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The Indiscrete Language and the Unrepeatable

Summary:

The perspective of classical psychoanalysis is based on the theme of lacking, around which the bombast of hysteric theatre and the grand narrative of the family novel unfold. Contemporary pathologies (panic attacks, food pathologies, such as new forms of addiction, gambling and sex) are more silent, more like short stories, they shed light on a different, excessive aspect, on an anguishing, if not panicky, intrusiveness of an Other beyond measure, with no limits, no rules.

The concept of the drive event, which allows us to stress this perspective of contemporary psychoanalysis, takes place in antithesis to repetition and is what separates human beings from their animal nature to make them language beings.

The event does not repeat itself, but is rather the unrepeatable, linked to the real in life and that gives it its uniqueness. Repetition, on the other hand, seeks being, or the lack that stands for it. But while one can give lack a sense through interpretation, one cannot do the same with the drive event, which remains an excess that contemporary psychoanalysis has the task to treat in its singularity. The psychoanalytic operation thus veers from the symbolic key of Viennese classicism to the orientation around the real of modernity.

Hysteria today has disappeared from psychiatric diagnostic handbooks, swallowed up in the vortex of oblivion, as if it were no longer recognizable after having lost the lively, theatrical nature with which it was presented to Charcot and clinicians in the nineteenth century. The expressiveness of hysterical symptoms has changed; it has transformed, one might say, its poetics, and now manifests itself, for example, in the form of eating disorders or panic attacks—though less histrionic, certainly no less striking. The lexicon of hysteria, like any other lexicon, is subject to the erosion of time as well as historical and social changes, and has modified the terms in which it poses its own questions about sexuality, desire, and a radical dissatisfaction that no object can apparently fill.

Classical and contemporary theory

When Freud confronted the question of hysteria, the first task was not to respond to it, but to understand it, to penetrate the enigma. The question was posed within the coded language of symptoms and dreams, written on the body or hidden in the dark of night: it needed to be brought to light, clarified, interpreted. The word in psychoanalysis was thus, initially, articulated in an asymmetric dialogue. On the one side was the patient, who formulated the question about the contingency of his own life, or the necessity in which life is caught up, or the impossibility of his own desire: it's what Lacan referred to in saying that the question is formed in modal logic. On the other side was the response that the analyst provided by way of

interpretation, separating the grain from the chaff, the true from the false, presenting himself in what Lacan called, using an Aristotelian term, an apophantic role.

At the beginning of psychoanalysis, the response to the subject's appeal consisted first of all in understanding and making the other understand, in decoding. The success of the Rosetta stone metaphor was based on this, and led to descriptions of Freud as a kind of Champollion of the unconscious. On the other hand, the structure of dreams as presented in the *Traumdeutung* is in fact similar to that of the Rosetta stone; it's made up of a text written in two different languages—one of manifest dream-like images, and the other of latent thoughts. What's said in the obscure language, represented in dreams or symptoms, needs to be translated into the language that transparently expresses the content that the subject doesn't tolerate, that he rejects or removes. Up to this point we have the initial theory, clear and expressive, formulated with images vaguely dramatized by the Oedipal theory.

It's a theory that broadly refers to the concept of censorship, which is given ample space in the *Traumdeutung* since it considers that latent sexual content, written in a coded message, could shock the subject once the message is decoded, could turn out to be intolerable with respect to his moral values. Censorship implies the notion of a content that is readily formulated linguistically, but that cannot be uttered for reasons of decency, convenience, or tact. However, once the disruption brought about by the emergence of the forbidden content has been overcome, the subject is led to re-elaborate and integrate those aspects that he previously deemed unacceptable and senseless. This assumption forms the basis of the idea that it suffices giving meaning to apparently incoherent or symptomatic elements in the subject's behavior in order to release him from the pathogenic determinism in which he's trapped.

In contemporary theory, however, the concept of censorship turns out to be somewhat outdated. In fact, it aims more at an internal limit to what can be said than at a hidden expression; it emphasizes a threshold beyond which the power of language to signify diminishes, rather than a message that's actively suppressed by a specific need.

What does the subject talk about in his question? Classical theory stresses that whatever is expressed, recounted or presented, that is, what the subject says, can be treated in the same way as a dream's text: it's considered a manifest text that conceals a latent one, that's over determined, and that refers to a semantic field that differs from what is explicitly indicated. Originally, the Freudian *Übertragung* had exactly this meaning: the transference, transposition or transcription of a hidden meaning into a word that has another meaning.

The vehicle for making love [1]

Let's take an example. The basic axiom of the *Traumdeutung* is that dreams represent desires as being satisfied. The dream of a patient who constantly complained of his lack of success with women seems to confirm this. In his dream he sees a beautiful young woman and, based on her signals, realizes that she wants to make love with him. He takes her in his car and they drive for a while towards the countryside. They stop, get out, and take off on foot along a canal. Distracted by their conversation, they discover they've wandered into the open countryside, into the cold and humid fog, when he realizes that the woman's desire is quite pressing. It's the moment of truth, she wants him, it's time to carry through. But where? They're far away from everything, and he has now to find his way back, he has to get the vehicle in order to make love. For this patient—who endlessly seeks to acquire behavioral mechanisms for doing things, who proceeds according to the rule that learning a trade will stand you in good stead, who is always looking for life's instruction manual without ever using it—the final sequence of the dream, *the vehicle for making love*, marks the boundary between the narcissistic plane and the domain of drives. On the one hand, it indicates the ideal completeness where the instructions tell you everything, where in order to succeed with women one need only let oneself desire, follow the written score, set in motion an automatism: everything that's needed

is there, and if it's not in arm's reach, all one has to do is go get it. On the other hand, it denotes the phallic lack, the vehicle that isn't there and that refers back to the domain of drives; it expresses a desire that doesn't obey the will's commands and for which there is no instruction manual.

