

Alexandre Stevens

Lacanian Interpretation

The title of this Congress, Lacanian Interpretation, indicates of itself that the interpretation in question is specifically Lacanian and thereby distinguishes itself not only from other modes of interpretation that belong to other discourses, but also from what Freudian interpretation has become within the IPA.

At the same time, this title refers to a major scansion, which made apparent the fact that the Lacanian interpretation is precisely not an interpretation, that what we call interpretation is something else. This scansion is the paper given by Jacques-Alain Miller during the Study Days of the ECF and published with the title “Interpretation in Reverse”[1]. “Interpretation is dead”, he announced, “it will not be resuscitated. If a practice is truly contemporary, it is ineluctably post-interpretive.”[2] I say it is a major scansion, but one may also say that it is a rupture with, even a trauma to – it is not too strong a word – the question of interpretation.

May I remind you that in this well-known and today frequently quoted paper, Jacques-Alain Miller puts forward that “interpretation is the unconscious itself” and that therefore, the unconscious interprets.[3] Which does not stop this unconscious from, in turn, wanting to be interpreted.

The post-Freudian analysts of the IPA resolve this, this desire of the unconscious to be interpreted, by trying to say better, in a language of a superior level, what the unconscious just said. For them, more or less, interpretation is a meta-language that better says a truth that the unconscious was already saying. The interpretation thus reformulates what the unconscious says, in another language, “meta” therefore, meta-language.

From the start of his teachings, whether it be with full speech [parole pleine] or with punctuation, Lacan extracts himself from this dimension, is opposed to the idea of a meta-language interpretation. Interpretation is neither a better-said, nor any truer than that of the unconscious; it is rather a punctuation introduced into the analysand’s sentence, which thereby equivocates and opens the meaning up to a little outside-meaning, it shifts, or un-fixes, the meaning.

The rules of interpretation

Lacan gives what we could call, from this perspective, the rules of interpretation. They are, in “L’*étourdit*”, the three key points of equivocation: homophony, grammar and logic. Interpretation is not outside meaning in the sense that it is supposed to be incomprehensible, it is rather that it razes meaning with equivocation. As for homophony, Lacan says: “I maintain that anything goes here”[4], an expression that reminds us of his way of evoking interpretation in “The Direction of the Treatment...”: “... always free in the timing and frequency, as well as in the choice, of my interventions....”[5] As for grammar for which the minimum of his interpretive mode is an “I didn’t put the words in your mouth” – which is also “so, you said it” – he is referring fairly explicitly to what he developed in “The Direction of the Treatment...”, again, under the term of a rectification of the subject’s relations to the real. Here, it is no longer “anything goes” because this deals with an effect of subjectivation. And so he adds to these first two modes that of logic, for which equivocations are its paradoxes, that is to say, the impasses of logic. The equivocation in logic therefore adds to the first two the incompleteness of meaning, the halt on a real, the encounter of the sexual non-relation.

Let us note that in this presentation of the three modes of equivocation for use in interpretation, Lacan insists that all three are necessary. They are not three different types of interpretation, but a single interpretation that plays on the three levels of equivocation at the same time. That is to say, the interpretation by homophony, I quote: “is seconded here by grammar”, to which he latter adds: “Figure three now: this is logic, without which interpretation would be imbecilic.”[6] Ultimately, it

seems to me, this amounts to saying that the interpretation only carries if it conjoins the three levels of equivocation. It acts with the signifier; by the intermediary of the signifier, it is the homophony that implies the minimal couple S1 – S2, even if, as it is homophonic, it undoes meaning. It always makes use of what the analysand says, it follows his signifiers or highlights one or other singular S1 that represents the subject, that identifies him; it is grammar that puts the subject in his place in the sentence. But still, this interpretation must also aim beyond that, at a not-all truth, or a real, depending on the period of Lacan's teaching. This is what logic brings in the interpretative equivocation.

Punctuation and cut

We may wonder if these rules of interpretation by equivocation remain pertinent all throughout Lacan's teachings. Homophony, grammar and logic are three names for the punctuation that, according to their arrangement in the sentence, modify its meaning. And in Jacques-Alain Miller's paper, "Interpretation in Reverse", to which I refer here, if "the age of interpretation is over", that goes for interpretation by punctuation as well. I quote Miller: "Punctuation belongs to the system of signification; it is still semantic; it still produces a quilting-point." [7]

That is to say, punctuation always belongs to the structure of the unconscious, S1 S2.

