# CHAPTER FOUR

# JACQUES LACAN: FIGURES AND FACTICITY

## I

This chapter seeks to explore Lacan's premises regarding sign and subject, the crucial importance of language to the analytical process, and the interrelations of the Saussurean notions of signification which Lacan assimilated to his own notions of human subjectivity. To the extent that Lacanian psychoanalysis can be said to map out the mechanism of metaphor-making—through a series of explications and explanations of the mind substituting one image or thing by/for another—this chapter offers a reading of *Ecrits* as the book illustrates the process. That Lacan offers a series of figures to explain the phenomenon is not always helpful, but one is at least introduced to the figure of the figure in Lacan.

The orders of words and things cannot be taken as existing on two autonomous planes. On the one hand, the interrelation between the orders of worlds and things, thoughts and language is such that they are inextricably linked so that any attempt to isolate them constitutes an abstraction. On the other hand, the heterogeneity of these orders is so radical— involving objects, sounds, constructs, concepts, thoughts, intentions, consciousness, conventions etc.— that it resists any theoretical attempt to bring them under one coherent system.

The complexities of the human mind — its expression and resumption always pass through language because they are always inscribed in its semantic networks and its metaphorical and metonymic structures. Meaning, however, is not anchored, at the level of stylistic figures or of sign and message. Meaning glides perpetually in a constant "translation" of the elements that constitute it. Hence, in language, the symbol is always a signifier, but whose nature and characteristics are unrelated to the signified. Of course, their characteristics do show some factual similarity, as is the case with metaphors.

There is always bound to be a gap between the spoken/written text and its referential base, even the text and the very material that constitutes it as a text. Taking on from the Saussurean theory, it might be possible to explore in Lacan's text the ways in which the order of things and the order of words might communicate. Similarly, in line with Austin, the chapter seeks to contend that Lacan shows a world permeable to language, and conversely, a syntax permeable to the outside world, a world in which referents and meanings are acquired or even created rather than predetermined. Clearly, some semiotic stability is needed—one might think of Derrida's principle of iterability—sense leads to

reference and words take aim at things. But this aiming is not immune to failure, misfires or misses. Thus, we constantly generate other texts as users of a language. So interpretation is intertextual, a relation of texts to texts. Hence the activity of interpretation is always dependent on an imagined—mirror stage—identity of one text with another text.

Though Lacan was an influential theorist in France as far back as the 1930s, his Anglo-American impact did not really begin until the 1966, the year of his monumental *Ecrits*. In the same year, Lacan also delivered a lecture entitled "Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever" in a symposium at Johns Hopkins University, where other important French thinkers who were known as structuralists, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Lucien Goldmann participated. But since the lecture was not published until 1970, perhaps more important in opening Lacanian thought to a wider audience was Anthony Wilden's *The Language of the Self* (1968). The work included a translation of Lacan's landmark, 'Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', the report on his theory that Lacan delivered in Rome in 1953 at the first Congress of the newly founded Societe Francaise de Psychoanalyse. Wilden's book also included what is perhaps the first substantial piece in English on Lacan, his long essay, 'Lacan and the Discourse of the Other'. It included as well roughly seventy pages of Wilden's notes to intricacies in Lacan's text.

However, the floodgates to Lacanian studies were in fact opened by Anika Lemaire's introductory work, *Jacques Lacan* which appeared in Belgium in 1970, (though it did not appear in an English translation until 1977), and the American academic Stuart Schneiderman's work 'Afloat with Jacques Lacan', published in *Diacritics* in 1971. Eugen Bar also published an essay in 1971, titled, 'The Language of the Unconscious according to Jacques Lacan', and followed it in 1974 with a nearly seventy-page introduction, 'Understanding Lacan'. But a single publication credited for opening up Lacanian thought was volume forty-eight of *Yale French Studies* called 'French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis' (1972). This volume became instrumental because it threw Lacan into a controversy that embroiled academic critics from several sub-disciplines including psychoanalytic and deconstructive critics. The volume's most significant piece, one that forced critics to consider Derrida and Lacan together was Lacan's "'Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'", translated by Jeffrey Mehlman, and derived from Lacan's *Seminaire* II, of 1954-55. After this when Alan Sheridan's English

translation of a selection of the *Ecrits* appeared in 1977, the tide of Lacanian thought had already risen high. In the 1980s, since the thought itself was not fully absorbed into the field of Anglo-American psychoanalysis and literary criticism scholars were mostly engaged in exploring Lacan's ideas, as is evident in Juliet Flower MacCannell's work, *Figuring Lacan: Criticism and the Cultural Unconscious* (1986), B. Benvenuto and R. Kennedy's *The works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction* (1986). The nineties actually took Lacanian thought to different other disciplines. Therefore, there were indeed a few works which serve as an introduction to Lacan, keeping up with the trend of the eighties, like, Malcolm Bowie's, *Lacan* (1991), D. Evans' *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (1996), Bruce Fink's *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (1995), D. Nobus' *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (1998), including J.M. Rabate's *Jacques Lacan* (2001). The nineties were also characterised by a wealth of work done by way of understanding some preliminary Lacanian concepts, like those of the unconscious, the process of signification, desire etc, as expounded in the works of Laclau, Laplanche and Leclaire and the like.

In the present times, what is absolutely clear is that many of Lacan's conceptions—of the unconscious, the ego, the 'other' and the 'Other', the mirror stage and the cognitive "registers" (i.e. the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real)—all have become increasingly important in structuralist and post-structuralist, deconstructionist and post-deconstructionist as well as Marxist, feminist and postmodernist critical theories of English and American, not to mention French and other European academic circles. These include the material and structural relations of the subject's 'I' to the social 'other' and the 'Other' of the unconscious to be sure, but they also include the individual's relations within the family and social matrix. Finally and most important, they include the relation of the individual subject to the structure within its culture. Since these interests reflect current ideological orientations across several disciplines, the recent times saw a great diversification of Lacanian thought.

Lacan in fact generates fresh perspectives in various areas of study as is evident from the following list of prominent works Shoshana Felman's *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (1977), Geoffrey Hartman's *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text* (1978), *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading* (1988), E. Grosz's *Jacques Lacan:A Feminist Introduction* (1990), James M. Mellard's *Using Lacan, Reading Fiction* (1991), *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* (1994), edited by Maud Ellman, Peter

Brooks' *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1992), Zizek's *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (1992), *Psychoanalytic Politics: Jacques Lacan and Freud's French* Revolution (1992) by S. Turkle, J.Copjec's *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (1994), J. Rose's *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (1996), S. Vice's *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reader* (1996), P. Adams' *The Emptiness of the Image: Psychoanalysis and Sexual Differences* (1996), E. Cowie's *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis* (1997), E. Wright's *Speaking Desires Can be Dangerous: The Poetics of the Unconscious* (1999), E. Roudinesco's *Jacques Lacan: An Outline of a Lfe and a History of a System of Thought* 1999), Y. Stavrakakis' *Lacan and the Political* (1999), a recent work by Zizek, namely *The Fright of Real Tears:Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (2001), R. Parkin-Gounelas' *Psychoanalysis and Literature: Intertextual Readings* (2001), *Lacan and Contemporary Film* (2004), edited by T. McGowan and S. Kunkle. Works like Sean Homer's *Jacques Lacan* (2005) and Karl Simms' *Ricoeur and Lacan* (2007) prove that various theorists have embraced Lacan because his reading of Freud has placed particular emphasis on several elements that constitute us as individuals and social beings.

Lacan says that language is the condition for the unconscious— that it creates and gives rise to the unconscious. However, one is not able to make out whether Lacan's figuration of the 'signifier' is that of the conscious or the unconscious signifier. It is difficult to understand as to whether Lacan's figuration of the signifier is that of a conscious or an unconscious signifier. Lacan simply says that an unconscious signifier is radically distinct from a conscious signifier even if both are formally identical, what separates them is the context into which the signifier is inserted. Of course, one may say that the figuration of the signifier in the conscious may be determined by the context. But it seems difficult to understand exactly how signification at the level of the unconscious produces meanings. So far, unconscious language can be understood only as it returns into the consciousness.

