



Freud, Signorelli, and Lacan: The Repression of the Signifier

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Freud, Signorelli, and Lacan: The Repression of the Signifier

“The Freudian unconscious,” writes Jacques Lacan, “is the discourse of the Other.” This formula has seemed to many a curious way of expressing the nucleus of the return to Freud which Lacan has succeeded in producing in France, through 15 years of a searching commentary on Freud.

It would have in fact remained a mere curiosity, were it not that, with recent advances in the study of linguistics and language, the relation of the subject and the Other is indeed seen as a symbolic relationship, in the sense that language is symbolic where conventional codes like mathematics are not. Moreover, to complete the formula by Lacan’s “The unconscious is structured like a language” expresses in lapidary form the central concept which guided Freud throughout his discoveries.

The first seven pages of the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) give us one of the most significant analyses Freud ever made, one with implications for the theory of the unconscious and repression, for the interpretation of dreams and for a comprehension of the psychoanalytic symptom. Moreover, once this analysis is reintegrated into the discourse of Freud himself, what it reveals has far-reaching consequences for *les sciences de l’homme*, including linguistics, literature, and philosophy.

I am referring to the forgetting of the proper name “Signorelli,” or rather to the repression of the signifier “Signorelli,” which was the first parapraxis fully commented on by Freud (1898) under the title of the “Psychical Mechanism of Forgetting” (*Standard Edition*, III, 289-297).

What is important about this incident is not merely the fact that psychoanalysis has always been the “talking cure” (as one of Breuer and Freud’s early patients called it), nor simply that the Signorelli incident puts in question the whole problem of the dialectical relation of the various *subjects* in the

analysis (as represented by the analyst and his patient), nor the fact that every fundamental question about psychoanalysis depends on a full comprehension of the repression of “Signorelli.” Its importance extends far beyond what might be considered purely technical problems: It puts into question our theories of the *meaning* of language and consequently forces us to consider once again the question of the being of man, dependent as it is upon human discourse (*Rede*).

Since the repression of a signifier is a linguistic phenomenon, there can be no objection to our use of the methods and terminology of structural linguistics (Saussure, Peirce, and Jakobson, for instance, as applied to the dialectic of analysis by Lacan) to explain it, an operation that has proved as fruitful for the semantic aspects of linguistics as it has for the existential aspects of analysis.

The key to the question of “Signorelli”—which is the most obvious kind of example to support the naïve theory that language is a process of nomination (since “Signorelli” is a proper name) i. e., that “tree” means tree—the key to this question is that, in itself, “Signorelli” *doesn't mean anything at all*.

Lacan has used the example many times, and one remembers Merleau-Ponty, close student of Freud as he was (something which can be said of few philosophers—especially of philosophers associated with “phenomenology”) expressing his irritation at Lacan's constant insistence on the importance of such a seemingly accidental and not very meaningful lapse of memory. After stating categorically his “absolute conviction” of the necessity of a new return to Freud as a result of Lacan's commentaries, he said:

“I must admit that the Signorelli story, to which you have once again alluded, has always troubled me. When one reads this text, as with many other psychoanalytic texts, and when one is not among the initiated, when one is not in the practice of analysis, nor even associated with the experience of psychoanalysis, one is always struck by the fact that Freud, it seems, invariably seeks to turn things upside down and not to take them as they appear. . . .”¹

¹ Jacques Lacan, “La psychanalyse et son enseignement,” *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* (April-June 1957), p. 98. Lacan's comments on the Signorelli incident are on p. 75. See also *La Psychanalyse*, I (1956), p. 27-28.

These words are fraught with an unconscious irony, for the Freudian “phenomenology” is precisely that which *does* take what *does* appear, and which discovers its latent signification by associations which help fill the gaps between the signifiers of the conscious discourse: in other words, by integrating the discourse of the Other within the discourse of the subject. It is never a question of some hidden “instinctual sense,” for the linguistic manifestation of the unconscious through what Lacan calls the Symbolic (opposed to the Imaginary and to the Real) does not deal with the *sens* (the meaning), but rather with the *lettre*, with the “presentations,” “representations,” and “representatives”² to which the ineffable, invisible, and inexplicable “drives” become attached. The unconscious is always present in the manifest, but it exists there, in a special form of “conscious absence,” as the latent, or, as Leclaire and Laplanche have summed it up in their critique of Politzer:

“(a) The unconscious is not co-extensive with the manifest as its signification: it is to be interpolated into the *lacunae* of the manifest text [Cf. Freud, *Standard Edition*, XIV, 167.]; (b) The unconscious is in relation with the manifest, not as the *sens* to the *lettre*, but at a same level of reality. This is what authorizes us to conceive of a dynamic relationship between the manifest text and what is absent from it and must be interpolated into it: it is a fragment of the discourse which must once again find its place within the discourse.”³

Freud put the problem of the relationship of presentation between the conscious and the unconscious in these terms:

“What we have permissibly called the conscious presentation [*Vorstellung*] of the object can now be split up into the presentation of the *word* and the presentation of the

² *Vorstellungen, Wortvorstellungen, Sach- or Dingvorstellungen, Repräsentant, Repräsentanz, Triebrepräsentanz* (and once: *Vertretung*).

³ S. Leclaire and J. Laplanche, “L’inconscient,” *Temps Modernes*, no. 183 (July 1961), p. 88. “Signorelli,” as an element of *memory*, is a pre-conscious element belonging to the system *Cs. Pcs.* If it had merely been forgotten, it would have remained within this system, where “suppression” operates. But, as its overdetermination will reveal, it was not simply suppressed into the non-conscious but, as an instinctual representative, actually “crossed the bar” of repression into the unconscious.

thing. . . 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 [*Niederschriften*] of the same content in different physical localities, nor yet different functional states of cathexis [*Besetzung*] 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. . . . Now, too, we are in a position to state precisely what it is that repression denies to the rejected presentation in the transference neuroses: What it denies to the presentation is *translation into words which shall remain attached to the object*. A presentation which is not put into words, or a psychical act which is not hypercathected, remains thereafter in the *Ucs.* in a state of repression.”⁴

Freud had previously said, and the distinction is again a crucial one:

“Even in the unconscious . . . an instinct cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea [*Vorstellung*]. If the instinct did not attach itself to an idea or manifest itself as an affective state, *we could know nothing about it*.” (XIV, 177, my italics.)

In reference to unconscious “instinctual impulses” [*Triebregungen*], he goes on: “Yet its affect was never unconscious; all that had happened was that its *idea* had undergone repression.” (XIV, 178.) Or, in Lacan’s terminology, “*c’est le signifiant qui est refoulé*.”

These passages are of particular significance when compared to the description in the “Preliminary Communication” (1893), at the very beginnings of the discovery of the unconscious, of the relief of the hysterical symptom, where a somatic compliance has become allied to the psychic determinant:

“For we found, to our great surprise at first, that each individual hysterical symptom immediately and perma-

⁴ “The Unconscious” (1915), *Standard Edition*, XIV, 201-202. My italics, except for “word” and “thing.”

nently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the [traumatic] event by which it was provoked and in arousing its accompanying affect, and when the patient had described that event in the greatest possible detail *and had put the affect into words*. Recollection without affect almost invariably produces no result. The psychical process which originally took place must be repeated as vividly as possible; it must be brought back to its *status nascendi* and then given *verbal utterance*. . . . [The psychotherapeutic method] brings to an end the operative force of the idea [*Vorstellung*] which was not abreacted in the first instance, by allowing its strangulated affect to *find a way out through speech* [*Rede = discours = logos*]. . . .”⁵