What's presented in the *Traumdeutung* as the division between a manifest and latent text can, in fact, be generalized to a separation between the narcissistic plane of representation in which the subject is portrayed as the ego, and the domain of drives, organized around the phallic lack, in which the subject disappears. The importance of the linguistic material that interpretation draws on is clear in this example. The move of interpretation towards the domain of drives cannot take place at just any point in the manifest text, but only at the point of contact created by the equivocal expression, "the vehicle for making love", because it is here that the subjective syncope that needs to be unveiled is hidden.

These concepts are clearer in the formalization provided by Lacan. Turning the Saussurian algorithm around, Lacan reveals the priority of the signifier over the signified, as shown in the dream, and writes:

S

s

The ambiguity in the dream on which interpretation plays thus appears in the following form:

MANIFEST LEVEL

vehicle for making love

DRIVE LEVEL

vehicle for making love

automobile where to make love

phallic lack

On the one hand, the vehicle for making love indicates a presence, something that the subject thinks he has at his disposal, or that can be made available to him just by asking for the instructions. On the other hand, we find a lack that can be understood in two ways. In the subject's discourse, in which the lack appears in the form of a request, even if a disguised one, it means: not yet. I don't have here the vehicle for making love, but I'm going to go get it; I don't yet know how to succeed with women, but I'm going to learn. In interpretation's response, outlining the lack means instead bringing the subject to recognize the essence of his own desire in such a way that the lack cannot be filled without annulling the desire itself. In the first case the lack is contingent; in the second case, it's necessary.

Different perspectives of interpretation

Lacan's formalization reveals different perspectives of interpretation. The first plays upon a substitution of meaning. After all, this is what's understood by the most general sense of interpretation. In a musical performance, for example, an interpreter's skill consists in revealing implicit aspects of an already written piece of music, in enriching it with new meaning that, though potentially within the score, had never before emerged. This version of interpretation is a supplement to meaning.

Emphasizing the priority of the signifier over the signified, as does Lacan, presents another perspective. In the example of the dream, there is the clear possibility of reading a shift in meaning: in the patient's explicit discourse, the "vehicle for making love" is the automobile, while in the interpretive response it's the phallus. Yet putting things this way, one only grasps a superficial level that remains at the imaginary level. Suggesting to the patient that what he says can also mean something else is not a very profound interpretation. In fact, the radical turn lies in showing him that it doesn't mean anything, or rather, that it means "nothing"—that beyond which nothing else can be revealed. This means moving the signifier from the usual referential function it plays in daily discourse to its reality of pure semblance, much like Parrhasius' curtain. This way of interpreting can have a comical effect: what appeared as an enigma, the revelation so anxiously awaited, is in fact little more than nothing, the Oedipal tragedy turns into a comedy, and the anxiety is resolved in laughter. We haven't played off the ambiguity of meaning, but used the pure signifier, the last signifier behind which there is nothing more to say, the signifier's nonsensical nature, as Lacan called it.

But is it really true that behind the last word in which the meaning of the phallus is expressed, there is nothing more to say? Or is it not rather the case that, as Italo Calvino suggested, the word's limit reveals the immensity of what remains to be said? To the extent that interpretation addresses the domain of drives, it can no longer play only upon the effects of meaning, the substitution of signifiers, the revelation of insight. It's no longer enough to understand, or make the other understand, since in addition to meaning there is also at issue satisfaction, the hysteric's need, beyond just recognition, of desire, which he at the same time evades with the classical move of *dérobade*: you thought you'd find me here, but instead I'm somewhere else.

What is lacking?

Consider the classical structure of interpretation. It reveals the truth of the subject, it brings out the lack that makes up the subject in language. But if from the point of view of language the subject is lack, from another point of view it is something. But what? The canonical response is that if in language the subject is lack, then in being, the subject is the object (a), that which remains once it's been established that the lack is not the last word. These notions underlie Lacan's expression *manque à être*, which is so difficult to translate. Apart from the concept's noble, Sartrean lineage, the expression is a fallback on the language of accounting: namely, *manque à gagner*, meaning a loss of earnings. It's not a sum that previously existed and disappeared: it's a sum that was never registered. Similarly, the subject's being is not something that existed and was then lost in the course of development, but rather that which the subject never had and yet strives for. In order to translate this idea into English, Lacan proposed the expression "want to be", in which 'want' indicates both a lack and the tension towards the being that's lacking, the wanting to be. It's the reason why interpretation centered on the phallic meaning, which indicates a lack in the last instance, the irremediable lack, does not however have the last word. The tension in fact remains, the projection towards a vanishing point, towards a solidity that language cannot grasp. The key idea that Lacan expresses in *manque à être* is the missed encounter between language and the subject's being, a missed encounter that leaves behind it the worry of desire, the threat of anxiety, or the promise of enjoyment.

