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Introduction

"The unconscious is structured like a language." With this deceptively simple aphorism, Lacan inaugurates his return to Freud and the project of psychoanalysis as taken from the perspective of linguistics, structural anthropology, set mathematics, and topology. In its content and structure, this aphorism is a simple statement of analogy, comprised of a subject, a verb, and an object clause, that sketches lines of equivalence between the unconscious and language through the notion of structure. While the phrase remains the same, the significance of this phrase is transformed as Lacan elaborates and adumbrates his "theory" over the course of his teaching. The trajectory Lacan follows starts from his considerations of the mirror phase of infant development and the family complexes. By the time of the Rome report, he shifts his focus to attend to the Symbolic and the way in which the subject is structured by the Symbolic, giving predominance to the effect of the Symbolic on the subject in his considerations of full and empty speech, on Symbolic castration, and how the Symbolic forms the "destiny" of the subject. By the mid-sixties, as announced in Seminar XI, and until the end of his career, his emphasis is on the Real. In Television, Lacan enunciates the ways in
which both the Imaginary and the Symbolic fail in the effort to limit or contain the intrusions of the Real into the discourse of the subject. My intention here is to look at how unconscious formations attempt to enunciate the subject's impossible relation to the Real as it is expressed in the failures of the Imaginary and the Symbolic to provide asylum for the subject from the Real. I will do this by taking the elements of this aphorism and comment on each individually, to then conclude with an explication of the definition that Lacan offers us in *Television*.

**The Unconscious**

In response to Jacques-Alain Miller's comment "The unconscious — what a strange word,"¹ Lacan responds with three very precise observations. First, he states that the unconscious is that which goes unnoticed; second, that there is no unconscious except for the speaking being; and, third, in so far as the unconscious speaks, it depends on language (*T*, 5). Lacan takes these propositions from Freud, and makes specific reference to three texts which allow him to demonstrate that Freud's practice and clinical theory were based in the deciphering of a pure signifying "dit-mension," a portmanteau word of Lacan's which implies both a topologic sense and a sense of something said in the in between of words (*T*, 5). These three texts are *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. What does Freud say in these texts? And how does he speak of the unconscious and its manifestations?

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud reveals that the dream has the structure of a sentence presented as a rebus, a form of pictographic writing which reproduces both the phonetic and symbolic uses of the signifying elements in the juxtaposition of the pictorial and imagistic elements represented to the dreamer.² The dream operates to construct its personal message by means of condensation, where one element functions to represent or signify several others, and displacement, where what is signified is shifted to a signifier that is more likely to go unnoticed by the dreamer. Through the text, Freud consistently emphasizes several key points. First, there are no discernible differences between the dreams of the neurotics who
have come to consult him and “normal” individuals. Second, all
have an unconscious that dreams and these dreams express the ful-
fillment of an archaic or primitive wish that by definition must re-
main unfulfilled. And, third, the phenomena found in dreams, whether
those of the normal or the neurotic, have the same structure as the
symptoms which cause one to suffer and to enter analysis.

In The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, Freud shows how
the slips and errors of daily social discourse — those low grade
annoyances which don’t quite cause the subject to suffer but do cause
the subject’s manifest intention to sputter and fail — succeed in giv-
ing expression to a discourse that comes from another place. At the
point where the lapse occurs, where the breakdown erupts, there is
a convergence of several meanings, each being represented by dif-
ferent chains of signifiers. Each chain uses the same lexical item as
the representative of each of these disparate meanings or conflicts,
or, as Freud would say, the meaning of any one item in the chain is
overdetermined. These nodal points, where the individual has been
surprised by the failure of his or her original intention, can be thought
of like the crossing of two sets of railroad tracks, to borrow Freud’s
metaphor. As a result of the collision between the two trains of thought
which derails them both, a third action is produced which, as a com-
promise formation, attempts to express them both in a form which
will allow the unconscious to get its message through the censor to
the conscious mind. Freud again stresses that the line between these
everyday slips and those symptoms which result in neurotic suffer-
ing is unbroken, that it is a matter of degree rather than a difference
in kind, and that any symptom, regardless of type, is itself a message
to be deciphered, to be translated from one language to another, and
in this translation the symptom can be resolved.

In Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, Freud demon-
strates that it is the emergence of an unanticipated significance that
hinges upon the ambiguity of a word or phrase which allows for
very disparate and contradictory meanings to be simultaneously ex-
pressed, and that laughter is the unconscious’s way of acknowledg-
ing that both messages have been received, that in nonsense an
inadmissible truth has found its way to expression (F, 60). Here again,
there are two discourses linked at a nodal point by the double in-
scription of a given signifier in which this signifier intends a different signified in each discourse. This underscores the impossibility of a thorough or complete translation, but leaves room for an adequate interpretation to bring forth the non-sense at the core of the mind.

Lacan, in Function and Field of Speech in Psychoanalysis, elaborates his manifesto for the project of psychoanalysis as a return to Freud, especially the linguistic and structural Freud, as a way of combating ego psychology and its emphasis on adaptation to normal or conventional reality. For the Lacan of this time, the unconscious is "that chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter." (F, 50). The censored truth of the unconscious, the inadmissible knowledge which constitutes the subject as radically ex-trinsic to itself, is a history that has been written elsewhere, in many places. But even in these places, what has been written has been incompletely effaced and something else written over it, like a palimpsest where traces of the first message vaguely show through the second. Like a tablet of hieroglyphics, the unconscious has been written on the monument that is my body, in the archival documents of my childhood memories, in the semantic evolution of my personal vocabulary and style, in the traditions and legends whose mythos express my history, and in the traces left by the distortions required to bridge the gaps left by what is present in its absence. The unconscious is the history of the subject, in that it is a larger text outside of the script which is conscious to the subject. Lacan gives a "definition" of the unconscious, as "that part of the concrete discourse, in so far as it is transindividual, that is not at the disposal of the subject in reestablishing the continuity of his conscious discourse" (F, 49).