The point of quoting these passages is to bring to light the crucial question of “presentation,” which has been analyzed from a critical, theoretical, and clinical point of view, in the article by Leclaire and Laplanche. Using the Lacanian graphic representation of the signifier (“S”), the signified (“s”), and metaphor-metonymy (“S’”), derived through Lacan from Saussurian linguistics and from Roman Jakobson’s distinction between metaphor and metonymy (the relation of similarity and the relation of contiguity), the authors, like Freud, posit a “mythical” origin of the unconscious (but anterior to the primal repression) and elaborate Freud’s *Wortvorstellungen* (“word-presentations”) and *Sachvorstellungen* (“thing-presentations”) along the lines of the conscious-unconscious opposition revealed in the passages I have quoted. They deal with the signifiers, and only secondarily with the signified (for the signification of a signifier is another signifier or set of signifiers, as Charles S. Peirce insisted). By going back to Freud’s description of the topographical *regression* from “dream-thoughts” to “perceptions” in the dream—a regression that remains *meaningless* until elaborated, first, by putting the dream-text into words, and secondly, by the “working-through” of the word-associations by which the dreamer interprets (un-

⁵ Breuer and Freud, *Studies on Hysteria, Standard Edition*, II, p. 6, p. 17; cited by Freud in the “Psychotherapy of Hysteria” (1895), p. 255. Most of both passages are in italics in the original. The italics which remain are mine.

consciously) his own dream—Leclaire and Laplanche offer a structural analysis of a dream whose crude phallic visual symbolism turns out to be of minor importance. The unicorn in the dream is not just a unicorn, but “*une licorne*,” which “decondenses” into “Lili” and “corne,” the one a person of crucial importance in the subject’s history, the other (*corne du pied*) related to his personal experience and to his personal neurotic symbolism. On this basis, they are able to interpret the metonymic movement or displacement of the subject’s desire from the economic point of view.

The uninitiated reader may perhaps wonder what these instincts, presentations, signifiers, and dreams have to do with the lapsed memory of “Signorelli.” In the first place, Lacan’s commentaries bring us up against the death-instinct latent in the 1901 re-telling of the story, and secondly, we know that a parapraxis exhibits the same mechanisms of condensation (*Verdichtung*) or *metaphor*, and displacement (*Verschiebung*) or *metonymy*, as the dream. Moreover, the parapraxis involves a *symptom*, even if represented only by an absence, a substitute-replacement for something else. Once we correlate the word-presentation, “Signorelli,” with “signifier,” and then the substitute memories which replaced it, with *metaphor* (the symptom) and *metonymy* (desire), and relate these categories to the elements missing from the 1901 account, the Signorelli incident begins to reveal its full theoretical and personal importance.

These missing elements, as is to be expected and as the reader can discover for himself by comparing the two accounts, are those of the most *personal* importance to Freud who, we recall, was still struggling with the beginnings of his own self-analysis at the time.⁶ At first glance, the theme of death in the Signorelli incident seems, in the 1901 account, to be related to the death instinct and to what we have learned to call Being-for-death in a general and undifferentiated way. But with the additional information reported by Freud in 1898—although the essential details are naturally concealed—it is possible to see the death-instinct, in the area of the untouchable and unveri-

⁶ For this very reason, Ernest Jones promises in volume II of his biography to produce a revised version of the Signorelli incident (hardly mentioned originally) in a later edition of volume I.

fiable “primal repression” (*Urverdrängung*), exerting the classic “attraction” on a specific and individual act of “repression proper” or “after-repression” (*Nachverdrängung*), at the same time as the repressed item was “pushed” out of Freud’s consciousness by the suppression of a train of thought.

Freud’s father had died in 1896, two years before the Signorelli incident. Now, although it is well known that Freud discovered that his step-brother Philipp, twenty years older than he, had served the function of a rival for the affections of Freud’s young mother and that he had indeed served to a large extent in the function of the father in the oedipal triangle, it was the man who, as Lacan would put it, bore the *Name-of-the-Father* (the dead master, perhaps even the *Dieu caché*) who had died in 1896. Moreover, in the “in-mixing” (*immixtion*) of subjects in the human world, in that dialectic of identification which Lacan’s commentary on “primal” narcissism (*le stade du miroir*) has revealed as a constituent prerequisite of the totality of the alienation of the *je* in the *moi*, no subject and no other can be considered except in so far as both are constituted in reference to the otherness of the Other—so that either Jacob or Philipp can be father, brother, lover, rival, mother’s lover, father’s son, subject, Master, human being, even object, depending upon the particular constellation in which he and the subject are temporarily implicated at any given moment.

Thus, even if we cannot ever be precisely sure to whom the subject (Freud) is referring when he *names the other*, we can always be sure, by the content of the nomination, that the subject is *constituting himself in a relation*, in a human in-mixing of self and other, in other words in a relationship whose structure is always (at least theoretically) demonstrable, a relationship in which the psychoanalyst can only be increasingly faithful to the discoverer of his art (or science) in so far as he views it as a particular manifestation of certain basic models.

There is plenty of evidence of Freud’s feelings about Jacob Freud, both in the letters to Fliess and in a number of Freud’s dreams, but also, significantly enough, in the preface (1908) to the second edition of the *Interpretation of Dreams*, where Freud speaks of his unwillingness to alter the original work, completed in 1899:

“For this book had a further subjective significance for me personally—a significance which I only grasped after I had completed it. It was, I found, a portion of my own self-analysis, my reaction to my father’s death—that is to say, to the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man’s life.” (IV, xxvi)

On November 2, 1896, at a time when Freud’s conscious feelings about his father were very mixed as a result of his theory of childhood seduction, he writes to Fliess:

“By one of the obscure routes behind the official consciousness the old man’s death affected me deeply. I valued him highly and understood him very well indeed, and with his peculiar mixture of deep wisdom and imaginative light-heartedness, he meant a great deal in my life. By the time he died his life had long been over, but at death the whole past stirs within one. I feel now as if I had been torn up by the roots.”⁷

We know, of course, of the large number of “disrespectful” references to Jacob Freud, but one of particular significance for the Signorelli theme is that in the dream about the *Stuhlrichter* (literarily “chair-judge” or “stool-judge”) which means “*presiding judge*,”⁸ where respect and disrespect exist in mutual (conscious) contradiction. This dream occurred in 1899, not long after the Signorelli incident, which happened in September 1898, and which refers to a visit to Orvieto in September 1897.

The theme of this dream is death and judgment: “*Mori-amur pro rege nostro*”—and, curiously enough his father also represents Maria Theresa. The so-called “absurd dream about a dead father,” (V, 435-439), which occurred sometime between 1896 and 1899, is also important here, because of the apparently inexplicable date: 1851. This date brings us closer to the per-

⁷ *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*, New York, Basic Books, 1954, p. 170 (Letter 50). All references to numbered letters are to this edition. Freud had elsewhere referred to himself as the “double” of his father—and the Narcissus who contemplates himself in the other may well be fascinated by his alienation to the point of death.

⁸ *Standard Edition*, V, 427-429. The German *Stuhl* comprises both of the common English meanings of “stool.”

sonal theme when it is recalled that Fliess had predicted that Freud would die at 51 (i. e., in 1907). Freud's obsession with death remained with him, as we know, throughout his life, and one recalls the representation in another dream of his visit to an Etruscan tomb complete with skeletons (probably in 1897), which appeared as a "wooden house," which Freud read as a coffin into which he expected to enter. He interprets the vision of his dissected body at the beginning of this dream as his self-analysis, which, in the dream, is undertaken at the command of that particularly formidable father-figure "Old Brücke," (V, 452-455); but the evisceration, the chasm, and the anxiety in the dream-text are readily interpretable as revolving around the castration complex, that "bedrock" beyond which analysis cannot penetrate, where the male's "rebellious overcompensation" causes him to refuse "to subject himself to a father-substitute, or to feel indebted to him for anything."⁹ This describes very precisely Freud's relationship to Fliess, with whom he was originally constituted in what we have learned (from Hegel) to call the master-slave dialectic, that is to say, in an attitude of servitude with the result of ensuring, through his labor, his final mastery. In January 1897 (his 41st year), he writes to Fliess: "Give me ten more years . . ." and he decides on the epigraph for the projected "Chapter on Sexuality": "From heaven through the world to hell."¹⁰ Moreover, it was in relation to Fliess, with whom there was a very special identification, in fact a transference which served Freud in his self-analysis, that Freud had the extraordinary fainting-fit in 1912, from which he awoke with the words: "How sweet it must be to die"—almost the words of Montaigne after his fall from his horse—and directly connected to the quarrel and break with Fliess in 1900. Freud had in fact discovered the solitude of mastery.