It's thus a question of extending the interpretation. In the classical view, a symptom hides one or more fantasies. The repertoire of fantasies compiled by the first psychoanalysts accounts for meaning, reveals the background of the subject's personal mythology. Fantasy is in fact a way of narrating: it puts the account of the event, of the missed encounter between language and being, in the form of indelible images or phrasal sequences (like the Freudian "a child is hit"). Interpretation that reveals fantasy is once again a modality of words centered on lack, which lets slip through its fingers what it clearly indicates, which uncovers being at the very instant it withdraws.

Being and language

Lacan's comments on this topic are limitless, and take as their starting point the Freudian maxim *wo Es war, soll Ich werden*. In refusing to translate this with a simple substitution in which the component of drive has to be withdrawn in order that the ego can take its place, Lacan elevates the Freudian saying to a pre-Socratic dignity. In *Es* there is being, or rather there almost was, it was just on the point of being grasped, when suddenly it vanished upon the arrival of the subject.

As long as we pursue being with language, whether to give it meaning or to imprint upon it the definitive mark of a lack, we remain within the diagnostic framework of impotence. Reestablishing the truth doesn't mean modifying at the same time the situation. It's an obstacle that psychoanalysts have historically encountered and grappled with in the famous debate over standards that took place in the 1950s. The issue of defining the setting and its rules does not in fact come from Freud, who offered no more than a few suggestions, nor from the first Vienna Circle. The problem of the setting's rules arose after some of the pioneers in psychoanalysis, such as Ferenczi (1932) and Alexander (Alexander & French 1946), had extended the repertoire of therapeutic factors beyond the means of language, claiming that interpretation was insufficient for bringing about a change in the subjective structure. These positions were considered heresies, and establishing precise standards for analysis and the setting amounted to circumscribing once again the psychoanalytic process with linguistic resources, for which interpretation and insight were the only therapeutic factors: while there could be variants or temporary modifications to it, there could be no deviations from it. Within this important debate, Kurt Eissler (1953) expressed the standard position with great clarity and rigor.

Lacan's statement that the unconscious is structured like a language, which dates from the same period of the debate over standards, is not at all, considered within this context, subversive. In light of Saussurian and later Jakobsonian structuralism and linguistics (Jakobson 1963), Lacan revived the basic idea of classical psychoanalysis: that a change in the economy of the subject takes place by way of a linguistic operation. He did so with a conceptual power, a wealth of references, and a cultural reach that was unequalled among his contemporaries. He remained, however, along a consolidated line. He clearly renewed the concept of interpretation, pulling it from the stagnation of imaginary correspondence, rescuing it from a superficial reductionism in which one thing simply means another and the game is over. Yet, regarding therapeutic principles, he didn't stray from the path already laid out. It wasn't until Lacan's reconsideration of the concept of drive, between the end of the 1950s and the entire decade following, that the most innovative twists of his thinking emerged, which would lead to the problematization of the real in the latter part of his teaching.

The drive event

Without entering into the details of this topic, which is still at the center of current Lacanian debates, we'll only take up a suggestion by Miller, an idea he put forward in his 1999-2000 course (Miller 1999-2000) in which he claimed that in psychoanalysis the real is defined, not on the basis of what persists, of what is unchangeable, but on the basis of what takes place, that is, the event.

The real of the drive, which escapes the grasp of language, must be considered in terms of time. The drive event is what remains after the last word, after the reduction of the word to pure phallic semblance that unveils the lack.

At this point we can describe the turn that takes place between classical and contemporary psychoanalysis, between Euclidean psychoanalysis as defined by the debate over standards in the 1950s, and non-Euclidean or non-standard psychoanalysis, of which Lacan's practice is one example.

For classical psychoanalysis, trauma is contained in the meaning of neurotic symptom. In making this claim, one needs to pay attention to the terms *meaning* as well as *trauma*, which is Freud's way of indicating the *event*. In order for the unveiling power of the interpretive process to effect change in the economy of the subject, it's necessary to think that meaning and event coincide. Meaning, the subjective view of the event, must fully exhaust within itself the prerogatives of the event as such. Fantasy must then be the exhaustive narration of the event, must reabsorb all of its characteristics, and must serve as the neurotic's individual myth. This is one possible reading of the very first turning points in Freud's thought that led him, as he wrote to Fleiss, to no longer believe his neurotic patients. He was at first convinced that the etiology of neurosis lay in a real episode of seduction that took place in infancy, but then changed his mind when he realized that this wasn't possible, that if such were the case then all the respectable families of Vienna would be full of pedophiles. He concluded that the situation had to be somewhat different. Seduction doesn't take place in real life, but in a fantasy of seduction, in a psychic reality. A fantasy that's libidinally over-invested must thus have the same traumatic impact as an episode that actually took place. If this were the case, however, it would suffice revealing to the subject the content of his unconscious fantasy in order to free him from the domination of symptoms. The linguistic operation is sufficient since the traumatic factor itself is made up of a linguistic and imagistic sequence. The subject draws on scanty clues from reality—a mating ritual between animals, ambiguous situations observed between parents, strange sounds heard during the night—in order to construct stories having all the violence or erotic power of myths.