The unconscious is "transindividual." What does Lacan mean by this? For Lacan, what is "transindividual," or what crosses over, as well as what crosses out, each individual, is the Symbolic order. The Symbolic is Lacan's way of signifying those laws or rules which govern all human interchange, founded on the exchange of gifts. The Symbolic has two important aspects which must always be borne in mind. First, it is something that is in place and in full operation prior to the existence of any particular subject, and second it is that which regulates the formation of every subject. What is encompassed
by the Symbolic? There are four elements which comprise the Symbolic for Lacan. First is the conventional and consensual use of language, or how it is we all agree to accept the méconnaissance of everyday speech, or what Lacan calls the “blah blah blah” of the words of Imaginary recognition exchanged between the ego and its counterpart. Second, it comprises our social relations, the cultural norms of kinship relations and marriage ties, or with whom we can have sex and with whom we might produce children. Third, it comprises our economics, or how we extract from our activities called labor a value to exchange for that which we cannot produce but require, and further, how we come to terms with the disparity between the value anticipated and the value appraised in the marketplace. And fourth is the logic of mathematical combination, or how things add up while keeping divisions in place, how the fantasy of one plus one becoming one is always disappointed through the two that remain. Through submission to the Symbolic, the subject becomes barred, relinquishing direct access to being and a full jouissance, so as to enter the properly human community mediated by the Symbolic. For Lacan, the unconscious is the result of the imposition of the Symbolic order on the Real of the subject, and it is the Real as the insistence of what can neither be expressed by the Symbolic nor captured by the Imaginary that always returns to disrupt the discourse of the barred subject.

In Television, Lacan gives a very succinct definition of the unconscious as he has come to understand it. He states that the unconscious is “the insistence through which desire manifests itself, in other words the repetition of the demand working through it” (T, 8). While succinct, this is also a very dense statement which concentrates the teachings of several seminars. How might we comment on this? The infant comes to mark his experiences with the signifiers given to him by the Other in response to his cries, passing his needs through the signifiers of the Other, and having to use the words the Other provides him to try to name and express what is at best vague and ambiguous to him. The thing that is causing the infant to cry receives a word in response, but what this word gets linked to for the infant is not necessarily what it is linked to for the one who provided the word. As Lacan says, in passing through “the defiles of the signifier,”
(SS, 309) the subject is split between speaking and being. For Lacan, "being" here refers to what could be the truth of the subject before he became alienated from himself by accepting the words of the Other as saying something more true about him than he himself could know. What can be said is what can be demanded, but what is always demanded is "a sign of love," (SS, 311) that sign of recognition of the subject as lacking, that promise to give what one does not have to one who could not use it anyway. What was lost in gaining the power of speech can never be enunciated, but this does not mean that it goes away. The empty place where it is supposed once to have been remains. It insists as desire. In so far as the barred subject is alienated in the signifiers of the Other, he makes an object of himself so as to satisfy what he takes to be the demand of the Other. The barred subject presents this objectification as a password to the Other so as to be recognized by the Other as being like the Other, and thereby receive the gift of love as a confirmation. What the Other wants of him remains always a mystery to the barred subject, so he is never able to succeed in his efforts to produce this for the Other, and is destined to repeat this work endlessly. The barred subject is marked by an impossible relation to the demand of the Other, and in response to the question posed by this demand has produced a phantasm, or a way to get back some of the jouissance lost to him as he passes through the defiles of the signifier. The phantasm, as an equally impossible relation to the objet a, or the lost object of desire, is the scenario or constellation of signifiers which, when followed to the end of the chain, produces some measure of jouissance. For Lacan, the barred subject as marked by the impossible relation to the demand of the Other constitutes the definition of the drive. The satisfaction of the drive produces jouissance for the barred subject, but it is a production which only occurs when the barred subject has "succeeded" in making himself be that object "demanded" by the Other, that would be the proof of love. Consciously, this "success" is known to the barred subject when it suffers the most. There is always a remainder left in this work, some way in which being, being lost, drives the barred subject to want more. The barred subject has made a bad deal, shortchanging himself in the exchange with the Other, sacrificing more of his jouissance
than was asked for. The unconscious, as the result of the imposition of the Symbolic law on the subject, ceaselessly attempts to find a way to represent the lost object of desire, so that the barred subject might know what was lost in submitting to the demand of the Other and put an end to the demand of the Other as a harsh and tyrannical law which imprisons the barred subject.

**Structure**

Next, I'd like to consider the notion of structure and look at how Freud and Lacan conceptualize the formation of psychic structures. In *Television*, Lacan again tells us right where to go, directing us to Freud's correspondence with Fliess, specifically Freud's letter of December 6, 1896. At this time, and in other texts as well, Freud is trying to make sense of the clinical material presented to him by his hysterical patients, to come to a theoretical understanding for himself of how the mind could be structured such that first when perceptions occur they are or can be registered in consciousness, second that these perceptions can be remembered or have an effect on and in the psyche, and third how and why it is that some memories are kept out of conscious awareness. In his theorizing, Freud builds a model that goes from the level of stimulation through memory to conscious awareness. Freud states in his letter to Fliess that the psychic mechanisms come into being by a process of stratification, such that material "in memory" is subjected to a rearrangement or retranscription and that this process occurs several times over in different places and in different forms. According to Freud, there are four levels in the constitution of memory. First, there are "perceptions," or the brute stimulation of the body, to which consciousness attaches but which leaves no trace. Second are the "indications of perceptions," which are the first registrations of perceptions and are arranged according to associations by simultaneity. Here, one has noticed that the stimulation has occurred and it is linked to other stimuli that occurred as this particular stimulation occurred. Third is unconsciousness, or the second registration arranged according to causal relations. What is registered at this level remains inaccessible to consciousness but can be used to hallucinate satisfaction in the unconscious, that is, it can be used to produce dreams. Fourth is the level
of preconsciousness, the transcription which attaches the thing representations to word representations and corresponds to the ego. Successive registrations of the memory trace represent the psychic achievement of successive epochs, requiring a translation of the trace at the boundary between the different levels of structure.