Second, it remains to be determined as to 'who' articulates unconscious language. If, for Lacan, the unconscious is a discourse, the grammatical person in which it is to be elaborated remains to be determined. In accordance with the principle of psychical unity, it may be said that it is always the subject who speaks in the unconscious. But it is not determined as to which person it is referred to.

The problems cited raise certain important questions regarding language and the unconscious. One is required to examine as to the line of demarcation, if one exists between the language used in the conscious and that used in the unconscious state. If the unconscious is revealed to us only through language, it would also be pertinent to examine as to whether the language that reveals the unconscious bears any difference from the language of ordinary use. In other words, if figures like the metaphor and metonymy, puns, slips of tongue characterize the language of the unconscious, can these figurative devices not be used by a speaker while in his conscious state? It is the texts on the line that irremediably separates the signifier from the signified which invite reflection. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether it can be held that the signifieds, the significations we give to the world, obscure the fundamental signifiers more than they manifest them.

As one perceives the problem as to who articulates the unconscious language, one also has to find out as to how one differentiates the conscious from the unconscious on the basis of the significations provided by language. If one is led to assume based on the study in the previous chapters, that there is no non-figurative language, it is important to identify the markers that differentiate a literal and a figurative meaning. Hence, in so far as psychoanalysis is concerned, the effectiveness of the process of signification with regard to production of meaning needs to be assessed.

## II

Lacan makes use of the philosophy of language that says that language reproduces reality. As there is no thought without language, knowledge of the world, of others and of the self is determined by language. This leads Lacan to promote the thesis that birth into language and the utilization of the symbol produce a disjunction between the lived experience and the sign which replaces it. This disjunction increases, language being above all the media of communication and of reflection upon a lived experience. Always seeking to 'rationalize' and to 'repress' the lived experience, reflection will become profoundly divergent from that lived experience. Language is often reduced to being merely a means of communication within a constituted order. But for Lacan, language is inseparable from the meaning of existence. He tries to develop in all its consequences that the word symbolizes and renders symbolic the essence of things. As he puts it in 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis': "I consider it to be

an urgent task to disengage from concepts that are being deadened by routine use the meaning that they regain both from a re-examination of their history and from a reflexion on their subjective foundations" (*Ecrits* 36).

Lacan therefore urges upon the necessity to move beyond those concepts and ideas that are worn-out by use over a long period of time so much so that the individual member of the community fails to consider any scope for innovation in them. If one takes this thought to language, it may be suggested that Lacan stresses upon the feature of creativity in language, so as to move beyond the conventional frontiers of the use of a language.

Lacan moves beyond the conventionally demarcated boundaries, he traverses the limits of human consciousness—that which is thought to be apparent—to the 'unseen', that is the unconscious. His fundamental analytical principle therefore, is that the unconscious is like a language and can be understood only in the ways language itself is understood. Everything which has meaning is inscribed in the very archives of the unconscious by language, understood in the full extent of its semantic, rhetorical and formal features. In his essay, "The agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud", Lacan makes the claim on which his theory of psychoanalysis is based: ". . . what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language" (*Ecrits*147). Lacan is of the view that:

> [I]nterpretation is based on no assumption of divine archetypes, but on the fact that the unconscious is structured in the most radical way like a language, that a material operates in it according to certain laws, which are the same laws as those discovered in the study of actual languages, languages that are or were actually spoken. (*Ecrits* 258)

Here Lacan in fact demonstrates Freudian ambitions to give language a pre-eminent role. However it is not to be understood by this that the unconscious is a language, but only that it is structured like a language and functions in similar ways. In fact, in his lecture 'Of Structure as an Inmiximg of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever'(1972), Lacan claims that "the unconscious structured as a language. . . is a redundancy because "structured" and "as a language" for me mean exactly the same thing. Structured means my speech, my lexicon, etc. which is exactly the same as a language" (188).

On the other hand, Lacan often insists that 'the unconscious is the discourse of the Other'. However, one thing is to be noted here: if the unconscious is structured like language, and the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, then the Other is the place from which the linguistically structured discourse emanates. Therefore, Lacan not only defines the unconscious as the discourse of the Other; he equally defines the Other from which the discourse of the unconscious emanates: "The Other is therefore, the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks to him who hears, that which is said by the one already the reply, the other deciding to hear it whether the one has or has not spoken" (*Ecrits*155). This may prompt one to suggest that the two sides—the Other as a language and the other as figures who utter the discourse are dependent on one another. This may in fact be at the expense of conceiving the Other as a real person, as any real person with all the social and moral responsibilities and possibilities that it entails.

In fact when Lacan speaks in such perplexing terms, he echoes principles of the psychoanalytic movement and Freud. The history of the term 'unconscious' in Freud's writings is long and complicated, but it may be traced to *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and may be said to have attained its climax during his discussion of the difference between 'word-presentations' (*Wortvorstellungen*) and 'thing-presentations (*Sachvorstellungen*), in the paper, 'The Unconscious'(1915). Throughout the paper, he insists on the discontinuity between the unconscious and the pre-conscious:

> We now seem to know all at once what the difference is between a conscious and an unconscious presentation. The two are not, as we supposed, different registrations of the same content in different psychical localities, nor yet different functional states of cathexis in the same locality; but the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone. (Freud 201-2)

This bears importance here as Freud marks a difference between the unconscious and the conscious presentation of the word and the thing. While the unconscious presentation has a combination of the word along with the thing, the conscious presentation indicates only the thing. In other words, in the process of interpreting a dream, the 'wordiness' of the words must be disregarded in order to arrive at the meaning that attaches to their 'thingness.' Hence, the unconscious and the conscious are differentiated on the basis of the word-thing presentation. Of course, this presentation of words and things seems quite

intricate and unstable at whatever level they occurred within the physical apparatus. This instability and intricacy could be said to be primarily because of the fact that the conscious interpretation of a dream fails to relate a particular element of signification to one signifier. In the unconscious, however, the figurative implications seem to somewhat 'tame' the relationship between the word and the thing, if one may put it that way.

Having said that, while Freud is always trying to go through language to something else—actual persons, events, or happenings, for example—that account for traumas in the subject—Lacan, by contrast relegates those presumptive original sources to the background. Origins can never be available to us (even if they exist); what is available, Lacan would say, is a capacity for symbolization, expressed in language. In the "Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1957), Lacan develops the theory that the nature of language will not really be questioned as long as linguists and philosophers believe that the spoken language refers to some *a priori* essence, or even that meaning and spoken language have to be connected. Such assumptions send logical positivists searching for the "meaning of meaning" (*Ecrits* 166):

> If we try to grasp in language the constitution of the object, we cannot fail to notice that this constitution is to be found only at the level of the concept . . . These considerations ... turn us away from the locus in which language questions us to its very nature . . . (*Ecrits*165-66)

Nevertheless, by a rereading of Freud's early texts—notably *The Interpretation of Dreams, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) and *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), Lacan secures backing from Freud for his own theoretical project. He claims not to have replaced Freud, but merely to have rediscovered the essential Freud; His opening reference to the three canonical works of Freud is significant here:

> Take up the work of Freud . . . to remind yourself that the dream has the structure of a sentence or, rather, to stick to the letter of the work, of a rebus; that is to say, it has the structure of a form of writing, of which the child's dream represents the primordial ideography, and which, in the adult reproduces the simultaneously phonetic and symbolic use of signifying elements, which can also be found both in the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt and in the characters still used in China. (*Ecrits* 63)

The quoted paragraph is an instance of Freud's speculative analogy between dreams and language, although it moves from one term of comparison to another very rapidly. For someone with a 'semiotic view of the world—that language, pictures, sounds etc, in short, the entire domain of perceptible is governed by the process of signification— it becomes easy to understand Freud's idea of the 'rebus' as a mode of encoding and decoding in the structuralist sense. Freud sees the entire process of the interpretation of dreams to be a following of the process of dream-work in reverse. In the structuralist linguistic view, this process of creating or deciphering a rebus becomes a process of translation. That is, in the dream-work, first, the element in the pictorial code is translated to a verbal code, and second, the element in the verbal code is translated into an alternative, homonymous element within the same verbal code. Therefore, one might as well locate a metalinguistic operation at work in the dream process. Hence, Lacan encapsulates the lessons of the *Psychopathology* in the formula "every unsuccessful act is a successful, not to say 'well turned' discourse" (*Ecrits* 64), and those of *Jokes* in a comment on the ambiguity that language confers on all mental processes:

