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The "floating signifier": from Lévi-Strauss to Lacan

As the Anglo-American looks on in fascination or exasperation at the remarkable speculative activity associated with the names in our title, he may be tempted to conceive of the utility of what Panofsky might have called an iconography of recent French thought.¹ For to work one's way through the thousand pages of Lacan's *Ecrits*, for example, is to come to terms with a highly problematic and allusive convergence of the themes, motifs, and concepts of Heidegger, Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and others, in an idiosyncratic meditation on the most radical aspects of Freud's discovery. It is thus perhaps to recall as well the mastery with which Panofsky analyzed Renaissance images into their various Christian and classical components and to envisage an analogous analytic attempt vis-à-vis the French. What follows is a modest effort in that direction—observations on the value the crucial Saussurean term *signifiant* has been accorded as it has drifted from one tradition of discourse to another: from linguistics to anthropology to psychoanalysis. For reasons which will later be clear, I should indeed not be averse to considering these remarks as an eccentric epilogue to Panofsky's essay on "Father Time."²

Yet no sooner have we invoked the patronage of Panofsky and iconography than the inadequacy of the model becomes apparent. For Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, in their critique of the fascination of *visible* evidence and in their insistence on a diacritical reading of linguistic phenomena, are, in every sense of the phrase, *verbal iconoclasts*. To isolate a term outside of the network of latent relationships which constitute its *value* would be, at best, cavalierly to spare oneself in

¹ This paper is an expansion of a lecture originally given to the Yale Comparative Literature Colloquium.
reading these authors the painstaking efforts which they have made as readers, and, at worst, to fall prey to the very illusions which are the objects of Lacan’s and Lévi-Strauss’s attack. There could be, in fact, no more intimidating image of the failure of a naïve search for “le signifiant” than the scene in “The Purloined Letter” which Lacan employs heuristically: we might comb the works of our two authors much as the Queen’s police examine inch by inch the Minister’s chamber in their pathetic hunt for the missing letter. The error, in either case, would be to search for the plenitude of a real object when, in fact, what is in play and at stake is a purely formal circuit of symbols. *Imbécillité réaliste*, writes Lacan...

Having declared our intention to read our authors in the spirit in which they themselves have read, it remains for us to present our strategy. We shall discuss two important texts, ostensibly dealing with different subjects, but involving the problematic nature of the “signifier.” They will be shown to be transformations of each other. The first is Lévi-Strauss’s speculative introduction to the works of his mentor Marcel Mauss. The second is a series of fragments from an interview with Lacan later published as *Radiophonie*. It is hoped that the superimposition of these texts will generate some sense of the poetics of recent French thought. I write as neither anthropologist nor psychoanalyst, but rather as someone who became aware that the most adventurous tendencies in French thought were beginning to converge in a reflection on textual dynamics which resembled nothing so much as a radicalization of the inoffensive craft we had come to know as “literary criticism.”

Before ascending to the *gaya scienza*, we would do well to gain our grounding in *Tristes tropiques*. At the culmination of his journeys in the book, Lévi-Strauss, the enraptured bearer of all the illusions of the anthropological tradition, finds himself the first European to make contact with a Tupi village. The approach in canoe involves the description of a nature primordial in its vitality.

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Trees grew in every direction, with flowers in full bloom across waterfalls. It was difficult to tell whether the river's main purpose was to irrigate this astonishing garden, or whether it would be quite simply overwhelmed by the multiplicity of plants and liana which had arrogated to themselves not merely the vertical dimension, but all space's dimensions now that the ordinary distinctions between earth and water had been abolished.\(^5\)

The anthropologist's enthusiasm is born of the marvelously undifferentiated density of the site. And the pastoral description will conclude by invoking a nature undisturbed by man, reminiscent, we read, of certain Breughel paintings of paradise.

Yet no sooner has the anthropologist penetrated into the village and admired the Tupis' "joyful language" than a reversal occurs. "And yet, this adventure begun with such high hopes, left me with a feeling of emptiness." The manic moment has collapsed into depression. Indeed the entire passage will function under the sign of all and nothing, all as nothing: "Those confused appearances of the natives which are everything and nothing... I had at one and the same time my reward and my punishment." It is here at the conclusion of his journey that Lévi-Strauss becomes aware of the nature and basis of his impasse and the frustration inherent in it. For his long sought savages "were all too savage... No sooner are they known or guessed at than their strangeness drops away, and one might as well have stayed in one's own village. Or if... their strangeness remained intact, then it was no good to me, for I could not even begin to analyze it."

In this pivotal tourniquet (or whirligig), to borrow a Sartrean term, either the subject's knowledge or the object's fascination will be sacrificed in the vain quest for significant knowledge of the other. For to know the savage is to obliterate his "savagery" or interest. But for the savage to retain his otherness is to frustrate any possibility of knowing him. The example of Proust is apposite here. For Lévi-Strauss stands before the Tupi natives much as Swann did before Odette. The Proustian passion was to know the unknown woman as unknown. Thus Swann's eventual discovery of Odette's part life

marks the death of his passion for her. In Proust as in Lévi-Strauss, we begin with a crucial failing of sympathy.

At the moment of return to Europe, Lévi-Strauss laments the futility of his trip:

The investigator eats his heart out in the exercise of his profession: he has abandoned, after all, his environment, his friends, and his habits, spent a considerable amount of money and time, and compromised his health. And the only apparent result is that his presence is forgiven by a handful of wretched people who will soon, in any case, be extinct; whose main occupations are sleeping and picking their lice...6

Transposed into a Parisian key, this lament is recognizable as the reflection a wearied Swann offers at the end of his disastrous attempt to know the other: “To think that I have wasted years of my life, that I have longed for death, that the greatest love that I have ever known has been for a woman who did not please me, who was not in my style!”7

The final question will be one of ends. Lévi-Strauss: “It is a time, above all, of self-interrogation. Why did he come to such a place? With what hopes? And to what end?” For Proust, the answer to the anthropologist’s question is clear: the suffering of Swann (or the narrator) exists in order to inspire a great book. That which has been lost in reality will be regained, appropriated, enshrined within as art. Now whatever the validity of Proust’s solution—and Sartre has written volumes on the bad faith concomitant with esthetic martyrdom—it is clear that such a conclusion is inadequate to Lévi-Strauss’s dilemma. For his problem was not an inability to make his own or appropriate the experience of the Tupi, but rather to find some ground on which he could understand them without “appropriating” them. It was not a question of a loss in reality to be redeemed by an esthetic (or imaginary) gain, but rather of escaping from a realm in which apparently to win is to lose, and vice versa.