If one considers carefully this Freudian development, one sees, however, that it makes possible the identification of meaning and event only by leaving aside an essential factor: while it's true that fantasy is a montage of words and images that generates narrative, there's an aspect that cannot be left behind, namely, libidinal investment. A fantasy becomes traumatic only if libidinally invested, and this is an element that cannot be referred back to the idea of a psychic reality considered as a linguistic assemblage. The debate on standards sidesteps this very element, or rather deals with it through the notion of a hierarchy of interpretations: first regarding resistance, and then regarding material. All this, however, hinges on insight, that is, on the grasping of meaning.

When we speak in terms of event we need to clarify this concept, since we have here the keystone for understanding the importance and limits of language in psychoanalytic experience.

First of all, the event is not an episode at a specific moment in the subject's life that leaves an impression, whether positive or negative, upon him. The life of each person is, of course, made up of such episodes that leave a mark, that become important or memorable. To the extent that these episodes take on meaning, they become part of sense-generating frameworks that constitute various periods in the biography of the subject. American psychoanalysis, with its narrative and postmodern orientation, is critical of the idea that there is only one authentic biography, and approaches treatment with the aim of constructing alternative biographies that are possible for, and can be lived by, the subject. More simply, the patient recounts a story in which his neurosis is the consequence of certain problems. The classical analyst usually helps the patient rediscover his past by reconstructing his lived experience and framing it within a kind of normative biography. Narratologists reject the notion of a story made up of facts from the past, and take as their point of reference the present: a patient's story begins with analysis, and the past is reorganized and reread from various angles. In short, it's a matter of constructing for the patient a story in which he fits best and is able to recognize himself. Time is conceived in terms of the current situation, and the event is considered as an ongoing dialogue.

There is an antithetical position between analysts such as Ferenczi, who thought that trauma was an actual episode that took place in reality, and narratologists, who eliminate the empirical depth of biography in order to trace the event back to a dialogical exchange. On the one hand, there's an apotheosis of lived experience, on the other hand, an absolutism of the verbal.

We have to consider, however, that even if the event cannot be traced back to an empirical episode, it likewise cannot be compared to the pure fact of a word, it cannot be recounted, and is not a semantic object.

In order to arrive at a precise concept of the event, one must leave aside both its empirical reduction to a biographical episode as well as its narrative conception. The event is in reality a *drive event*. In saying this, we touch upon one of the most important topics in the contemporary debate in psychoanalysis. The notion of drive is in fact resistant to the empirical approach of science. As long as psychoanalysis claims an epistemological status as a positive science, it will continue to find along its path the obstacle of drive. This was one of the main problems encountered by ego psychology as formulated by the first post-Freudians. The Freudian death drive seemed from the very outset to present a metaphysical risk, and only Melanie Klein (1921-1945), one of the pioneers in the field, accepted it with no reservations. Heinz Hartmann (1972), the leading theoretician in ego psychology, was one of the main advocates regarding the necessity of making psychoanalysis a part of the positive sciences, and was consequently forced to explain drive in terms of energy, force and work. Psychic energy was considered to be essentially physiological in nature, and was formulated as a weaker version of the concept of physical energy. What was for Freud a limit concept between the physical and psychical was placed in this way exclusively on the side of biology. This position encounters considerable limits in clinical practice, it places in doubt the utility of metapsychology, and led narratologists, at the beginning of the 1970s, to reject it altogether, adopting instead a more hermeneutical position. Ego psychology, on the one hand, includes psychoanalysis within the *Naturwissenschaften* and naturalizes drive in biology and narratology; on the other hand, it shifts psychoanalysis to the *Geisteswissenschaften* and simply sets drive aside.

Man and animal, or the animal in man

Once again in the 1970s there emerged another position, namely John Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby 1969-1980), which rejects the idea of psychic energy and uses ethology as the basis for reconsidering the premises of psychoanalysis. For attachment theory, there is no need for energetic hypotheses regarding what activates behavioral cycles; it doesn't distinguish between drive and animal instinct. As a result, it eliminates the discontinuity between man and animal. Modern bio-psychiatry, in fact, does the same: in basing its research on experiments carried out on laboratory animals in order to develop models applicable to humans, it not only contradicts the by now well-established fact in biology that no species can constitute an experimental model for another species, but also ignores the complexity that language introduces to an organism and its responses. As has been known since Aristotle, the leap from animal to man takes place through language. Clearly, this doesn't exhaust the argument on the subject: regarding the philosophical *topos* of man and animal, *L'aperto* by Giorgio Agamben (2002), one of the most interesting books in contemporary philosophy, deals at length with this issue.

The fact remains, however, that it is language that disorganizes instinct, that disrupts instinct's automatic cycle. The *enfants sauvages* are among the most suggestive examples of this. Probably the best-known cases are Victor, found in Aveyron in 1799, and Amala and Kamala, two small girls found in India in 1920. Yet there are a few hundred documented cases of these mute beings who were raised with animals, learned to walk on all fours or eat raw meat, but once reinserted into a human environment, survived only a few years without acquiring language and hence the possibility of symbolic thought.

The *enfants sauvages*, included under the heading of *Homo ferus* in Linnaeus' classification, made it clear to illuminist's how unnatural human "nature" was: without exposure to human environments, the human animal is not humanized. In order to transform *Homo ferus* into *Homo sapiens* simple evolution is not enough; the traumatic encounter with language is instead necessary.