Obviously, the incidents picked out from these dreams can be otherwise interpreted in a different chain of associations, for the symptom is invariably overdetermined.¹¹ The essential de-

⁹ "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937), *Standard Edition*, XXIII, 252.

¹⁰ Letter 54, p. 183-184. Freud's imperative is curiously significant.

¹¹ "Overdetermined," is often used to imply: "susceptible of any number of contradictory but equally valid interpretations." However, it means precisely that the symptom is determined (by the subject), and that the determin-

terminant for Freud in the Signorelli incident is the theme of death, or more precisely, in Freud's own words: "death and sexuality." It will be seen at once that the introduction of the opposition of death and sexuality, apart from lending itself to immediate transformation into *Thanatos* and *Eros* (a binary opposition that would be meaningless if each element were not defined by its own opposite) serves to reinforce the personal element as well. For no Freudian discovery is more fraught with the theme of death and sexuality than the oedipal triangle—which also implies the *judgment* of the Father—and Freud had discovered the Oedipus complex, as part of his own self-analysis through the dialectical transference situation of the analysis of his patients, through the relationship to Fliess,¹² and through the internal dialectic of his dreams, in 1897.

Perhaps the most significant point to be made about the Signorelli incident is that it is part of a *discourse* and that the

ing elements are intimately interconnected as a series of inseparable binary oppositions forming an integral structure. But the complexity of the structure makes it necessary to deal with the elements in small "packets," packets which nevertheless reflect the organization of the whole. Thus the theme of alienating narcissistic identification, constitutive of the ego (Lacan's *stade du miroir*), for instance, through all its successive developments, cannot be separated from the opposition of the internal and external, the conscious subject and the other, the unconscious subject and the Other, *Eros* and *Thanatos*, the presence and the absence of the signifier. See: J. Lacan, "The Function and Domain of the Word and Language in Psychoanalysis," ed. and trans. A. G. Wilden, 1967; J. Lacan and J. Hyppolite, "The Commentary on the Verneinung," ed. and trans. A. G. Wilden, 1967; J. Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," trans. J. Miel, *Yale French Studies*, issue 36 ("Structuralism"), November 1966 (where a selected and commented bibliography of Lacan's post-war writings will also be found); and J. Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, XXXIV (1953), p. 11-17. Most of Lacan's more important articles are available in French in: Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1966.

The fact that a (later model) exhibits the same structure as another (earlier) model, does not imply that the second is or can be *reduced* to the first. The structure may be repeated, but never the elements *in themselves*; for the diachronic relation of synchronic model to synchronic model makes this impossible. A person has a history.

¹² The following passage, in a letter to Fliess of November 14, 1897, is of particular significance here: "My self-analysis is still interrupted and I have realized the reason. I can only analyze myself with the help of knowledge obtained objectively (like an outsider). Genuine self-analysis is impossible; otherwise there would be no [neurotic] illness. Since I still find some puzzles in my patients, they are bound to hold me up in my self-analysis." Cited in *Standard Edition*, XIV, 20-21 (Letter 75). The translation of this last sentence in *Origins* (p. 235), as James Strachey has pointed out, is exactly the opposite of the German. This inversion in itself, and in such a crucial context, is pregnant with implications regarding the function of the Other with which this essay is intimately concerned.

two accounts given of it (1898 and 1901) differ. It is just as important to discover in the 1898 account, relegated to a later footnote in 1901 (p. 13), the one element necessary to complete the structural equivalence of this especially significant parapraxis to the dream. Not only are metaphor, metonymy, and attempted wish-fulfilment involved, but also a *regression* from the word-presentation to a thing-presentation or, in the usual terminology, from “dream-thoughts” to “perception.” For what does not appear within the later account, but only in the first, is *the image of Signorelli*, “with serious face and folded hands,” and the significant fact that Freud had no difficulty in remembering the name of Signorelli’s predecessor in the work, Fra Angelico, the painter of angels, who is *also* represented in the painting, and next to Signorelli’s self-portrait. To this as yet inexplicable significance of Signorelli for Freud must be added the fact that if you study Signorelli’s face in the fresco it won’t strike you as *particularly* serious—or as particularly anything.

The two accounts must be read in detail, but the essence of the incident is as follows. During a carriage-drive in Herzegovina with a chance acquaintance, and before coming to the subject of the *Last Judgment* at Orvieto, Freud had been discussing the characteristics of the Turkish inhabitants of the area (Bosnia-Herzegovina), and in particular the extraordinary confidence of Turkish patients in their doctors and their great resignation to fate. In response to a doctor’s death-sentence, they are wont to reply: “*Herr*, what is to be said? If he could be saved, I know you would have saved him.” But their attitude to sexual disorders was, Freud knew, entirely the opposite, and the example he quotes as immediately running through his mind also began with the patient addressing the doctor as “*Herr*.” Freud was speaking German at the time, but had for some weeks been speaking Italian, “translating it in his head,” as he puts it. At the same time as he thought to himself that there was probably some intimate connection between these two attitudes, Freud “delicately” avoided telling his partner in conversation of the second feature of the opposition between death and sexuality as revealed in the relationship of Turkish patients to their doctor.

Thus, Freud sought to divert his conscious attention from

the theme of death and sexuality. Shortly afterwards, the conversation turned to the subject of Italian painting, and Freud, by a rather natural further association, asked his companion whether he had seen the fresco at Orvieto by. . . . Impressed as he had been the previous year by Signorelli's work (at Bolsena in particular), and in spite of his admiration for this particular painting, he could not name the painter. The fresco in question is variously called the *Last Judgment* [*Weltgericht*] or the *Four Last Things* (Death, Judgment, Hell, Heaven). It will be recalled that it was at Orvieto that he had seen the Etruscan tomb, complete with two skeletons, which he later associated, in the dissection dream, with "Old Brücke" (a teacher whose judgment on his students was notoriously harsh, for all his "kindly" qualities), with his own self-analysis through which the oedipal theme had emerged, with his anxiety over his body in bits and pieces and over the chasm (*béance*) yawning before him, and with his own entry into the grave.

However, along with the loss of the signifier "Signorelli," there "rose" in his consciousness an "ultra-clear" representation of Signorelli's face. But this face, the symptom of his anxiety, was completely meaningless, *because he could not put it into words*. Moreover, what is not brought out in the second account is the fact that the parapraxis lasted for several days, causing Freud an "inner torment" as he somewhat surprisingly puts it, for the forgetting of a name is usually only a momentary annoyance. On the contrary, Freud anguished over it until the name was supplied to him by another stranger some days later. And when the signifier returned, the ultra-clear vision of the master's features *faded away*.

The signifier "Signorelli" was replaced by two metaphoric substitutes (condensations), both of which exhibit the characteristic metonymic progression of signifiers with the condensation. If the metaphor provides the means of passage from the unconscious to consciousness, it is metonymy (displacement) whose flight from signifier to signifier articulates the movement of the subject's desire. The chain of metonymic displacement within the substitutive condensation "Botticelli," representing Freud's desire, is exactly correlative to the metonymic chain within "Signorelli," for "Signorelli" itself was repressed in the place of something else, and it too is a metaphoric

condensation. *Both are signifiers, and both exist at the same level of reality*, before as well as after the repression.