It is at this stage that Lévi-Strauss offers the sketch of a tragedy which might redeem the frustrations of the journey: L’Apothéose

6 Ibid., p. 337.
7 Proust, A la recherche, I (Pléiade), p. 382.
d'Auguste, a remarkably Sartrean transposition of Cinna. Without pursuing an analysis of the baroque plot, we shall simply note that its implicit theme is Cinna’s difficulty in avoiding the temptations of an esthetic solution to the trials of the traveler. Like the anthropologist, Cinna flees his society and heroically takes off for a life of unmediated communion with nature. His eventual disappointment is total: “Travelling is a deception (une duperie) . . . I lost everything.” Yet upon his return, his greatest disappointment is in being unable not to transpose his depression into esthetically gratifying form. Despite himself, Cinna has become an inauthentic culture hero: “I would explain in vain the emptiness and futility of all that happened; no sooner were these transformed into a narrative than my audience was dazzled and all adream. Yet there was nothing . . .” The superb individualist is thus unable to remain faithful even to the truth of his wasted life. In Sartrean terms, being is already irrupting in the heart of nothingness.

Now what is crucial for us is that Lévi-Strauss—unlike Proust—fails to complete his sketch, refuses to write his masterpiece. Instead he turns to another kind of textual activity—structural analysis—whose most recent manifestation has been that vast “myth of mythology” which comprises the four volumes of Mythologiques. Let us rejoin Lévi-Strauss as he stares in frustration at the Tupi tribesmen, as close to him as “an image in a mirror.” In its exemplary clarity, the scene may be regarded as a logical pivot between, on the one hand, L'Apothéose d'Auguste, literature which, as we have seen, repeats those victories, which are defeats, of naïve anthropological experience, and, on the other, let us say, Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté, the opus which Lévi-Strauss will write instead, and which (by implication) pretends to be a solution to the problem presented. In his despair at the futility of an unmediated contact with the Tupi, Levi-Strauss stares at the barren earth:

Let the earth speak, therefore, since the men are beyond our grasp. Over and above the delights which it had given me by the river's edge let it at last

8 Tristes tropiques, p. 341.
yield its secret... I turn a prosecutor’s eye upon an enormous landscape, narrowing it down to a strip of clayey river-marge and a handful of grass: nothing there to prove that when I next raised my eyes to the world about me I should not find the Bois de Boulogne stretched out all round that insignificant patch of ground. Yet that same ground was trodden by the most authentic of savages, though Man Friday’s print was absent (où manque pour-tant l’empreinte de Vendredi). 9

Faced with the sterile plenitude of the empirical proximity of his savages, Lévi-Strauss, at the conclusion of this scene, at the turning point of his voyage, thus dreams of reviving a redeeming, mediating absence. It is here, in Friday’s missing footprint, that we shall inscribe the first of our principal texts: “L’Introduction à l’œuvre de Marcel Mauss.”

Marcel Mauss, of course, is the theorist of exchange and thus the provider of the concept which will structure Lévi-Strauss’s great book on Elementary Kinship Structures. As the bearer of the law of exchange (i.e., the prohibition of incest), as Lévi-Strauss’s intellectual mentor, Mauss may be regarded as a symbolic Oedipal father: precisely in the sense intended by Lacan in his suggestion that the Oedipus complex may be nothing other than what the subject may know of his unconscious insertion into the symbolic realm of kinship structures. 10 To study Lévi-Strauss’s relation to Mauss in this speculative text is thus to work at the moment of imaginative and logical juncture between the anthropologist’s work and that of Lacan.

The first occasion on which the reader of Tristes tropiques may be inclined to invoke Mauss’s thought is during Lévi-Strauss’s interpretative discussion of Caduveo face painting. It will be recalled that Caduveo society is divided into three endogamous castes, the most noble of which is obsessed with and paralyzed by considerations of prestige and fear of misalliance.

Such a society would be in grave danger of segregation. Willingly or of necessity each caste tended to turn in upon itself, so that the cohesion of society as a whole was threatened. In particular the endogamy of the castes and the

9 Ibid., p. 298.
10 See Ecrits, p. 277.
multiplication of hierarchical nuances would make it very difficult to arrange unions of a kind which conformed to the concrete necessities of collective life.\textsuperscript{11}

For fear of misalliance the Caduveo kill their children and adopt others from outside the tribe. Clearly, their society is disintegrating under the pressures of a sterile endogamy.

Now the Bororo, unlike the Caduveo, were able to revitalize a similar society by introducing a compensatory measure of exogamy. Their endogamous castes were split into exogamous moieties. Thus a redeeming measure of reciprocity was introduced into the rigid hierarchy. Now this results in a village organization whose structural principles Lévi-Strauss claims to recognize... in the interplay of symmetry and asymmetry in the facial designs of the lovely Caduveo women. His explanation:

But the remedy which they [the Caduveo] lacked on the social level—or whose consideration they prohibited (interdit)—nevertheless did not wholly escape them. Insidiously, it continued to disquiet them. And since they could not take cognizance of it and live it, they began to dream of it. For if our analysis is correct, Caduveo graphic art must be interpreted as the fantasy of a society which seeks with unfulfilled passion the means to give symbolical form to the institutions it might have had, if interest and superstition had not stood in the way.\textsuperscript{12}

Of the three intellectual “mistresses”—geology, Marx, and Freud—whom Lévi-Strauss invoked in the beginning of his work, it is clearly Freud who presides over this analysis of repressed fantasy. And yet this graphic art delineates an unconscious which is by no means the most intimate or private sphere of the individual (or closed group). On the contrary, this unconscious is a fantasy of communication, an endlessly repeated, for never satisfied (inassouvi) desire to dis-close or symbolize that fantasy (phantasme). In fact, these Caduveo are already dreaming the dreams of Marcel Mauss: that system of exchange which, for Lévi-Strauss, will constitute society through the prohibition of incest. It is a dream of self-expropriation.