One way to think of these translations is as a quantum transformation of the structure which completely rearranges the elements and lines of force among them. If this transformation goes "well," a new, stable structure is instituted which preserves the elements of the old structure but makes of them a foundation which is only indirectly accessible at best. If this transformation does not go "well" and a translation has not occurred, which results in the lack of a new transcript, then the excitation present in the memory trace is dealt with according to the structure of the previous epoch, and anachronism persists in the structure. For Freud, repression is then defined as a failure in translation, the motive of which is to avoid the release of unpleasure that would be generated by the translation, the unpleasure being the unmanageable level of excitation which disrupts the functioning of the psychic organization. If there was too much stimulation at the time of the original experience, then the registration of the memory has a method for inhibiting the release of the unpleasure, such that the more the memory is repeated the more inhibited the unpleasure becomes. For Freud, the only situation where this is not the case, where the inhibition is insufficient, where the activation of the memory produces a new experience of unpleasure, where the memory acts like a current experience, is with sexual events. Freud concludes that a sexual event in one phase acts in the next phase as though it were current and uninhabitable because its translation to the next phase did not occur. What determines a pathological defense, or repression, is the sexual nature of the event and its occurrence in the earlier phase.

For Lacan, there are two events in the institution of the subject which effect these structuring transformations and erect boundaries between the different epochs, and which necessitate the retranscription or successive registration of material within the structure of the psyche. The first event is the mirror phase, the point where the possibility of becoming properly human is inaugurated. Prior to
this time, the infant, trapped in its motor incapacity, has only experienced itself in isolated fragments, or bits and pieces. At some moment, the infant experiences itself as a whole through some form of reflection, the paradigm for which is seeing the image of its body as a unity as it is reflected in a mirror. The infant takes on or assumes this image, forming an identification between itself, the image as it is reflected, and the signifier of its name. The movement from insufficiency to the anticipation of becoming like those other beings whom the infant sees and with whom the infant shares the same form, produces for the infant a jubilation, or an experience of jouissance. But the formation of this idealized "I," or its primary identification, is not complete until it is confirmed for the infant by the others around it. One can imagine the infant in its parent's arms, seeing both itself and its parent in the mirror. The infant sees itself whole and complete like its parent in the reflection, over there and in reversed form. It turns to the parent with the question, "is that me?" The parent directs the infant to the reflection, confirming that the reflection is one of the infant, and calls the reflection by the infant's name. The infant follows the parent's gaze to the reflection, moving outside of itself to find itself in a first alienation. Turning away from the reflection, the infant looks to its parent to have this identification of itself as the image in the mirror confirmed by the parent. The confirmation that comes from the parent, or how the infant sees itself being seen by and in the gaze of the parent, acts as a second reflection, an image in a mirror of an image in a mirror that is a second alienation. But rather than being optically pure or true, these mirrors are distorted, cracked, pitted, and more like the warped mirrors in a carnival fun house, something the infant is totally unaware of. The mirror image, in addition to the compound alienation, is also distorted, but it is taken to be a true and accurate picture of who the infant will become.

The second structuring transformation for Lacan is Oedipus. Here, the subject-to-be has to establish a bridge between the law of its own family to the law of its culture. The story of Oedipus goes something like this: The child, having had to deal with the inconsistencies of maternal care, has come to the conclusion that he is not that which causes the mother to desire. There is a third to which the
mother is always in reference, some point outside of the dynamics of their relationship to which her attention goes. Lacan titles this point the Name-of-the-Father. It is a place-keeper within the psychic economy of the mother which denotes the mother as a subject who lacks and as a subject submitted to the Symbolic. The Name-of-the-Father functions as an injunction against the mother not to re incor porate her product, not to use the child as the object which could satisfy her desire, not to use the child to make herself “whole.” The Name-of-the-Father is the third which severs the Imaginary dyad, marking the mother and child as different and separate from each other. As a signifier representing the mother’s desire, the Name-of-the-Father has an unknown signification for the child; he does not know then what the mother might truly desire. The Name-of-the-Father, as the signifier of the mother’s desire, has as its signified the phallus. In the Imaginary, the phallus has to do with the maternal lack. Here, the child attempts to become that which he perceives would complete the mother, to fill her hole and make her whole, which as holy a task as it may seem is wholly impossible. This is the conundrum of a psychotic, who, having failed in the endeavor to cross the Oedipal divide, constantly fears falling into the black hole. For the psychotic, the Name-of-the-Father has not acted as a third severing the one, or the Imaginary fusion of the mother-infant dyad, into two. In the Symbolic, the phallus has to do with paternal law. At the moment the Oedipal drama is concluded, at the moment when the cut of Symbolic punctuation retroactively seals the anticipated Imaginary destiny, at the moment when the subject announces itself in future perfect tense, the Symbolic phallus supplants the Imaginary phallus (55, 306). The Name-of-the-Father also functions as a command to the child “Jouis!,” sending the child in search of someone different from the mother with which to act — in a way it knows not yet how — to satisfy this incomprehensible commandment from the Name-of-the-Father (55, 319). The injunction of the Name-of-the-Father can be observed in operation in latency-aged children who enter into “chum” relationships with same-sexed peers and who struggle to learn how to play games by “the rules,” such that the formal properties of the game remain the same regardless of who plays when they play. As Lacan states, in hearing the “Jouis!” of the
Name-of-the-Father, the child can only respond “J’ouis,” an “I hear” which acknowledges the injunction but makes no claim to understanding what this injunction intends for the subject (SS, 319). The Name-of-the-Father acts as a promise to both the child and the mother, by promising them both that they will find the object cause of desire elsewhere if they forsake jouissance with each other, that their satisfaction lies with someone else. Rather than face the threat of the impossible jouissance of the mother in its nakedness and devouring destructiveness, the child accepts the Name-of-the-Father’s promise to protect it. The child, in an act somewhere between a relinquishing and a sacrificing, gives up having all possible jouissance with the mother in order to stand within the protection of the Symbolic law, accepting some jouissance so as not to face the dissolution of the Imaginary ego in a symbiotic fusion with the mother. The retroactive effect of Oedipus is to complete the sentence of anticipated, logical development of the subject by putting a stop to the sliding of signifieds under the signifier which represents the subject in discourse, its name. The effect of the punctuation of Oedipus is to fix the structure of the subject by linking its Imaginary identifications with Symbolic structures, thereby marking the subject as having a unique identity, as different from either parent, or anyone else, with whom he may have identified. With the quilting of the knot at Oedipus, what Lacan has called an “anchoring point” or the point de capiton, (SS, 303) the subject is instituted in his relation to the signifier as lacking, as a structure which can bear the lack of the object cause of desire, the objet a. It is in the signifying identification, where one accepts the denotation given to one’s sex as having something to say about who one will become even though one has no idea of what sense can be made of this, that the pre-verbal is articulated within the subject’s relation to the word. With the Symbolic cut which results in the loss of the objet a, the Imaginary is given a specificity by the Symbolic mark of difference, what Lacan has called the trait unaire, translated as the “unary trait” or the unbroken line. The subject is barred, making the gap between speaking and being unbridgeable. The barred subject is given a unity in the signifier in that the signifier is a mark of pure difference, being that which all the other ones are not.
How does Lacan describe the formation of structure in the psyche? To address this question, I want to focus on an often overlooked portion of Lacan’s seminar on Poe’s *The Purloined Letter*. Lacan notes how, in the text, Dupin and the narrator have this discussion about the schoolyard champion of the game of odds and evens, a discussion that seems out of place with the rest of the story. What use does Lacan make of this? He replaces this children’s game with something a little more abstract. Instead of a game, he says, imagine a random string of plus and minus signs denoting presence and absence. Next, add punctuation to the string by grouping the signs in sets of threes. Give each pattern of three signs a name, determined by whether they are three identical signs, or all (+ + +) or (- - -), three alternating signs, or (+ + +) or (- + -), or a set formed of two similar together with one different, or (+ - -), (+ + -), (- + +) or (- - +). Lacan chooses three to form his smallest set, as there is usually one child and two parents, but only two sexes, and the child must identify with one or the other. He also uses plus or minus signs to link this operation with how linguistics denotes phonemic markings, as well as how the child will come to denote the presence or absence of the marker of sexual difference. A grammar is established when one sets out such a punctuation in a random sequence. The grammar gives you the rule bound behavior of the entire sequence, specifying the stochastic process whereby one can go from one pattern to the next, what moves are allowed and which are forbidden, how the sequence of patterns repeats itself, and what it requires to go from one particular pattern in the sequence to another. It is with punctuation, with the cut, that a structure is retroactively established with very specific rules for the operation of and the movement through that structure. Where does Lacan go with this abstract metaphor for a simple children’s game? He proceeds to the one cut that fixes the structure of the barred subject — the cut of Oedipus. In the formation of the barred subject, the punctuation of Oedipus establishes the logic of the structure, which manifests itself as repetition, or the grammar of the drive. As he says in *Television*, the unconscious is the ideal capitalist worker, a worker bee who works ceaselessly to produce the satisfaction of the drive through the repetition of the grammatical utterance the conclusion of which was the punctuation point that
caused the objet a to fall and instituted the barred subject of desire (T, 14).

