is a mimesis of the discourse of the Other. Dream images, the manifest content of the dream, are not capable of representing logical relations between the dream thoughts, the latent content of the dream, according to Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, or of representing logical relations between conscious thoughts, the relations created by syntactical rules.

Dream images can be characterized by their incapacity to incorporate to any significant degree the syntactical structures of language. The syntactical structures of language interweave the imaginary and the symbolic, conscious and unconscious, in the complete constitution of the subject. The imaginary corresponds to the perception of the image, the *Vorstellung* in reproductive imagination as it is connected to the perception of the sensible form, and the mnemonic residue of the image which is incorporated in dreams. The symbolic corresponds to language, the *logos endiathetos* and the intelligible, and the intelligible form as symbol, in the signifying structure into which the perceiving subject is incorporated. In Freudian dream analysis, dreams remain a function of the imaginary rather than the symbolic, though the composition of the dream is determined by linguistic structures, the symbolic, which are the structure of the unconscious.

Linguistic structures which can be found in dream composition include metaphor and metonymy, which, as Lacan demonstrates, reveal the uncon-

scious in conscious discourse, as well as syntactical mechanisms such as ellipsis, pleonasm, hyperbaton, syllepsis, apposition, catachresis, and autonomasis, which are the mechanisms of condensation and displacement, regression and repetition, which contribute to the composition of dream images as elements of the unconscious registered in the subject by the Other of Lacan, the linguistic superstructure which determines the subject in ways that are not always conscious, corresponding to the intellectual, a priori intuition, and the universal of Hegel. In that these are the mechanisms which allow the subject to moderate the dream discourse, they are not mechanisms of the dream itself, but rather the conscious reading of the dream in discursive reason; the unconscious can only be found in conscious thought, as an absence, and the irrational can only be found in rational thought, as that which is other to it within itself. Intellection can only be made present to consciousness in discursive reason, which limits access to it, given its corruption in relation to sense perception.

Among the syntactical mechanisms, ellipsis involves the omission of a word in a syntax without altering the signification, introducing a gap in the syntactical structure. A pleonasm is the use of more words than are necessary for the signification, so it is a repetition, and a condensation. A syllepsis is the use of a word in a syntax which agrees with one word in the syntax grammatically but not another, so it is a displacement, suggesting the irrational within the rational. An apposition is the placing of a word in a sentence to explain another word, as a repetition. A catachresis is the incorrect use of a word; an autonomasis is the use of a title instead of a name. These are the primary condensations and displacements, along with metaphor and metonymy, which are active in both language and dream construction.

The syllepsis can act as the *point de capiton*, the anchoring point of Lacan in the signifying chain. The anchoring point of Lacan is the point at which, in the retroactive anticipation of meaning on the part of the subject in the course of the diachronic establishment of a syntactical structure, a sentence for example, the subject enters into the structure in the gap between signifiers, linguistic units, and is represented by one signifier to the next signifier, either diachronically or retroactively, and the subject becomes aware that there is a disjunction between the signifier in language and itself, a bar which cannot be crossed, because the structure of the signification, the discourse of the Other, is the unconscious, which is not accessible by conscious thought. The unconscious is inaccessible as the intellectual is not fully accessible to discursive reason, except by representation. The intellectual in phi-

losophy is partly knowable through rigorous intellection, while the unconscious is partly knowable through the practice of psychoanalysis.

The coexistence of the mnemonic image and the phonetic element or signifier in the writing of a dream is the coexistence of the imaginary and symbolic, and the coexistence of the mnemonic residue of the visual perception and the mnemonic residue of the auditory perception, the traces interwoven into the language of the unconscious. The visual residue is the “thing presentation” (*Sachvorstellung*), according to Freud, and the auditory residue is the “word presentation” (*Wortvorstellung*) in the formation of the dream image, which is described by Freud as the transition from the latent content to the visual image of the dream in a “concern for representability” (*Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*). The coexistence of the *Sachvorstellung* and the *Wortvorstellung* in the *Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*, in the writing of the dream, is a “double inscription” (*Niederschrift*) which involves condensation and displacement, repression and repetition, and which corresponds to the coexistence of conscious and repressed or unconscious images which may occur in the preconscious, in the memory of the dream, and which constitutes the structure of conscious language in the mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy in particular. Dream work functions as a productive imagination, combining intelligible forms with mnemonic residues of sensible forms.

The *Niederschrift* contributes to the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* of the dream, which is the representation of a representation, according to Freud, but which, according to Lacan, is that which takes the place of the representation. The intelligible form takes the place of the sensible form. The mnemonic residue of an image in perception is transformed by syntactical mechanisms in the unconscious as it is seen as a hallucination or the mnemonic residue of the dream. The *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* poses a disjunction between what is perceived by the subject and what is represented in the mind, as perceived reality is given by mind, and language structures perception. The disjunction between what is seen and what is represented to mind is the disjunction between sense perception and intellection in philosophical metaphysics, between the real and the ideal, in the terms of Hegel, or between the form and the idea in the terms of Plato. The disjunction of the metaphysic is displaced, in linguistics and psychoanalysis, from the structure of reason in consciousness to the structure of language and the unconscious, as seen in the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. The disjunction between what is seen and what is represented reveals a divided subject, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, a subject which does not know itself, and a subject which is alienated from its con-

scious reason, in the tradition of Hegel, for whom reason becomes alienated from itself in its doubling. The basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis is to be found in linguistics, and in the study of language and perception.

As a result of the complex network of psychical relationships which produce the dream images, and the mechanisms of condensation and displacement, dreams are composed of disconnected fragments of visual images, syntactical structure in language, and thoughts consisting of intelligibles and perceptions. These comprise the *Sachvorstellung* and the *Wortvorstellung*, the thing presentation and the word presentation, the sensible image and the intelligible image, which are seen in a variety of logical relations to each other in a palimpsest of traces which is difficult to unravel, and which can appear to be irrational, according to Freud. The network of logical relations which contribute to the composition of dream images is too complex to be unraveled in dream analysis. Displacement, condensation, fragmentation, substitution and the *coincidentia oppositorum*, coincidence of opposites, are products of the complex network of logical relations, or the mnemonic residues of such, in the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* in dream thoughts, which is too complex to correspond to any logical structure, just as intellection is not completely accessible to discursive reason in metaphysics. In the process of the dream formation, the logical links which hold the psychical material together are lost. It is the task of analysis to restore the logical connections which the dream work has destroyed, as dreams are seen as the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind, as Freud writes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, an access to psychical mechanisms which psychoanalysis seeks to understand. Lacanian psychoanalysis furthers this quest in the analysis of the linguistic mechanisms of which dreams are a product.

The relation between the dream image and the dream thought, the manifest content and latent content, can be seen in the relation of the subject to language. The dream image responds to the dream thought in the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, as a form of psychical activity in response to perceptual activity. The content of the perception is anticipated and rearranged, as the subject is anticipated in language, retroactively, in the same way that the content of perception is ordered by the intellectual or intuition. In the unconscious, as in intellection, the word represents the image to another word as the signifier represents the subject to another signifier, and it is that series of relations which make both the dream and language possible and intelligible.

Lacan compared the distortion (*Enstellung*) described by Freud in dream work (*Traumarbeit*), to *glissement* in signification, the sliding of the signi-

fied under the signifier in the course of the signifying chain, as seen especially in metaphor, where one word takes the place of another, which bars the subject from signification, from the language which it produces in conscious thought. In the gap between what is perceived and what is represented in the dream as the mnemic residue of perception, a direct connection is lost in the process of distortion, as the connection is lost between the signifier and the signified in language. Freud's dream condensation (*Verdichtung*) is compared by Lacan to the combination of signifiers in metaphor. Displacement (*Verschiebung*) is compared to the transfer of signification in metonymy, where the correspondence between signifier and signified is maintained, but shifted, and rendered nonsensical.

The only difference between the mechanisms in language and the mechanisms in the dream work, according to Freud, is the difference between the intentions of communication in language and the consideration of representability (*Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*) in the dream, which is also a mechanism of a type of communication, which combines both *Wortvorstellung* and *Sachvorstellung* in conscious discourse. The elision of the subject in language, in the dream and conscious discourse, creates an absence of the subject to itself in its reason, as in the doubling of reason of Hegel. The anticipation of the subject in the signifying chain caused by the absence of the subject, which occurs at the *point de capiton*, or the inaccessibility of the unconscious, is that which causes desire in the subject in signification. The desire of the subject is the desire of the Other, for Lacan, the discourse of which the unconscious is composed. Desire is enacted by the *objet a* of Lacan, that which is missing from the subject, and in perception the *objet a* is found in the gaze, that which is missing from perception.

In Chomskian linguistics, the surface aspect of a language is the phonetic form or physical signal, the signifying element of the word as sign, as it were, in Saussurean linguistics, while the deep aspect is a "corresponding mental analysis,"<sup>2</sup> as described in *Language and Mind* by Noam Chomsky, that arises in response to the physical signal of the phonetic form. In Chomskian linguistics, the sign only contains a signifier and not a signified, as it would in Saussurean linguistics, because, first, the corresponding mental analysis consists only in sets of extended signifiers prompted by the phonetic signal, and second, because the phonetic signal only operates in a given syntax, and not of its own. For Chomsky the deep aspect of language consists of interrelating propositions and complex ideas, networks of signifiers, that are not articulated in the phonetic signal but are generated by it, and are generat-

ed by a matrix of underlying relations from the signal. The deep aspect consists of a network of formal regularities organized by a conceptual framework, which might be described as the unconscious. According to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in the *Monadology*, perception is a multiplicity of sensations which involves the self-consciousness or awareness the sensations, leading to the possibility of the unconscious. The self-consciousness of the sensations is “apperception.” The differential mechanism of perception is analogous to the mechanism of sensual bodies in flux. As Anna Teresa Tymieniecka put it, “for Leibniz the continuity of the psychological flux is grounded in the continuity of stages of incessantly varying and passing insensible perceptions understood as the basic element or material of the conscious flux.”<sup>3</sup> Such would constitute a “deep aspect” of perception, a network of perceptions, intelligible and sensible, connected to an isolated perception of a form, in the same way that a network of signifiers is generated from a signifier in language. The structure of perception must be related to the structure of language, in that perception is constructed by reason, which is borne out in the theories of Jacques Lacan. Apperception can also be called “macroperception,” and as Gilles Deleuze explained, “macroperception is the product of differential relations that are established among microperceptions.”<sup>4</sup> The continuity of the stages of insensible perceptions, and the differential relations among microperceptions, constitute desire in perception, generated by language, and the intersection between language and perception.