\textsuperscript{11} Tristes tropiques, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 169.
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Now the Introduction to the works of Mauss allows us to confirm and extend this observation. We read:

In investigating further (en approfondissant) the data of the unconscious, we do not move, so to speak, in the direction of ourselves: we enter a level which does not seem strange to us because it hides our most secret self (notre moi le plus secret); but (much more normally) because, without moving out of ourselves, we come to coincide with kinds of activities which are at once ours and other (NOTRES et AUTRES), the conditions of mental life for all men in all ages (p. 31).

Now it is clear that this collective—but resolutely un-Jungian—unconscious is already present in the microcosmic case of the Caduveo, who are the bearers of their society’s dreams.

Moreover, we may already suggest that the delineation of this third domain, neither self nor other, but the system of communicative relations by which both are necessarily constituted and in which they are alienated will be Lévi-Strauss’s response to the dilemma we observed in Tristes tropiques. Faced with the impossibility of significantly knowing the otherness of the others, Lévi-Strauss will attempt to come to terms with the unconscious structure he shares with them: with his own otherness to himself. The Caduveo unconscious thus retains exemplary value for later developments. Moreover, after reading of the (self-) destructive efforts of generations of Europeans to idealize the natives into divine or infernal savages, we could observe little more moving than the timid Caduveo attempts to overcome that narcissism in themselves—if only in Lévi-Strauss’s fantasy—and (re-) affirm symbolically, through their facial designs, a rudimentary form of culture (i.e., of reciprocity).

It is perhaps a sign of the success of the Caduveo line drawings that the women so decorated are endowed, in the anthropologist’s eyes, with a definite erotic charm. “These delicate and subtle contours are no less sensitive than those of the face itself; sometimes the one accentuates the other, sometimes it runs counter to it; in both cases the effect is deliciously provocative. As a result of this, as it were, pictorial surgery, art secures a sort of claw-hold upon the human
body.” 13 Now this inscription of a properly erotic dimension—which is also a fantasy of exchange—on the biological individual has its precise counterpart in the Introduction to the works of Mauss, who, we are told, in his Essai sur les techniques du corps, proposed “a study of the way in which society imposes on the individual a rigorously determined use of his body.” (p. 11) This examination of the modes by which a social structure “imprints its mark” on the individual body would open up “into the heart of psychoanalysis (en pleine psychanalyse).”

Let us first note that it is Mauss, the intellectual “father,” who offers Lévi-Strauss the concept allowing him to think the Caduveo woman as desirable in so far as her biological reality has been alienated in an unconscious, collective structure. For the glorious imprint of the rudiments of an exchange system on the native’s face is a visual rendering of that loss of the corps propre which Lévi-Strauss, after Mauss, would have us consider.

Had we space, we would follow Lacan and his (former) students here in their efforts to wrest from Freud’s texts—rather than from empirical observation—the possibilities of thinking this primary socialization (i.e., sexualization) of the biological individual: the generation of what S. Leclaire has called le corps érogène. 14 Just as we saw Lévi-Strauss stymied in a dual relationship with the Tupi, so J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis have described Freud’s difficulty in conceptualizing the cornerstone of his construct—the Oedipus complex—in terms of a series of inadequate oppositions: subject/object; biological constitution/traumatic event; internal/external. 15 Eventually Freud will be led to think through the ontological status of the bizarre domain he had discovered in terms of Urphantasien (primal fantasies): universal structural schemes, transmitted from generation to generation, from Oedipus triangle to Oedipus triangle, and ultimately grounded in a pre-history whose mythical status—symbolized by

13 Ibid., p. 162.
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the primordial role played by the absence of the dead father in *Totem and Taboo*—Freud on occasion seems not far from admitting.

Above and beyond any attempts to read Lévi-Strauss’s structures into Freud’s mythical pre-history, one of the most remarkable differences between the French and American perceptions of Freud, as we have suggested, derives from the French attempt to “de-biologize” the unconscious. For the “subject” of the French unconscious—Oedipal through and through—is the loss of the natural object and its replacement by an ideational representative (“memory trace,” “signifiant”) furnished in an intersubjective setting. To examine this process of transition from the biological (individual) to the sexual unconscious would be to revive such crucial Freudian terms as *Anlehnung* (étayage, anaclisis), the movement by which the sexual drive (Trieb, pulsion) is derived from the instinct (of self-preservation); *auto-erotism*, not as an initial phase of maturational development, but as the necessary condition of human sexuality in so far as its object is not “real” but fantasmatic; *hallucinatory satisfaction*, not as an infantile hallucination of satisfaction, but rather as the hallucinatory re-activation of privileged “meroy traces” as an ned in itself (as in the “wish-fulfillment” of dreams).¹⁶

Lacan’s break with American ego psychology, which he has denounced as the ideology of free enterprise, is thorough. Whereas the American theorists have retained the Freudian notion of the ego as an agent of synthesis, mastery, integration, and adaptation, Lacan’s point of departure (in the *stade du miroir*) has been to revive a far more worrisome conception of the ego, which is implicit in Freud’s papers on narcissism and on mourning and melancholia: the ego as constituted by an identification with another as whole object, perpetually threatened by its own otherness to itself, essentially suicidal. Whereas the Americans write of ego mastery, Lacan’s ruse has been to situate that mastery in a (Hegelian) dialectic of master and slave. What for the Americans is an agent of strength, for Lacan is the victim of the illusion of strength; the would-be guardian of objectivity

is the ideologue *par excellence*, whose main function is to insulate the ego from the scandal of primary process thinking. The difference between the two might be summarized by the shift of perspective implicit in Lacan’s Heideggerian transcription of what is generally taken to be Freud’s humanist slogan: *Wo es war, soll ich werden*. Lacan translates: *Là où c’était, il me faut advenir*. (There where it—the symptomatic slip—was, there must I come to be, to locate my subjectivity).

One reason this reading of Freud is of concern to literary America is that it is indicative of a general reversal of values attributed to various metaphorical and conceptual schemes. For it must not be forgotten that American “new criticism” found fast allies among the ego psychologists. Thirty years after Freud had declared the main thrust of his discovery to be that the ego isn’t even master in its own house, E. Kris was reassuring the academy that “regression in the service of the ego” might solve a good measure of the humanist’s problems.  

If there could be any index of the French distrust of the metaphors of wholeness, integrity, and the entire imaginative complex epitomized by the “seamless web,” it is J. Laplanche’s suggestion that the ego, in its constitutional imperviousness to unconscious truth (i.e., the fact of primary process thinking), might be afflicted with a “synthesis compulsion” (precisely Cinna’s discovery upon returning from his desperate trip).