But it was obviously not the conscious desire to avoid the “delicate” topic of sexuality that motivated the repression, but rather an unconscious and inarticulable desire for something else. “I wanted . . . to forget something,” said Freud in 1901; “I had *repressed* something,” but in spite of a later reference to the theme of the fresco at Orvieto, he implies that this desire to forget was simply associated with another external determinant of the theme of death and sexuality: the recent death of a former patient of his, suffering “from an incurable sexual disorder.” It is the article of 1898 which reveals the direction in which the deepest truth lay. “For this topic [sexuality] to have been able to produce such effects,” says Freud,

“it is not enough that I should have [consciously] suppressed it once in conversation—an event brought about by chance motives. We must assume rather that the topic itself was also intimately bound up with trains of thought which were [already] in a state of repression in me—that is, with trains of thought which, in spite of the intensity of the interest taken in them, were meeting with a resistance that was keeping them . . . from becoming conscious. That this was really true at that time of the topic of ‘death and sexuality’ I have plenty of evidence, which I need not bring up here, *derived from my own self-investigation*. . . . I recollected that these repressed thoughts had never engrossed me more than a few weeks before, after I had received a certain piece of news” (III, 292-294).

This news, which he had received at *Trafoi* in June, was that on the *suicide* of his former patient.

But three things *had* reached consciousness: “Botticelli,” “Boltraffio,” and the image of Signorelli. Using the Lacanian

graphic representation of $\frac{S^1}{S}$, (the bar representing something

to be crossed), we can write the replacement of “Signorelli” by “Botticelli” as “Botticelli.” Both of these metaphors can
“Signorelli”

be “de-condensed,” so as to reveal the metonymic movement of

desire within them (remembering that “Signor(e),” the repressed element here, is the Italian for “*Herr*”):

		Turks (“ <i>Herr</i> . . .”)	
BO (TTIC)	→	<i>Bosnia</i>	→
		<i>Herz-egovina</i>	→
		Death and Sexuality	→
		ELLI	
SIGNOR	→	<i>Herr</i> (<i>Herz</i>)	→
		Turks (“ <i>Herr</i> . . .”)	→
		ELLI	
		Death and Sexuality	

In such a metonymic chain of associations in a dream, it would be normal to seek a nodal point of “deepest resistance,” a “transferential point.” It will become evident from the later repetition of this parapraxis, that this point is *Herr-Herz* (“*Sir*” and “*heart*”).

The bracketed “-TTIC-” represents an instance of what Freud calls the essentially meaningless “hieroglyphic determinative” in the dream text, an element “not intended to be interpreted (or read as the case may be)” but whose function is “to establish the meaning of some other element” (XIII, 177).

The link between *Herr* and “*master*” or “*father*” and the theme of death is reinforced by the fact that shortly before the incident (Letter 95, August 31, 1898), Freud had commented to Fliess on the attitude of the Czar—whom he regarded as an untrustworthy obsessional neurotic—as it was expressed in the Peace Manifesto of August 1898. His comments would seem to establish an immediate association with a passage from the *Draft N* of May 1897:

“Hostile impulses against parents (a wish that they should die) are also an integral part of neuroses. They come to light consciously in the form of obsessional ideas. In paranoia the worst delusions of persecution (pathological distrust of rulers [*Herrscher*] and monarchs) correspond to these impulses. They are repressed at periods in which pity for one’s parents is active—at times of their illness or death. One of these manifestations of grief is to reproach oneself for their death . . . or to punish oneself in a hysterical way by putting oneself into their position with an idea of retribution.”

And the draft goes on to speak of identification, to search for the

motive of this death-wish, and to examine the question of incest (*Origins*, p. 207-210). *Hamlet* and *Oedipus Rex*, of course, were rediscovered in October 1897.

The key-terms in the repression of "Signorelli" are *Herr* and *Herz*, both from the point of view of sound and sense. In fact, the overdetermination seems to be getting away from us. Freud had expected to be promoted to the status of "Herr Professor" in September 1897 and again in 1898. He mentioned his expectation and the title to Fliess (who had chided him over the "Herr Professor") in the summer of 1897.¹³ Moreover, the man responsible for his not receiving the appointment was the Minister of Education, Freiherr von Härtel. Furthermore, to return to the dream of the bodies in the Etruscan grave at Orvieto: its décor came from two novels by Rider Haggard: *She* and the *Heart of the World*.

What of "Boltraffio"? By its complete lack of any manifest similarity to "Signorelli" (for at least the "elli" had been retained in "Botticelli"), as well as by the comparative obscurity of the painter, it may be legitimately assumed to have been the *second* symptom in the diachronic chain of signifiers in Freud's discourse. A further effort at remembrance has been met by a stronger force of repression—whose synchronic action of substitution, in the dynamic sense, is inseparably linked to the economic progression of Freud's desire. We can replace the de-condensed "Botticelli" by the following graphic representation of "Boltraffio" without altering the lower part of the schéma previously given:

Turks ("Herr. . .")

BO (L) → Bosnia → Herz-egovina → Death and Sexuality → Trafoi → TRAFFIO

Freud's desire is a death-wish—and not simply for one person. By a "secondary revision" (to make better sense, since "Botticelli" was a ridiculous choice, and in any case retained the "elli"), Freud has at the same time moved further from "Signorelli" and yet closer to the personal theme of death as

¹³ June 6, 1897 (Letter 65). Freud returns to the subject in a letter of February 9, 1898 (Letter 83): "There is a rumour that we are to be invested with the title of professor at the Emperor's jubilee on December 2nd [1898]. I do not believe it, but I had a fascinating dream on the subject; unfortunately it is unpublishable, because its background, its deeper meaning, shuttles to and fro between my nurse (my mother) and my wife. . . ." See also note 16.

represented by the *suicide* of which the news had come to Trafoi. In this new distortion, it is the relation of contiguity which is in question. We must write it as a Saussurian *glissement* or displacement (*Entstellung*) of one signifier over

another: $\frac{\text{“Botticelli”} \rightarrow \text{“Boltraffio”}}{\text{“Signorelli”}}$

In simplified terms: $\frac{\text{Her (z)} \rightarrow \text{Death}}{\text{Signor}}$

But “Signor” is not death, whatever it may represent in this determinative chain of signifiers; moreover, death remained behind, latent within the manifest secondary metaphoric substitutes. Not only that, but the death-wish bears on the Father (*Herr*), the Master (*Herr*), the Minister (*Freiherr*), and the Professor (*Herr*). It is now clear precisely in what sense Lacan’s definition of the unconscious is in question here. We are dealing with a repressed signifier (the *signified* Signorelli never really enters into the question) without which “Botticelli” and “Boltraffio” are mere disconnected presentations, meaningless in themselves, *words attached to no “object.”* As Lacan puts it: “The unconscious is that part of the concrete discourse in so far as it is trans-individual, which is not at the disposition of the subject to re-establish the continuity of his conscious discourse.”¹⁴ Only with the restitution of “Signorelli” does Freud’s conscious discourse re-establish its continuity—it is, as Freud said, the *Vorstellung*, not the thought, not the instinct, not the thing, which is repressed—and consequently becomes re-integrated into his personal history.

Impossible as it is to examine in itself the curious process called repression within the limits of this essay—which is concerned rather with its structural representation—it must need be said that in one sense repression is the means to mastery over the repressed (over the death-instinct for instance), while in another, it demonstrates the servitude of consciousness to what it does not know. In the Signorelli incident, the death instinct, incommunicable and ineffable unless attached to an instinctual

¹⁴ “Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse” (*Rapport de Rome*), *La Psychanalyse*, I (1956), p. 105.

representative, becomes attached to the image of Signorelli. And, at the level of “after pressure,” Freud loses his mastery over the signifier “Signorelli,” becomes in fact enslaved to its absence from his discourse, in a regression from the word to the image where the blocked intentionality of that discourse produces a temporarily ineffable attachment.