The network of signifiers generated by the form in the deep aspect must be differentiated from the formal syntax itself, and this is found in the dialectic between perception and the forms perceived. This is accomplished by formulating “a base system of rules which are concerned with underlying relations” (*Language and Mind*, p. 16), in the words of Chomsky. In other words, the abstract level of the network of perceptions, the intelligible forms, as opposed to the physical level, the sensible forms, requires an abstract conceptual structure of universal principles, as for Kant and Hegel, in the deep structure of language in Chomskian linguistics, in which apperception can be framed. This requires the movement from the particular to the universal in thought, as in Hegel; inversely, the surface aspect of apperception, the perception of physical relations, can only be understood within the conceptual framework of the deep aspect. In other words, a pure sensual perception of physical relations is impossible, the unmediated perception of phenomenolo-



gy; a conceptual structure is always already present in the perception of the sensual world; the intelligible form precedes the sensible form.

In linguistics, ambiguity arises from the “logical conflict of the denotative and the connotative,”<sup>5</sup> as described by William Empson in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, the denotative being the signifier in the phonetic signal, and the connotative being the network of signifiers generated by it. Noam Chomsky gave as an example of such ambiguity the phrase “the shooting of the hunters”: each signifier in the signals corresponds to a particular network of signifiers (the signified), but because of the position of each signifier in the syntax of the phrase, there are multiple possibilities of combinations of networks of signifiers to be drawn from the phrase, in its connotative effect; because of the position of the gerund in relation to the noun, the noun can be either the subject or the object of the phrase, and the designation of the preposition is undefined. Such ambiguity in language serves as a transformational device, because in reading the phrase the perceiver becomes aware of the underlying conceptual, abstract matrix which necessitates the perception of the phrase, in other words, the work of the intellectual or the unconscious. Reason thus becomes conscious of itself in language, and self-conscious of its own process in perception. Such ambiguity renders the phrase functionally meaningless, and exhibits the limitations of language as representation in relation to both perception and meaning, and the limitations of discursive reason in relation to perception.

Ferdinand de Saussure, in the *Course in General Linguistics*, compared the relationship between the signifier and the signified in language to a sheet of paper: “Language can also be compared with a sheet of paper: thought [signified] is the front and the sound [signifier] the back; one cannot cut the front without cutting the back at the same time; likewise in language, one can neither divide sound from thought nor thought from sound; the division could be accomplished only abstractly, and the result would be either pure psychology or pure phonology” (p. 113).<sup>6</sup> The signified is conceived as being the same substance as the signifier. But this is impossible, if the signifier is a physical, phonetic entity and the signified is an abstract, conceptual entity, an intelligible, though it is based on the mimesis of the signifier. Saussure himself renders the possibility of an identification in substance between sound and thought invalid in the following sentence in the *Course in General Linguistics*: “Linguistics then works in the borderland where the elements of thought and sound combine; their combination produces a form, not a substance.” An identification between thought and sound, signified and signifier,

can only be a formal identification, an identification of representation, and one which is easily negated, in order to free the syntax of signifiers in a composition in language, or in visual forms, so that it can create its own signification.

The possible disjunction between the signifier and signified was affirmed by Saussure himself in the analogy of language to layers of planes or waves: “Against the floating realm of thought, would sounds by themselves yield pre-delimited entities? No more so than ideas. Phonic substance is neither more fixed nor more rigid than thought; it is not a mold into which thought must of necessity fit but a plastic substance divided in turn into distinct parts to furnish the signifiers needed by thought” (p. 112). Thus the “linguistic fact can therefore be pictured in its totality—i.e. language—as a series of contiguous subdivisions marked off on both the indefinite plane of jumbled ideas and the equally vague plane of sounds.” Language does not “create a material phonic means for expressing ideas,” as the analogy of the piece of paper would suggest, but it rather serves “as a link between thought and sound, under conditions that of necessity bring about the reciprocal delimitations of units.” In other words, language creates the disjunction between signifier and signified in structural linguistics, but still connects the concept and the perception, the intelligible and sensible.

For Saussure, the phonic substance of language in the vague plane of sounds is irreducibly disjoined from the indefinite plane of jumbled ideas in thought, the intelligibles, which must be seen not as a network of signifieds, but as a network of signifiers themselves, which, though “chaotic by nature....shapeless and confused,” as revealed in dreams, are ordered in the process of language, in the interaction with the network of signifiers in speech, writing, and composition, the *logos prophorikos*; thus, “language works out its units while taking shape between two shapeless masses,” between which there is an unbridgeable gap. In the ordering of language, the formation of the sign, the “thought-sound” in the pairing of the signified and signifier, or the insertion of one phonetic signifier into a network of abstract signifiers, is completely arbitrary according to its own mechanisms, according to Saussure. “Not only are the two domains that are linked by the linguistic fact shapeless and confused, but the choice of a given slice of sound to name a given idea [network of abstract signifiers] is completely arbitrary” (*Course in General Linguistics*, p. 113). The only determinate factor in the pairing of the phonetic signifier with the idea or concept is a culturally determined syntax, which might be characterized as Chomsky’s “system of

rules that characterize deep and surface structures and the transformational relation between them.” Thus for Saussure, “the social fact alone can create a linguistic system.” This would be a basis for the Lacanian Other.

Language cannot thus depend on a direct relationship between a signifier and signified, between a word or form and an idea, in order to generate signification. In Saussure’s analogy, a network of signifiers interacts on a phonetic level, while at the same time a network of signifiers interacts on an abstract level, and it is at the points of intersection between these two matrices that language is produced. Since the interactions between the signifiers on the phonetic, physical level are independent of any attached abstract signifiers, the interactions can only be characterized as “differences” in opposition, and not only that, but “differences without positive terms” (p. 120). Not only is language at the phonetic level, that is, speech, surface structure or *logos prophorikos*, characterized as a play of differences without positive terms, but the conceptual level of language, the deep structure or *logos endiathetos*, is also characterized as a play of differences without positive terms. “A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas...” according to Saussure. This reaffirms the necessity that the signified be seen as a network of abstract signifiers. The movement between the series of differences of sound and ideas is defined by Saussure as “shifting,” and it is this shifting which determines the production of significance in language. “Regardless of what the forces of change are, whether in isolation or in combination, they always result in a shift in the relationship between the signified,” or network of signifiers, “and the signifier....Language is radically powerless to defend itself against the forces which from one current to the next are shifting the relationship between the signified and the signifier. This is one of the consequences of the arbitrary nature of the sign” (pp. 74–75).

Jacques Derrida referred to this “systematic production of differences” introduced by Saussure as *différance*, which is based on the interdependence of the network of signifiers (speech events, *parole*, *logos prophorikos*), and the network of signifieds (the linguistic system, *la langue*, language without speech, *logos endiathetos*, to be redefined by both Derrida and Lacan as a network of abstract signifiers). According to Saussure, the “linguistic system (*la langue*) is necessary for speech events (*parole*) to be intelligible and produce their effects, but the latter are necessary for the system to establish itself.”<sup>7</sup> Because of this self-referential interdependence of *la langue* and *parole*, language is seen as the production of a system of differences, *diffé-*

*rance*. Derrida's neologism refers to both the act of differing and the act of deferring, as the production of differences is seen as deferring a possible relation between a signifier and what might be a signified. *Différance* is related to the term *espacement*, or "spacing," and can also be related to the Saussurean term "shifting." In *Positions*, Derrida described *différance* as "a structure and a movement that cannot be conceived on the opposition presence/absence [signifier/signified]. *Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing by which elements relate to one another."<sup>8</sup> The spacing is thus the "production, simultaneously active and passive...of intervals without which the 'full' terms could not signify, could not function." *Différance* is the mechanism of the production of differences in signification in the absence of a direct relationship between signifier and signified, in the linguistic structure introduced by Saussure.

Further, according to Derrida, "the play of differences [*différance*] involves syntheses and referrals that prevent there from being at any moment or in any way a simple element that is present in and of itself and refers only to itself. Whether in written or in spoken discourse, no element can function as a sign [signifier] without relating to another element which itself is not simply present" (*Positions* p. 26). This relation "means that each 'element'—phoneme or grapheme—is constituted with reference to the trace in it of the other elements of the sequence or system. This linkage, this weaving, is the *text*, which is produced only through the transformation of another text. Nothing, either in the elements or in the system, is anywhere simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces," as in the traces of menemic residues of Freud.

In the thought of Lacan, the absent signifier is the key to understanding both metaphor and metonym, the principal mechanisms of signification in *différance*. The "instituted trace" of Derrida can be related to the bar of signification of Lacan, as the *archê* or *chôra* of *différance* in signification, the point at which the mechanism of differentiation is no longer reducible, and which constitutes a displacement of the role of the *chôra* in classical philosophy in modern linguistics. The impossibility of there "being at any moment or in any way a simple element that is present in and of itself" is present in Zeno's paradox. In the flight of an arrow, the arrow is always in a particular location at any given instant, and thus must never be in motion. The arrow can only be in motion if each particular instant is seen in relation to preceding and succeeding instants, and contains the traces of those instants, as a

signifier in language would contain the traces of all preceding and succeeding signifiers in a sentence.

Derrida identified the maintaining by Saussure of an instituted relationship between the signifier and the “signified” a form of “logocentrism,” a kind of metaphysics in the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, between the phonetic phenomenon in speech and the idea or concept. In metaphysics the signifier is subordinated to the signified and it is the idea or concept which is primary. The metaphysical is located in the “transcendental signified,” the possibility of the idea or concept which exceeds language, as in *nous*, and the possibility of an intellect which exceeds reason and logic. In *Positions*, “maintenance of the rigorous [on the part of Saussure] distinction—an essential and juridical distinction—between the *signans* and the *signatum* and the equation between *signatum* and the concept leaves open in principle the possibility of conceiving of a signified concept in itself, a concept simply present to thought, independent from the linguistic system, that is to say from a system of signifiers” (p. 19).

Saussure made it clear that any possibility of a “transcendental signified” can only be found in the abstract concept itself, the intelligible, as representation, as “in language, one can neither divide sound from thought nor thought from sound; the division could be accomplished only abstractly, and the result would be either pure psychology or pure phonology.” Such is the first principle of metaphysics, that the *signatum* cannot be independent of the *signans* by which it is constituted. Derrida continued, “in leaving this possibility open, and it is so left by the very principle of the opposition between signifier and signified and thus of the sign, Saussure contradicted the critical acquisition of which we have spoken,” and by doing so he “accedes to the traditional demand for what I have proposed to call a ‘transcendental signified,’ which in itself or in its essence would not refer to any signifier, which would transcend the chain of signs and at a certain moment would no longer itself function as a signifier.” But there is no transcendental signified in metaphysics that is not connected to a signifier.