Let us return then to Lévi-Strauss. We have attempted to present the difference between the sterility of the anthropologist’s unmediated encounter with the Tupi and the fascination of the Caduveo women in terms of the intervention of a conceptual scheme furnished by Mauss in the latter case. Now just as the author of the *Essai sur le don* thus offers a means of transcending the sterile, empirical presence of the other, so his role will be to initiate Lévi-Strauss to a second beneficent violation: operated on the anthropological data dictated by “experience.” For to the extent that Mauss has an intuition of the

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unconscious, he will go beyond any illusory—or at best preliminary—attempts at empathy with his informants in order to attain a new and properly structural dimension of analysis. Mauss's "epistemological break," for our author, marks the zero degree of exoticism. For it involves seeing nothing new—i.e., nothing that Malinowski had not already seen—but everything anew.

For the first time in the history of anthropological thought an effort was made to transform empirical observation and attain a deeper reality. For the first time the social is no longer considered in terms of pure quality... and becomes a system, among whose parts connections, equivalences and solidarities may be discovered (p. 33).

Mauss's effort to find a latent structure in the disordered phenomena others had observed, moreover, is, for Lévi-Strauss, parallel to that of Jakobson and Troubetskoy to construct the set of relationships which would constitute the Grundzüge der Phonologie. Together, writes Lévi-Strauss, their work would lead to that "vast science of communication" whose inception, we may infer from the text, was the publication of Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté.

And yet Mauss, having gone so far, failed to complete his project. The remainder of the Introduction consists of Lévi-Strauss's inquiry into: "...the reason why Mauss stopped at the brink of these immense possibilities, like Moses leading his people to a promised land whose splendor he would never contemplate" (p. 37). The image recalls one (from Tristes tropiques) which I omitted citing earlier, and which assimilated the subject of Caduveo face painting to an "inaccessible golden age." Of this paradise we would suggest that it is fundamentally inaccessible in so far as it is a metaphor for an unconscious system of exchange or expropriation. We may say the same of Mauss's "promised land." For the very terms of this radical science of communication posit that authentic knowledge of the other may take place only on an unconscious level. Lévi-Strauss's intellectual task and ultimate homage to this Moses—like Freud's—will be to slay him: to demonstrate that Mauss was most "himself" not in his conclusions but in the margins of "those chaotic pages, which
still resemble a rough draft.” In brief Lévi-Strauss's ultimate project will be to reveal that Mauss—Moses, the “father”—was unconscious.

Such is the third violation: “an excursion, which some will no doubt judge imprudent, to the furthest confines of Mauss's thought and perhaps even beyond” (p. 22). Through a delineation of the “structure of (Mauss's) work,” which is also a “reconstruction” of it, it is an effort to allow Mauss to communicate the basis of a theory of communication. Now the analysis proceeds through a dismantling of the evidence attained through Mauss's effort to identify with the natives. On two crucial occasions, in the *Essai sur le don* and the *Esquisse d'une théorie générale de la magie*, Mauss was guilty of accepting a native explanation of phenomena as their scientific explanation: it is precisely when he “understands” the other's thought that understanding escapes.

Yet this very contradiction (for Lévi-Strauss) is an indication that a valid solution to the anthropological problem lies in understanding the logic of Mauss's (unconscious) error. For the two native concepts—*hau* and *mana*—which Mauss imports in order to save his system are but: “the subjective reflection of the necessity (exigence) of an unperceived totality.” They are symptoms in a virtually Freudian sense of an unobserved (unobservable?) order which structures mauss’s (the natives’) vision. It will be by a superimposition of texts that this latent organization will be generated: “What would result if we projected retrospectively onto the notion of *mana* the conception of exchange which Mauss invites us to formulate?” (p. 46). The conclusion read into the *Essai sur le don* was that the relational reality of exchange was fundamental to the system and preceded the distinction between the individual acts of buying and selling. Now Lévi-Strauss's strategy is to transfer the relational (or structural) nature of exchange to the domain of (structural) linguistics, with which, we recall, Mauss's own thought might have converged. For *mana*, with which virtually any unknown object may be endowed, would seem to be understandable in the context of the nature of language itself: not in genetic terms, but as a function “of a certain situation of mind in the presence of things.” Lévi-Strauss tinkers
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(bricole) inventively, and offers truc, machin and (American) oomph (designating desirability) as mana-like functions in modern languages:

always and everywhere, these kinds of notions intervene, a little like algebraic symbols, in order to represent an undetermined quantity of signification, in itself void of meaning and thus apt to receive any meaning, whose unique function is to bridge a gap between signifiant and signifié, or, more exactly, to indicate that in a specific circumstance, on a specific occasion ... a relation of inadequation is established between signifiant and signifié to the detriment (préjudice) of an earlier complementary relationship.

Now by signifiant, Lévi-Strauss here means literally that through which meaning takes place: the structure of language. The signifié, on the other hand, is of the order of the known. Lévi-Strauss’s paradox is that whereas the linguistic totality (of meaning) must have come into existence (as structure) all at once, that which we know has been acquired progressively. With the irruption of language, the whole world began to take on meaning all at once, before anyone could know (connaître) what the meaning was. “But, from the preceding analysis, it follows that it (the world) meant (a signifié), from the beginning, the totality of what humanity could expect to know of it.” This dissymmetry between the synchronic (structural) nature of the meant and the diachronic nature of the known results in the existence of “an overabundance of signifier (signifiant) in relation to the signifiés to which it might apply.” And it is this “floating signifier,” this “semantic function whose role is to allow symbolic thought to operate despite the contradiction inherent in it” which Lévi-Strauss sees, in this elusive essay, as the reality of mana. It is “a symbol in the pure state,” thus apt to be charged with any symbolic content: “symbolic value zero.”