Consequently, interpretation taken in reverse is a cut. "Withhold S2", says Miller, "don't bring it in, so as to circumscribe S1." That is: in order to circumscribe S1 alone, by not having allowed the meaning to bind under the next signifier, S2. Whereas punctuating, placing a quilting point, binds meaning in a way, closes it and fastens it, cutting the session, on the contrary, can break with meaning. In order to obtain this, the session must be short, or rather, must be shortened – literally – the cut must occur before the meaning is complete, before it binds itself together. In this way, the session will remain a-semantic, and not closed by a meaning.

Transfereential unconscious and real unconscious

But I would like to underscore a second important scansion for us in the study of Lacanian interpretation – the first then being Jacques-Alain Miller's paper on interpretation in reverse. The second scansion is the moment that Jacques-Alain Miller puts forward at the beginning of his course of 2006-2007: the opposition between the transfereential unconscious and the real unconscious. He does this using the very last teaching of Lacan, in particular, the "Preface to the English-Language Edition of Seminar XI" in the *Autres écrits*. [8] He highlights a radical "disjunction between the unconscious and interpretation" in Lacan's text, using this phrase: "When [...] the space of a lapsus no longer carries any meaning (or interpretation), then only is one sure that one is in the unconscious." [9] But then, if the unconscious is real, if it is only defined as what is outside of an interpretable meaning – if it is un-interpretable, what happens to Lacanian interpretation? It can then only aim at the disintrication of S1 and S2. In a way, it is the radicalisation of the sealing of the session as an a-semantic unit to produce an S1 all alone. The NLS Congress comprises a great variety of case studies that include different varieties of Lacanian interpretation, reviewing subjective rectification, punctuation, cutting and the analytical act.

Lacanian interpretation in the psychoses

But some of the cases to be presented are those of psychotic patients. What can we say about Lacanian interpretation in the psychoses? Does it too operate in reverse of the unconscious, or on the contrary, does it look to introduce a quilting point? The terms of this question allow us to understand that this will depend on the clinical situation and the way in which the subject is caught

up in a jouissance. All the more so in that interpretation is itself a principle of paranoid psychosis. I suggest using the light Éric Laurent sheds on the question of the treatment of the psychoses in an article published in the *Feuillets du Courtil*, where he introduces the term “translation of jouissance”. What is to be expected of a psychoanalyst in these cases is that he bring the subject to translate into signifiers the jouissance that is gripping him. A continuous effort of translation in order to cover over jouissance with semblants.

In this case, putting-it-well means translating as closely as possible the jouissance experienced, suffered by the subject. Translating can allow the subject to find a quilting point – at least until the next one comes along – to stop the run of meaning. If we think of it in this way, as an attempt to stitch a quilting point, we produce – or rather, we allow the subject to produce – a sort of sealing up of meaning that places the analytical session as a semantic unit, one bound by meaning, instead of an a-semantic one, that is, one not closed by meaning.

But translation can also be grasped outside meaning: it is the letter that, from the tracing of it, comes to limit jouissance; it is the S1 (signifier 1) that functions without closing on an S2. It is then an anchoring point for jouissance – a point that halts it, limits and fixes it for a time, but without binding the meaning.

Translated from the French by Julia Richards

1 Miller, J.-A., “Interpretation in Reverse”, in Voruz, V & Wolf, B, *The Later Lacan*, New York: State University of New York Press, Coll. Suny, 2007, pp. 3-9.

2 Ibid., p. 9.

3 Ibid., pp. 3-4.

4 Lacan, J., “L’étourdit” in *Autres écrits*, Paris: Seuil, 2001, p. 491.

5 Lacan, J., “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power” in *Ecrits, The First Complete Edition in English*, transl. by Bruce Fink, New York, Norton & Co., 2006, p. 491.

6 Lacan, J., “L’étourdit”, op. cit., pp. 491-2.

7 Miller, J., “Interpretation in Reverse”, op. cit., p. 8.

8 Lacan, J., “Preface to the English-Language Edition of Seminar XI” in *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, transl. by Alan Sheridan, Penguin, London: 1994, pp. XXXIX-XLI.

9 Ibid., p. XXXIX.