And in the *evocative* (rather than informational) appeal to the other of Freud’s conscious discourse, itself representing the metonymic procession of that human *desire* which, unlike need, is the desire not of an object, but the desire of the Other—that is to say essentially the same as the Hegelian desire for recognition where the object of desire serves the function of constituting a human rivalry—Freud is in fact addressing himself to the Other, locus of the signifier, in a symbolic interchange of an inarticulable unconscious desire. “Signorelli” has become part of the discourse of the Other, for after leaving his German acquaintance (an-other), Freud continues to address himself to that Other with a big O; as Lacan would put it “il parle à la cantonade,” he speaks to an Other in that other scene (*der andere Schauplatz*), as in the dream, where all monologues are inevitably dialogues.

Mute as the other half of Freud’s broken *parole* may be (his question is greeted with silence), his *demand* (his articulated conscious desire) contains its own unconscious reply: Botticelli? Boltraffio?—No. Signorelli. *Signor*—in other words: Death, Judgment, Hell, Heaven. The master in the painting is *der Herr Gott*, and the Son, the potential father, the little *Herr* (*Signorelli*), is at his right hand.

Thus, we are already far beyond the pleasure principle, and in 1898, for the intense desire to recover the repressed signifier produces intense unpleasure, and the economic equalization of this desire, the realization of the “principle of constancy,” brings Freud face to face, not simply with death—for the *image* of the Father and the Son remained constantly with him—but rather with what we realize is the meaning of (human) Being and consequently with the meaning of life as Being-for-death.

We have seen the characteristic over-determination of the repressed representation “*Herr*,” and have seen it linked it to “*Herz*” in Freud’s dream of the Etruscan grave, where both

fathers and sons (four bodies, instead of the two adult skeletons he actually saw at Orvieto) were represented and in which the décor was partly derived from Rider Haggard's *Heart of the World*. By itself, this correlation of *Herr* and *Herz* in *Herzogovina* may seem a little far-fetched, but the following instance of a *compulsion to repeat*¹⁵ will demonstrate its validity.

I quote the 1898 footnote (p. 296, note 1) in full:

“It would be a mistake to believe that the mechanism which I have brought to light in these pages only operates in rare cases. It is on the contrary a very common one. On one occasion, for instance, when I was meaning to describe the same small incident to a colleague of mine, the name of my authority for the stories about Bosnia [on ‘death and sexuality’] suddenly escaped me. The reason for this was as follows. Just before, I had been playing cards. My [Bosnian] authority was called Pick. Now ‘Pick’ and ‘Herz’ [‘Spades’ and ‘Hearts’] are two of the four suits in the pack. Moreover the two words were connected by an anecdote in which this same person pointed to himself and said: ‘I’m not called *Herz*, but *Pick*.’”

Clearly, Spades and Hearts offer an immediate association with the theme of death and sexuality, of Thanatos and Eros, of the death-instinct and the life-instinct. But this is not all. The note continues: “‘*Herz*’ appears in the name ‘*Herzogovina*’ and the heart itself, as a sick bodily organ, played a part in the thoughts I have described as having been repressed.” The reference is, of course, to Freud’s own heart condition, serious enough for real concern after 1894, and his refusal to give up the smoking that aggravated it, at a time when he fully expected to die in his forties from a rupture of the heart.¹⁶

¹⁵ In the process of analysis, says Freud, “we observe that the patient can go on spinning a thread of . . . associations, till he is brought up against some thought, the relation of which to what is repressed is so obvious that he is compelled to repeat his attempt at repression. Neurotic symptoms, too, must have fulfilled this same condition, for they are derivatives of the repressed, which has, by their means, finally won the access to consciousness which was previously denied to it” (“Repression,” *Standard Edition*, XIV, 150).

¹⁶ See: E. Jones, *Sigmund Freud*, Hogarth Press, London, 1953, vol. I, p. 339-342, and the following discussion of Freud’s unconscious hostility towards Fliess (and Breuer).

For Freud’s specific references to his heart trouble, which may have simply

Before going further into the representation of the structure of repression revealed in the Signorelli incident, a few theoretical remarks are necessary.

The essential theoretical positions on which this structural analysis is based are, briefly, the position that “sense-perceptions” are *meaningless* in themselves until they are assumed as *speech*, and that thought and speech are structurally identical. This is of course, only a development of Freud’s constant insistence that it is the *verbal* elaboration of the dream, not the dream-picture, nor the dream-thought, which counts. Thought, like speech, as Charles S. Peirce insisted, is in signs; there is no meaning to the concept of “unexpressed thought,” since without expression (interior or exterior), thought shares the essence of meaninglessness with perceptions, which in themselves do not function beyond the level of *signals*. Hegel was never closer to the truth than when he said that the rational is real and the real is rational; for without the *ratio*, there would be no real—even the indeterminacy in physics is a symbolic rationality. Language for him (and now, we realize, for us) is the “*Dasein des Geistes*.” The sign, the unity expressed by the structural representation $\frac{S}{s}$, is symbolic, and as such is dependent on the

glissement or transposition of the signifier (metonymy) for its signification. The signification of the signifier “S” will always be represented by the metaphor or metonymy “S^t” (another

signifier): $\frac{S^t}{S}$, or $\frac{S \rightarrow S^t}{s}$, etc., and the question of the status of

the *signified* (“s”) remains inevitably problematic, because *the signified is of a different order from the signifier*.

For no signifier can actually be tied to a signified in reality, although there is an existential necessity for the circulation of the signifiers to be “blocked” at some point, and related to the order of reality, since without this blocking or anchoring (Lacan’s “*point de capiton*”), the circulation of the signifiers

been a hysterical symptom, see the letter to Fliess on May 31, 1897 (Letter 64). The dream with which this is associated (sexual exhibitionism) is more fully reported in *Standard Edition*, IV, 238-240 and 247-248. The dream itself is associated with the old nurse who played such a large part in Freud’s own self-analysis. For his father’s heart-trouble, see letter 48.

could not make sense. In other words, since every signifier is defined by another signifier, the circulation would eventually return to the tautology of signifier A = signifier A, unless there is assumed to be a primordial "blocking" which becomes defined before the stage of the subject's insertion into the pre-existing linguistic code. For Lacan, this "*capitonnage*" is related to the function of the father, and specifically to the *Nom-du-Père*.

This is not the place to go into this extremely complex question, which is the key to Lacan's theory of psychosis. But it is worth noting that, in spite of Freud's apparent theoretical acceptance of what Wittgenstein calls the Augustinian theory of denomination or pointing as the origin of learning language (see the 1891 article on aphasia), as well as his "discovery" of the Saussurian concept of the "acoustic image" a decade before Saussure, *in practice*, he simply refused any primacy to the theory of denomination as the support of "symbolism."¹⁷ It is difficult to see how so many popular accounts of Freud by qualified medical men could assume that the theory of symbolism consists only in the simplistic equation of the *picture* and the *word* with the *thing* (or, in Lacan's terminology, the equation of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real). The Symbolic, in becoming Imaginary, must retrace its path into the subject's *parole* before its personal linguistic symbolism can be revealed. And if visual symbolism still retains its force, it is because we are related to the other and to the world through the Imaginary domain of the ego, the primary domain of *perception* which is genetically anterior to the possibility of *sub-*

¹⁷ Two excellent examples from Freud out of the many that could be cited are (a) the one-word dream "*kanal*" analysed in *Standard Edition*, V, 517, note 1, where both the "literal" and the conceptual significance are involved ("Channel"—"*Pas de Calais*"—"Du sublime au ridicule il n'y a qu'un pas"), and where this one word is the transference nucleus of the dream; and (b) the analysis in the article on fetishism of the *real* displacement of the signifier, where "*ein Glanz auf der Nase*," consciously interpreted and activated by the subject as "a shine on the nose" ("*Glanz*" means "shine" and it could be *glans*) turned out to be a repressed residue of the subject's forgotten mother-tongue, English, so that the unconsciously-determined "meaning" of "*Glanz*" was its homonym "glance." (*Standard Edition*, XXI, 152.) These examples have been commented on by Lacan. The "*licorne*" dream is, of course, very similar to Alexander the Great's "satyr" dream (*σά τρύπος*: "Tyre is thine") reported by Freud in *Standard Edition*, IV, 99, note 1, where he comments that "it is impossible as a rule to translate a dream into a foreign language."

jects (in the plural), whereas the *Kern unseres Wesen*, the Subject (*ES*), is related (unconsciously) to the Other through the Symbolic.