Now Lévi-Strauss’s argument uses Saussurean terms in a way which requires examination. For Saussure, the sign is constituted by the “arbitrary” or “unmotivated” association of an acoustic image (signifiant) and a concept (signifié). Our author, however, subverts these meanings by playing on the present participial and causal resonances of a transitive verb cut off from its direct object: “le signifiant précède et détermine le signifié” (p. 32). The result of Lévi-Strauss’s displacement is that the opposition signifiant / signifié is subverted
into another of Saussure’s dichotomies: langue / parole. For language (langue) is the collective, structural, unconscious system of differential relationships which constitutes the condition of possibility of any individual speech act (parole). It was for that reason that Saussure’s linguistics was a “linguistics of language (langue)”: the level of linguistic reality whose intelligibility was crucial. When we turn to the realm (parole) bracketed by Saussure, however, we can see that its pragmatic task embraces the anthropologist’s paradox: applying (necessarily the totality of) language (le signifiant) to a (referential) reality which can be known only progressively (le signifié). The problem posed is: given the (systemic) nature of the linguistic unconscious, how can the (linear) conscious exist? The answer is mana, “the servitude of all finite thought;” at once a tribute or sacrifice which individual consciousness must pay to its unconscious foundation; the admission that there is always indeed something more meant than (or in) what we say; the mode of insistence of the unconscious in the conscious.

With mana as “floating signifier,” moreover, Lévi-Strauss appears to have returned to a Saussurean usage of the term signifiant, for it is no longer that through which (all of) meaning may function (la langue) but an acoustic image, albeit without fixed concept (signifié). Or rather it is the signifiant (in Saussure’s sense) which allows the signifiant (in Lévi-Strauss’s sense) to signify. (In an important way then, the term signifiant, as displaced and subverted by the anthropologist, is itself endowed with mana: for it has “meaning” in excess of what we may assume to be “meant” by it.) Mana thus represents the arbitrary (and differential) basis of Saussure’s language (langue) irrupting into speech (parole). The “inadequation” between signifier and signified which it indicates is but the “arbitrary” nature of the Saussurean sign (signe)—the first principle of the Cours—creating the possibility for communication at the very moment its grotesque entry in a realm not its own apparently indicates a paralysis of communication.19

19 Cf. Lévi-Strauss’s image in the chapter of Structural Anthropology (New York, 1967) on myth: “If this is the case, we should assume that it [myth]
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In view of the preceding, the reader will appreciate the aptness of G. Deleuze’s adding to the original series of *mana*, *machin*, *truc* and *oomph* the Freudian *ça* (*id*). For it would seem that *mana*, the paradoxical instance separating (and affirming the irreducibility of) *signifiant* and *signifié*, language and speech, the collective and the individual, would converge with the Freudian division between the unconscious and the conscious. And in a sense our analysis of the *Introduction* to Mauss has been nothing but a commentary on Lacan’s gnomic observation: “The unconscious is a concept forged on the trace of that which operates to constitute the subject” (*Ecrits*, p. 830). For the “floating signifier” is a concept constructed by Lévi-Strauss on the basis of what seemed like an unexplainable incoherence in native thought (ubiquitous *mana* as *trace*). To explain it was to accede to the very mechanism through which (inter-) subjectivity becomes possible. On the other hand, the *Introduction* is an essay not primarily about the natives but about Marcel Mauss. The “concept” was theoretically already (implicit) in Mauss as “trace” or indication of the hidden explanation. In violating Mauss’s conscious conclusions, Lévi-Strauss has liberated that theory of communication which will allow Mauss to communicate (unconsciously) with the reality of native thought. Or to move from a purely semantic level to an affective one, we might say that by producing Mauss’s *ça*, Lévi-Strauss has liberated the *oomph* of the Caduveo woman. In either case Lévi-Strauss’s conceptual Oedipus entails assuming one’s place in a discourse which is self-transgressive in what one fears one can no longer call its essence.

We turn now to Lacan’s text in the hope that the difficulties we meet there will shed light on others we have come across in Lévi-Strauss. The lines chosen are fragments assembled—both for their programmatic value and for the illuminating construction they in-

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vite—from the transcript of an interview with the analyst on Belgian radio. We shall attempt to organize the dispersion of the *Ecrits* around the linguistic idiosyncrasies presented by the passage.

The unprepared reader may perhaps begin to find his bearings if we situate the *genre* into which our text falls somewhere in between intellectual prose poem and crossword puzzle. But this outrageousness, this insistence on mediating the ultimate(ly meaningful) through the nonsensical is part of an effort to revive that telling sense of impropriety which shocked the first readers of the *Traumdeutung* with a feeling that the book’s “analyses” resembled nothing so much as a collection of (bad) jokes. For it will be recalled that Freud’s characteristic response to such annoyance was not an attempt at refutation but rather a shift of focus which eventually led him to direct his attention fully to that second variety of *marginalia* in his study on *Der Witz*. It is as though the side of Freud which was most resonant for Lacan were not his gaze at a hidden center, but rather his displacement of the center into the margins; not his probing of the ultimately significant, but his exposure of it to the devastating play of nonsense. This second trait endows our text with a quality Freud suspected might pertain to his book on dreams as well: untranslatability. For that reason our reading will proceed through a series of explanatory and analytic paraphrases following passages from the original French.

The analyst’s *excursus* will theoretically be a response, *après coup*, to the question of the ontological status of his discourse: “je fus interpellé sur l’être que j’accordais à tout ça.” Already, in the reporting of the question, an incongruity between the elevation of Being (i.e., the metaphysical tradition) and the unassimilable, vulgarly indefinite aspects of the analyst’s domain is affirmed. Whether the id (*ça*) be associated with the surprising eloquence of the symptom (*ça parle*) or the sinister, free-floating quality of unconscious fantasy (*ça et là*, as Deleuze suggests), it *insists* in a realm somehow incompatible with the constructions of metaphysics. 21

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Lacan's response begins:

1. Mon épreuve ne touche à l'être qu'à le faire naître de la faille que produit l'étant de se dire.

1. The rift (faille) through which the analysts's ordeal (épreuve) would accede to some transcendence of the empirically existent (étant) is already resonant in the proximity of être and naître. For in hearing n'être, we are faced with an emergence which is already a disappearance. Being is somehow deconstituted by its integral dependence on the bizarre negativity of language. The analyst's move, beyond the empirical, through—or "into"—language is incompatible with ontology.

2. D'où l'auteur est à reléguer à se faire moyen pour un désir qui le dépasse.

2. The danger here would be to see, in this speculative dismissal of the author as a relevant category, a relapse into romaticism. For désir does not indicate any "vital force;" it is rather the translation of the Freudian Wunsch (wish). As such it is integrally linked to "memory traces," caught up in an intersubjective, textual structure. This alienation of the individual (and his needs) in the displacements and condensations through which the fantasmatic structure is repeated is, for example, the subject of the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter.'"