Language

According to Lacan, Freud attempted a linguistic analysis and deciphering of his patients' clinical material without the benefit of a science of linguistics. Freud speaks of language, its formation, and how it functions in two texts, The Unconscious and Beyond the Pleasure Principle. In The Unconscious, Freud speaks of four different types of representation which exist at different levels in the unconscious and work together topographically. First, there is the Darstellung, or the presentation of perceptual impressions that occur without leaving a trace. Next is the Sachvorstellung, or the thing-representation, which is comprised of the libidinal cathexis and the "direct memory-images" of the thing (U, 201). At the level of the unconscious, evoking the Sachvorstellung involves the registration of the event and whether it was an experience of pleasure or unpleasure. Moving up in the structure is the Wortvorstellung, or the word-representation, in which the memory trace is linked with an acoustic or verbal image, and that it is this verbal image that allows for the representation to enter consciousness. As Freud states: "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" (U, 201). The difference that Freud is underscoring is that these two types of representation operate at different levels and according to different rules in the psychic apparatus, with the Sachvorstellung operating by the laws of the primary process. At the next level of the system there is the Vorstellungsrepräsentanz, or the representative of the representation. This delegate of the drive which represents it in the sphere of ideas is more than just the contents of the unconscious; it is that which constitute it as the unconscious proper. The drive becomes fixated to a representative, and it is this representative which will then represent the drive in the unconscious. Freud states: "We have reason to assume that there is a primal repression, a first phase of repression, which consists in the psychical representative of the instinct being denied entrance into the conscious. With this a fixation is established; the
representative in question persists unaltered from then onwards and the instinct remains attached to it.”

To see where this takes Freud, we must turn to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which he uses as the starting point for his reflections his observations of his grandson playing the game of *Fort/ Da* with the spool and thread in his crib. In watching his grandson make the spool disappear and reappear, Freud concludes that his grandson is attempting to master the comings and goings of his mother who has left him in his crib, in some way to make up for the loss of his mother. But instead of being satisfied by the physical manipulation of the spool and thread alone, his grandson takes his activity one step further by creating a phonemic opposition to represent the play of the absence and presence of his mother in language. Freud’s grandson can now master the loss, or absence, of his mother making her be present in her absence by repeating only the words. He compensates for his absence of mastery of his mother by mastering his physical manipulation of the spool and the vocal mastery of the sounds he produces. In changing his “voice” from passive to active, in no longer being willing to suffer the absence of his mother, the child attempts to author himself through the agency of his speaking, rather than remain authored by and in the signifier. The sounds “Fort” and “Da,” like all other words, take the place of the missing “thing,” and by taking their place fill up the subject with a something that is much better than the nothing of absence. The awareness of absence, what Lacan has called the *manque-à-être* (variously translated as the want-of-being, the wanting-for-being, the want-to-be, or the lack-of-being), inaugurates discourse and is the precondition of all structure. It is by coupling the loss, the activity, and the word that the child gains the power of language and begins his first steps into the human community, begins the search to re-find the lost object.