Here Derrida re-interpreted Saussure’s “identification” between signifier and signified as “opposition,” and at the same time defines the signified as the signifier itself. Neither of these concepts can be found in Saussure himself. Derrida thus concluded, “On the contrary, though, from the moment one puts in question the possibility of such a transcendental signified and recognizes that every signified is also in the position of a signifier, the distinction between signifier and signified and thus the notion of the sign becomes prob-

lematic at its root.” But there is no necessity for such a transcendental signified. The same conclusion can be drawn from the identification which Saussure himself makes between signifier and signified. For Derrida, this “does not mean that the notion of sign could or should be scrapped; on the contrary, the distinction between what signifies and what is signified is essential to any thought whatever.”

This distinction arises within the trace, within *différance*, rather than as an a priori condition, and the metaphysic is preserved as such. As Eric Perl wrote, “whenever a supposed ‘transcendental signified’ is produced, it turns out, necessarily, to be defined and constituted by difference, and therefore produced within the system, the text, to which it is supposedly prior and independent.”<sup>9</sup> Derrida, in fact, maintained the priority of the signified over the signifier, as the substance of the production of language, given that the signified is none other than a network of signifiers. In *Of Grammatology*, the “signifier will never by rights precede the signified, in which case it would no longer be a signifier and the ‘signifying’ signifier would no longer have a possible signified.”<sup>10</sup> It will be left to Jacques Lacan to challenge this relationship, the priority of the signified. In the shifting of Saussure, the dual play of differentiation between the abstract and the physical, it is at those points of the interaction between like signifiers, and in their combination, where a “positive fact” or “value” is produced in language. If the abstract signifier is seen as a mimetic form in thought, and thus a deception or an illusion in the Platonic sense, then it would be difficult to accept that value could be produced in language in this way, at least for the purposes of artistic expression or composition, poetic expression in tropic language.

An example of the shifting of Saussure can be found in a comparison of the two phrases “Je l’apprends” (I learn it) and “Je la prends” (I take it), which have the same sound in speech, which was prioritized by Saussure over writing, but a different signification. The signification depends on the context in which the phrase occurs, which can provide a clarification, thus the value of the sign in signification depends on its relationship to other signs. “Each linguistic term derives its value from its opposition to all the other terms” (*Course in General Linguistics*, p. 88), as in chess “the respective value of the pieces depends on their position on the chessboard,” operating according to an established set of rules. The established set of rules in language governs its operations which take place between the network of signifiers in speech and writing and the network of signifiers in thought which constitute the signified. While the “cut” or opposition between sound

and thought is important in language, the identification between sound and thought in language is equally important, which delimits the possibility of the transcendental signified in this oppositional linguistics. Both the cut and the identification are necessary in order to relate sound to thought, and the shifting or play of differences which generates signification takes place on all levels, in the network of phonetic signifiers, the network of abstract signifiers, and in the interaction between the two, which is both identificatory and oppositional, in a *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Jacques Lacan identified the network of abstract signifieds of Saussure as a network of signifiers, and placed the network of phonic signifiers over the network of abstract signifiers in the algorithm S/s. The value of the signifier is not to be found only within the rules which govern the shifting of phonic signifiers, but within the rules of the interactions of the entire system of networks between sound and thought. The value of the signifier is determined at a certain point in the flux of the interaction of networks, the flux of the play of differences, which Lacan calls the “anchoring point.” The anchoring point (*point de capiton*) is that point at which “the signifier stops the otherwise determinate sliding [*glissement*] of signification” (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 303),<sup>11</sup> following the concept of shifting in Saussure. This anchoring point is necessary for a relationship between a signifier in speech and a signifier in thought, and it reveals the presence of the unconscious in speech. It is a function of the context of Saussure, the set of rules which determine the relationships between words in a sentence. In particular, “the diachronic function of this anchoring point is to be found in the sentence, even if the sentence completes its signification only with its last term, each term being anticipated in the construction of the others, and, inversely, sealing their meaning by its retroactive effect,” as in the instituted trace of Derrida, locating the metaphysic within the structure of language itself. The anchoring point is the point at which the signification constructed by the sentence intersects, either becoming identical or opposite to, a corresponding signification in the network of signifiers in thought. It depends on the same principle as that of Zeno’s paradox in the trace: signification is a diachronic event, but is produced at a synchronic point which precludes the possibility of signification. Signification in the sentence is only produced retroactively, when the synchronic structure of the identification of sound and idea intersects with the diachronic structure of speech and thought.

The anchoring point in the sentence must stop the *glissement* of signifiers in order for the sentence to signify something. The best example of this is

found in an analysis of the structures of metaphor and metonymy, the two principal tropes used in figurative language. An analysis of metaphor and metonymy also confirms the primacy of the signifier over the signified, or speech over thought, for Lacan, in the determination of signification, and in the definition of the subject in language. Following the placement of the signifier over the signified, Lacan established that it is not the subject which produces language, but rather language (the Other) which produces the subject. Metaphor and metonymy are particularly important for the role that they play in the constitution of the unconscious of the subject in relation to conscious thought, most importantly in the mechanisms of dream work as established by Freud, wherein conceptual structures in the unconscious, the manifest content of a dream, are transformed into dream images. The two principal mechanisms at work in the transference are condensation and displacement, which Lacan sees as forms of metaphor and metonymy in language. It is this relationship that allows Lacan to formulate the thesis that the unconscious is structured like a language. Other mechanisms of unconscious language, such as jokes, glossolalia, neologisms, and even the process of desire, can be described in metaphoric and metonymic terms.

A metaphor produces signification by substituting the name of one thing for something else, but it is only in the combination of the two names that an idea is formed. If the world is a stage, the idea of the stage must be subsumed under the sign of the world; a shift or *glissement* takes place wherein the signified is transferred from one signifier to another, in what is called *signifying substitution*. It is the process of combination and condensation which produces the signification, which occurs at the anchoring point of the phrase, the point at which the condensation intersects with the equivalent network of signifiers in thought, and the idea is retroactively produced in the gap between the two networks, which is also the point of combination. The anchoring point in the metaphor is the point at which “sense emerges from nonsense” (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 158). In the *glissement* of the metaphor, the signified follows the signifier; the signifier is thus autonomous in relation to the signified, and is the determining factor in the production of signification. In the *glissement*, the idea of the world has been effaced or hidden, and replaced by the idea of the stage. It remains as a trace, and occupies the gap between speech and idea.

The preceding example of metaphor depends on a particular relationship that must be present between each corresponding signifier and signified which allows for the transference to take place; the transference is thus gov-



erned by a specific set of rules, and the signifiers within the metaphor can only function in relation to each other. The same is true in the mechanisms of the metonym. The metonym is a displacement, a change of name (*metonymia*), the substitution of a descriptive term with another which has no relation to the subject term (“the mouth of a river,” for example). The conditions of the substitution depend on a pre-inscribed relationship between the subject term and the substituted descriptive term, in this case the relation between a mouth and water. In metonymy, as opposed to metaphor, the initial signified, water in this case, is not eliminated or effaced; it is retained as necessary to produce the signification in relation to the substituted signifier. The metonym is thus subject to a stricter set of rules than the metaphor, and requires a more complex combination of signifiers.

Lacan described the function of both metaphor and metonymy with a set of algorithms. The metaphoric process is symbolized as:  $f(S'/S)S \approx S(+ )s$ .  $S'$  is the first signifier in the metaphor,  $S$  is the second, and the  $(+)$  represents “the crossing of the bar — and the constitutive value of this crossing for the emergence of signification” (p. 164), that is, the anchoring point which provokes the crossing of the bar between signifier and signified, between conscious and unconscious language. A second algorithm for the metaphoric process illustrates the importance of the elision of the primary signified in order for the metaphor to function:  $S/S' \cdot S'/x \rightarrow S(U/s)$ . The  $S$  is a signifier,  $x$  is the unknown signification,  $s$  is the signified (idea) created by the metaphor, and  $S'$ , the barred  $S$ , is the elision of the substituted signified in the *glissement*. The algorithm for the metonymic process displays the maintenance of the substituted signified in the signification process:  $f(S...S')S \approx S(—)s$ . The fact that the bar is not crossed indicates that the division between the signifier and signified is maintained, because the substituted signified has not been elided. It illustrates that in the metonym there is a certain resistance to signification. Of itself, “the mouth of a river” is nonsensical and represents an absurdity which “the world is a stage” does not, because it involves a displacement or substitution as well as a simple condensation or combination. It is because of this displacement that the substituted signified must be maintained, and the anchoring point, or *point de capiton*, in the process of signification is delayed (it does not take place initially), and requires an additional association between signifieds in order to take place. These mechanisms can then be applied to dream work, in order to understand the structure of the relation between dream thoughts, or manifest content, and dream image, or

hallucination, and they can also be applied to the artistic production of visual forms, in the transference of thinking to form-making.

The transformational methods of Chomsky can be compared to certain transformational devices in Platonic philosophies that were developed to move from the sensible to the intelligible, from specific forms to formal concepts. These devices include the irregular bodies of matter as derived from the regular bodies in the *Timaeus* of Plato, the dianoetic reasoning of Proclus in the *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, and the diagrammatic function of polygonal geometries as an allegory of intellect in the *De circuli quadratura* of Nicolas Cusanus.

As Noam Chomsky explained in *Language and Mind* in 1968, “according to the Port-Royal theory, surface structure corresponds only to sound—to the corporeal aspect of language; but when the signal is produced, with its surface structure, there takes place a corresponding mental analysis into what we may call the deep structure, a formal structure that relates directly not to the sound but to the meaning,” that is, the signification. “Propositions that interrelate to form the deep structure....enter into the complex ideas that are present to the mind, though rarely articulated in the symbol, when the sentence is uttered” (p. 16). The sentence in language, discursive reason, is the particular manifestation of an extensive set of possibilities in a conceptual matrix which is implicit in the intellect, the intellectual, in the same way that, for example, polygonal figures in the geometry of Nicolas Cusanus are particular manifestations of the infinite possibilities contained within the figure of the circle in *De circuli quadratura* in the fifteenth century, in the correspondence between the sensible and the intelligible.

For Cusanus, polygonal figures are manifestations of mathematical doctrines developed in the intellect,<sup>12</sup> as the polyhedral solids of Plato are geometrical constructions of the children of the demiurge based on the mathematical proportions of the idea, translated into intelligible form. As described in the *Timaeus* (42–43),<sup>13</sup> “his children remembered and obeyed their father’s orders, and took the immortal principle of the mortal creature, and in imitation of their own maker borrowed from the world portions of fire and earth, water and air—loans to be eventually repaid—and welded together what they had borrowed; the bonding they used was not indissoluble, like that by which they were themselves held together,” not archetypal, “but consisted of a multitude of rivets too small to be seen, which held the part of each individual body together in a unity. And into this body, subject to the flow of growth and decay, they fastened the orbits of the immortal soul.”