3. Mais il y a entremise autre qu'a dit Socrate en acte.
4. Il savait comme nous qu'à l'étant, faut le temps de se faire à être.

3-4. The ironic invocation of the Socratic dialogue as analogous (comme nous) to the analytic session posits, at the beginning of the metaphysical tradition, the expectation of a progress leading to the eventual (faut le temps) revelation of Being or Truth.

5. Ce "faut le temps", c'est l'être qui sollicite de l'inconscient pour y faire retour chaque fois que lui "faudra, oui faudra le temps".

5. But this awaiting of the truth of the origin in the end is already undermined by a bracketing of the words used to affirm it. The
analyst acts as scribe, inserting the (im)proper punctuation—here quotation marks—in the analysand’s associations. And with this recourse to diacritical marks, teleology and archeology are both displaced, alienated in a compulsive repetition (y faire retour). Such repetition, in its driven quality (lui faudra, oui faudra le temps), constitutes the register of the Freudian symptom and, more fundamentally, of the drive itself.

6. Car entendez que je joue du cristal de la langue pour réfracter du signifiant ce qui divise le sujet.

6. The division of the subject, the fact of dynamic repression, is a function of le signifiant, in a manner (as we shall see) whose objective correlative Lacan’s shattered prose would constitute.

7. Y faudra le temps, c’est du français que je vous cause, pas du chagrin, j’espère.

7. The pun on cause, meaning both to cause (pain) and to speak (French), is indicative of Lacan’s efforts to situate the “psychical reality” which, for Freud, constituted the bedrock of analysis, in a (linguistic) register akin to Lévi-Strauss’s symbolic (symbolique).

8. Ce qui faudra de ce qu’il faut le temps, c’est là la faille dont se dit l’être, et bien que l’usage d’un futur de cette forme pour le verbe: faillir ne soit pas recommandé dans un ouvrage qui s’adresse aux belges, il y est accordé que la grammaire à le proscrire faudrait à ses devoirs...

8. Faudra, the future tense (temps) of the verb faillir (to fall short, to lack), is presently being eclipsed by the form faillira. Faudra is as well, of course, the future tense of falloir (to be necessary). What is perpetually re-evoked is the necessity of a lack, rift, or failing—for faille is as well the subjunctive of falloir. And the object of this affirmation, at once ludicrous and tragic, is, at different levels, the symptomatic breach in the individual’s speech, the threat posed by (symbolic) castration to his bodily integrity, and, most fundamentally, the irreducible inadequation of human (Oedipal) desire to its object.
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More centrally, we may already suggest that with its polymorphous repetition, the phrase faut le temps itself will change its meaning. The initial call for patience will undergo a semantic erosion, resulting in a secondary sense: the beat must be marked. But the full thrust of that shift in meaning will not be comprehensible until the end of our text... après coup.

9. C’est ainsi que l’inconscient s’articule de ce qui de l’être vient au dire.
10. Ce qui du temps lui fait étoffe n’est pas emprunt d’imaginaire, mais plutôt d’un textile où nœuds ne diraient rien que des trous qui s’y trouvent.

9-10. If fabric (étoffe) be a suitable metaphor for anything that occurs in analysis, it is not in the sense of a stunning material whose color (say, in a garment) might visually fascinate our narcissism. (Thus the progress of the dream analysis, in the article below by Laplanche and Leclaire, will depend on going beyond the imaginary plenitude of the mythic figure of the unicorn.) No, fabric is a valid metaphor in its suggestion of the weave of a text(ile). Thus the (absent) knots (nœuds) invoked are not at all the Sartrean whirligigs of which R. D. Laing writes, but rather those structuring points of intersection in dream analyses which Freud called nodal points (Knotenpunkte). But why are they said to be absent (trous qui s’y trouvent)? And why allude to fabrics in the first place? Is it not by allusion to the nodal term faille (= coarse silk), whose presence in our sentence is as plain as the purloined letter in the Minister’s chamber?

11. Ce temps logique n’a pas d’En-soi que ce qui en choit pour faire enchère au masochisme.

11. To forget this linguistic dimension, to view the end of analysis as an identification with the analyst’s ego—or the forging of a positive “identity”—is to invite a general reification (En-soi) and a masochistic bid for approval from the analyst as master.

12. C’est ce que le psychanalyste relaie d’y faire figure de quelqu’un.
Le “faut du temps”, il le supporte assez longtemps pour qu’à celui qui vient s’y dire, il ne faille plus que de s’instruire de ce qu’une chose n’est pas rien: justement celle dont il fait signe à quelqu’un....

12. For the analyst is not there to respond meaningfully to the patient’s demand, to be someone (quelqu’un). His task is rather to sustain the process whereby the patient’s discourse transgresses itself. Such is the crucial mode of repetition known as the transference. In it the symptomatic slip is revealed not to be nothing (rien) but a distorted effort at communication (faire signe à quelqu’un).

The notion of transference (Übertragung, literally meta-phore) has strategic value in the French reading of Freud. For we may recall that Lévi-Strauss’s wager was to attempt to articulate the structure of language (say, Saussure’s “value”) and the structure of a communicative network (through Mauss’s notion of exchange). Now the term transference in Freud is unique in that the change of meaning it will undergo in the evolution of Freud’s thought offers a link between a kind of relationship within language and a kind of relationship between communicants, between what another tradition calls the syntactics and pragmatics of language. For if transference will eventually mean the symbolic repetition of a structuring fantasy, displaced onto the analyst, and constituting the very medium in which the analysis is pursued, its original sense, in the Studies on Hysteria, is displacement itself: the existence of unconscious distortions of meaning. At stake in the ramifying meaning of the term is thus the individual’s inscription (as nodal term) in the repetitions and displacements of an unconscious (linguistic) structure of exchange. Is it any wonder that the analyst, whose silence effects the disclosure of this process, seems, during the transference, endowed with mana?

13. Car me voici revenir au cristal de la langue pour, de ce que “falsus” soit le chu en latin,lier le faux moins au vrai qui le réfute, qu’à ce qu’il faut de temps pour faire trace de ce qui a défailli à s'avérer d’abord. A le prendre de ce qu’il est le participe passé de “faller”, tomber, dont faillir et falloir proviennent chacun de son détour, qu’on
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note que l’étymologie ne vient ici qu’en soutien de l’effet de cristal homophonique.