> [T]he face it reveals to us is that of the spirit in the ambiguity conferred on it by language, where the other side of its regalian power is the witticism or 'conceit' ('*pointe'*) . . . where its domination over the real is expressed in the challenge of non-sense, where humour, in the malicious grace of the 'mind free from care' (*esprit libre*), symbolizes a truth that has not said its last word. (*Ecrits* 66)

On the whole, Freud's works seem to be clothed in linguistic imagery by Lacan, an imagery that already featured in the former's works. Hence the core of Lacan's interpretation of Freudian theory, suggested in his comments of Freud's work, appears to be its insistence on analysis not of the primacy of events, but on the primacy of language. The insistence focuses both on language as it operates on the axes of "connection" and "substitution" (*Ecrits* 170) within the subject as a means of access from the unconscious to consciousness and on language as it functions as the agency of exchange between the subject and another subject. The notion of 'symptom', for instance, which for Freud, played a major role in diagnosing problems related to psychoanalysis is blithely refurbished: ". . . it is already quite clear that the symptom resolves itself entirely in an analysis of language, because the symptom is itself structured like a language, because it is from language that speech must be delivered" (*Ecrits* 65). As is evident from this quote, these and similar expressions make it clear that the symptom, "structured like a

language" sounds like the unconscious itself. Lacan's indifference to distinctions of this sort may in itself be thought of as salutary—symptoms are legible and interpretable, but include a wide range of interpretive possibilities, so as to make the search for a coherent theoretical language mind-boggling and naive. Therefore, the entire conceptual framework of psychoanalysis seems to be propelled by way of linguistics towards a higher destination that Freud had foretold:

> Freud's discovery was that of the field of the effects in the nature of man of his relations to the symbolic order and the tracing of their meaning right back to the most radical agencies of symbolization in being. To ignore this symbolic order is to condemn the discovery to oblivion, and the experience to ruin. (*Ecrits* 70)

It appears that Lacan gives importance to this category because of its versatility and inclusiveness, being able to refer in a single gesture to an entire range of separate signifying practices. Moreover, it acts as a link between the world of unconscious mental processes and that of speech, and also between both these worlds and the wider worlds of social and kinship structure:

> Since we are practitioners of the symbolic function, it is astonishing that we should turn away from probing deeper into it, to the extent of failing to recognize that it is this function that situates us at the heart of the movement that is now establishing a new order of the sciences, with a new putting in question of anthropology. . .
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> Isn't it striking that Levi-Strauss, in suggesting the implication of the structures of language with that part of the social laws that regulate marriage ties and kinship, is already conquering the very terrain in which Freud situates the unconscious?
>
> From now on, it is impossible not to make a general theory of the symbol the axis of a new classification of the sciences where the sciences of man will once more take up their central position as sciences of subjectivity. (*Ecrits* 79-80)

In *Structural Anthropology* (1963), Levi-Strauss claims that "marriage regulations" and "kinship terms" should be regarded as "a kind of language, a set of processes permitting the establishment between individuals and groups, a certain type of communication," the mediating factor being the "women of the group" (156). In this case, Levi-Strauss is doing three things: first, women and words are taken to be on the same plane –as a medium; second, communication is regarded to be the focal act in all societal

relationships; and third, communication is primarily thought in terms of linguistic communication. Through this, Strauss attempts at showing as to the different ways in which social phenomena lend themselves to intellectual elaboration and mental associations can be established by means of selection of various features. No matter how casual this might seem to be, it cannot be denied that there is always structurality in all structures. Therefore there can be nothing like what Levi-Strauss calls "untamed thinking." Lacan draws a similarity between Levi-Strauss and Freud on the grounds of the latter's suggestion that the unconscious too has a structure like all other social and natural phenomena. Like the norms of social and linguistic behaviour where the individual member despite being free is bound to certain regulatory acts, similarly, the structurality of the unconscious affects the unconscious in innumerable ways in what we say and do. Nothing accordingly is without meaning as everything is guided by a structurality within the structure. Inspired by Levi-Strauss, Lacan locates himself at the crossroads where all systems and sciences meet and from there study the movements of the structure-seeking humankind.

In Lacan's view, a conscious "self" as well as an unconscious "self" in fact comes into existence in the subject's assumption of the power of symbolization effected by language and eventually translated in speech. For a journey back to the 'original symbolism' to be found in language affords a new knowledge of what it is to be human: "Man speaks . . . but it is because the symbol has made him man" (72). Here, it is fairly obvious that 'man' refers to any human subject whatever.

'The Symbolic' as a major concept in Lacan first appears in 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', where Lacan sets out to show how the 'conception of language as signs' is inadequate; in other words, how 'language' is more than 'communication'(*Ecrits* 245). This he does by drawing a contrast between language and the 'wagging dance' of bees, as observed by von Frisch. This dance 'is distinguished from language precisely by the fixed correlation between its signs and the reality they signify' (*Ecrits* 245).

Karl von Frisch, for instance, talks about *Tanz-Sprache* (German for dance language). He argues that the wagging dance of the honey bee is a code that indicates distance, direction and quality of food or nesting sites. Lacan's interest in this waggle dance lies in the fact that what will look like arbitrary or meaningless movement turns out to be

knowledge transmitted through codes. While the worker bee does the waggle dance, three things are likely to happen: in the first place, other worker bees notice the dance and dance in the same way as the waggle dancer and fly away. Second, the ones who join later after doing the waggle dance (in what von Frisch calls the number eight (8) pattern), move over to a nesting site or flowers as may be indicated by the depth and dimension of the pattern '8' created by this particular waggle dancer. There is also a third possibility that the bees joining the waggle dancer may find that independent private knowledge system of resources (whether genetically transmitted or transmitted as part of community knowledge) is activated because of the waggle dance.

This situation provides for alternative location of resources that may be activated due to participation in the dance. In other words, the three likely activities highlighted here hint at three different symbolic systems at work. Each provides for a basis of meaning production that either separate or rules out the other two. Given this situation, while looking for a 'language' in the waggle dance is legitimate, the process of meaning production is such that it is impossible to look for a common ground of meaning production.

While the pattern (the number 8 pattern) is meaningful, there is no direct correspondence between the action of the forager-foraged that dances and forages as if by way of a symptomatic relationship. In other words, language is not only a sign language but is a system that operates in terms of the Saussurean dyadic model of semiotics, also complicated by the relationship of the signifier and the signified.

Even more importantly the signifier and the signified seem to be divided by the process of signification, which is presented by the equation $\frac{S}{s}$. This equation $\frac{S}{s}$.results in the ringed loops of Lacan, already suggesting a relation between the signifying chain and the number 8 pattern of the waggle dance. Having said that the relationship between the language of dance and language as we understand it can be seen as communication that create and codify loops which are simultaneously functional and symboilic.

If we extend this to the structure or working of a sentence, we see how syntactical grammar and grammar of symbols appear different at the level of medium and materiality while remaining symbolic at the level of function. A sentence like, "Look at me" may serve a direct communicative purpose where listener X is required to look at

speaker Y, say, before crawling through a tunnel. It is also possible that this sentence is not meant for direct communicative action but it is the transmitter of a cultural and moral code where, speaker Y is chastising listener X, say, in a father to son communication. Here the father refers to his own moral codes which are definitely not to be seen in the face or body of the person concerned.

Here the act of looking indicates a semiotic displacement which is also an optical displacement in the sense that real looking is most likely to defeat a symbolic load of the statement. Similarly, a gesture pointing to a corner by way of directing the tip of one's index finger in a classroom may be physically effective if a particular student at that particular moment is expected to move to a corner from his or her seat. At the same time in the same place, the same gesture may be used to point to the presence of cobwebs in a corner of the room which, in turn, may be a reflection of the failure of the entire class to take responsibility for cleanliness. In this case also, we find semiotic displacement serving as a communicative tool. As in the case of the bees, the waggle may or may not be followed correctly, but each act of following produces a meaning that cannot be ignored.