Thus the universal is inserted into the particular. According to Cusanus, material variations are first made visible by mathematical figures, which transform them into geometrical figures, in the same way that for Lacan, metaphorical and metonymical processes are represented by algebraic algorithms.

In the *Timaeus* of Plato, the spherical structure of the universe is manifest in the architectonics of the soul as fashioned by the demiurge. As the universe is a “circle moving in a circle, one and solitary, yet by reason of its excellence able to converse with itself,” the soul, the generating or desiring intellect, is constructed of two circles, which are made from two strips which are cut from a fabric, and then “placed crosswise at their middle points to form a shape like the letter X” (*Timaeus* 36). The ends are then bent around in a circle and fastened to make two circles, the outer circle having the regular motion of the same, the invisible motion of the eternal, and the inner having the irregular motion of the different, the visible motion of the heavenly bodies. The geometries operate in the dialectical movement from sensible to intelligible, the symbolic content of the geometries in the *Timaeus* notwithstanding. The geometries in the *Timaeus* are employed metaphorically, wherein the sensible motion of the different must be elided in order to signify the passage from sensible to intelligible. The anchoring point is the axis of the X which is formed, the trace which the two geometries have in common.

In the *De circuli quadratura* of Nicolas Cusanus, polygonal geometrical figures are manifestations of mathematical doctrines developed in the intellect, as the polyhedral solids of Plato are geometrical constructions based on the mathematical proportions of the idea in dianoetic thought, linking the intelligible to the sensible. According to Cusanus, material variations are first made visible by mathematical figures, as phonetic entities are transformed into a syntax. In the Prologue to the *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, Proclus stated that mathematics “occupies the middle ground between the partless realities—simple, incompressible, and indivisible—and divisible things characterized by every variety of composition and differentiation” (3),<sup>14</sup> between discursive reason and that which is beyond it. Mathematics is the medium by which pure forms in the intelligible world are transformed into the matter of the material world, as copies or representations, as for Cusanus mathematics transforms material variations into geometrical figures, which are diagrams of those variations, the intersection of the conceptual and the physical, thus a transformational relation (Chomsky's term). Geometrical figures are the result of mathematical doctrines devel-

oped in the intellect, the intersection of intellection and the sensible world, the subjective and objective in Hegel's terms. In the *Timaeus*, mathematical proportions determine the geometrical constitution of the regular solids.

Proclus defined the dialectical process of ascending to the intelligibles and descending into particulars (*Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements* 8) as the process of analysis and synthesis. For Nicolas Cusanus, the dialectical process, which is manifest in the *coincidentia oppositorum*, ascends toward the intelligibles in a process of folding or *complicato*, or implication, as in the folding of polygonal figures toward a circle in which they are inscribed or around which they are circumscribed. The dialectical process descends toward the particulars in a process of unfolding or *explicato*, or explanation, as in the unfolding of the polygonal figures away from the circle. For Proclus and Cusanus, mathematics are the means by which the motion of bodies can be applied toward the dialectical movement of understanding toward *nous*, understanding of intelligible reality, the organization of the sensible world which is not present to the senses in perception, the underlying conceptual matrix, the deep structure of Chomsky and *la langue* of Lacan.

Mathematical understanding moves in two possible directions, either from the limit to the unlimited (in the terms of Proclus, the unlimited being the variations of material reality), that is from unity to plurality, or the reverse, from multiples back to unities, or from conclusions back to hypotheses, from forms to principles, seeking the underlying principles of *nous*. In the geometrical model of Cusanus, polygonal figures unfold from the circle toward multiple subdivisions, and enfold toward the circle, returning to the limit of the principle. "Consequently it is only natural," explained Proclus (19), "that the cognitive powers operating in the general science that deals with these objects should appear as twofold, some aiming at the unification and collection of the manifold for us," the particular to the universal in the Hegelian dialectic, "others at dividing the simple into the diverse, the more general into the particular, and the primary ideas into secondary and remoter consequences of the principles." The dianoetic process of mathematical understanding operates in both directions, in dialectic and discursive thinking. According to Proclus, the "range of thinking extends from on high all the way down to conclusions in the sense world," from *nous* to the objects of perception. In the binary dialectical movement, mathematics and geometry are able to force the mind out of sense perception and into contemplation of the intelligibles of a deep level structure.

Similar relations can thus be seen between deep aspects and surface aspects in language, in the linguistic theory of Chomsky, in transformational processes from particular to universal, concrete to abstract, and from perceived relations to intelligible relations, which in turn determine the perceived relations and the forms of sensible objects. In *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Chomsky described the transformational relation as such: "A deep structure enters the semantic component and receives a semantic interpretation; it is mapped by the transformational rules into a surface structure, which is then given a phonetic interpretation by the rules of the phonological component."<sup>15</sup> The transformational rules determine how conceptual relations (*nous*, the unconscious) are transformed into language, how language is formed and understood in relation to intellect. The rules constitute a system of grammatical relations which are made possible by an underlying conceptual ordering process. The conceptual matrix is transferred into particular sentence structures according to the transformational rules, which determine the physical signals which form the sentence, as mathematical relations determine geometrical relations in Proclus and Cusanus.

The algorithm of Lacan, S/s, the placing of the signifier over the signified, and the bar which differentiates them, is designed to suggest the identification between the signifier and the signified defined by Saussure, in the analogy of the two sides of the piece of paper, but at the same time is designed to suggest the inaccessibility of the signifier to the signified, the inaccessibility of language to its underlying structure. It is designed to suggest the inaccessibility of conscious thought to unconscious thought, in the same way that the polygonal figures of Cusanus can never reach the circle in which they are inscribed or around which they are circumscribed, no matter how many sides the polygon is divided into. According to Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in *The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan*, "whereas for Saussure, what is essential is the relation (the reciprocity, or the association), Lacan introduces a resistance such that the crossing of the bar, the relation of the signifier to the signified, in short, the production of signification itself, will never be self-evident" (p. 36).<sup>16</sup> While Saussure allows for an arbitrary correspondence between each signifier in language and a particular element of the underlying syntactical matrix to which it is related, Lacan denied that possibility, and the signifier, the phonetic unit, can only be defined in relation to other signifiers. The process of signification is seen as autonomous, and "algorithmic."

The signifier no longer represents something for someone in language, but rather represents the subject in language for another signifier, that is, it represents the insertion of the speaking subject into the network of signifiers that constitute signification. Following Saussure, language is seen as a system of differences by Lacan, but now it is an autonomous system with no direct relation to that which is signified. The sliding of the signifier which has been identified in the metonymical chain, where the bar between signifier and signified is not crossed, constitutes an endless deferral of meaning. "Meaning," though, that which is signified, or a network of conceptual signifiers, or intelligible signifiers in *nous*, is nevertheless still present as an absence (as unconscious thought is present to conscious thought as an absence), the absence to which the sliding (*glissement*) of signifiers always refers, as in the absence of particulars in the intellectual idea. The absence of the signified plays the role of the object of desire of the signifying chain, the void around which dialectical reason circulates, as in negative theology. The absence of the signified is the subject itself, which is present in every signifier, thus the absence is present in every signifier as a trace.

The mechanism of desire in the signifying chain necessitates the trace of absence; without the trace of absence, neither the desire nor the process of signification would exist. Metonymy is the trope of that desire, in that the bar is not crossed, and signification is constantly deferred, while metaphor, in the operation of substitution and the eliding of the second signified, enacts the mechanisms of that desire in the substitution of the signified for the signifier, the substitution of the concept for the word. The object of desire in the metonym is the lack of being, the absence in signification, and the signifying chain is a mechanism of deferral. Metaphor and metonymy are seen as constituting the matrix of operational rules which determine language, as mathematics and geometry were seen as the underlying matrix which structures form. They are also seen as the matrix of operational rules which determine unconscious thought. The elision of the signified in the process of signification is seen as distortion (*Enstellung*) in the translation of unconscious thought into dream images and linguistic manifestations; the metaphoric process is seen as condensation (*Verdichtung*); the metonymic process is seen as displacement (*Verschiebung*); and the translation of images into language in general is seen as a particular process of representation (*Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*).

The anchoring point of Lacan in the metonymic mechanism of the autonomous process of signification is the bar between the signifier and the signi-

fied. The bar is seen by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe as an *archê* or originary point in the mechanism, the point beyond which the mechanism cannot be reduced, which corresponds to the absence on which the mechanism is predicated. The bar also reifies the presence of the subject in the mechanisms of signification, as that absence which is present in every signifier. It is language which produces the subject, rather than the subject which produces language. But it also renders the subject impossible as soon as it comes into that language, because the subject is immediately divided between the concept and the word. The subject is only possible in language, and as soon as that possibility is realized in signification, the subject becomes impossible, because of the inaccessibility of the signifier to the signified, the premise of the presence of the subject. As the presence of the absence in the signifier, the subject fades into the signifier, and as the subject can only be represented by a signifier to another signifier, it cannot be present in the process of signification, the shifting or sliding of signifiers above the bar of the signified. For the same reason the subject is not present in the transformational relation of Chomsky, nor the dialectical reason of Proclus or Cusanus, nor the doubling of reason of Hegel, as other than an absence, which is the *archê* of the mechanisms of those signifying processes.

As the subject enters language as a negation and is divided by the process of signification, the subject is alienated in language, in its participation in the symbolic order of Lacan. The subject is self-alienated in the division between the word and the concept, between sensible reality as perceived and experienced and the representation of reality in that perception in language. But there must still be a connection in order for language and perception to work. For Hegel the subject is self-alienated in self-consciousness, the awareness of reason that it is other to itself; the alienation of the subject of Lacan presupposes the alienation of the subject of Hegel, because the alienation of Lacan precedes the mechanisms of discursive reason as given by language. In metaphor, a representation cannot take place until a concept is erased. "Through the word," then, "already a presence made of absence—absence itself gives itself a name..." (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 65). The subject is alienated in the mimesis of Plato, for whom all perceived form, all perceived reality, is a representation of a concept which precludes the existence of the subject prior to its insertion into language, into representation.

The subject can only participate in language, in any form of representation, as divided, as being both present and absent, and absent in its presence. The subject must be seen as an effect of language. The self-representation of

the subject in language or form-making is a masking of the impossibility of the presence of the subject. The subject gains identification in the *différance* of the play of signification in language for Lacan; the subject is caught in the reflections and associations between signifiers, between the means of representation, as it is caught in the gaze in perception, the play of forms as representations, in the same way that the subject of Plotinus is caught between mirrors in a play of reflections or representations of both the sensible and intelligible. As any signification occurs only retroactively in the course of the play of the signifiers, the subject is “thrice removed from reality” in the same way that artistic forms are for Plato copies of copies, copies of sensible forms which are copies of intelligible ideas. The subject is both defined and negated in the play of the veil of reality which defines language and perception as representation.