14. C’est le prendre comme il faut, à faire double ce mot, quand il s’agit de plaider le faux dans l’interprétation. C’est justement comme “falsa”, disons bien tombée, qu’une interprétation opère d’être à côté, soit, où se fait l’être, du pataqu’est-ce.

13-14. The insistence of the signifier *faut* is manifest here as *faux*: the false. But we are reminded that analysis takes place in a domain in which the duality of true and false is subordinated to a third category, the spoken: the time necessary for an accident of speech to reveal itself as symptomatic of something *other*. The sentence is a microcosm of the development in Freud’s thought which led him from a (naïve) realism bent on tracking down a primal *event* (seduction or scene) to the affirmation of the primacy of transmissible structural schemes (primal fantasies), of a “psychical reality,” whose coherence and consistence, informing both “true” and “false” perceptions, nevertheless has an existence, says Freud, independent of “material reality.” The irruption of the written *trace* in the analytic monologue, foreshadowing a development in paragraph 17 below, alludes as well to one of the more radical and persistent notions in Freud’s thought: the memory trace, not as an image of its object, but as a sign constituted by its coordination with other signs.

If the term *faux* is nevertheless retained, it is less as an indication of untruth than because of the relevance to analysis of those slips (say, *faux pas*) whose uncanny significance it is the analyst’s task to demonstrate. Only by becoming an apprenticeship in marginality (*à côté*) can analytic interpretation strike its mark (*bien tombée*). For it is in the seemingly insignificant linguistic error (*pataquès*) that (Heideggerian) Being (*l’être*) poses its question (“pataqu’est-ce”).

15. N’oublions pas que le symptôme est ce “falsus” qui est la “cause” dont l’analyse se soutient dans le procès de vérification qui fait son être....
15. For if psychoanalysis is a science, its verifiability remains a function of the vicissitudes of just such symptomatic errors.

16. Un temps encore pour ajouter à ce dont Freud se maintient, un trait que je crois décisif: la foi unique qu'il faisait aux Juifs de ne pas faillir au séisme de la vérité. Aux Juifs que par ailleurs rien n'écarte de l'aversion qu'il avoue par l'emploi du mot: occultisme, pour tout ce qui est du mystère. Pourquoi?

16. *Un temps*, as opposed to the previous *du temps*, marks the transition we alluded to above (paragraph 8): from an open continuum to a repetition of discrete temporal intervals. This “moment” will be devoted to an evocation of Freud's symptomatic faith that the Jews would ultimately not be found wanting in the face of truth's violent disclosures (*séisme*). The following sentence (*Aux Juifs . . .*) is incomprehensible unless we decondense the word *aversion* into (1) that penchant of the Jews to *turn away* from the study of the Law to mysticism, and (2) the *aversion* which Freud felt for that turning away, and which led him to refer to it as *occultism*. The metaphorical truth of the statement is clear in Freud's problematic identification with Moses scorning the idolatrous Jews (in *Moses and Monotheism*). It is manifest as well in the painting of *Spinoza Being Jeered by the Jews* which hung in his office. But rather than pursue our documentation of Lacan's statement, let us note that the condition of possibility of our interpretation—and the analytic activity *per se*—was the restoration of a concealed metaphor (aversion/turning away). Such would be the critical analogue to the removal of repression, and it is for such reasons that we refer to Lacan's text as the objective correlative of the analytic process.

17. Pourquoi sinon de ce que le Juif depuis le retour de Babylone, est celui qui sait lire, c'est-à-dire que de la lettre il prend distance de sa parole, trouvant là l'intervalle, juste à y jouer d'une interprétation.

17. Why then Freud's faith in a people so bent on "occultism?" Why, if not because of their tradition of textual interpretation, their prefer-
ence of the fragmentation of the letter to the plenitude of voice, opening texts up to interpretative play?

18. D’une seule, celle du Midrasch qui se distingue ici éminemment. 19. En effet pour ce peuple qui a le Livre, seul entre tous à s’affirmer comme historique, à ne jamais proférer de mythe, le Midrasch représente un mode d’abord dont la moderne critique historique pourrait bien n’être que l’abâtardissement. Car s’il prend le Livre au pied de sa lettre, ce n’est pas pour la faire supporter d’intentions plus ou moins patentes, mais pour de sa collusion significante prise en sa matérialité: de ce que sa combinaison rend obligé de voisinage (donc non voulu), de ce que les variantes de grammaire imposent de choix désinentiel, tirer un dire autre du texte: voire à y impliquer ce qu’il néglige (comme référence), l’enfance de Moïse par exemple.

18-19. If Midrash, in Lacan’s meditation, constitutes the prototypical interpretative enterprise, its relevance for analysis lies in its resisting the temptation to read “deep” (plus ou moins patentes) meanings into the text. What would be latent for such interpretation would be less a meaning beneath the manifest content than a hidden organization of the manifest content. And it would be the lacunae of such a structure which would invite the Midrashic interpolations, here assimilated to the analytic construction of the subject’s (i.e., Moses’s) childhood.

Lacan’s choice of Midrash, that perpetuation of the Law, as the exegetical tradition in which Freud might be inscribed is significant. For D. Bakan has (rather unconvincingly) interpreted Freud’s relation to Judaism in terms of a continuation of the Kabbalistic (mystical) tradition. 22 Above and beyond the merits of each text, little could be more symptomatic of the divergence in the French and American perceptions of Freud than Lacan’s Freud as (metaphorical) repetition of Midrash and Bakan’s as (metonymical) continuation of Kabbalah.

22 David Bakan, Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition (New York, 1965).
20. N'est-il rien d'en rapprocher ce que de la mort du même, Freud tenait à ce qu'il fût su, au point d'en faire son message dernier?...

20. But is there not a paradox at the heart of the Midrashic transmission of the Law? For in order to be preserved the text must be interpreted, opened up, violated. And such is the anomaly—a law perpetuated in its own transgression—which Lacan hints at in alluding to Freud's slaying of Moses—or deconstruction of monotheism—as his final interpretative feat. Lacan's suggestion gains in clarity when regarded as a commentary on the following passage in Moses and Monotheism: "The text, however, as we find it today tells us enough about its own history. Two distinct forces diametrically opposed to each other, have left their traces on it. On the one hand, certain transformations got to work on it, falsifying the text in accord with secret tendencies, maiming and extending it until it was turned into its opposite. On the other hand, an indulgent piety reigned over it, anxious to keep everything as it stood, indifferent to whether the details fitted together or nullified one another. Thus almost everywhere there can be found striking omissions, disturbing repetitions, palpable contradictions, signs of things the communication of which was never intended. The distortion of a text is not unlike a murder. The difficulty lies not in the execution of the deed but in the doing away with the traces..." 23 Thus to interpret, to discover the Bible's division against itself, is to come to terms with Oedipal murder: the fact of repression, of unconscious textual distortion (or displacement). For there could be no better metaphor for the absence of the Holy One than the self-transgressive nature of "His" and all discourse as charted by Freud: uncontrolled metaphoricity itself. Even Moses stuttered.