Lacan is interested in language producing meaning not by way of communication that transparently shows a reflection between structure and function (say of language or of a group of words or a sign or a symbol) at a given point of time. In fact, it is possible to say that the Lacanian system repeatedly highlights symbolic and corresponding (one transparent and the other one less so) structures functioning in a sliding frame. The sliding is caused in different socio-historical situations where the language user is compelled to switch between symbolic and direct usage. Hence, Lacan makes the symbolic quality of language its distinctive feature:

> In a language, signs take on their value from their relations to each other in the lexical distribution of semantemes as much as in the positional, or even flectional, use of morphemes—in sharp contrast to the fixity of coding used by bees. The diversity of human languages takes on its full value viewed in this light. (*Ecrits* 246)

But human language does not bear any uniqueness in being arbitrary and symbolic: the humming of birds in this sense may also be regarded as symbolic. Thus symbolisation cannot be regarded as the defining characteristic of a language as opposed to a mere

communication system. It needs to be borne in mind that the symbols of the symbolic order are not physical objects reflexively signifying themselves, but signifiers as the signifiers of language. They signify something else, something other than their objective appearance, just as the signifiers of language do. So although both language and the symbolic order are comprised of symbols, it does not mean that they are the same thing but that they are other kinds of signifiers, Lacan would say, than those found in language. The field of the symbolic might encompass language, but might also exceed it. Hence, the Symbolic order is governed not simply by conventional rules but by inexorable legalities, by impossibilities, absences and exclusions.

Lacan however acknowledges only perfunctorily that new structural principles, new rules of exclusion come into play as one moves from one given system to another, and neither does he suggest that that the transition from one system to another may present difficulties. Along this line of thought it may be noted, for instance, that at the moment of postulating a 'primary language of symbols' upon which all other languages depend, Lacan refuses to say what these prepotent symbols are. He instead refers to the surrounding paragraph in search of a definition, but definitions seem beyond recovery:

> Hieroglyphics of hysteria, blazons of phobia, labyrinths of the *Zwangsneurose*—charms of impotence, enigmas of inhibition, oracles of anxiety—talking arms of character, seals of self-punishment, disguises of perversion—these are the hermetic elements that our exegesis resolves, the equivocations that our invocation dissolves, the artifices that our dialectic absolves, in a deliverance of the imprisoned meaning, from the revelation of the palimpsest to the given word of the mystery and to the pardon of speech. (*Ecrits* 76)

For Freud, the analyst was the discoverer and restorer of lost orders of meaning. Here, it appears that Lacan modifies the non-problematization of language propounded by Freud. And he does this by reformulating Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of the sign, as well as Levi-Strauss's use of structure and Roman Jakobson's use of metaphor and metonymy.

To consider Saussure, in the first section of "The Agency of the Letter" (1957), Lacan discusses Freud and Saussure. He uses raw materials from Saussure at length to discuss psychoanalysis. However, even before Saussure has been named in Lacan's paper, the Saussurean algorithm is mentioned, though with alterations:

> To pinpoint the emergence of linguistic science we may say that, as in the case of all sciences in the modern sense, it is contained in the constitutive moment of an algorithm that it is its foundation. This algorithm is the following:
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> 
>
> which is read as: the signifier over the signified, 'over' corresponding to the bar separating the two stages. (*Ecrits* 164)

The algorithm  at once indicates a move away from Saussure. Hence earlier in 'The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious', Lacan (*Ecrits* 415) concedes that the algorithm S/s, although it 'should be attributed to Ferdinand de Saussure', 'is not reduced to this exact form in any of the numerous schemas in which it appears in the printed version of the various lectures from the three courses he gave'. Indeed Saussure's metaphors to describe the relationship of signifier to signified make it clear that they are equal to, and simultaneous with, one another: they are two sides of the same coin, or they may "be compared to a sheet of paper. Thought is one side of the sheet and sound the reverse side" (Saussure 111). Lacan describes the formula,  (signifier over signified) as representing two distinct and separate orders separated by "a barrier resisting signification" (165). Using this algorithm, he says, will allow "an exact study of the connections proper to the signifier, and of the extent of their function in the genesis of the signified" (165).

Lacan refers to the signifier as language itself which is initially spoken. This in a way leads Lacan to explain as to how Saussure's *parole* is acquired from *langue.* Lacan's linguistic trajectory follows Saussure to distinguish between the world-as-referent and linguistic meaning. He emphasises upon the personal significance of a word—which Lacan calls *parole*—between the world and the object, i.e. persons and things, and then shows how the word is made up of component signifying parts. Lacan opines that language must not only account for the world but also enable an infant to "individuate" or appropriate objects ontologically. Lacan's *parole* is therefore said to contain three intricate parts: (i) that of signifier in the sense of spoken language, (ii) that of meaning, and (iii) that of discourse (*Seminaire* III, 86).

However, it needs to be stressed that for Lacan the relationship between the signifier and the signified is not arbitrary because as has been mentioned earlier the signifier structures the signified. Hence while Saussure separated sound from concept to show the arbitrariness of meaning, Lacan retains the bar between the signifier and the signified. For the bar separating the signifier and the signified indicates an irremovable cleavage between them.

But there is a problem here. As Lacanian signifieds are units of meaning produced by the effects of the signifier, they will be bound to represent extralinguistic themes that bring about coherence to somewhat distant words. Hence as themes attached to language, they give meaning and intentionality to the signifiers which only take shape on the person's individuality in relation to the limited signifieds to which they refer.

We are thus confronted with the paradox that, in so far as they remain opaque to the consciousness, signifieds exist below the bar, but because they give value or meaning to conscious life, they play above the bar. On the other hand, Lacan condemns the "illusion" "that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever" (*Ecrits* 166). However, the algorithm is not simply to represent two separate parallel orders—then "it would remain the enigmatic sign of a total mystery. Which of course is not the case" (*Ecrits* 166).

Thus Lacan replaces the Saussurean diagram of the tree "to show how in fact the signifier enters the signified, namely in a form which, not being immaterial raises the question of reality" (*Ecrits* 167). Lacan's diagram represents something often noticed in public places:

> [T]he image of twin doors symbolizing, through the solitary confinement offered Western Man for the satisfaction of his natural needs away from home, the imperative that he seems to share with the great majority of primitive communities by which his public life is subjected to the laws of urinary segregation (*Ecrits*167).

This example brings us to the crux of the matter of Lacan's so called 'materiality of the signifier'. Thus he concludes that:

> [I]f the algorithm S/s with its bar is appropriate, access from one to the other cannot in any case have a signification. For in so far as it is itself only pure function of the signifier, the algorithm can reveal only the structure of a signifier in this transfer. (*Ecrits* 168)

Of course it remains to be seen whether Lacan grants an unwarranted reality to the unconscious through his insistence on the 'materiality of the signifier'. It would be more accurate to say that material objects can signify to an 'interpretant' directly, without the need of the mediation of language, and moreover, if and when language does mediate, it is not necessary for the object-meaning and the linguistic signification to coincide. For instance, when a man raises his index finger in the midst of an auction, given the context, one interprets it as the man's intention to participate in the bidding. Similarly, the same action in a meeting would indicate the man's desire to speak.

However, the moment this action is translated to verbal terms, as in the case of the sentence, "I am raising my index finger", no matter what the situation is, the implications would vary and might mean differently for different people. Then, the signifier is subject "to the double condition of being reducible to ultimate differential elements and of combining them according to the laws of a closed order" (*Ecrits* 168). This property of the signifier in Lacan's view requires the notion of a "topological substratum", which he usually calls the "signifying chain" and which he describes as analogous to the "rings of a necklace that is a ring in another necklace made of rings" (*Ecrits* 169).