By always referring to the Freud of *Dreams, Psychopathology, and Jokes*, Lacan constantly underscores that the properly psychoanalytic field is that of the structure of language. In “The agency of the letter”, Lacan lays out his use of Saussurean linguistics in psychoanalysis. Lacan starts with the algorithm $S/s$, or the signifier over the signified, such that the bar which separates them establishes two distinct and non-coextensive orders. A signifier can only point to
another signifier, as demonstrated in any dictionary; such that the relation between any signifier and its signified, or what it might mean, is totally arbitrary and conventional. No language can say it all. The structure of the signifier is that it has to be articulated, which from a linguistic standpoint, means that they must be reducible to basic differential units and they must be combined according to the rules of a closed order. The equivalence between the signifier, the phoneme, and the letter leads Lacan to consider the letter as the “localized structure of the signifier” and to conclude that it is only in the chain of signifiers that the meaning “insists,” forcing one to accept the incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier until one reaches a point of punctuation which seals the utterance and retroactively fixes the signification (A, 153). What the structure of the signifying chain reveals is the possibility to use it to signify something quite other than what it says, doing this through the mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy in its “function of indicating the place of this subject in the search for the true’ (A, 155). For Lacan, there is the language of everyday discourse, or empty speech, in which one wants to be recognized by one’s counterpart. Here, one chatters away, using the code, not with the intent of conveying a message, but to elicit a sign of recognition so as to be allowed to pass through the door and enter the collective. But, there is also the subject’s “primary language,” or the language formed on the basis of those oracular messages, or master signifiers, those signifiers without a signified, received from the Other. Particular to this subject, primary language is constituted when language is humanized by being seized by the desire of this subject in desire’s attempt to enunciate itself and so be recognized. Lacan calls this full speech, when the subject is able to enunciate those signifiers and have the message returned in inverted form (F, 81). In full speech, the subject realizes his history in relation to a future, coming to a knowledge of his future anterior (F, 88). What is important for Lacan is the “effect of the signifier” (F, 83). What does Lacan mean by this? Language, through the signifier, evokes the subject by initiating the subject into a new subjective, as well as intersubjective, reality, as indicated by the response of the other to the speaking of the subject. The subject can find an identity in language only by becoming lost in it, just as all the
other objects are lost in language. The signifier, in representing the subject for another signifier, produces an effect of signification, but it is an ambiguous and uncertain signification that is produced which must be interpreted, and this leads only to another signifier in an endless chain of signifiers (F, 85). The combination of signifiers produces an effect of the signified, such that if one masters the combination of signifiers one masters the effect of the signified. In restoring the subject to full speech, the subject comes to an understanding of how he has been played by the signifier, how the destiny he has been inhabiting has been pre-ordained by the signifiers from the Other. In coming to understand how he has been a prisoner of the signifier, the barred subject gains a degree of freedom to play back.

In Television, Lacan adds another “dit-mension” to his understanding of language. From the perspective of the unconscious, there are two sides of the structure of language, these being the side of meaning and the side of the sign (T, 7). The side of meaning always reduces itself to non-sense, to the unsayable of the sexual relation. The side of the sign leads back to Saussurean linguistics, and the distinction between the signifier and the signified. But now, Lacan makes a shift in emphasis. Whereas before he had focused on the distinction between speech and language, Lacan creates a new concept, which he names by the portmanteau word lalangue. What is Lacan indicating by lalangue? Before there is language, with its structure and rules as the linguist might come to know them, there is the babbling play of sound as it emerges from the mouth, like a song in a language one doesn’t know. This is lalangue, where even phonemes are not yet marked as separate and distinct. Whatever signifiers function as such in a given language, these signifiers come out of the unmarked field of play of lalangue. Linguistics is instructive here. First, consider the limited array of sounds, or phonemes, that the human mouth is capable of producing. These are detailed in the International Phonetic Alphabet, and in the babbling phase of infant speech the infant produces all of them. Each language uses only a subset of all possible sounds from which to constitute the set of sounds which function as signifiers for a given language. In time, the babbling infant comes to babble only with the sounds used in its native language, its “mother’s tongue.” Then, after puberty, the child can
no longer acquire a new language that is free of "an accent," that is "well-spoken" as a native would speak it, that is unmarked by the sounds of the child's "mother's tongue." In babbling, the infant produces sound for the physical pleasure of using its body to make something. It is an activity which produces jouissance for the infant. Now, Lacan states that the signifier produces, in addition to the effect of signification, an effect of jouissance, or a jouis-sens, or the "enjoy-meant" (T, 10). Lacan illustrates this with his play on the name of his seminar for the year, the non-fooled err or les non-dupes errrent, which is a homonym for name of his last seminar given at St. Anne on the names of the father, or les noms du père. For the subject of the unconscious, however, there is one phonemic concatenation which remains problematic, and that is the combination of sounds representing the name of the subject in discourse. One's name is unlike every other word in one's language in that the only true referent one has for it is missing, lost when one became a speaking being, a parle-être, which is also a homonym for parlettres, which could be translated as by or through letters, or for the letter.