21. Occasion de passer à l'envers (c'est le propos de mon séminaire de cette année) de la psychanalyse en tant qu'elle est le discours de Freud, lui suspendu. Et, sans recours au Nom-du-Père dont j'ai dit m'abstenir, biais légitime à prendre de la topologie trahie par ce discours....

21. Just as Freud situated his own discourse in the latent interpretative tendency present in (and at work against) the Biblical text, so Lacan, metaphorically repeating the tradition, has focused his attention on the “netherside” (l’envers) of Freud’s own text. For it is precisely in the rigor (whence topologie) with which Freud’s own discovery perpetually and necessarily escapes him (lui suspendu), as revealed (trahie) in the structural repetitions and displacements—the fantasmatics—of the metapsychology itself, that the truth of that discovery lies. The refusal to invoke the Name-of-the-Father condenses at least three allusions: (1) the traditional Jewish refusal to invoke the name of the Lord; (2) Lacan’s reluctance to invoke in his interpretation that humanized displacement of God, the author—in this case, Freud—as master, “possessor” of his writings; (3) most subtly, Freud’s own inability, in the prototypical parapraxis of The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, to recall the name of the painter Signorelli. The analysis of that slip is mediated by a crucial assimilation of the first fragment of the name to that of the Lord (Herzegovinia—Herr—Signor(elli)—Lord). Thus if the first allusion playfully recalls Freud as perpetuating the Midrashic tradition, the third locates Lacan’s discourse at the very moment at which Freud’s words escape him. Whence (2): the irrelevance for Lacan, already alluded to above, of the notion of the author (as “father” of his works).

22. Qu’au dossier de la signification ici en jeu de la castration, soit versé l’effet de cristal que je touche: de “la” faux du temps.

22. Finally, prepared by the mythological context, comes the most surprising transformation of the “floating signifier” yet: la faux du temps, the scythe of Father Time. As Panofsky makes clear, the scythe of time was originally Saturn’s castrating sickle; its temporal resonances entered into play only when Saturn (in Greek: Kronos) was confused—in a fateful pun—with Chronos (time). 24

24 Panofsky, op. cit., p. 75.
Now I would suggest that the whole of Lacan’s text be considered in terms of a problematic line quoted earlier from Lévi-Strauss’s text on Mauss: “the signifier (le signifiant) precedes and determines the signified (le signifié).” It will be recalled that if we retain Saussure’s definitions of these terms, the sentence is untrue of the linguist’s system. For one side of a sheet of paper, to recall Saussure’s image, cannot logically precede the other side. If we retain Lévi-Strauss’s (re)definitions of the terms—to simplify: signifiant as unconscious structure; signifié as individual consciousness—the statement has meaning for Saussure’s text but concerns a problem he did not deal with. In Lacan’s text, however, both interpretations are true to the extent that unconscious fantasy, the structural ground of analysis, tends to become manifest as the apparently meaningless insistence of a fragment of speech (faut du temps). Analysis—or, more modestly, Lacan’s text—could in fact be described as the discovery of the double truth of Lévi-Strauss’s maxim: the realization that one’s hope for individual progress (toward a saving signifié) was always already but the means by which a primal fantasy (signifiant) perpetuated itself in a timeless (Freud: zeitlos), intersubjective unconscious. For this is the tragic moment when the very words by which the individual affirms his patience (faut le temps: time is necessary for the truth to out) are revealed to be the vehicle of that (ça) which demonstrates absurdly the uselessness of any patience (faut le temps: the tempo must be marked, the patient’s discourse punctuated by a compulsive repetition in a reversible time in which that discourse—uncannily—falters). Thus Lévi-Strauss’s signifiant is seen to “precede and determine” (his) signifié at precisely the moment in which Saussure’s signifié is determined by (his) signifiant. Freud’s term for this difficult moment of inscription of the individual into an unconscious structure of exchange is the “castration complex”: the culmination of the Oedipus complex, which issues in the devastating loss of incestuous access to the mother. Whence Lacan’s invocation of “la faux du temps,” Father Saturn’s scythe of time, whose slash between the reversible time of unconscious fantasy and the irreversible time of the ego, between Lévi-Strauss’s
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signifiant and Lévi-Strauss’s signifié, finds its precise place in our iconography in Saussure’s famous bar between significant and signifié. If the reader is at all sensitive to the absurdity, grotesqueness, and sheer terror which hinge on that fragment of language (the definite article in “la faux du temps”), he is well on his way to appreciating Lacan’s poetics. For the feminine here (la), designating the absence of absences for the analyst, mediates all those crucial modes of constitutive lack (Lacan: manque à être) our commentary has delineated. Of these the one we shall conclude by evoking is the loss of the security of a metalanguage. For Lacan’s maxim that “there is no metalanguage” has found its illustration in the text we have chosen: in the manner in which the “truth” of the analytic experience recurs “endlessly” (Freud: unendlich) in the very words in which the patient affirms his willingness to wait for a disclosure of “truth” in (or as) the end. It is as though for the analyst we can attain through language no distance from that in language which alienates us. Whence the refusal to read Freud as a humanist.25

And our own metalanguage? In our quest for the significant, we have seen in Lacan’s use of the term a complexity which subsumes the divergent uses of Saussure and Lévi-Strauss. (For despite the differences between the realms on which the analyst and the anthropologist focus, it is clear that at a level we might refer to as the poetics of their thought, the two texts we have examined beg comparison.) Yet the apparent development or complication of the term has taken place through and against a fundamental repetition, whose emblem, in our two texts, might be Moses slain. As for the relation between that development and that repetition—and consequently, the relation between what we have written and what we have written “about”—it is a question we shall at present leave open. For to begin to answer it… faudrait le temps.