The analogy of the necklace seems to imply the circularity of the signification of any particular signifier, itself caught in the circularity of the signification of the system of language itself, which is commonly regarded by linguists and philosophers as an autonomous and closed, opposed to the open order of "reality":

> My definition of the signifier (there is no other) is as follows: a signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier. This signifier will therefore be the signifier for which all the other signifiers represent the subject: that is to say, in the absence of this signifier, all the other signifiers represent nothing, since nothing is represented only *for* something else. . . (*Ecrits* 350)

Hence in addition to the function of articulation, signifiers are marked by the function of ambiguity; the function of meaning created by opposition of one element to another.

Lacan's point seems to be that if any particular signifier refers directly to a particular signified "reality", it can do so through the mediation of the rest of the signifying system making up the language.

The symbolic function of certain signifiers in the discourse bears resemblance to a colourfully woven material—he refers to a "verbal thread"(*Ecrits* 183): "[W]e are at the mercy of a thread woven with allusions, quotations, puns, and equivocations . . . that is what we must resign ourselves to" (*Ecrits* 189).

Another of Lacan's themes is that 'the signifier' is far from being simply a self-bounded system:

> For the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates meaning by unfolding its dimension before it. As seen at the level of the sentence when it is interrupted before the significant term: 'I shall never . . .', 'All the same it is . . .', 'And yet there may be . . .' Such sentences are not without meaning, a meaning all the more oppressive in that it is content to make us wait for it. . . (*Ecrits* 169-170).

What Lacan seems to be doing here is re-using Saussurean diction to account for the divergent manifestations of language. He goes on to evoke the Saussurean concept of the "*glissement*" (*Ecrits* 285) or sliding of one system over another:

> We are forced then to accept the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier—which Ferdinand de Saussure illustrates with an image resembling the wavy lines of the upper and lower Waters in miniatures from manuscripts of *Genesis*; a double flux marked by fine streaks of rain, vertical dotted lines supposedly confining segments of correspondence. (*Ecrits* 170)

Moreover, Lacan slides more or less imperceptibly from the notion of the signifier and signified as "word concept" and "signification" (*Ecrits*165) to the Saussurean distinction of "speech" and "thought" (*Ecrits*172) respectively. Through Saussure, Lacan seems to attempt a better understanding of "the different value that our language assumes in the interpretation of resistances" (*Ecrits* 83) and an initiation of the "discussion of the bi-univocal correspondence between the word and the thing" (*Ecrits* 165).

It is necessary here to see in this formulation a split between articulation of meaning and anticipation of meaning. For instance, in an expression like 'regularly irregular', the

meaning is not created by iteration or repetition but by a sense of division or opposition. To say 'regularly irregular' is to combine the properties of two oppositional implications. In a sense, the use of the word 'regularly' before 'irregular'—that is, before the second word is heard or sighted—creates an impression or anticipation and in a natural course, would perhaps even be followed by the word like 'present' or 'available'.

Such anticipation would have been expected according to the codes of language at a given point in a given culture. But this anticipation is defeated and a new horizon of expectation accrues. Interestingly, the two words strengthen the meaning of the phrase not only by opposing each other but by also defeating the regular horizon of expectations in a given culture. So the sense of 'deferral' that helps consolidation of meaning need not only be valid in an additive context, where accretion leads to clarity as we see here. The phrase acquires its resonance from a code of resistance that the culture of the language user could have acquired over time. Most oxymorons would work on this logic of bi-univocality of figures. Expressions like 'eloquent silence' or 'darkness visible' or 'cold fire' clearly work with resistance as a key to resonance. In reality however, articulation takes the route of 'bi-univocality' and creates double articulations that do not cohere either by way of accretion or iteration or opposition or division.

In a phrase like 'darkness visible', the strength of the figure creates a trail of ambiguity where 'darkness' and 'visible' keep together in a slip-and-slide relation. The phrase is governed by a semantic impossibility in the sense that darkness and visibility are opposites both in physical and figurative terms. But in Milton's scheme of things, Satanic attributes, mysterious and frightening at the same time must defy the common sensical invocation of fear and mystery. The figurative therefore displaces common sense anticipation, deferral and builds on resistance to strengthen its case.

The power of 'darkness visible' would not be available to the reader if there was no resistance. One may say that that there would be no resistance if there was no violence to articulation. The violation to articulation in a sense happens because the two words, put together resist each other and resonate each other. A similar resistance-resonance relationship can be seen in the expression, 'darkness at noon'.

The combination of certain words disrupts the normative flow of a semantic order. To put it differently the sense of anticipation created by the positioning of words compels the words to resist what could be called traces of inconvenience of inherited meanings. In

other words, while a combination such as ‘a bubbly woman’ allows the two words to support each other, the production of meaning is combinatorial and meaningful in this limited context. If we say ‘a bubbly pig’ or ‘a bubbly puff’, the usage may be equally more appropriate but the implication may not be as powerful.

Similarly in an expression like ‘cold rage’ or ‘cold sweat’ the word ‘cold’ sheds most of its traces: atmospheric, climatological, phenomenal or tactile. The word ‘rage’ in this case signifies not only an angry mood but also a fiery temper. In other words, anger is already associated with a figurative rise in temperature and therefore should have been annulled by the word ‘cold’. In reality, these two words are opposed not by their physical materiality of the moods they represent but by figural extensions. Positioned side by side, they enhance meaning by creating resistance. In other words, words or figures produce meaning by way of articulation and by way of ambiguity.

Lacan sees the implication of resistance and relates it to interpretation, where the relationship between a word in and out of a language and a thing in the world of objects enriches itself. This enrichment is explained by way of ambiguity or perhaps something that is close to polyphony: “the figure of the burgeoning fecundity” (*Ecrits* 174). Lacan says in an earlier instance:

> Through the word—already a presence made of absence . . . there is born the world of meaning of a particular language in which the world of things will come to be arranged.
>
> Through that which becomes embodied only by being the trace of a nothingness and whose support cannot therefore be impaired, the concept . . . engenders the thing.
>
> For it is still not enough to say that the concept is the thing itself . . . It is the world of words that creates the world of things . . . (*Ecrits* 72)

For these purposes and to demonstrate “the figure of the burgeoning of fecundity” (*Ecrits* 174), the pluralizing semantic power of speech of individuals, the metaphor of the ‘signifying chain’ proves to be effective. The chain at one point limits the speaker’s freedom, but on the other hand is mobile and is able to recoil upon itself—any one of its links can provide a point of attachment to other chains. Lacan also uses polyphony and poetry to demonstrate this double articulation that is so typical of language:

> . . . one has only to listen to poetry, which Saussure was no doubt in the habit of doing, for a polyphony to be heard, for it to become clear that all discourse is aligned along the several staves of a score. (*Ecrits* 170)

For example, in the expression, 'a train of thought', we take it for granted by linking 'a train of thought' to a succession of ideas. If one invokes a train of thoughts and starts thinking a train of 'thoughts' or a train 'full of thoughts', the idea would be ridiculous. On the other hand, if one thought about thoughts arranged in different bogeys or compartments from the idea of one thought succeeding the other or giving rise to the other then the idea would not work out at all. Either way, a train of thoughts or a train of thought would neither imply a train full of thoughts or thoughts frozen in compartments. So the explanation of meaning may appear valid in a routine linguistic scheme that is to say, in a rule-oriented sentence. On closer analysis, the explanation may itself throw up contradictions or reveal 'holes' in the meaning itself.

Both in poetry and painting, meaning production works with correspondence as well as with displacement of links. That the poet is called "the master of the signifier" is not to be taken lightly. For example, in lines like, "After great pain a formal feeling comes" (Emily Dickinson, Poem No. 341), or "The Soul selects her own Society" (Dickinson 303), or "I heard a fly buzz—when I die (Dickinson 465), or "My life closed twice before its close" (Dickinson 1732), we find the poet compelling the figure to become something literal or allowing something figural to engage in clearly material acts.