To illustrate this for you, I want to make use of a television show about psychoanalysts, Frazier. In this particular episode, Eddie, the dog, has become depressed and generally uninterested in his usual doggie activities, much to the concern of Martin Crane, Eddie's owner and father to Frazier and Niles, both of whom are supposed analysts. At one point in trying to understand how it is that Eddie came to be depressed, the three men are discussing how intelligent dogs really are, how much of human language any given dog might understand, and how much more intelligent than the average dog Eddie is in Martin's estimation, which means for Martin that Eddie would understand many more words and much more of what is said around and about him, such that what he hears would have a bigger impact on Eddie than your average dog. As the argument about canine intelligence and comprehension of human speech proceeds between the three men, the camera cuts to a shot of the scene as it is seen from Eddie's perspective. The three men are gesturing wildly, they are each taking turns emitting these strings of non-comprehensible language-like sounds in loud and angry tones from their mouths, and interspersed in the babble of non-sense is the phonemic sequence
“Eddie.” All three of the men are chattering away in this verbal combat known as a discussion, barely veiling the need each of them has to be recognized as being able to speak the final word, to win the argument. The only signifier which gets Eddie’s attention is his name, and its being enunciated by any one of the men causes him to shift his gaze between the three men. The camera comes back to the scene from the human perspective, and Frazier and Niles enter into a debate as to the psychogenesis of depression in technical, “psychoanalyst” language. The camera then cuts to a shot of the scene of Frazier and Niles’s argument from Martin’s perspective, and again the two brothers are gesturing wildly, they are each taking turns emitting these strings of non-comprehensible language-like sounds in loud and angry tones from their mouths, and interspersed in the non-sense is the phonemic sequence “Dad.” Unable to obtain the sign of recognition from their father, the two brothers struggle between themselves to determine who will accede to the other’s perspective, who will accept the position of slave by recognizing the other as master. Martin’s gaze moves between his two sons, following the signifier “Dad.” If the first sequence was humorous, the second scene is hilarious for its representation of the truth of what passes as dialogue and communication. To pacify Martin, Frazier and Niles agree to allow a consultation with an animal psychotherapist, who concludes that the argumentative, hostile, and negative home environment is, of course, the cause of Eddie’s depression, blaming the humans for causing Eddie to suffer, the poor d’homestique (T, 5). This accusation leads to each of them speaking about what in particular is personally upsetting to them, and this inevitably leads to a discussion of death and how one never knows when it might come to claim you as its own, how one is powerless over the ultimate master. In being confronted by his powerlessness over death, Frazier throws himself down onto the couch, in what could be read as an hysterical fit or fainting spell, only to spring back up as he has landed on Eddie’s favorite chew toy which was buried in the cushions, a Barbie doll. In anger, Frazier throws the Barbie doll across the room. Eddie leaps up, grabs his toy with his tail wagging, and begins to chew with obvious delight and gusto, no longer depressed now with the return of his objet a.
"The unconscious is structured like a language." What can we conclude the Lacan of Television has to say about this? To be able to give a response to this question requires taking up the issue of the Real, for it is always the Real which intrudes into and disrupts the discourse of the subject. Both the Symbolic and the Imaginary fail in their efforts to contain or limit the Real, to keep the Real in its place. This leads to the issue of how the subject comes to encounter the Real and what this implies for the subject. The subject's encounter with the Real can best be understood by an examination of the operation of the structure of the four discourses, which will be briefly presented in terms of how the quarter-turn of the structure produces a different subjective position. This will then allow us to read through Television, focusing on Lacan's comments that point to the linkage between the Real and the unconscious.

To speak of the Real is to fail to say something definitive about it. It is relatively simple to say quite a bit about the cohorts of the Real in the Borromean knot. Both the Imaginary and the Symbolic have a "positive" ex-sistence; they stand forth in the light in a way that lets them move into "unconcealedness" or alétheia. What can be done is to say something about both the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and from this circling of the event horizon demarcated by the Imaginary and the Symbolic leave an indication of where the Real might be inadvertently found. Lacan speaks of the Imaginary as being instituted in the mirror phase, where the infant links its image as it is reflected with its name as this identification is confirmed by the maternal other. It is an identification with a Gestalt that is exterior to the infant, with a Gestalt whose difference in size and whose reverse symmetry are in direct contrast and contradiction with the infant's experience. This identification with the mirror image gives a specular permanence and fixity to the ego while establishing the alienation that is the hallmark of the ego. As Lacan states, the mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation — and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of
spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extend from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic — and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development.\(^\text{15}\)

This is the inauguration of the infant as a human subject, but within a form that functions like a crustacean's shell, giving form and solidity in such a way that any challenge to that form is experienced as a return to the \textit{"corps morcelé"} or fragmented body and results in an aggressivity directed out at the counterpart in a drama of envy and jealousy. If the mirror stage is the moment of anticipation, then the conclusion of the Oedipal drama is the moment of retroactive effect which sutures the subject to and in the Symbolic. If the mirror phase creates the possibility of becoming human, the Oedipal drama opens the rigidity and fixity of the mirror phase to more possibilities. But the Symbolic, in its own way, is similarly as rigid and fixed as is the Imaginary. This comes to the subject from two separate directions, both fundamental to the Symbolic. The first is determined by the pre-given nature of the Symbolic, and this operates at two levels. At the first level, symbolic structures are already there in full operation prior to the birth of the subject, as the foundation of the societal and familial culture into which this particular subject is born at this moment of time. At the second level, in so far as the subject exists in the speech and thoughts of his parents prior to his birth, who he may come to be has already been formed into a destiny which has nothing to do with the Real of the subject but everything to do with the fantasies of his parents as these are played by and played out in the dialectics of their desire. The second impetus for rigidity in the Symbolic comes from the fact that there is only one signifier with which to mark sexual difference. Given that the concluding moment of Oedipus quilts together the subject, a signifier denoting its sex, and the social expectations that support that denotation, the Symbolic also inaugurates a destiny for the subject that can be as inflexible as are the Imaginary identifications of the mirror stage. Lacan describes the Symbolic as a ciphering algorithm that operates on a stochastic
process. As one proceeds along the grammatically derived chain — as he describes it in his reflections on the children’s game of evens and odds in Poe’s *Purloined Letter* — the choices available become fewer and fewer until the subject no longer has any choice. This cut institutes a grammar that, at the level of the drive, operates as a repetition, leading the subject, without his knowledge, to a re-staging of the scenario within which the cut occurred so as to re-experience that cut, the moment at which the subject came into being. In that the subject now has an identity in the Symbolic, the subject comes to embody the emblematic nature of the signifier, with the same stultifying effects as the mirror image had for the subject. The neurotic exemplifies the unresolvable conflict between the desire of the subject and the ineradicable mark of the signifier of the subject’s sex, a signifier which has no signified for the subject at the time this signifier carves a mark on his body, a master signifier. What comes to intrude and disrupt both of the Imaginary identifications and the Symbolic identity is the Real.