The cycle of instinct, from the triggering stimulus, to the behavioral sequence, to the ending stimulus, loses its own sure guidance with the acquisition of language. Regarding sexual behavior, for example, the animal is attracted by its partner's plumage, colors, and mating dance: its behavior is determined. In the case of man, as shown in the story of Daphnis and Chloe handed down to us from Longus, there is no innate knowledge that leads a subject towards the opposite sex: everything must be learned, since if language

deprives instinct of its naturalness, it doesn't replace it with any other compass, it doesn't provide any signifier that points the way to what instinct unambiguously indicates with triggering signals. In light of this, we can define the drive event as the break between what instinct was and what drive becomes, as the discontinuity between man and his animality, as the point of no return between *Homo ferus* and *Homo sapiens*, where language marks for the subject the impossibility of coinciding with his own being.

It's said that Amala and Kamala, after being torn from their wolf family, physically wasted away before the age of 20, looking out towards the forest through their hospital room windows. Prisoner of an alien human context, Amala and Kamala's gaze, fixed upon the forest, seems like the emblematic figure of the subject's wanting to be, of its *manque à être*, but with this important difference: Amala and Kamala watch something they once had and lost, an empirical space in which they were in fact immersed and from which no boundary separates them, if not the medical prison in which they languish; the subject instead chases after a being that was removed *ab origine*, and which marks a point of no return. It is why the drive event has neither a chronological arrangement nor a narrative possibility.

Life adrift in language

Let's consider now a conceptual polarity made up of a clear antithesis: that of event and repetition. The event is transitory, it happens suddenly; it's a flash that vanishes as quickly as it appears without establishing any duration; it marks a momentary detachment from being that's too brief to become a thought. Repetition spreads out in permanence, it insistently turns back towards what was lost, it continues to ask, and incessantly returns to the point of being's removal as if to make it spring forward. It's in this sense that repetition is the negation of the event: it persists in seeking the being for which the drive event has marked its loss.

It's important to clarify what happens in the event and what is repeated in repetition. I tried to show above how the drive event marks the break between man and his animality. This idea should not take precedence over what Lacan formulates in *manque à être*. The being that's lost before having been encountered, the being that the subject chases after, does not coincide with animality. Man, as a living creature, pursues his own corporal existence, and in psychoanalysis the subject's corporality is certainly important. Language's impoverishment of the vital force does not turn the subject into an entity of pure logic. We can say that the drive event is the emergence of life whose persistence interferes with language, even if language does not take life into its own assessments, even if what's at issue is a real that goes adrift. It's what led Lacan, in the last years of his teaching, to speak about the drift of drives. Life goes adrift in language, it crosses language without the latter being able to set its course. What happens then in the event? Not only the break between man and his animality, but also the flash in which life is felt at the moment it risks being lost. We have here the mark of anxiety which Lacan, in *La Troisième*, one of his lectures from the 1970s, no longer defines in relation to the object (a), as he did in his seminar ten years earlier, but in relation to the body: anxiety, he says, is the feeling that arises from the suspicion of being reduced to our body. The object (a) is ultimately ascribable once again to a semblance, a semblance of being that's fixed in fantasy and that can, in the place of *manque à être*, support interpretation. Life instead is something extreme, says Lacan, since "beyond that vague expression which consists in announcing the enjoyment of life, we don't know anything about life." There is here a clear distinction between the elusive *real of life* and *being*, whose object (a) seizes a semblance.

What happens in the event is that, for man, life is felt in the moment in which language takes from him the animal immediacy of contact with it.

What's repeated and what's too much

What is repeated in repetition? When Lacan takes up the Freudian concept of repetition against the background of Kierkegaard (1843), who raised the question about the possibility of enjoying a pleasure from the past, of having once again those things that are lost, there is the idea of restitution. We know that Kierkegaard was led to these reflections following the end of his engagement to Regina Olsen, but beyond this anecdotal aspect, what is at issue in repetition are the continuity and necessity of being: *quod quid erat esse*. It's in order to rediscover the continuity of *what being was* that repetition acts and formulates its own questions. Repetition is in fact articulated on the level of the signifier, and what's repeated is the question that tends to bring out what being was, or rather, according to Lacan's coinage, what it was on the point of being. In this way, repetition can only always return to *manque à être*, the lack left by the removal of being, since there is no before to which it can turn, a kind of lost paradise it can reenter. From the psychoanalytic perspective as outlined by Lacan, there is not, first, being, then its loss, and then the attempt to recover it. Being is always only that which is about to be, that which almost was.

We see now that the event is connected with the elusive real of life, with the time of the break in which the subject feels the twinge of anxiety and the subsequent enjoyment. Repetition, instead, is connected with being, or rather with the mark that its lack leaves in the structure of meaning. The subject is thus led to pursue his own desires in the object semblance in which lack is wrapped

It's important to see that the drive event does not inscribe a lack, but rather makes an excess of plenitude emerge. The break that separates man from life, that makes itself felt, confronts the subject with the fact that life is more than what he's able to grasp, even more than what he's able to tolerate: it's the contrary of depletion. Instead, lack and loss do not belong to the real of life, but to being, since being is that which one can talk about, that which philosophy has always talked about. It's being that desire pursues, in the same way that the knights in Atlas's palace chased after empty semblances that Ludovico Ariosto's magician used to draw them into a labyrinth of vacant rooms. But no one pursues the real of life, since it is always already there, and presses, pulses, overflows like excess pleasure that the banks dug by the signifier are unable to contain.