One does not have to offer excuses for citing contradictory material from Freud, but the apparent contradiction between his views on language and linguistic structures as being structures belonging to the conscious and pre-conscious secondary process, and his remark that he proposes to regard condensation and displacement as distinguishing marks of the *primary* psychical process,¹⁸ cease to be a contradiction if they are assimilated into the distinction he makes between the word-presentation and the thing-presentation. For Freud, the “language of the unconscious” appears consciously in schizophrenia:

“In schizophrenia *words* are subject to the same process as that which makes the dream-images out of latent dream-thoughts—They undergo condensation, and by means of displacement transfer their cathexes to one another in their entirety. The process may go so far that a single word, if it is especially suitable on account of its numerous connections, takes over the representation of a whole train of thought.”¹⁹

This is an apparent further contradiction with the concept of the unconscious as a primary process involving “unattached” libidinal energy, whereas in fact it is precisely through the unconscious “instinctual representatives” that the libidinal energy becomes “attached” and consequently capable of conscious or unconscious “expression.” And Freud adds a note to the remarks on schizophrenia which further clarifies the sense of the “language of the unconscious.” “The dream-work, too,” he says, “occasionally treats words like things, and so creates very similar ‘schizophrenic’ utterances or neologisms.” In the “Metapsychology of Dreams,” written in 1915, he makes the crucial distinction between dream-language and psychotic language as follows:

“In [schizophrenia], what becomes the subject of modification by the primary process are *the words themselves* in

¹⁸ “The Unconscious,” *Standard Edition*, XIV, 186; Leclaire and Laplanche, p. 107.

¹⁹ *Standard Edition*, XIV, 199; Leclaire and Laplanche, p. 109. The last sentence quoted is of especial significance here.

which the pre-conscious thought was expressed; in dreams, what are subject to this modification are not the words, but *the thing-presentations to which the words have been taken back*. In dreams there is a topographical regression; in schizophrenia there is not."

He goes on to say that in the psychoanalytic work of dream-interpretation, this difference is not so obvious, for, since the interpretation follows the paths from the latent thoughts to the elements of the dream, since it "reveals the way in which verbal ambiguities have been exploited, and points out the verbal bridges between different groups of material," we get the impression now of schizophrenia, now of a joke, "and are apt to forget that for a dream *all operations with words are no more than a preparation for a regression to things*." Thus the condensation and displacement revealed by the thing-presentation in the dream (e.g. *la licorne*, the satyr) is a result of a previous condensation and displacement within the word-presentation in the dream-thoughts. The regression to perception carries this mechanism back to the image, and the verbal elaboration of the dream restores it to the subject's Word.

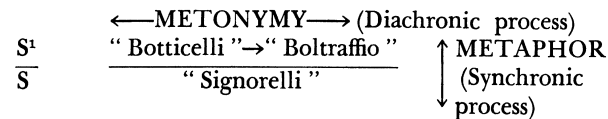
"The completion of a dream process," Freud continues, "consists in the thought-content—regressively transformed and worked over into a wishful phantasy—becoming conscious as a sense-perception; while this is happening, it undergoes secondary revision, to which every perceptual concept is subject" (XIV, 229, my italics). Thus the dream-wish is *hallucinated*. But this is precisely the operation we have observed in the case of "Signorelli," itself the regressive transformation of a thought content. What could not appear in consciousness as a word, appeared as a hallucinatory sense-perception, the "ultra-clear" image of Signorelli. And Signorelli, both in perception and in verbal representation, represented the theme of death and judgment, with its inevitable link to sexuality through the theme of the Father in the painting and the "*Herr*" in speech. For the Father is the figure of the Law, and the primordial law, as anthropology reveals, appears to be the prohibition of incest, almost invariably a prohibition connected with the mother.

The perception of Signorelli's face, in itself, is meaningless *until it is misrepresented as "Botticelli" and "Boltraffio."*

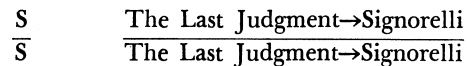
Only after this distortion *in the text* (the discourse) has taken place is it possible to comprehend the significance of "Signorelli," and this significance does not depend in any way on the theory of visual symbolism, where "Botticelli" and "Boltraffio" should theoretically be associable directly with a "thing" (and surely there is no more obvious denominator than a proper name). These two words, which amount to the conscious "dream-text," cannot be associated with anything except on the assumption that the linguistic structures of metaphor and metonymy do in fact operate in the unconscious (in the primary process), or in other words, that the unconscious is structured like a language.

However, the image of Signorelli is not the *sense* or meaning of the *letter* "Botticelli," for "Signorelli" is itself a metaphor or condensation, the unconscious correlative of a symbolic process. Signorelli is not the "thing," but the thing-presentation. And the ineffable "thing itself" to which Signorelli is attached as a representative, is the death-instinct. Thus, the symbolic representation "Signorelli" (along with the condensation of the associations within it) is indeed metaphorically related to the imaginary representation Signorelli, and it is through this mechanism that "Signorelli" becomes attached to the death-instinct, mediated by the thing-presentation of the image of Signorelli.

The symbolic relationship between the conscious and the repressed can be represented as follows:



The imaginary relationship, where the signifier and the signified are *identical* to each other, since the intentionality of the Word has not lent sense to the perception, is consequently:



There is evidently a visual displacement of the theme of the fresco to the image of Signorelli (which is a visual conden-

sation of that theme) and the fact that this displacement did occur is confirmed by Freud's remarks in "Constructions in Analysis" (XXIII, 266) on the subject of the "ultra-clear" recollections of his patients—some forty years after the Signorelli incident—where he alludes to that incident and to the discussion of the image in the note to the 1901 account, and where he employs the same adjective: *überdeutlich*, leaving us free to interpret the image of Signorelli as a screen-memory.

Using the Lacanian schematic representation, Leclaire and Laplanche elaborate the process involved in repression as follows:

"Let us recall here the schematic representation which Lacan gives of the metaphor in linguistic symbolization.

"It consists in the substitution, in a relationship between the signifier and the signified ($\frac{S}{s}$), of a new signifier

'S¹' employed as the signifier of the original signifier 'S' which, by this substitution, falls to the level of the signified:

"According to the algebraic formulation [used by Lacan]:²⁰

$$\frac{S^1}{S} \times \frac{S}{s} \longrightarrow S^1 \times \frac{I}{s}$$

"Apparently something very simple has happened, there has been a change of name: this signified 's,' which I first of all called 'S' is now connoted by 'S¹.'