In poetry, the signifier sheds and acquires traces at unexpected moments and in unexpected ways. In Keats' nightingale ode, the speaker refers to a heartache "a drowsy numbness" causing pain to the sense. The explanation is routed through a deferral of meaning to the second line which not only explains the pain but also concludes the anticipation of an interpretation. The line however, pushes meaning to speculation by inserting "as if." The subsequent explanation attributing feeling to drinking hemlock nullifies the spectre of pain. For hemlock eases not intensifies pain. These two lines between them create a complex network of meaning through accretion, articulation, and resistance.

However, instead of developing the poem by further addition of similar signifiers the poet pushes for meaning through a larger perspective of resonance. Thus the poet not

only uses signifiers but also creates signifiers by allowing the literal to operate in the figural world or by pushing the figural to operate in the physical world.

The models above say more than showing that speech is either vertical or horizontal, or forward-moving at one point and stationary the next, or rule-oriented at one moment and freely creative the next. They drive home "the function of the cut in discourse, the strongest being that which acts as a bar between the signifier and the signified" (*Ecrits* 331):

> This cut in the signifying chain alone verifies the structure of the subject as discontinuity in the real. If linguistics enables us to see the signifier as the determinant of the signified, analysis reveals the truth of this relation by making 'holes' in the meaning of the determinants of its discourse. (*Ecrits* 331)

While the poets appear to be 'masters of the signifier', weaving multicoloured and multilayered fabric with words, the ordinary language user nonetheless works at a similar level with the signifying chain. Literature simply enables us to analyse the domain of the signifier that very prominently feature also in the conversation between two men talking on the street. This becomes more pertinent when we consider the "two 'sides' of the effect of the signifier on the signified" (*Ecrits* 177), or theoretical dispositions that Lacan, following Jakobson names metaphor and metonymy, defined as "one word for another" and "word-to-word" (*Ecrits* 173) respectively.

In the way metonymy operates, Lacan brings in the point that there is no connection between the word and thing. We speak of "thirty sails" to mean thirty ships, but the normal definition of this figure as "the part for the whole" appears misleading:

> The part taken for the whole, we said to ourselves, and if the thing is to be taken seriously, we are left with very little idea of the importance of this fleet which 'thirty ´sails' is precisely supposed to give us: for each ship to have just one sail is in fact the least likely possibility. By which we see that the connexion between the ship and the sail is nowhere but in the signifier. . . (*Ecrits* 172-3)

From this it appears that any metonymy is always an apparent 'non-sense' for example one does not drink a glass (in "Let's share a drink" or "drink a glass") or refer to a boat or boats as thirty sails. The other side of the signifying function is the metaphor, which "flashes between two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the

signifying chain, the occulted signifier remaining present through its (metonymic) connexion with the rest of the chain" (*Ecrits* 173).

Lacan's concern with the discourse of the unconscious and with its relationship to the poetic metaphor takes him on to a discussion of Freud's 'psychical apparatus'. He often suggests that loyalty to Freud demands adherence to a language-based creed unambiguously announced by Freud himself:

> Thus in 'The Interpretation of Dreams' every page deals with . . . the letter of discourse, in its texture, its usage, its immanence in the matter in question. For it is with this work that the work of Freud begins to open the royal road to the unconscious. . . The first sentence of the opening chapter announces . . . that the dream is a rebus. And Freud goes on to stipulate . . . that it must be understood quite literally. This derives from the agency in the dream of that same literal (or phonematic structure) in which the signifier is articulated and analysed in discourse. . . . The linguistic structure that enables us to read dreams is the very principle of the 'significance of the dream' . . .(*Ecrits* 175-76).

Moreover, dreams being "the object of a special study in Freud" reveals "that the dream-work follows the laws of the signifier" and that the signifier has a "constitutive" in the unconscious realm to which dreams give access (*Ecrits*178).

In chapter six of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, dream-work is analysed as consisting of four stages: condensation, displacement, figurability and secondary revision. The first three harmonise with the linguistic and the rhetorical tendency of Lacan's vocabulary. If these processes are read linguistically, especially in the light of structural linguistics of Roman Jakobson, figurability and displacement are both examples of code-switching, of moving from pictorial code to the linguistic code and vice-versa.

Against this background Lacan explains these terms of the Freudian dream-work. He writes that transposition is "what I designated earlier, with Saussure, as the sliding of the signified under the signifier, which is always happening (unconsciously, let us note) in discourse". Condensation, on the other hand "is the superimposed structure of signifiers in which metaphor finds its field", while displacement is the "transfer of signification that metonymy displays" (*Ecrits* 425).

All crucial events take place in language and all other non-linguistic factors such as decorum, mood and bodily gesture are relevant only in so far as they aid language in the study of the dream. That leads Lacan to "confir[m] that the dream-work follows the laws of the signifier" (Ecrits:178).This serves to demystify the unconscious as well—it is not, in this view, structured 'like a language', for it has no structure outside language and no structure other than the one that language affords: "The unconscious is neither primordial nor instinctual; what it knows about the elementary is no more than the elements of the signifier" (*Ecrits* 187). The "vertical dependencies" (*Ecrits*170) of the signifying chain extend as far downwards into the hidden worlds of mental processes as it is possible for imagination to descend. Lacan recalls to the reader's "attention the automatism of the laws by which are articulated in the signifying chain" (285):

(a) the substitution of one term for another to produce the effect of metaphor;

(b) the combination of one term with another to produce the effect of metonymy (285)

Thus the difference between the metonymic structure and the metaphoric structure corresponds to the task of displacement and substitution in psychoanalytic theory. The metonymy is thus a displacement from signifier to signifier, but since the original term, which is latent remains unexplained, it corresponds to the tendency seeking to escape the significant term by calling up another one contiguous to it: "Metonymy is . . . the effect made possible by the fact that there is no signification that does not refer to another signification..." (*Ecrits*285). The metaphorical structure on the other hand, "occurs at the precise point at which sense emerges from non-sense that is at the frontier which, as Freud discovered, when crossed the other way produces the word . . . that is simply the signifier '*esprit*'. . . (*Ecrits*175). This virtually means that the difference between sense and non-sense is immaterial in the creation and consumption of figurative language.

It would be imperative to recall here that Lacan's register theory responds to this particular issue especially in relating language and desire. When Lacan dwells on the imaginary, he also speaks of language and desire changing place as condition and consequence.

Lacan speaks of language as hollowing out desire. In simple terms, it would mean that the semiotic possibilities invoked by any aspect of desire are first of all articulated

through language. For instance, if somebody says, “I am dying to be in Paris”, this spectre of death is neither raised nor desired. Having said, that the sentence also hits a semiotic impossibility. In the sense that it stretches what is apparently a desire at the moment of death to a craving. In pure linguistic terms, “I am dying to be in Paris” does not make any sense.

Similarly, “I badly want a cup of tea”, if analysed in the light of semantic logic would sound ludicrous. This would suggest that a statement made to convey a certain feeling may not adequately represent the logic of the experience in language but may result in a figure that makes up for non-deliverance of logical expectations.

Similarly, somebody saying “My heart bleeds” or “My heart is sawed into two” raises spectres of hurting and cutting. The lines hint at the desire to convey pain or anguish. But without a context to legitimise the violence that the act prefigures, bleeding and the cutting appear rhetorical to say the least. In this situation, desire hollows out language.

Now coming back to the metaphor-metonymy problem in Lacan, we see how the problem itself can be understood by looking at the various axes of meaning production, namely substitution, sliding and extension. We further see how meaning is generated by a sense of contiguity as well as continuity. When we talk about the metaphysics of presence in Derrida, we simultaneously get to see a powerful aspect of absence.

In other words, presence-absence operates in the same way as vertical and horizontal substitution. The presence of two words together creates a particular kind of syntactic ordering and suggests a horizontal relationship. At the same time, each word might carry vertical layers which may relate at a level other than the horizontal visible surface and may produce a metaphysics that is ruled not by presence, that is horizontal relationship but by a vertical relationship.

As stated earlier, Lacan’s use of the terms of metaphor and metonymy and their correlation with the Freudian condensation and displacement respectively is a specialized development of Jakobson’s theory of the relation of similarity and the relation of contiguity.