The antithesis between event and repetition is not just conceptual: the movement of repetition would tend, in fact, in its ideal and impossible fulfillment, to cancel the event, to prevent it from ever taking place. Reviving being, although it never was, achieving the *quod quid erat esse*, would mean placing life back into the unnoticed, placing it on the same level as static being, making it coincide with the latter, eliminating its event-like aspect and restoring it to a naturalness stripped of any anxiety and with none of the shock of estrangement that seizes man when he perceives himself in relation to it. If Freud, in studying repetition phenomena, was led to speak of the death drive, it's because in reiterating the question, repetition seeks to silence life in the utterability of being. Against this background, however, is the agitation of the unutterable life that crosses right through existence, and the vague expression of the enjoyment of life, to which Lacan refers, comes close to what the phenomenon of panic discloses: the inconsistency of the Other.

The enjoyment of life and ideals

Modernity's various manifestations, which teem with any number of contrasting trends, have accustomed us to the idea that there is no governing center of the world, a model to which everything leads back, a truth that appeals to absolute values. We no longer belong to an era in which we consider that the Name of the Father plays the role of guarantor, like the Cartesian God whom we had to trust faithfully in order to be certain of not falling victim to misleading illusions.

In this inconstant diversity of things, the enjoyment of life becomes an imperative that substitutes the investment of a period's ideals, and it's for this very reason that it reveals an aspect of incoherence and desperation. From this point of view, repetition, even in its symptomatic nature, reconstitutes a line of continuity, but it's precisely because it must create stability that it's constrained to exclude the event.

There are various expressions of repetition. Recurrent dreams are a common form. One patient, for example, always dreamed about going back to the house where her father lived with his mistress after he left the family. In the dream, she would roam about the empty rooms; she had to finish something even if she didn't know what it was. Without being able to complete the task she had set for herself, she would unfailingly be startled by the sound of a key being inserted into the outside lock; she would hear her father and his mistress who were returning home and were about to find her there. She had to escape, and would awake with a start in the grip of anxiety. Only after having analyzed her unconscious desire to take the place of her father's mistress, and thus fulfill the incestuous fantasy with her father, did she stop having this dream. We have here one of the most classical Freudian scenarios, but one which clearly shows that repetition is a symbolic mechanism, in this case the dream, whose function is to retain an unrealized, to make into being what is only an aspiration to being. What didn't stop recurring for the patient, however, were the instances of anxiety, which manifested itself, once she no longer had the dreams, as apparently unmotivated panic attacks. Unbound from the fantasy scenario, anxiety emerges erratically, and it's not through interpretation that one can treat it. In the end, repetition itself is a way of dealing with the real of anxiety through the symbolic, but when in the dream the pressure of the real becomes too strong, the scenario dissolves in the brutality of awakening.

Even the symptom is a phenomenon of repetition, with its insistence, its manifestation in forms that are able to hold ever changing content, like an old wineskin in which one pours new wine without it ever splitting. Interpretation reveals the desire in which it hides, it unmask its guises, and instead of eliminating it, is witness to its revival, pursuit, and reiteration. In this way, the symptom is shown to be, rather than a dysfunction, something functional, something to complement the Other's inconsistency. The symptom's function is to retain the lack of being without which the Other literally comes apart. Emptying the symptom of neurotic suffering through analysis does not mean bringing repetition to its fulfillment in order that being manifest itself at its peak, but rather to reach a limit in which lack is shown to be necessary. All this, however, does not invest the drive event. There is no way of reaching the event starting from repetition, and this is the reason behind Ferenczi's failure, even though he was the first among the most important pioneers to consider an analytic process that did not stop at the possibilities of interpretation.

The model of psychosomatic phenomena

In order to come upon a point of contact between language and the drive event, we need to follow a completely different path. We can take as a model psychosomatic phenomena. While the symptom belongs entirely within the field of language and can be explained with the mechanisms of substitution that Lacan indicates in the two main axes of metaphor and metonymy, the psychosomatic phenomenon is found at the limits of language: although one cannot attribute to it a meaning, it is certainly a trait that's written upon the body; although it doesn't respond to interpretation, it isn't mute; and although it's a sign, it's not articulated in a discursive chain with other signifiers.

Lacan addressed this issue in a few brief passages, and it's interesting to see how he presented it in a key passage from Seminar XI (Lacan 1964). He refers to Pavlov's experiments saying how, in reality, these led to the association of a signifier with the organic organization of need. By interrupting the cycle of need, the experiment in fact artificially creates the break from which desire emerges. If the animal does not learn to speak, argues Lacan, that is, if it does not formulate something like a question on the basis of these conditions, it's because it is behind in time. There can arise in it every type of disorder, but since it is not now already a speaking creature, it will not be called on to question the experimenter's desire. In other words, the animal won't be led to wonder what the experimenter wants of it, why he makes him do these things, or what his intentions are. For Lacan, however, the interest of the experiment resides in a particular aspect: the fact that it indicates where one ought to try to understand the psychosomatic effect.