"But it can also be seen, and this is what interests us, that something has fallen 'below stage,' [has been] 'simplified' in the algebraic sense of the term: the original signifier. *It is in so far as the fate of this signifier 'S' is distinct from a pure and simple suppression [Unterdrückung] that the metaphor offers poetic resources, resources creative of sense, as opposed to simple 'name-definition':* 'The metaphor must be defined by the implantation, in the same signifying chain, of another signifier by which

²⁰ Author's note: We are using here one of the formulations given by J. Lacan, that he used in his article on psychosis ["D'une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de psychose"]. *La Psychanalyse*, IV [1958], p. 25.

the signifier it supplants falls to the level of the signified, and, as a latent signifier, perpetuates at that level the interval where another signifying chain can be grafted on to it.’²¹

“What has happened to the signifier ‘S’? It has fallen to the level of the signified, but, at the same time, to the level of a latent signifier; in such a way that, as we see it, we shall write the formulation of this process as follows:

$$\frac{S^1}{S} \times \frac{S}{s} \longrightarrow \frac{\frac{S^1}{s}}{\frac{S}{S}} \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{[CS. (PCS)]} \\ \text{[UCS.]} \end{array}$$

“What we see in our formulation is nothing other than the *actual schematization of repression*, in which there is conserved on another line, that which in the pre-conscious discourse has been apparently ‘simplified’” (p. 113-114).

Although the algebraic operations employed in this formulation seem to bear no relation to what is actually involved—and it is difficult to see why the authors bother with the so-called “algebra” at all, since the 1 of $\frac{1}{4}$ is not the signifier of 4, and since the clinical and theoretical material does not require the performance of these operations—the essential features of this schematization are: (a) that it represents the two chains of signifiers, the conscious and the unconscious, in the metaphoric

relation of signifier to signifier ($\frac{S^1}{S}$), (b) that each chain is separated into a signifying and signified chain (but not in precisely the same way).

The authors go on to justify the schematization theoretically, and thence to apply it clinically to the “unicorn” dream. I cannot reproduce here their lengthy exposition, only their conclusion. They summarize:

²¹ Authors’ note: J. Lacan [“A la mémoire d’Ernest Jones: Sur sa théorie du symbolisme”], *La Psychanalyse*, V [1959], p. 12.

“. . . At the level of preconscious language the distinction between the signifier (words) and the signified (‘ images ’) exists. At the level of the unconscious language, there are only images, at one and the same time performing the function of signifiers and signifieds. In one sense, it can be said that the unconscious chain is pure sense [*sens*], but it can be just as readily said that it is pure signifier, pure non-sense, or open to all senses.

“ It is indisputably because this unconscious signifying chain exists that preconscious language entails a certain fixity of significations, a certain *capitonnage* which characterizes the secondary process. . . . ”

In the case of the unconscious chain of signifiers “ the possibility of ‘ all senses ’ is produced as a result of the actual identity of the signifier and the signified.” This is not to say that the *glissement* of the signifier over the signified does not occur in some fashion in the unconscious chain: “ what slides [*glisse*], here, what is displaced, let us say that it is the pulsional energy, in a pure and non-specified state ” (p. 117) .

The creation of this unconscious chain, but not the mythical origin of the unconscious—which is dependent on the process of pure differentiation—depends on the *primal repression* (the primal metaphoric passage) which provides the essential “ anchoring ” or *capitonnage* upon which the subject is dependent for his personal assumption of the language. The primal repression in fact presupposes an earlier “ mythical ” state, for the object of the primal repression can never become conscious, moreover, it never was “ conscious.”

It is precisely this anchoring which is lacking in psychotic language, whose characteristic feature is the uncontrollable shifting between opposites, none of them anchored at any point, so that the speech of the psychotic is, in the extreme case, completely incomprehensible. The primal repression—Lacan’s “ paternal metaphor ”—has miscarried; the *Verwerfung* (Lacan) of the function of the father leaves the psychotic subject at the mercy of the pure differentiation of the binary opposition at the origin of the unconscious, and as such he is reduced to treating words like things on the basis of oppositions like that of the perception of externality and internality, the action of

expulsion and introjection, used by Freud as the basis of the original differentiation of the primary *Ich* from what it discovers to be alien to it.²²

To return to the image of Signorelli and to the question of its appearance in consciousness in the place of the repressed signifier: Freud elucidates the notion of repression as follows:

“. . . It is not even correct to suppose that repression withholds from the conscious *all* the derivatives of what was primally repressed. If these derivatives have become sufficiently far removed from the repressed representative, whether owing to the adoption of distortions [*Entstellungen*] or by reason of the number of intermediate links inserted, they have free access to the conscious. . . . “It is not the repression itself which produces substitutive formations and symptoms, . . . these latter are indications of a *return of the repressed*.”²³

Thus the symptom “Botticelli” indicates the return of the repressed theme of “death and sexuality” (as Freud notes, the repression had missed its mark), which can be represented as $\frac{S^1}{s}$ or $\frac{\text{“Botticelli”}}{\text{Death and Sexuality}}$. “Death and sexuality” is the signified Imaginary scene, the conscious memory of the fresco at Orvieto, the scene of death, of the grave, of the *Last Judgment*, and of its associations with sexuality.

Another piece of information relating to Freud’s personal life and his self-analysis must be intercalated here, in order to consolidate the last link in the chain, but the information is so scanty at this point that the consolidation must remain conjectural. The first parapraxis mentioned by Freud is that of the name “Mosen,” which he reported to Fliess in Letter 94 on August 26, 1898, a few weeks before the Signorelli incident (itself reported to Fliess in Letter 96 on September 22).

“[The forgetting of a name] happened to me not long ago, over the name of the poet who wrote *Andreas Hofer*. . . . I felt it must be something ending in *au*—Lindau,

²² See: Freud, “Die Verneinung,” (1925) *Standard Edition*, XIX, 235-239 and the references in note 11.

²³ “Repression” (1915), *Standard Edition*, XIV, 149, 154.

Seldau or the like. Actually of course the poet's name was Julius Mosen; the 'Julius' had not slipped my memory. I was able to prove (i) that I had repressed the name Mosen because of certain associations; (ii) that material from my infancy played a part in the repression; and (iii) that the substitute names that occurred to me arose, just like a symptom, from both groups of material. The analysis resolved the thing completely; unfortunately, I cannot make it public any more than my big dream. . . ."

The significance of Mosen is possibly beyond investigation, but that of the ending *au* is not. It was on the move to Leipzig in 1859 that Freud first saw gas-jets, as the train passed through *Breslau*, and he described them significantly as "like souls burning in hell."²⁴ It was at Breslau that he had met with Fliess for the "Congress" of December 1897, where Fliess first proposed the theory of bisexuality to him, the subject of their later estrangement. As it happens, it was on the journey from Leipzig to Vienna in 1860, that Freud "must have had" (as he puts it) the occasion to see his mother naked—he related his remembrance of this event to Fliess on October 10, 1897.²⁵ But what is of crucial importance is that in this remembrance, he *confused* the two train journeys by reporting the second, when he was four years old, as having taken place when he was two and a half, which was his approximate age at the time of the first. Thus the name Breslau became intimately linked, in the extra-temporality of remembrance, to an illusion-shattering vision on a train. The letters of early 1898 are full of references to Breslau, as a result of the December 1897 meet-

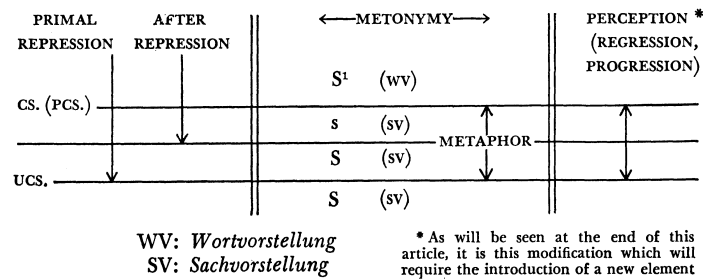
²⁴ Letter 77 (December 3, 1897): "Breslau plays a part in my childhood memories. At the age of three I passed through the station when we moved from Freiberg to Leipzig, and the gas jets, which were the first I had seen, reminded me of souls burning in hell. I know something of the context here. The anxiety about travel which I have had to overcome is also bound up with it."