According to Jakobson, any linguistic sign involves two methods of arrangement: combination and contexture, and selection and substitution. In a cluster of articles on

aphasia, he draws an essential distinction between what he calls 'selection' and 'combination'. Borrowing from Saussure, he explains:

> Selection (and, correspondingly substitution) deals with entities conjoined in the code but not in the given message, whereas, in the case of combination, the entities are conjoined in both, or only in the actual message. The addressee perceives that the given utterance is a *combination* of constituent parts (sentences, words, phonemes etc.) *selected* from the repository of all possible constituent parts (the code). The constituents of a context are in a state of *contiguity,* while in a substitution set signs are linked by various degrees of *similarity* which fluctuate between the equivalence of synonyms and the common core of antonyms. (Jakobson 243)

In the final chapter of his remarks on aphasia, Jakobson deals with "the metaphoric and metonymic poles" in the wider context of normal speech and literature:

> In normal verbal behaviour, both processes are continually operative, but careful observation will reveal that under the influence of a cultural pattern, personality and verbal style, preference is given to one of the two processes over the other. . .
>
> In manipulating these two kinds of connection (similarity and contiguity) in both their aspects (positional and semantic)—selecting, combining and ranking them—an individual exhibits his personal style, his verbal predilections and preferences (*Fundamentals of Language* 76-77)

This point regarding aphasia needs a little attention. On the one hand, aphasia is the inability to express thoughts in words. Psychoanalysis offers explanations of this inability by linking the inability to some latent fear or anxiety. For instance, a speaker may not be able to recollect a name or describe the floor pattern in a hall due to associations that his or her mind makes with the 'forgotten' name or expression and the same event associated with the name of the pattern. In other words, the act of forgetting is necessarily attributed to the failure of the recall system. In this act of forgetting, we see the evidence, however residual of the mind making adjustments with remote traces in the thinking process.

In Jakobson's system, this psychoanalytical explanation forms the basis for creativity in language. For, unless a user sheds or drops traces of a word in order that the positioning

of the word creates an expected or resistant figure, language simply would not work. In other words, aphasia becomes the condition (not so much the consequence) of meaning production when Jakobson talks about selecting, combining and ranking words, he is necessarily referring to vertical and horizontal substitutions. It should be noted here hat both types of substitutions are at the heart of creating and making sense of figures.

This is also the point to recall Paul de Man's famous blindness-insight continuum. Unless one is blind to the surrounding, de Man says, one cannot 'see' an object. Similarly, unless one is blind to meanings and traces surrounding a word or a figure, one cannot move to a specific meaning whether by way of articulation or by way of anticipation. In essence, every language user 'forgets' an entire spectrum of associations that a word would ordinarily invoke. To drive at a specific meaning whether the specific meaning is generated by substitution or by combination is immaterial here. In both cases, the key to meaning production lies in 'forgetting.'

As already seen earlier, horizontal combination of words demands bi-univocality, necessarily compelling words to suppress or 'forget' normal social links. Similarly, working on the vertical register creates the condition for substitution of certain layers of meaning, that is forgetting certain types of contextual or symbolic associations a word or a figure would make in a given situation and a given linguistic community.

Something as common as a 'hot-dog' shows how these two words combine to produce a food item that 'forgets.' The traditional associations in fact, would highlight either the qualifier or the noun. It appears that the expression 'hot-dog' emerges from a process of multiple shedding where a longer expression 'hot-dogs stand for food' was clipped to its present shape.

If 'hot dogs stand for food' meant as it is claimed, 'food sold by street corner vendors in nineteenth century industrial towns in America,' the origin of the expression appears truly logical. For there were crowds that appeared unruly as sellers and buyers competed for space, attention and impact. On the other hand, the explanations that hamburgers sold in certain US campuses were suspected to have dog meat and hence the name, appears a little untenable.

In any case, given that hot dogs are also served cold, the word 'hot' and the word 'dog' can be said to operate in a system of forgetting. 'Hot-dog' therefore becomes a food

article only if the new meaning is legitimised by a process of forgetting, such as clipping, shedding etc. Every act of insight, that is new understanding, is founded on acts of blindness or forgetting.

In literature, Lacan comments that poetry is of course predominantly metaphorical, but the "realistic trend in modern literature is predominantly metonymic. Jakobson goes on to consider the application of this polarity in Freud:

> A competition between both devices . . . is manifest in any symbolic process, either intrapersonal or social. Thus in an inquiry into the structure of dreams, the decisive question is whether the symbols and the temporal sequences used are based on contiguity (Freud's metonymic "displacement" and synechdochic "condensation") or on similarity (Freud's "identification and symbolism") (81).

However, this makes it apparent that Lacan's use of this polarity between metaphor and metonymy is slightly different from Jakobson's. While Jakobson attaches the idea of displacement to metaphor, Lacan attributes the Freudian concept of displacement (*Verschiebung*) to metonymy. Lacan in this context is closer to Freud than to Jakobson, since the importance of metaphor and metonymy in the discourse is correlative to the importance Freud assigns to condensation and displacement in the formation of jokes, slips of the tongue or pen, dreams, and symptoms in general:

> One. . . of these logical relations is very highly favoured by the mechanism of dream-formation; namely, the relation of similarity, consonance or approximation—the relation of "just as". . . The representation of the relation of similarity is assisted by the tendency of the dream-work towards condensation (Freud 319-20).

Of course, Lacan goes much further towards systematizing Freud as he assimilates the dream mechanism of displacement ("metonymy") to desire and that of condensation ("metaphor") to the symptom or substitute: "For the symptom is a metaphor whether one likes it or not, as desire is a metonymy, however funny people may find the idea" (*Ecrits* 193). For Jakobson, a metaphor is "the capacity for two words to replace one another . . . and [be] linked . . . by semantic similarity (or contrast)" (Jakobson 255). Further, in 'Two Aspects of Language', Jakobson points out that metaphor and metonymy have two 'aspects': positional and semantic. Therefore, 'hut' for instance can either be substituted by 'cabin', 'palace', etc. or it can gain a positional aspect such as 'is a wretched little

house'. This instance is in fact metaphorical, both substitutionally and positionally, since 'a wretched little house' is a substitute for 'hut'. Hence, a metaphor has to be 'metonymical responses to the same stimulus such as *thatch, litter,* or *poverty* combine semantically substitutive but it may or may not be a positional predicate, whereas and contrast the positional similarity with semantic contiguity' (Jakobson 254-55). Lacan's example of the metaphor may be considered here: "His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful" (Lacan 422). According to Lacan:

> In Hugo's verse, it is obvious that not the slightest light emanates from the assertion that a sheaf is neither miserly nor [spiteful], because it is clear that a sheaf has no more merit than the demerit of these attributes, since miserliness and hatred, along with the sheaf, are properties of Booz, who exercises them when he uses the sheaf as he sees fit, without making his feelings known to it. (422).

Interestingly, the line from Hugo's poem, cited by Lacan is variously translated. One translation reads "His sheaves lay broad and open as the day" (www.textetc.com/exihibits/et-hugo-1.html). Another translation reads, "his sheaves were neither miserly nor spiteful" (oyc.yale.edu/transcript/463/engl-300). This line refers to Booz or Boaz sleeping, tired and exhausted at the end of a hard day's work.

The poem begins by referring to Booz's weariness caused by threshing corns all day long. The state of his sleep and the objects lying around him are related. For helpers, tools, sacks of wheat, hay, ropes and several other farm articles lie scattered all over. The fact that Booz is found sleeping hard and content from the looks of it in the middle of a whole lot of articles is significant in the sense that there is a horizontal linking between Booz and the articles as if these articles were an extension of his personality.

Conversely, the articles scattered as they are suggest a sense of freedom and the absence of regimented farm discipline, as could be expected in a given context. In addition, one also finds farm hands sleeping in the same barn, suggesting the absence of hierarchy and a certain respect for life and nature. An old man sleeping ('endormi'), grains scattered, and packed in sacks around him is already suggestive of the world of the father with a difference.