Following Lacan's suggestion, we see in psychosomatic phenomena the other side of repetition. In repetition we find the subject who, disembodied from life, chases after his own desire along the trail of being's lack. We see language that rejects life in order to pursue being. Psychosomatic phenomena represent the other side of the coin. Here, there is no subject: language directly marks the body, an erogenous zone, an area removed from the impoverishment of life; it cuts into the flesh that hasn't been voided of enjoyment. Why does Pavlov's experiment in fact have a key role in highlighting psychosomatic phenomena? Because it reveals the animal in man, because it underscores the point at which language intervenes in the destruction of instinct, where the fact that the Other's desire is not questioned implies that it does not enter the circuit of meaning: the sign left on the body is a mark of the drive event, a break that rejects instinct but which is not projected towards the absent being. On the basis of this model we can consider a series of signifiers that have no referential function, that are not linked to desire, that have no resonance of sense, and that are traces of the drive event.

Outlining the indiscrete language

In this way one can outline another dimension of language with respect to the one studied by Lacan during the first, structuralist, period of his teaching. The psychosomatic phenomenon is a particularly interesting example, since it reveals the signifier that's imprinted upon the flesh, but there are also other manifestations of language that are not separated from the event. There's psychotic delirium in which the language-event dimension invades that of referential language. There's what Lacan, in the 1970s, called *lalangue*, merging the article and noun by way of alluding to infantile lallation, in order to indicate the ambiguous play of language, and to highlight the ludic and non-semantic use of language.

It is not along a discursive level that the event is narrated, since in order to be narrated it must be missing, there must be a lack. It's a level in which language is connected to the event, and it's precisely for this reason that it does not enter into the mechanism of repetition. It's a language without grammar, without articulated parts, a kind of indiscrete language: it's not divided into elements and does not hide a truth to be unveiled since it instead parades what is intimate by its vital pulsing.

The structured level of language, connected with repetition, pursues a semblance of being which escapes it. The effect of interpretation—beyond the codes it appeals to, and of which Oedipus is only one among possible others—is the emergence of truth at the moment in which the lack is uncovered.

Since the event is not something that can be veiled, has neither hidden consequences nor meaning, and cannot therefore be dealt with through interpretation, the indiscrete language unfolds without concealing anything, starting from what is unrepeatable. It's not like a latent text that needs to be brought to light, since it's made up of absolutely generic terms that move about in the plain light of day; here, it's more a question of establishing the nexus with the drive event. A clinical example will help render this concept more concrete. It concerns a case that provides, in my view the clearest illustration of this matter.

Ingerirsi (“Interfering”)[2]

A twenty-eight year-old woman sought analysis to resolve certain problems in her life that had taken the form of an anorexic disorder. Coming from a wealthy family, her father's name, which was well known, was in the front pages of newspapers for a certain period of time. She recounted how she was always given responsibility within the family and that already as a child she had to look after her little sisters who were only slightly younger than she was. She always accepted this responsibility as a duty, even if with a certain reluctance since she felt it wasn't natural: being close in age and disposition to her siblings, she felt more like a sister than a caretaker. Because she was genuinely fond of her sisters, she adopted a maternal attitude towards them, which persists today, even if most of the time she restrains herself from giving too much

attention or advice since, as she says, “I’m afraid of *ingerirmi* (interfering) in their private life.” Nothing in this statement would give us pause if it weren’t for the fact that it served as the constant backdrop to her discourse during our session concerning her worries over her own body, which was once thriving and healthy: so healthy that she knowingly wanted, at a certain point, to harm it. The explanation that she gave of this desire to harm herself was that, in this way, she was able to spite all those who were distressed over her physical decay. She would refuse to eat and then enjoy watching her family’s growing concern. When this behavior first manifested itself, it seemed to her that she was perfectly in control of the situation; she thought that she could turn back at any time. Only later, when she realized that the process had become unstoppable and that it was no longer subject to her own will, was she overwhelmed by anxiety. At first, she didn’t take her doctors seriously, throwing away her medication and undermining their treatment. Now, all she does is seek doctors’ advice and become desperate over their inability to help her.

It becomes clear that the signifier “*ingerirsi*” as well as the behavior of interference are set against the background of the oral instinct: *ingerenza* (interference) and ingestion are brought together in her, giving rise to something excessive and intolerable.

On the one hand, it might seem that her eating behavior served to draw the attention of her family, and that, in light of the fact that it raised their concern, she wanted to gain their affection, to place herself within their gaze. Yet, the way in which she expressed herself leads one in another direction: that instead it’s a question of removing herself, almost of her self-cancellation, in order to protect herself from the intrusion of the Other’s pleasure to which she felt overly exposed. Certain episodes highlight this aspect in particular. Her father had a mistress, and did nothing to hide this from her. Instead, he would often telephone and ostentatiously begin whispering in the daughter’s presence when the conversation took an unambiguous turn. It was a situation that she couldn’t bear even if she wasn’t able to remove herself from it, and she wondered why, without being able to provide an answer, her father wanted her as a witness to his affair. For her father, it was an actual loss of control, which was translated into a terrible car accident that miraculously left the family unharmed. Following the accident there were heated family discussions in which she placed herself in the middle. She had no intention of interfering in her parents’ business, but she was to a certain extent constrained to do so: “I was like a scale,” she said, “I had to keep things in balance.” She wanted to disappear, but was forced to stay there, her arms pulled from both sides, like the arms of a scale. This highly expressive image, which identifies her with a scale, originated in a slip of the tongue between *bracci* (the arms of a scale) and *braccia* (the arms of a person).