The being of the subject entails a fundamental lack of self-knowledge, which is manifest in the relation between conscious and unconscious thought, and in language itself, which always contains the divided subject. Lacan explained in *Écrits* that “the effect of language is the cause introduced into the subject. By virtue of this effect, he is not the cause of himself,” because “his cause is the signifier, without which there would be no subject in the real. But this subject is what this signifier represents, and it can never represent anything except for another signifier, to which, from that point on, the listening subject is reduced.” (p. 835). Therefore, “we don’t speak to the subject. *That* speaks of him, and it is there that he apprehends himself—and all the more necessarily so since, before he disappears as a subject beneath the signifier that he becomes because of the sole fact that *that* addresses him, he was absolutely nothing.”<sup>17</sup>

The alienation of the subject from itself in its representation in language is only perpetuated by language, which deepens the condition of self-alienation and lack of self-knowledge in the pretense of representation. The production of signification in the play of signifiers in the pretense of representation in language is defined by Lacan as *signifiance*, a neologism which is translated as “significance” by Alan Sheridan in *Écrits, A Selection*, but is better to be left as *signifiance*, according to Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe. *Signifiance* refers not to significance or signification, but to the operation of signification, which is the *glissement* of the signifier above the bar between signifier and signified; it is thus a signification without signification, but rather a signification which “makes signification possible” (*The Title of the Letter*, p. 62). The key element of *signifiance* is the



absence of the signified, or the transformation of the signified into the signifier. It is a play of signification that is not preceded by signification, a surface structure which is not preceded by a deep structure, but rather creates a deep structure in the pretense of representation.

Ultimately it is impossible to signify or represent anything other than the impossibility of signification or representation, other than the absence of the subject in representation. The location of any possible signified in the metaphoric or metonymic process is taken place by a signifier in the necessary shifting of the signifier in the production of discourse; any hole which appears must be covered up, as discourse is a veil which covers the absence of the subject. Discourse must appear as a totality or manifold in order to represent intellection. The signifier assumes the role of the signified, thus all signification can be located in the mechanisms of language itself. It is the absence of the signified which drives the signifying process itself in its attempt to compensate for that lack.

The signifying process then entails, in the inability of crossing the bar into the signified, the pushing of the limit of signification to the bar. In the *complicato* of Cusanus, the polygonal figure, the process of signification, is pushed to the limit of the circle, the signified, but can never arrive at it or become it; such an arrival is only possible in *nous*, in the intelligible, or the intellectual of Plotinus, that element of human intellect in which the One or divine is participant, and which in fact entails the negation of the subject. In the *Enneads* of Plotinus: “When we seize anything in the direct intellectual act there is room for nothing else than to know and to contemplate the object; the subject is not included in the act of knowing, but asserts itself, if at all, later and is a sign of the altered...” (IV.4.1).<sup>18</sup> Representation in signification constitutes the elision and division of the subject for Plotinus as well.

Crossing the bar of the signified means revealing the absence of the signified, thus the absence of the subject, in the process of signification, and would negate the signification, the division between the physical and the conceptual, between reason and that which it perceives. In metaphor the signifier both slides along the bar and crosses over it. According to Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, “to pass over to the level of the signified,” in Lacan’s *Écrits, A Selection* (p. 155), “is always, and perhaps can only be, to pass to the limit of the signified, in other words, without crossing that limit (or having already exceeded it, but precisely in such a way that the signified is immediately exhausted, punctuation dissolved and sliding perpetuated). One should consequently maintain these two theses simultaneously—certainly not

an easy task: *signifiance* crosses the bar, and *signifiance* only slides along the bar” (*The Title of the Letter*, p. 62). This simultaneity is given by the fact that signification, the production of the signified, is in fact achieved without the participation of the signified. The punctuation, or anchoring point, the point at which signification is retroactively produced in the tropic chain, produces a signification which is not a signification, in which the signified is transformed into the signifier, and the ruse of representation is maintained in relation to the subject in language. Unconscious thought is present in language, but only as an absence.

The Saussurean relation between signifier and signified is thus qualified as one of impossibility and permanent division, and it is the division, the bar which resists a direct relationship, which is the originary condition of signification, the *archê* of representation in language. Signification in language always necessitates a negotiation of that *archê*, of that impossibility, of the one unchangeable condition of expression. The autonomy of the signifier is only a result of that condition, as all intelligible forms in the *Timaeus* are only the result of archetypal forms. As Lacan explained, “the thematics of this science is henceforth suspended, in effect, at the primordial position of the signifier and the signified as being distinct orders separated initially by a bar resisting signification,” and “that is what was to make possible an exact study of the conditions proper to the signifier, and of the extent of their function in the genesis of the signified” (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 149). The bar between the signifier and the signified is that which metaphysics has always attempted to overcome; the psychoanalytic model of Lacan causes a displacement of the metaphysic in language, moving it back into the structure of language, as a function of unconscious processes, in the construction of reason and perception. But as in the *différance* of Deconstruction, the metaphysical can still be seen to be present, just displaced.

The signification which does not cross the bar between the signifier and the signified constitutes the “unmotivated sign” in language. The unmotivatedness of the sign, in its relation between signifier and signified, contributes to the motivation of the signifier in the sliding of signification above the bar, as it takes place within the illusion of representation. The “philosophy of the sign,” according to Lacan, is replaced by the “science of the letter,” and “we will fail to pursue the question further as long as we cling to the illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever” (p. 150). The mechanism of the science of the letter for Lacan

is the algorithm, which is a signifier which does not signify, a pure mathematics which disrupts the relation between signifier and signified.

The signifier is removed from the sign in language, and is divested of its traditional linguistic function. The algorithm is seen as a “hole” in signification, and is composed of purely differential logic, based on the “logic of the signifier.” From Saussure, “the signifier is constituted only from a synchronic and enumerable collection of elements in which each is sustained only by the principle of its opposition to each of the others” (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 304), as described by Lacan. From Plato, mathematics is based on the perception of opposites in sensible reality, in particular day and night. “If linguistics enables us to see the signifier as the determinant of the signified, analysis reveals the truth of this relation by making the ‘holes’ in meaning the determinates of its discourse” (p. 299). It is the gaps in discourse, the lacunae, the scotomata, the *méconnaissance* (inability to know or understand, misconstruction or failure to recognize, especially on the part of conscious reason in relation to itself), which determine the relation of discourse to the subject, as traces of the bar between the signifier and the signified, between language and the subject, and which reveal the presence of unconscious thought within conscious thought.

The organization of the play of the signifier in *signifiance* is based on the presence of the holes in signification. The holes are seen as the *chôra*, which was described by Derrida as “something that cannot be represented, except negatively....It is a space that cannot be represented, so it is a challenge to anything solid, to architecture as something built.”<sup>19</sup> The *chôra* was described in the *Timaeus* (52) as “space which is eternal and indestructible, which provides a position for everything that comes to be, and which is apprehended without the senses by a sort of spurious reasoning and so is hard to believe in,” thus “we look at it indeed in a kind of dream and say that everything that exists must be somewhere and occupy some space, and that what is nowhere in heaven or earth is nothing at all.”

The *chôra* is a space which is other than space, which allows for the becoming of space, as *signifiance* is, in the science of the letter, signification which is other than signification, and which allows for the becoming of signification. The *chôra* is only given in a dream, that is, in unconscious thought, as it is interpreted in the mechanisms of language. According to Plato, “because of this dream state we are not awake to the distinctions we have drawn and others akin to them, and fail to state the truth about the true and unsleeping reality: namely that whereas an image, the terms of whose exist-

ence are outside its control in that it is always a moving shadow of something else, needs to come into existence in something else if it is to claim some degree of reality, or else be nothing at all....” The *chôra* is the becoming place of the image as signification in language, so it is the production of the intelligible form in the imagination, in the void between intellection and sensible reality. It is the place of the transformation of the manifest content of a dream, the dream thought, into a dream image; and it is the space beneath the signification of both the image and signifier in language, the space which is the absence of the subject in the intellectual, the absence of the signified in the process of intellection.

The anchoring point, the *point de capiton*, in the *glissement* of *signification*, is a *chôra*, a place which is not a place. Like the *chôra* of Plato, the anchoring point of Lacan is presented as a myth, a necessary construction of reason, as knowledge of the unconscious is a myth. As Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe described it, “there is no signification which is not always already sliding outside of its alleged proper meaning” (*The Title of the Letter*, p. 54). In Lacan’s words, quoted in *The Title of the Letter* from a 1958 seminar, “between the two chains...that of the signifiers in relation to the circulation of traveling signifieds which are always in the process of sliding, the pinning-down or anchoring point I am speaking about or even the anchoring point is mythical, for no one has ever been able to pin a signification onto a signifier....” The anchoring point, like the bar between the signifier and signified, is an *archê*, an *apeiron*, a source of origin which does not exist.

The *apeiron* is a *chôra* which exceeds the physical and temporal permutations of matter, as the anchoring point in the tropic sequence is that point which exceeds the mechanisms of language and introduces the crossing of the bar between the signifier and signified, as a mythological event. The anchoring point, as the *chôra*, provides a receptacle for the process of change, the tropic *glissement*, in language. The anchoring point is the zero point, the hole, in the flux of signification (*signifiance*) in language, the point at which the network of signifiers both passes along the bar and crosses over it, the point at which the signifiers in language leave an impress which produces signification, as a transformational relation.

The concept of the signified is not excluded from Lacanian linguistics, but it is displaced within the process of signification, as is the metaphysic. The signifier is initially that which resists the possibility of signification, or posits a bar between signifier and signified, as in the algorithm  $f(S)I/s$ . In the metonymic process, the bar is maintained between signifier and signified; the

signifiers slide along the bar, and the presence of the elided signified is manifest as absence, or lack of being, within the chain of signifiers itself, in the nonsensical or irrational quality of the metonym. Thus the algorithm  $f(S...S') \approx S(\text{—})s$ , in which the bar is maintained in relation to the sliding of the signifiers. In the metaphoric process, the bar is crossed in the elision of the second signified, in the positing of a presence of an absence in relation to the chain of signifiers, that which allows the chain of signifiers to create signification. The crossing of the bar is the myth of reason introduced by the anchoring point in the sliding of the signifiers, which introduces the void of signification as an element in the signifying process. Thus the algorithm  $f(S/S)S \approx S(+)s$ . The crossing of the bar is constituted by the substitution of one signifier for another and the elision of the proper signified. It is thus a process of negation, and in particular the negation of the subject in language.