The lack of anxiety metonymically extending from Booz to the grains and from the grains to the farm hands allows Lacan to invest in this particular story a simultaneous

figure of lack and excess. That Ruth appears in the poem sleeping at the old man's feet is suggestive of other possibilities both erotic and creative. The Bible story suggests both the 'sheaf' and the old man's kind and liberal nature by way of this metonymic situation leading to a figure that is meaningful in its absence: the figure of Ruth's innocent sexuality.

It should be marked here however, that Lacan denies Booz's either kindness or generosity by layering on the sheaf, aspects that do not emerge from the poem or the Biblical context. However, this instance can be shown as one of metonymy and yet one cannot say that it is entirely free from what Ricoeur would elsewhere call 'the rule of metaphor.' Lacan, for instance says that: "If his sheaf' refers back to Booz. . ., it is because it replaces him in the signifying chain—at the very place that awaited him, because it had been raised up a step by the clearing away of miserliness and hatred" (*Ecrits* 422). As Ricoeur will go on to show some years later in *The Rule of Metaphor* (210), mere substitution cannot as such be taken to be the defining characteristic of metaphor, since metonymy is a kind of substitution too. Yet this is precisely what Lacan is doing in this case: taking the fact that the *substitutes* Booz for his sheaf to be decisive in attributing a metaphoric quality to the process. Moreover influenced by the Freudian assault on the Cartesian *cogito,*(Lacan's reformulation of Descartes' '*I* think: *I* am': 'I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am where I am not thinking' (*Ecrits* 430), Lacan goes on to make an existential claim about metaphor in this line: "the sheaf has thus cleared this space of Booz, ejected as he now is into the outer darkness where miserliness and hatred harbour him in the hollow of their negation" (422). Thus he appears to have brought a rereading of Jakobson's metaphor and metonymy in this example.

This act of rereading Jakobson on the part of Lacan is pushed to its limits a few pages further on in 'The Instance of the Letter':

> It is nonetheless true that the philosophical *cogito* is at the centre of the mirage that renders modern man so sure of being himself in his uncertainties about himself, and even in the distrust he has long since learned to exercise regarding the pitfalls of pride. Now if, turning the weapon of metonymy against the nostalgia that it serves, I stop myself from seeking any meaning beyond tautology, and if, in the sense of 'war is war' and 'a penny's a penny', I resolve to be only what I am, how can I escape here from the obvious fact that I am in this very act? (*Ecrits* 430).

Jakobson, however, explicitly describes tautology as the ultimate example of a metaphor, and not of metonymy, since he regards both contrast and similarity alike to be examples of the kind of substitutability that metaphor entails. Hence while discussing patients who have defects in substitution, Jakobson writes: "Told to repeat the word "no", Head's patient replied "No, I don't know how to do it". While spontaneously using the word in the context of his answer ("No, I don't . . ."), he could not produce the purest form of equational predication, a=a:<no> is <no>" (Jakobson 1971: 247). On the other hand, he defines metonymy sometimes as contiguity and sometimes as association in a way as if both terms were synonymous to one another. Seen in this way metaphor and metonymy are reducible to the same thing, mainly because both metaphor and metonymy are versions of substitution. Thus when we turn to Lacan's next sentence in 'The Instance of the Letter' after the one quoted just a few lines before, there is the question "How—in going to the other, metaphoric pole of the signifying quest, and dedicating myself to becoming what I am, to coming into being—can I doubt that, even if I were to lose myself there, I am there?" (Lacan 430). This question presupposes that metaphor is at the opposite pole of the 'signifying quest', whereas actually, in the Saussure-Jakobson-Lacan scheme of things, it shrivels to the same place as metonymy.

However, it cannot be denied that there is a metaphor present in the sentence "His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful": at least it is not literally the case that the sheaf is neither miserly nor spiteful. So, once a metonymy has been introduced, there is maximum chance for a metaphor to follow.

For Lacan, truth is evoked:

> Only in that dimension of ruse whereby all "realism" in creation derives its virtue from metonymy, as well as this other fact that access to meaning is granted only to the double elbow of metaphor, when we hold in our hand their one and only key: namely, the fact that the S and s of the Saussurean algorithm are not in the same plane, and man was deluding himself in believing he was situated in their common axis, which is nowhere. (Lacan 430-1)

With this, Lacan seems to condemn the semiotic quest to find meaning at a point between the Saussurean signifier and signified. Metonymy signals the resistance of meaning—the refusal of the unconscious to yield up to truths—while metaphor creates new meanings whose very existence points to a representational base beyond themselves.

## III

Lacan has unhooked language from meaning –the Saussurean signifier from its signified –and linked it to metaphor and metonymy. It may now be considered that Lacan's account of the disproportion that reigns inside the sign has one important theme. That is the relations between signifiers which become more important than linguistic relations of other kinds. Going in search of meanings at its source, or in its essential forms, one has to travel by way of language, and at every moment in this search, variously connected signifiers extend to the horizon in all directions. When the signified seems to be finally within one's reach, it dissolves into yet more signifiers: ". . . no signification can be sustained other than by reference to another signification" (*Ecrits* 165). So viewed, signifieds are symptoms or metaphors, that is they substitute for something else.

From a Lacanian perspective, on the other hand, language as a system is metonymic. Discourse is incomplete, discontinuous and as such a sure sign of something lacking. But, language is not only a metonymy, pointing to something unsaid and incomprehensible in the very act of communication —but it is also a metaphor— substituting for a sense of lack in being. Lacan's epistemology promotes the idea of a metaphorics, where metaphor is first a function and only then an iconic mode of meaning. On the other hand, the symbolic "letter", which Lacan says, is the "material support that concrete discourse borrows from language" (*Ecrits* 147), is both metaphoric as well as metonymic, not merely one or the other. As metaphor, it substitutes itself for the thing it represents or re-presents, while as metonymy, it involves the displacement of meaning in a chain of significations. The letter stands, whether as metaphor or metonymy, for the word or the words upon which access to the unconscious depends.

Hence, the quest for 'true' or 'full' speech is shown to resemble the poet's search for originality and expressive freedom within the structural constraints that his chosen medium relentlessly exerts—as the author proceeds "from reductions to deductions, and from induction to hypotheses" , the "conclusion" that he comes to is similar to "the pile of plates whose collapse is the main attraction of the classic music hall turn—leaving nothing in the hands of the performer but a couple of ill-assorted fragments" (43). Lacan draws attention to the illusory power of words in his own writing. His 'labryinths', 'oracles', and 'equivocations' clearly bring a volatile mode of meaning into play, when it comes to depicting the mobility and multiple layering of language. Meaning is therefore

inherently ambiguous. It is rarely a matter of clear, objective productions of information, intention, simple linguistic transformations or lucid communications. Meaning actually emerges from the combination of ideas inferred between two contiguous signifiers in play. Lacan, in fact, seems more interested in the phenomenon of indirectly represented words or images and shows that contiguity is not meaningful as an end in itself, but only in its evocation of an unstated referent.

Language is an open porous system then, which only 'seems' to be closed. This issue in fact has also been identified while seeing symbolism as the defining characteristic of language—that the symbolic order is a closed system. If the symbolic order is closed for Lacan, then it is also an order in which the subject is trapped. The symbolic stumbles in its attempt to arrive at the Real, because, while everyday reality might be knowable, the Real of the subject is something to be identified, revealed. This might be the effect of the constant sliding of the signified under the signifier. The symbolic order might be closed, but is never complete: the Real is that which it lacks. There is always something else, something other which escapes, an unknown, which is unfathomable. Hence, the systematic unity of 'meaning' serves as a camouflage to the fact that individual words strung together compose a primary signification. This further goes on conveying, seeking, protecting, and denying the "truth" that mind is anchored by unconscious knowledge, which it itself a verbal enigma. In reality, since expressions occur in contexts (conventions and circumstances) and contexts spread out indefinitely, each force must negotiate with an infinite number of semiotic values. Thus every time, the content of the letter enters into a new operation, the distinction between the letter and the object ultimately is bound to collapse. There is a liaison within the context of opposition of words and things. In other words Lacan and Derrida repeatedly visit the figure of the figure and suggest that linguistic substitution and psychological substitution of one word by another belongs to the domain of metaphor and metonymy.