Such episodes serve to highlight a sense of intrusion that, however, does not originate in these episodes and that is continuously represented in her story. For example, when she was in high school, during a time when the effects of the sexual revolution were still current, she felt a certain anxiety due to the pressure of her classmates’ requests—requests she couldn’t avoid for ideological reasons. It was an ideology that she accepted, but for this very reason made her feel prey to intense desires that she couldn’t escape.

The *ingerenza* (interference), the pressure of the Other’s enjoyment, was a constant element of her life and the only defense she was able to imagine was her own cancellation. One day, while we were analyzing her thoughts on motherhood and her feeling that this wasn’t a real possibility for her, I threw out the idea that perhaps this had something to do with the fact that she would be forced to *ingerirsi* (interfere) in...I had no sooner pronounced the last word than she was momentarily overcome by a terrible fear, which she immediately explained to me afterward. Instead of thinking of *ingerenza* (interference), she thought of ingestion: she thought of her own situation, of one who devours herself in order to avoid being caught in the middle, and recalled a cartoon, accompanied by the song *Nowhere man*, in which a puppet devours itself until it disappears.

I’d say that this even sheds some light on her eating behavior: it wasn’t a question of drawing her family’s attention, but of destroying their enjoyment, the pleasure they had in seeing her in good health. Denying oneself is denying the Other, just as when she was a little girl and her grandfather would shower her with chocolates and candies, insisting that she take them, even though she didn’t want any: she felt that he gave

them to her because he wanted to eat them himself. In her life there is an excess related to oral pleasure that becomes an invasion, a devouring, with respect to which the only defense is her self-cancellation. The signifier of *ingerirsi* (interfering), as it occurred in the discourse, becomes the bearer of this excess that leaves a particular imprint upon her family relationships and her life in general. It also takes on, however, a feeling of personal violation that explicitly appears in her father's desire to make her a witness to his affair.

It's worth comparing now two important elements that appear in the clinical examples I described: *the vehicle for making love* and *ingerirsi* (interfering). From a certain point of view, they're similar: they are both elements in which the ambiguity of the discourse is concentrated, making it possible to get a hold of the unconscious. However, if we examine them with the requisite care, the difference is much greater than the resemblance.

The vehicle for making love is, on the one hand, the car of the manifest text while, on the other hand, expresses the meaning of the unconscious sequence: the patient's desire to learn the art of seduction as if he were a mechanic, as if it worked automatically, and as if he could become the vehicle for making love. From this wanting to be, from a lack correlated to an ideal fulfillment, interpretation thus refers back to a lack that is necessary but cannot be filled, and in doing so appeals to the phallic meaning.

Ingerirsi (interfering) begins, on the one hand, with intrusive relationships that characterize the family, and on the other hand, with the oral instinct. However, it doesn't mark a lack that seeks to fill itself with being, but rather the opposite: an invasive fullness, an unbearable excess, an overwhelming abundance. There is no meaning to clarify, or enigma to resolve; there is no interpretation that can make sense of the intolerable *ingerenza* (interference) of pleasure that passes through the patient's entire life. *The vehicle for making love* sketches the outlines of a lack; *ingerirsi* (interfering) is the bearer of excess. This implies an essential difference, since the first sequence, to the extent that it's centered on lack, draws with it the repetition compulsion. In the second sequence, there is no trace of repetition nor can there be, since there is instead fixity, constancy, an irresolvable nexus of continuity with the event. In *ingerirsi* (interfering) the event of intrusion is continuously kept in mind, it's never a thing of the past. The signifier *perpetuates* it, it neither repeats, denotes nor commemorates it, since the signifier has never emptied itself of it, but is instead, we can say, part of it.

The classical Freudian neuroses, hysteria and obsessive neuroses, have made it possible to highlight the dimension of language that Lacan, taking up Paul's maxim, defined as the assassin of things, of language as the cancellation of pleasure, as the inscription of the paternal law and of castration, where everything moves around the phallic gnomon.

Contemporary pathologies bring out the dimension of language as connected to the event in which there is no suppression of pleasure and that can, precisely because of this, become invasive and intolerable, presenting itself in the form of anxiety or panic.

After the great dramatizations staged with the direction of hysterics, to which Hitchcock added his own masterly touch with *Marnie*, a new horizon is opening up for psychoanalysis—the impossible profession—called on, as always, to undo the unsolvable knots of life, to make them bearable. At this level, there is neither narration nor grand theatricality that takes the place of a lack. There is an excess to which psychoanalysis can respond, dressing itself in the garbs of the Wizard of Oz, and saying: “Make do with what's missing and make use of what's there: the ruby slippers you're wearing aren't only for shuffling along in the dust, but can make you fly when you know the secret.”

Translated from the Italian by Marcel S. Lieberman

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Notes:

[1] The original title in Italian is “La macchina per far l’amore”, in which *macchina* can mean both ‘car’ and ‘machine’ [translator’s note].

[2] The following case draws on the similarity between the Italian words *ingerirsi* (to interfere), *ingerire* (to ingest) and *ingerenza* (interference), which share the Latin root *ingerere*, to carry in or thrust in [Translator’s Note].