Substitution in metaphor renders “signification inaccessible to the conscious subject,” according to Lacan (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 166), to discursive reason, while metonymy enacts a perpetual desire which is always a desire for that which is not there, the absence in being which metonymy stages. “The signifying game between metonymy and metaphor, up to and including the active edge that splits my desire between a refusal of the signifier and a lack of being, and links my fate to the question of my destiny, this game, in all its inexorable subtlety, is played until the match is called, there where I am not, because I cannot situate myself there.” The result is “the radical excentricity of the self to itself with which man is confronted” (p. 171), as in the thought of Hegel. The gap (*écart*) which has been identified in signification in language can only be associated with a creation of a gap in the subject (*s’écarter*), a tearing or dehiscence, and that which is torn away (*écartelé*) within the subject, according to Lacan. Signification is not possible without the presence of absence, the absence of both the subject and being, which are both necessarily negated in the signifying chain. Language is the product of a subject which is not present to itself, which is dictated by unconscious processes, thus the conscious subject is a product of language, the symbolic order, the Other. The conscious subject is assured of its presence in language even by its absence, and the negation of being; language is thus the Platonic veil which reaffirms the participation of the conscious subject in the world through perception, but which is an illusion.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida described the instituted trace in language as maintaining language as a structure of differences in the Saussurean sense. The presence of absence in the trace is not a metaphysical presence, but ra-

ther a structural presence in the science of the letter. The trace makes signification possible, as is shown by Lacan in the *point de capiton* in the sliding of the signifying chain, the point at which absence is made present, and the unconscious enters into conscious discourse. The signifying chain is a structure of differences, through which signification is produced. In the “‘unmotivatedness’ of the sign,” the sliding of the signifier above the bar in *signifiance*, “a synthesis in which the completely other is announced” (p. 47) is achieved, as described by Derrida, in the presence of absence, of the unconscious. The trace is “where the relationship with the other is marked,” the crossing of the bar, and, as in the metaphoric chain of Lacan, “the movement of the trace is necessarily occulted, it produces itself as self-occultation. When the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself.” The trace is thus never present, it is only present as absence. The other, the unconscious, is only known as absence in conscious thought, in the structural mechanisms of language, making possible and precluding the possibility at the same time of all presence.

Similarly, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of Hegel, spirit, described as the inner being of the world, “assumes objective, determinate form, and enters into relations with itself—it is externality (otherness), and exists for self...” (p. 86).<sup>20</sup> It doubles itself in its otherness, and it is through the doubling of itself as otherness or externality that it participates in the particular. Mind becomes object, but as object it is immediately negated; it becomes self-reflected in the object which is the product of its doubling, as reason itself is reflected in the object which is the product of its doubling. Mind or spirit, as it is inaccessible, can be seen as the absence which allows for presence in language. The synthesis of mind and perceived object, subjective and objective, ideal and real, is the absolute. As with the *archê* of the bar between signifier and signified of Lacan, the trace is an absolute for Derrida, a form of an *archê*. For Derrida it is the otherness retained within the trace which is the necessary condition for the movement of differences, as for Hegel it is the otherness (an inverse otherness) of spirit in matter which is the necessary condition for the dialectic between the subjective and objective. According to Derrida, “The (pure) trace is *différance*,” the condition of the movement which produces difference, which “does not depend on any sensible plentitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic” (*Of Grammatology*, p. 62). *Différance* is mind or the intellectual, which negates itself in its doubling of itself in otherness. Although *différance* (mind) “does not exist, although it is never a being-present outside of all plentitude, its possibility is by

rights anterior to all that one calls sign (signifier/signified, content/expression, etc.), concept or operation, motor or sensory.”

Like the mind of Hegel and the intellectual of Plotinus, *différance* is anterior to and inaccessible to the laws of discursive reason in language, which are predicated on objective self-doubling and negation, the production of difference. *Différance* “founds the metaphysical opposition between the sensible and intelligible, then between signifier and signified, expression and content, etc.” Thus the presence of the metaphysical in *différance*. It is the ground for the possibility of the dialectic of the metaphysic, which is given by the structure of language. The rhetorical figure in language, such as the metaphor or metonym, as the enactment of *différance* (Derrida) or *signifiance* (Lacan), contains the metaphysic within it, and the subjective spirit of Hegel, in the absence contained within the linguistic structure, within the limits of conscious reason, and contains the hole as well, which is the presence (as absence) of the unconscious. The trace does not participate in the dialectic or the metaphysic; it is neither real nor ideal, sensible nor intelligible, but is anterior to all, the ground on which reason operates in language, according to Derrida (*Of Grammatology*, p. 65).

Spacing in language is “the unperceived, the nonpresent, and the unconscious” (p. 68), the mechanism of *différance* which corresponds to the anchoring point of Lacan, as found in the transformational relation and the rhetorical figure. Spacing is an “arche-writing” which only occurs in absence, in the effect of the unconscious. As in the paradox of Zeno, it occurs between idea and perception. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, it occurs between consciousness and perception, and is the mechanism of the gaze in perception, or the real, that which is inaccessible to the symbolic or imaginary, language or perception, as in the One of Plotinus. The conceptual must negate the physical form, as in language the trope overcomes the lack of sense, and the physical form must negate the conceptual, as in language the trope conceals the signified. In that way a sort of dialectic is enacted in the spacing of *différance*, in the relation between the intelligible form and sensible form.

A mechanism which results from the spacing of *différance* in writing is the “graft.” In *Margins of Philosophy*, Derrida explained that “writing, as a classical concept, entails predicates that have been subordinated, excluded, or held in abeyance by forces and according to necessities to be analyzed.”<sup>21</sup> It is those predicates “whose force of generality, generalization, and generativity is liberated, grafted onto a ‘new’ concept of writing that corresponds as well to what has always *resisted* the prior organization of forces, always con-

stituted the *residue* irreducible to the dominant force organizing the hierarchy that we may refer to, in brief, as logocentric.” Thus “to leave this new concept the old name of writing is to maintain the structure of the *graft*, the transition and indispensable adherence to an effective intervention in the constituted historical field.” The graft is a mechanism for the enactment of spacing in *différance* in writing. The graft is an intervention into the pre-existing structure of language, for the purpose of exposing the repressions of the structure of language, and overcoming them. The graft begins with oppositions, differences in the structure of language, the opposition of signifiers, and then proceeds to the displacement of those oppositions, in particular the displacement of metaphysical oppositions, which rely on the pre-inscribed correspondence between the signifier and the signified. Signifiers in language are taken out of the oppositions in which they are generated, and are recombined in ways which expose the scotomata or absences which the metaphysical oppositions concealed.

As for Lacan, the subject of Derrida is both constituted and dislocated or negated in language, in spacing and the graft. “Spacing as writing is the becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious of the subject” (*Of Grammatology*, p. 69). In Lacanian terms it is the fading of the subject into the signifier, and the loss of the subject below the bar between signifier and signified, in the *glissement* of *signifiance*. Spacing is the becoming-unconscious of the subject (as signifier) because it is the point at which the unconscious enters into language, when the absence becomes a presence. “The hinge [*Grisure*] marks the impossibility that a sign, the unity of a signifier and a signified, be produced within the plenitude of a present and an absolute presence,” or a totality given by intellection, because the bar resisting the signifier to the signified requires an absence, which is manifest in the play of difference. There is thus no possibility of a “full speech” (in expression), a speech which is not perforated by the holes which are the presence of absence in spacing, which reveal the mechanisms of the unconscious, which disrupts full speech, and makes it impossible. A language is only wholly comprehensible within conscious thought or discursive reason, and such a language conceals and represses the dialectic between conscious and unconscious thought. The presence of the absence in spacing reveals the intellectual in discursive reason.

*Différance* was described by Derrida as a form of desiring-production, in the enactment of the continuous desire for presence, the desire of the subject in its elision. The mechanism of the desiring of presence is the opposition be-



tween presence and absence, which creates the desire for presence, and makes presence impossible at the same time. The opposition between presence and absence is in the relation between conscious and unconscious thought, perception and intellection; it is the presence of the unconscious in conscious thought (as absence) which creates desire for presence. The subject can never be self-present to itself, because it can never be conscious of its unconscious mechanisms. Consciousness is an illusion. The movement of *différance* is death, because it is finite, and because conscious desire is the desire for death, as is seen in the dialectic between the sensible and intelligible, the particular and universal, that is, the metaphysic. Desire in language is the enactment of the Freudian death drive, the desire of organic life. Abstraction in thought is the purest representation of the desire for death, according to Wilhelm Worringer, which is played out in *différance*.

The movement along the signifying chain in *différance*, as in *signifiance*, is in anticipation of death, as is the production of symbols in imagination, the creation of the intelligible form. Imagination according to Derrida is a signifying supplement which is the self-representation of life as non-being, or death. The image is the self-reference of life "to its own lack, to its own wish for a supplement" (*Of Grammatology*, p. 184). The supplement is necessary because of the absence of the subject in being. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of Hegel, mind (universal, concept) is recognized in the particular (sensible, form) when the self "has consciousness and distinguishes itself as 'other', or as world, from itself [imagination]" (774). The self must become an other to itself before it can recognize itself as mind; it must become self-alienated, and see its existence as alien to being (death). For Lacan, the point at which the self becomes alienated from its own being is the *objet a*, the juncture between the symbolic structure and what is beyond signification, the real. The image in imagination for Derrida is the other of the self as representation, and reaffirms the alienation of the self to being in its own self-representation: "The presence of the represented is constituted with the help of the addition to itself of that nothing which is the image, announcement of its dispossession within its own representer and within its death" (*Of Grammatology*, p. 184). Representation is an absence in itself.

Art and death go hand in hand in the "originary iteration" (p. 209) of repetition, reproduction and representation. Mimesis itself is a supplement, a substitute, caused by the self-alienation of reason, and is inscribed in the process of *différance*, inscribed in the spacing which is the origin of the sign. The movement of signification in *différance* is perpetuated by the possibility

of the loss of that movement, a movement which is predicated on self-alienation, and which carries death and absence of being, and which constitutes an abyss. The point of the loss of signification is the point at which “the signifier can no longer be replaced by its signified” (p. 266), where the signified becomes the “terminal point of all references” and threatens the system with collapse. Such a signified is present in all signs in the signifying system (*différance*); it is, of course, the subject, the unconscious thought of the subject, which threatens the collapse of conscious thought in language and perception. Language endlessly propels prohibition and transgression in a dialectical relationship between self-preservation and self-destruction. The point of movement beyond signification, the *objet a* of Lacan, does not exist, but it is present in all factors of signification, and constitutes it as supplement to lack of being.