What is the Real? This is a question for which there is no positive answer. There is no image, no Imaginary *Gestalt*, which can hold forth the Real. There are no signifiers with which to speak or convey the Real. The Real rends the Imaginary asunder. It is that over which the Symbolic falters. By definition, this makes the Real traumatic. How does the subject know he has encountered the Real? Lacan turns to Aristotle to give an indication of the movement of the Real through the subject’s ex-sistence, framing the Real as *tuché*. In Seminar XI, Lacan quotes Aristotle: “Luck is an accidental cause in things generated by choice for the sake of something. Therefore, luck and thought are concerned with the same thing; for choice does not exist without thought.” The sign of thought is choice, signifying preference, and Aristotle’s position is that luck, as an accident of fate, is the privileged cause in the encounter that generates thought. For Lacan, *tuché* reveals the eventuality of the Real, but only to the extent that it is fortunate, that it could have been otherwise, that it was an encounter that could have been missed, that in essence it is a “missed encounter,” a missed encounter which reveals “the real that lies behind the phantasy” (FFC, 54). It is in the missed encounter between what the subject intended to say and what has disrupted
his speaking as an intrusion or eruption of the Real, or the truth of the subject’s unconscious, where “true speech” can emerge.\textsuperscript{18} Given the strictures of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, true speech, as an articulation of the Real, is missing in all but the chance encounter. The birth of the subject’s truth in speech “brings us up against the reality of what is neither true nor false.”\textsuperscript{19} This “reality” of the subject is the truth that insists even in denial. It is the truth which rends asunder any identification and the truth which questions any identity and causes that identity to stumble as it returns the subject to the same place. This is the Real, the unconscious truth of the subject which “speaks, and, no doubt, where it is least expected, where there is pain,”\textsuperscript{20} such that the recurrent truth of the subject, caught in the mesh of the Symbolic and the Real, is the impossibility of speech.

To make some sense of the subject’s struggle in “the discourse of error” requires looking at the operation of the four discourses and the subjective positions each constitutes for the subject. At the conclusion of Oedipus, the subject is marked with a signifier of his sex. This is an instantiation of a cycle of logical time for the subject, the instant of seeing.\textsuperscript{22} But, as it has yet to have a meaning for the subject, in that it is meaningless and nonsensical to the subject, this signifier denoting the sex of the subject is a signifier without a signified, which is a definition of the master signifier, or the $S_1$ of the Master’s discourse. There has yet to have passed the time for understanding. To be so marked by the $S_1$ is traumatic for the subject; it is a chance encounter with the Real that locates the barred subject within the Master’s discourse. The $S_1$ functions as a command to the subject, as the injunction against incest and forbidden jouissance. The subject struggles to give any meaning to this $S_1$ to find some way to link it to the rest of the chain of signifiers, to what Lacan represents as $S_2$, or knowledge. The subject goes in search of knowledge to find some signified which could bolster or support the $S_1$, to find an $S_2$ that could say something to the subject about this $S_1$. This search inaugurates the barred subject into the discourse of the university with its emphasis on subjectless or desireless knowledge.\textsuperscript{23} The seduction of the discourse of the university is that one could find a signifier that would give access to one’s “true being” were one to search long and hard enough, that there is a signifier that would
bequeath a knowable and an enunciatable meaning to the subject, some one signifier that would resolve the ambivalence and conflict. However, whatever signifiers the subject finds to function as signifieds for the \( S_1 \) always miss; they are never able to say it all. The signifiers bound with \( S_2 \) are never able to reveal the subject’s true being, to give the subject access to being that is unmediated by the Symbolic, such that the succession of signifiers represented by \( S_2 \) hysterize the subject. In having to bear an inadequate or wrong signifier, in having to suffer in the unresolvable conflict between Imaginary identifications and Symbolic identity, in having to be the bearer of a letter from the Other that must be returned to the Other even as it shapes the destiny of the subject, the subject is placed in the position of the hysteric, whose suffering speaks through the body as a demand for more. When the demand of the hysteric, which in this case could be any subject, can be heard and responded to by the proper interlocutor, this demand can lead to the revelation of desire. Desire leads to the objet \( a \), as that which has been lost or what is missing. The objet \( a \), as the object cause of desire, leads to the discourse of the analyst, where, through “the discourse of error . . . [which] could bear witness to the truth against evidence itself,”\(^{24}\) the objet \( a \) can emerge as an encounter with the Real. It is an encounter that leads to a new signifier that has no signified, that leads back to the beginning but from a new place.

What does Lacan say of the unconscious in Television? How does he situate the unconscious in relation with the Real? While not stating it directly, Lacan lays out the situation in his opening remark:

I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there’s no way, to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it’s through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real. (7, 3)

Truth is not-all in the Symbolic. The signifier, or any concatenation of signifiers, is that which is not understood, is an incomprehensible representation. Whatever words one uses, no matter how many words one uses, it is a logical impossibility to say everything, or even to have a measure of certainty that one is saying what one intended to say. Whatever one’s intention, language always stumbles over
lalangue, such that it is only because of language, only because the barred subject is produced in all of its ambivalence by discourse, that the unconscious comes to ex-sist. Without the surprising, “chance encounter” with the unconscious formations that cause the speaking of the barred subject to stumble, there would be no opportunity for the truth of the subject of the unconscious to emerge, “that is, indeed, the point of the unconscious” (T, 14). The difficulty for the barred subject is that the measure of jouissance that he or she has access to — what Freud has called the primary process — can only come to the barred subject through the “logical straits” of discourse, through the strictures of the Symbolic, which, insofar as we all participate in the méconnaissance of the “blahblahblah” of the chatterbox, will always leave out the truth of the barred subject unless there is the shock and surprise of the Real (T, 9). The surprise comes because of the chasm separating lalangue from language, of the gap between $S_1$ and $S_2$, for “lalangue supplies only the cipher of meaning” (T, 9). A cipher is an element in a code that, in itself, is meaningless, that says nothing. The cipher only conveys a message to someone who knows how to translate the coded message, who knows how to affix the proper signified to this string of incomprehensible signifiers. The subject of the unconscious lives in a world of ciphers where the Real of jouissance makes each of these ciphers, each signifier, operate as a “personal.” The subject of the unconscious has come to be in the sea of lalangue, where the sounds of lalangue are only a play of ciphers without a concordance, except where those ciphers mark the subject’s body as a site of interest to the Other, as a place where jouissance is produced (T, 6). This jouissance, this primary process of the Freudian unconscious, can’t be expressed, but is to be deciphered (T, 18). This does not imply that the barred subject is privy to the translation algorithm, but rather the cipher, the $S_1$, remains a “coded message” that is born by the barred subject, that the speaking being always has to deal with something of “the One,” the element excluded from sense whose senselessness creates the empty space as the precondition for the rest of the system to function. It is the Real of jouissance at the site of interest on the body of the barred subject, the investment of libidinal cathexis in the locale of the erogenous zone, that functions as the
point of attraction of the chains of signifying material, as the nothing around which the strands flocculate,25 causing these chains of jouissens to knot together and form the stumbling blocks in the barred subject's discourse, spoken of as symptoms (T, 10). It is by the accidents of "good luck," by the chance encounter, which cause the breaks or cuts in the flow of jouissens that establish the repetitions of the structure which sustain the barred subject. The barred subject is dependent on these lucky breaks, on the structure as that repeats itself without the knowledge of the barred subject, (E, 22) as a "knowledge that gives him his consistency as subject of the unconscious" (E, 29). Lacan illustrates this with his reference to Freud's case of the "Wolf Man," seeing the importance of this case as "that of establishing the real within the facts" (E, 28).