Signification in *différance* is ultimately what Derrida described in *Of Grammatology* as a supplement, filling in for the absence which desire seeks to overcome in presence. All expression, in language and art, is a supplement designed to fill a void, the hole in conscious thought, the inaccessibility of the unconscious. “Writing is dangerous from the moment that representation there claims to be presence and the sign of the thing itself. And there is a fatal necessity, inscribed in the very functioning of the sign, that the substitute make one forget the vicariousness of its own function and make itself pass for the plenitude of speech whose deficiency and infirmity it nevertheless only *supplements*” (p. 144). It is the task of any form of expression in art not to conceal its role as supplement, not to conceal the presence of the unconscious in conscious thought. In order to reveal itself as supplement, the art form must contain both presence and absence, and must contain the resistance of the signifier to the signified in its structure. Such is the difference between literal speech and figurative, tropic speech, the absence of the signified, and the presence of the unconscious as absence. Figurative speech is necessary as the enactment of the desire of reason, but it is always supplemental, and a necessary sign of the human condition.

The concept of the supplement determines the concept of the representative image. The supplement represents both a presence and an absence, the absence which it is designed to replace. The sign in language is a supplement, and it always contains both presence and absence, the absence of the thing which it represents in signification. The advent of language itself as presence denies the possibility of the presence of that which it represents, the object in perception. Literal language, and literal forms in art, have no rela-

tion, or are other to, sensible forms in perception, as forms of mimesis involving only discursive reason. Figurative language, and figurative forms in art, reintroduce the presence of the elided object in representation, as absence, the absence created by the representation. The supplement contains “the power of substitution that permits us to absent ourselves and act by proxy, through representation, through the hands of others. Through the written, this substitution always has the form of the sign. The scandal is that the sign, the image, or the representer, become forces and make ‘the world move’” (p. 147). The supplement is the substitution for the absence of being in thought, and in its manifestation as presence as supplement, only reinforces that absence. All figurative language is supplement, and enacts the desire for presence.

Language is seen as supplement as “the regulated substitution of signs for things” (p. 149), but it is impossible to see that which is supplemented, as it is impossible to see the unconscious. Supplement is generated by a desire for which there is no object available to consciousness, other than death. The desire is an unconscious desire, the mechanism of desire from the unconscious which filters into conscious discourse through the mechanisms of tropic language, in the signifying chain, which can never see the object of its desire, the absence in presence, the void in conscious thought. Supplement is “representation in the abyss of presence” (p. 163), desiring the presence of the absence of the unconscious, and “the desire of presence is...born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation, etc.” The abyss is the infinite in the presence of representation, as in the unlimited of Proclus, the infinite multiplicity of dianoetic reason as manifest in mathematics and geometry, as it infinitely approaches the limit of the One, the finiteness of absence.

There is no such thing as the indefinite multiplication of representation, but representation appears indefinite because it cannot see the object of its desire, nor the source of its desire, which is its own abyss. *Différance* poses the indefinite multiplication of representation; in *différance* it is the *archê* of the trace which momentarily arrests the movement of desire, while in *signifiance* it is the punctuation, or *point de capiton* of Lacan in the signifying chain. Desire is arrested momentarily because absence is made present, the presence of the unconscious in absence, but the presence, the momentary arrest, is only a trace, not a temporal event, as in Zeno’s paradox, and thus remains inaccessible to discursive reason or conscious thought, and unable to appease desire, the desire of reason for its own non-being.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, desire is the determinate self-perpetuation of self-consciousness around the void of its other, the desire of reason in relation to that which is perceived. Desire is the objectification of self-differentiation in self-consciousness, which is *différance*, the process of reason confronting its self-negation in its self-representation. Desire is the continuous re-constitution of reason in non-reason, that is, the self-preservation of conscious thought in relation to unconscious thought. It is the enactment of the self-differentiated and self-alienated identity of reason. Differentiation is a function of desire in reason, the necessity of perpetually creating the self-negation of the other in reason, which is a function of the death instinct in desire, the necessity of differentiation and negation.

Presence is the absence of *différance*, according to Derrida (*Of Grammatology*, p. 166); *différance* is thus a mechanism of unconscious thought. Presence in thought is consciousness, the presence of reason to itself, concealing the absence which is unconscious thought. *Différance* is other than conscious thought, as it is “to think the present from time,” in which presence is an absence, in the intellectual or a priori intuition of Kant, rather than to think time from the present. *Différance*, being neither presence nor absence, is structure, structure as supplement. Derrida explained, “Here structure means the irreducible complexity within which one can only shape or shift the play of presence or absence: that within which metaphysics can be produced but which metaphysics cannot think” (p. 167), because, ultimately, it is itself a metaphysic, a structural metaphysic, because it is a concept which contains presence and absence. It is not metaphysics which cannot think *différance* (metaphysics does not think), but rather conscious thought itself, because *différance* is the logic of the unconscious, that which is inaccessible to discursive reason, conscious thought.

For Lacan, that which is repressed in the traditional metaphysic of logocentric writing is the subject, because in the discourse of reason, the subject is identified with writing, and with speech. Signification outside of *signifiance*, the correspondence between the signifier and the signified, produces a disguise of the speaking subject, but since the subject is only present as an absence, as non-being, the disguise of language only disguises nothing, the nothing which is absorbed into the continuous opposition of the signifying chain. The subject as absence is opposed to the signification which is its disguise, and which is taken as its representation. Writing is no longer seen as that which is adequate to something, but that which is inadequate, as conscious thought and discursive reason, and language and perception by them-

selves, are no longer seen as adequate to something, but that which is inadequate in the constitution of the subject. In order to represent that which is other to itself in language, reason must necessarily become altered and self-alienated as it enters language, as the subject assumes its role in the signifying structure, following Hegel. The subject is the only possibility of signification in language, and the loss of the subject in language necessitates the loss of the metaphysic in language, as the metaphysic is the definition of the subject. The loss is contained within the opposition of significance, and *signifiance* is the dialectic of the identity of the subject, the Hegelian dialectic played out prior to the establishment of consciousness.

The structure of the relationship between signifier and signifier in the signifying chain in *signifiance* is the structure of the subject. Thus for Lacan “a signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier” (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 316). The subject is always present in the signifying chain, in every signifier, but only present as an absence. The presence of the subject is the void of being in the signifying chain; the subject is present as “excentric” to itself in the supplement of representation. The excentricity of the subject is based on “Hegel’s insistence on the fundamental identity of the particular and the universal,” and “it is certainly psychoanalysis that provides it with its paradigm by revealing the structure in which that identity is realized as disjunctive of the subject” (p. 80). Through discourse, “it is the [conscious] subject who introduces division into the individual, as well as into the collectivity that is his equivalent. Psychoanalysis is properly that which reveals both the one and the other to be no more than mirages.” The subject is distinguished from the “individual” because the subject is always the thinking subject, and it is the reason of the thinking subject which is seen as a mirage in relation to the identity of the individual, the subjective of Hegel. Although the unconscious is present in the discourse of Derrida, it is never acknowledged, and the individual for Derrida is always the thinking subject. While the presence of unconscious discourse determines to a large extent the mechanisms of *différance*, spacing and grafting, it is necessary to turn to the psychoanalysis of Lacan in order to determine their consequences for creativity, if creativity is to be the product of the individual, in the interaction of conscious and unconscious thought, and not just the thinking subject in discursive reason.

The Hegelian identity between the particular and the universal is the synthesis in the dialectic between the sensible and intelligible. The identity is based on the dialectic between consciousness in perception and self-

consciousness in discursive reason, and the synthesis of the two, which is mind. The dialectic between consciousness and self-consciousness is predicated on the self-doubling of the subject, the thinking subject, in consciousness, and its self-alienation and excentricity in its recognition of its otherness in perception in self-consciousness. The excentricity of the subject, its disjunctiveness in self-consciousness, is introduced by Hegel, and it is the goal of psychoanalysis, according to Lacan, to formulate the structure of the identity of the disjunctive subject. The first principle in psychoanalysis is the identification of the mirage of (Hegelian) consciousness in the thinking subject, and the mirage of discursive reason itself, in relation to the identity of the individual. The consequence in language is the identification of the disjunctive subject in tropic expression, in revealing the presence of unconscious discourse in language and perception, and the formulation of the structure of *signifiance*, signification in relation to the disjunctive subject.

The structure of *signifiance* of Lacan is similar to the structure of the *différance* of Derrida, who acknowledged the invention of the Freudian unconscious as a determining factor in the future structure of discourse, but who more or less uses the structure of the Freudian psyche as an analogy for strategies in writing, and is not really interested in the re-conceptualization of the individual, or even the thinking subject, as the source of a particular discourse. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, on the other hand, a different structure of the individual and the thinking subject is introduced, beginning with the Hegelian structures of consciousness and the Freudian structures of the psyche, and filtering them through the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure in particular. Lacan arrived at many of the same conclusions as Derrida in his reading of Saussure, but for Lacan the importance of the identity of the subject is always preserved. Lacan is more of a structuralist than Derrida, but that is inevitable, as both the unconscious and the psyche are structures. The departure from structuralism on the part of the post-structuralists is located in the overcoming of the logocentrism of the complicity between the signifier and signified in language, and the abandonment of that complicity altogether. Lacan reformulates the complicity rather than completely abandon it, although in the end the metaphysic of it is as irrelevant to Lacanian discourse as it is to post-structuralism.

Lacan rejected the possibility of the synthesis in the Hegelian dialectic, in which reason is reunited with itself in its self-alienation, which Lacan called the “logicizing *Aufhebung*” (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 294), and described as “a permanent revisionism, in which truth is in a state of constant re-absorption

in its own disturbing element, being in itself no more than that which is lacking for the realization of knowledge” (p. 296), given by the limitations of the framing of reason in consciousness, thus conscious reason in the thinking subject. The dialectic, in its limitation, provides the basis for the perspective of the subject in psychoanalysis as disjunctive prior to conscious thought, given the role of the unconscious. Hegel provides the possibility of progressive self-alienation, as a dialectical process without completion, as a basis for the structuring of the conceptual process in relation to the make-up of the individual. The basis for Lacan’s departure from Hegel is in the concept of the other, the inter-personal relationships that constitute the individual, which are absent from Hegel’s philosophy, and the concept of the Other, the symbolic order in which reason participates, to which it is subject, independent of itself a priori, in opposition to the Hegelian concept that the symbolic order is a macrocosm of reason. It is the Other, the matrix of language which is the basis of the unconscious, which sustains the mirage of consciousness and conscious reason, while at the same time ensuring the impossibility of its re-absorption in the dialectic.

The Other is a mediator between consciousness and self-consciousness, that which disrupts the dialectic of consciousness through the intervention of the unconscious, which is nothing other than the Other itself, the linguistic structure of the symbolic order. The other is presented in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* of Hegel as belonging to the particular, the objective, outside of concept, the subjective, and that which presents itself in reason as other than reason, but not within reason itself, as it becomes for Lacan. The exterior other of Hegel is equally responsible for the mechanisms of desiring-reason in signification. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (174), “The simple ‘I’ is this genus or the simple universal, for which the differences are not differences only by its being the negative essence of the shaped independent moments; and self-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by superseding this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as an independent life; self-consciousness is Desire. Certain of the nothingness of this other,” self-consciousness “explicitly affirms that this nothingness is for it the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a true certainty, a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself in an objective manner.”