How does one speak of this "real within the facts?" This is the function of myth, both at the individual level as well as at the cultural level, as "the attempt to give an epic form to what is operative through the structure" (E, 30). From Lacan's perspective, the structure operates by the repetitions established by the cuts, which, for the infant, are those absences created when something is taken away from or lost by its body, when the Imaginary Gestalt orthopaedically raising the infant up from its insufficiency is revealed in its truth as veiling the infant's incapacities. Initially, every object in the list enunciated by Lacan is presupposed by the infant as not separate from his body, but eventually they each become something demanded by the Other as proof of the infant's love (SS, 314). This loss is marked by the flocculation which creates a signifier at that site, as a citation which marks where something has fallen out of sight and is gone forever but eternally searched for as that which could complete and make whole the body once again, the holy quest. But this signifier is only "on loan" from the Other. It is bequeathed by the Other to the infant as a monument to what was lost, which, primordially, is always the One. The objet a, as the object cause of desire, acts as the signifier of that lost "oneness," as the representative of the representation which interpretation can bring forth at the proper moment of conclusion. The interpretation unknots the signifying chains so that the signifier loaned to the barred subject by the Other that has both constituted and instituted the destiny of the barred subject can be
returned to the Other. Through the cut which severs, an indestructible and eternal desire is established on the basis of the “dross” or trash which was lost to the cut, to castration. In denying the Real of the unconscious, in denying one’s castration and the desire founded on that castration, one can go “only from Dad to worse” (T, 46).

In speaking of going from Dad to worse, we must return to Frazier and the problems of Eddie’s depression to give an indication of how this might be for a barred subject. As Frazier is a psychoanalyst on the radio, one who listens and then speaks his interpretation, his telling of the story of Eddie’s suffering takes place in the context of his having responded to a listener’s question. On the radio, as a “radio personality,” Frazier wants to fulfill the listener’s expectations of being the expert for the listener, the one with the answer, the one who knows, which is a mirroring that narcissistically confirms Frazier’s Imaginary identification. Eddie was satisfied when he found his metonymic replacement for his objet a, his Barbie doll. Eddie, operating in the realm of instinct, is able to find the object for which his instinct sends him searching. And in the context of the scenario of the family drama described earlier, Frazier agrees with his brother, his father, and his father’s nurse that following Eddie’s example would be a good idea, that some milk and cookies, some oral gratification, would help take away the sting of death and the unfillable lack. They, together, are able to act in a way that parallels Eddie’s finding of satisfaction. Frazier, of course, in seeing the listener who questions as being a counterpart of himself, recommends the listener find her own version of milk and cookies to stave off her depression, to fill up her hole of what is missing with something. But Frazier’s second encounter with the objet a does not go as smoothly as Eddie’s has. For once he is off the air, Frazier reaches for a cookie and bites into it, anticipating a repetition of the oral jouissance that he shared with his immediate circle which he hopes will follow. But the Real is not as co-operative as Frazier might have it, for Frazier operates in the circuit of the drive. Instead of enjoying and relishing a good chew, he breaks a tooth on his cookie, being thrown off track as he stumbles over this unanticipatable Real.

Lacan frames the unconscious as the locus within the interior of the subject that is exterior to it, an “extimacy” as Jacques-Alain
Miller calls it, where desire manifests itself. Language structures the unconscious retroactively, creating an unbridgeable chasm between what can be said and what is impossible to say, or as Lacan terms it, between the Symbolic and the Real. As a ciphering algorithm, the unconscious plays with *lalangue*, plays in the defiles of the signifier, producing jouissance for the subject, even though this is not what the subject says he wants. When what the subject has intended to produce is disrupted or thrown off track, the signifying chain has come to a narrows in the chasm. It speaks, the unconscious does, across this chasm, attempting to find ways to enunciate the Real of the subject. From the perspective of consciousness, this is a garbled speaking, at best a partial truth but more likely the ravings of madness. When words fail, what can be deciphered is the non-known that one can only come to know from a blunder. In the blunder, something more of the truth of the subject can find a way towards enunciation through interpreting what might have been meant by the rhetoric of the blunder, or by linking the Real of *lalangue* to the signifiers of the Symbolic. In *lalangue* is the enjoyment of the body, the jouissance of the One, which the unconscious attempts to let the subject know something about so as to come closer to the truth of the subject.

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6 This has been described in *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida & Psychoanalytic Reading*, eds. John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).
15 ibid., 4.
18 Jacques Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis" (1956) in Écrits, 88. "Analysis can have for its goal only the advent of true speech and the realization by the subject of his history in relation to a future."
19 ibid., 47.
20 Jacques Lacan, "The Freudian thing, or the meaning of the return to Freud in psychoanalysis" (1956) in Écrits, 125.
21 ibid., 121.
23 Jacques Lacan, "Function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis" (1956) in Écrits, 70. "[T]he subject who loses his meaning in the objectifications of discourse . . . [revels] . . . the most profound alienation of the subject in our scientific discourse."
24 Jacques Lacan, "The Freudian thing, or the meaning of the return to Freud in psychoanalysis" (1956) in Écrits, 121.