Self-consciousness is dependent on the nothingness of the other, which is why consciousness in psychoanalysis is rendered invalid as a source of identity in reason; the other becomes something, with which reason is forced to

come to terms. The mechanisms of the particular in reason are the same, in relation to the universal; the result, desire, is still present in the same way, but the structure of the 'I' is changed. In the following section in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (175), in this "satisfaction, however, experience makes it aware that the object has its own independence. Desire and the self-certainty obtained in its gratification, are conditioned by the object, for self-certainty comes from superseding this other: in order that this supersession can take place, there must be this other." Thus "self-consciousness, by its negative relation to the object, is unable to supersede it; it is really because of that relation that it produces the object again, and the desire as well." The certainty of self-consciousness becomes an impossibility in itself, but for different reasons than for Lacan. "It is in fact something other than self-consciousness that is the essence of desire": desire is relocated in a place outside of self-consciousness, but Hegel cannot name it. "On account of the independence of the object, therefore, it can achieve satisfaction only when the object itself effects the negation within itself..." Negation is present in the other, as absence, and the negation is necessarily within self-consciousness, in the mechanisms of discursive reason and conscious thought, in the same way that absence is present in the signifier in the signifying chain of the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, though the other is redefined in relation to the structure of the unconscious.

The definition of Freud of the unconscious as the Other in reason "brought within the circle of science the boundary between the object and being that seemed to mark its outer limit" (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 175), according to Lacan. The metaphysic was now the subject of the science of the letter, displaced into the function of language as the function of the relation between conscious and unconscious thought. The negativity or absence of being that constitutes the other, and thus the constitution of conscious thought, was continued from the Hegelian dialectic, but the reconciliation of self-alienated consciousness is no longer possible. Nevertheless, as Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe conclude in *The Title of the Letter*, "if in Lacan this principle remains affected by a negativity which seems to resist the positive conversion during the progress of the stages of consciousness in Hegel (or if, in other words, it is a question here of an *un-conscious*), such a determination will not prevent the constant possibility and necessity of wondering whether that negative discourse is not already *prescribed* by Hegel and *comprehended* by his discourse" (p. 124).



The negative discourse is comprehended by Hegel but it is not named, nor given a structure. "This is a discourse that no simple negativity can escape from, as it is precisely within it that the discursive status of negativity is decided. Nevertheless, Hegel's discourse is in turn taken beyond its limits. The mediation of the Other slides toward the contract of speech," toward the signifying chain in the science of the letter, through the intervention of the Freudian unconscious and Saussurean structural linguistics. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe recognize the importance of Hegel in the thought of Lacan, and the importance of the philosophical foundations of psychoanalysis. The definition of the subject in discourse is based on the negative dialectic, and the concept of desire is based on the presence of absence in thought.

The structure of the relation between conscious and unconscious thought in psychoanalysis is an ontology as well as an epistemology, which has ramifications for the definition of the individual which are not present in Deconstruction, which is primarily an epistemology. The ontological element in psychoanalysis is a result of the necessity of the subject as a science, as opposed to a philosophy, though it is the philosophy of psychoanalysis from which an ontology is formulated. The ontology is related in particular to the metaphysical negative theology of Plotinus (the role that the *archê* plays in the signifying chain, as well as the role of dianoetic knowledge in the science of the letter), which played such an important role in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, although, again, it has been displaced in the epistemological framework. The negative theology is found in the primordial lack or hole in the system of language which is the black hole of signification, the void around which desire circulates, which makes signification both possible and impossible. The hole is the void around which signification circulates, stimulating desire, as is the One of Neoplatonism, and it is defined by Lacan as both the *objet a* and the real.

The signifying chain of structural linguistics which is adopted into Lacanian psychoanalysis preserves the dialectic as well. The dialectic is between the signifier and the signified, or what would be redefined as the conceptual chain of signifiers. The network of the signifier is described by Lacan as the "synchronic structure of the language material in so far as in that structure each element assumes its precise function by being different from the others" (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 126), while the network of the signified is the "diachronic set of the concretely pronounced discourses, which reacts historically on the first, just as the structure of the first governs the pathways of the second." Significations only occur, as a result, "by constitut-

ing their set by enveloping it in the signifier..." Language is thus "never signal, but always dialectical movement."<sup>22</sup>

The dialectic preserves, to a certain extent, the dialectic of subjective and objective spirit in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, between the universal and the particular. Language is defined by Lacan as a self-enclosed system whose holes or absences within reveal a connection to what is exterior to it, as in the dialectic of consciousness and self-consciousness in the thought of Hegel. Language for Lacan therefore "signifies in what it communicates: it is neither signal, nor sign, nor even sign of the thing insofar as the thing is an exterior reality."<sup>23</sup> What is exterior to language is not revealed in the function of language, nor in conscious thought. "The relation between signifier and signified is entirely enclosed in the order of Language itself, which completely conditions its two terms" (*The Language of the Self*, p. 122, note 85), following Saussure. Lacan compared language to mythology as a necessary and self-sufficient construct of understanding.

The dialectic of the synchronic and diachronic is present in the structural linguistics of Saussure, but in a different mode than in Lacan's reformulation, the influence of which has led to a certain amount of confusion about Saussure's original concept. The dialectic occurs in Saussure's distinction between language and speaking, *la langue* and *parole*. In Saussure's concept, "synchronic linguistics will be concerned with the logical and psychological relations that bind together coexisting terms and form a system in the collective mind of speakers," or *la langue*, while "diachronic linguistics, on the contrary, will study relations that bind together successive terms not perceived by the collective mind but substituted for each other without forming a system," or *parole* (*Course in General Linguistics*, pp. 99–100). The signifier and the signified, which are inseparable as the two sides of a piece of paper, are both incorporated into the synchronic realm of *la langue*, while Lacan introduces the dialectic within *la langue* itself.

For Saussure, the structure of language is synchronic, manifest in universal (conceptual) laws, the objective of Hegel, while the diachronic occurs as a result of what is imposed upon language from without, manifest in particular events, retaining the Hegelian dialectic. "Diachronic facts are then particular; a shift in a system is brought about by events which not only are outside the system, but are isolated and form no system among themselves," whereas "synchronic facts, no matter what they are, evidence a certain regularity but are in no way imperative; diachronic facts, on the contrary, force themselves upon language but are in no way general" (p. 95). Speech is then seen as the

conscious use (*parole*) of unconsciously determined structures (*la langue*), paralleling the relation between the sound-image and the concept of the signifier and the signified, with the addition of the diachronic element, and the relation between discursive reason and intellection. Diachronic linguistics or *parole* display the same divisions and classifications as discursive thought, while synchronic linguistics or *la langue* display the unity and totality of the intellectual, and a priori intuition. Lacan reinterprets the concept of the signified as containing the same diachronic element that is present in the *parole* of Saussure, thus reversing the expected relation between the signifier and speech and the signified and language, and the expected relation between speech and conscious discourse, and language and an unconscious structure.

The dialectic is also incorporated in a different way in the Lacanian structure of the relation between signifier and signified, in distinction from Saussure. *La langue* is determined by *parole*, as signified is determined by signifier, in that nothing can exist in *la langue* which cannot be manifest in *parole*, while it is also true that nothing exists in speech or writing as signifier as other than concept, the network of signifiers as signified. Signification occurs only among signifiers, in the form of the algorithm. According to Lacan, "One thing is certain: if the algorithm S/s with its bar is appropriate, access from one to the other cannot in any case have a signification. For in so far as it is itself only pure function of the signifier, the algorithm can reveal only the structure of a signifier in this transfer" (*Écrits, A Selection*, p. 152). Relations between signifiers consist of "reciprocal encroachments and increasing inclusions" as differential elements in a closed system. The structure of the signifying chain is similar to "rings of a necklace that is a ring in another necklace made of rings" (p. 153).

The relation between signifier and signified in the chain is always anticipated and inferred but never actualized, always deferred, as in *différance*. The result is the *glissement* of the signifier, as in metaphor and metonymy. The metonym produces signification in the linear combination of signifiers without crossing the bar to the signified; "it is the connection between signifier and signifier that permits the elision in which the signifier installs the lack-of-being in the object relation," the absence of the signified, "using the value of 'reference back' possessed by signification," to the absent signified, "in order to invest it with the desire aimed at the very lack it supports" (p. 164), thus the dialectic. The metaphor, meanwhile, in the substitution of signifier for signifier, in the actual elision of the first signified, crosses the bar between signifier and signified, and in that way causes signification. "This

crossing expresses the condition of passage of the signifier into the signified....” As Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe observed, the bar is both crossed and not crossed, because “the unconscious is the axis between the signifier and the signified,” according to Lacan (*Écrits*, p. 166). The unconscious only exists as absence in conscious discourse, thus preserving the Hegelian dialectic between reason and the other, which only exists as an absence in reason.

This essay developed and rewritten from sections of *Architecture and Psychoanalysis*, New York: Peter Lang, 2006, without the references to architecture, and with revisions and corrections.

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits, A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Teresa Tymieniecka, *Leibniz' Cosmological Synthesis* (Netherlands: Royal VanGorcum, 1964), p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold, Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Peter D. Eisenman, “From Object to Relationship II: Giuseppe Terragni, Casa Giuliani Frigerio,” in *Perspecta 13, The Yale Architectural Journal*, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966 [1915]).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 27, quoted in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> Eric D. Perl, “Signifying Nothing: Being as Sign in Neoplatonism and Derrida,” in *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought*, Vol. II, ed. R. Baine Harris (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 128–129.

<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 324, n. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits, A Selection*, and quoted in Joël Dor, *Introduction to the Reading of Lacan: The Unconscious Structured Like a Language* (New York: The Other Press, 1998), p. 40. This discussion follows the discussion in this text.

<sup>12</sup> Nicolai de Cusa, *De circuli quadratura*, in *Opera Omnia* (Hamburgi: In Aedibus Felicis Meiner, 1994), p. 89: “Versantur enim mathematicae doctrinae in veris intelligentiis, quoniam figuras in veritate sua absque variabili materia considerant.”

<sup>13</sup> Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1965).

<sup>14</sup> Proclus, *A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), p. 141.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992 [1973]).

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), translated in Joël Dor, *Introduction to the Reading of Lacan*, pp. 138–139.

<sup>18</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leiser, ed., *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (New York: Moncelli Press, 1997), p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold Vincent Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, p. 141.

<sup>22</sup> The last two quotations of Lacan are from the essay “The Freudian Thing” (“La chose Freudienne” [1956]) as translated by Anthony Wilden in Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), p. 122, note 85.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Actes*, pp. 242–44, cited in Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self*, p. 122, note 85.