Jones states (I, p. 14) that this first journey "dates" the beginning of Freud's railway phobia (especially strong during the period 1887-1899), which is not what Freud says, and adds an obscure remark about Freud's fear of losing his mother's breast. It wasn't a breast he was afraid of losing; moreover, the original "date" is irrelevant in respect to the later resubjectification of the event or phantasy.

²⁵ Letter 70. This whole letter is of especial interest to the theme of this essay, particularly Freud's remarks about his father, ending: "I projected [*gerichtet*] on to him an analogy [*Analogieschluss*] from myself," and the evocation of God and hell (in reference to the old nurse) which immediately precedes the passage about seeing his mother "*nudam*."

ing there with Fliess, including that in which the dream about his appointment as "Herr Professor" is related to his mother and his nurse (January 9, 1898). What makes the name ending in "-au" even more significant for the determination of the Signorelli incident, is that his partner in the conversation on death, sexuality, and Orvieto was a certain Herr Freyhau.

In attempting to collect the preceding representations of the repression of "Signorelli," the representation I shall use (slightly modified from Leclair and Laplanche) is as follows:



It must be emphasized that the simplified representation to be given includes all the preceding analyses and schematizations, but to include these here would result in an impossibly complicated diagram. In what follows, "Botticelli," "Boltraffio," and "Signorelli" represent the linguistic condensations previously explained. 'Signorelli' represents the pictorial condensation resulting from these linguistic operations. 'Death and Sexuality' represent the *real* and *imaginary* lived associations of death, judgment, incest, and castration. "Herr" represents the theme of the verbal and conceptual associations with mastery and paternity, indeed with the Father himself, and *Herr*, the image of the master. Eros and Thanatos stand for the "instinctual representatives" (*Triebrepräsenz*) of the life and death instincts (sexual and ego instincts), *one* of which is the image of Signorelli, the operative image in this case.

But one more series of links with the castration complex, obviously dependent on the signifier of signifiers, the phallus, must first be made. The death instinct (ego-instinct) is that which supports the network of the desire for castration common

in neurotic dreams (Leclaire and Laplanche). This desire was represented in the wish-fulfilment of Freud's dream of dismembering his own body, aided by the Louise N. to whom he had lent Rider Haggard's *She*, "the eternal feminine" as he described it. He saw the dissected lower part of his body, pelvis and legs, "without noticing," he says, "their absence in myself."

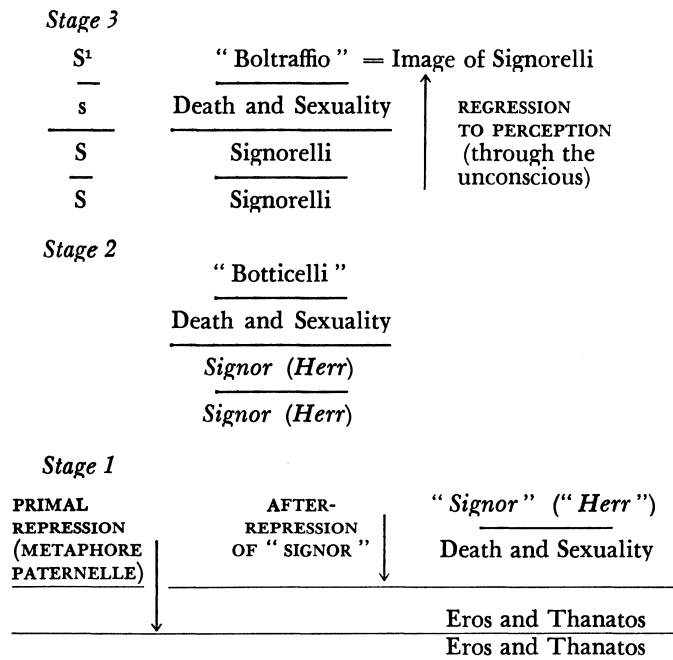
"The pelvis had been eviscerated, and it was visible now in its *superior*, now in its *inferior*, aspect, the two being mixed together. Thick flesh-coloured protuberances (which, in the dream itself, made me think of haemorrhoids) could be seen. *Something which lay over it* and was crumpled like silver paper ('stanniol'), had also to be carefully fished out."

The chasm (*Abgrund*) which had to be crossed for Freud to enter the window—"at this point I really became frightened [*Angst*] about my legs"—the female guide who carried him—"out of consideration for my legs"—and the final theme of the Etruscan grave²⁶ represent a persuasive analogy with the castration dream analysed by Leclaire and Laplanche. The missing associations of the dreamer, of course make the correlation especially difficult, but the coupled theme of anguish and astonishment in Freud's dream would seem to confirm the desire to lose the signifier, especially when related to the reported words of the Turkish patient to his doctor: "*Herr*, you must know that if *that* comes to an end then life is of no value" and to the incident that Freud had heard about at Trafoi. Moreover, this dream is also a travelling dream (in which Freud passes through a house *as if it were a railway station*), and the journey is one of constant anxiety for Freud.

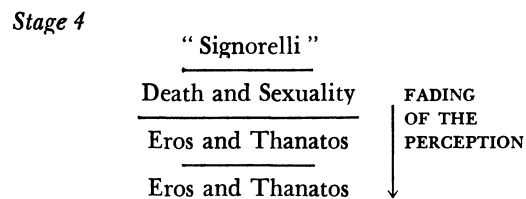
The process of repression in the Signorelli incident can be diagrammatically decomposed into its constituent parts, starting from the final stage and returning to the theoretically necessary supposition of the situation at an infinitesimal moment before Freud sought the signifier "Signorelli" in his pre-conscious memory. The signifier "Signorelli" never actually appears;

²⁶ *Standard Edition*, V, 452-454. The apparently contradictory attitude of fear of castration and desire for castration finds its counterpart in Freud's attitude to Fliess, where the apparent passivity of the slave masks an active struggle for mastery.

it was unavailable to consciousness; via the unconscious it has regressed to an image.



It is further possible to represent Stage 4, the final stage, after the return of "Signorelli":



This return of the repressed signifier represents Freud's return to mastery of the signifier, at least in this one instance, and consequently to mastery of death and castration in so far as

this mastery is ever possible for the human subject. For it was not long afterwards, Freud implies, that he lost the signifier "*Pick*," as a result of its relation to "*Herz*."

The significance of the return of the repressed "Signorelli" lies not in its passage into consciousness as if by some mysterious elevator out of the depths (Lacan), but in its return to the subject's discourse. Its repression represented the substance of Freud's wish, which was both fulfilled (by the absence of "Signorelli") and thwarted (by the continuing presence of death and sexuality): hence the "inner torment" of the search for "Signorelli," represented by the detachment of the substituted signifiers from their objects. The word returned to him literally from the discourse of the Other, and it can undoubtedly be supposed that the dialectical relationship with the man in the carriage had some further unknown determining effect, apart from the probable significance of his name, a transferential effect. In the absence of Signorelli, the affect remained as *Angst*; the *Vorstellung* had undergone repression. Upon the return of "Signorelli" and its assumption into the discourse, the affect was relieved, at least temporarily, and "Signorelli" returned to all the innocuousness of its function as the name of an Italian painter. With this, the image vanished like a ghost which had been laid.²⁷

Freud's *Angst* over the absence of "Signorelli" gapes like an abyss before him as it did in the dream (should we wonder that Sartre's description of *Angst* repeats this image?), and the return of "Signorelli," which, like the *Verneinung*, is in Freud's own words the *Aufhebung* ("lifting" and "conserving") of the repression, the return of mastery over the repressed, is the means of bridging that *béance*. For the image of the master-painter faded away, but with the restitution of the absent "Signorelli," Freud recovered another, never fully commented, repressed presentation (III, 291). Whereas in the repression

²⁷ Cf. Freud on the "conjuring" of images by the "pressure technique," *Standard Edition*, II, 280-281, where the patient gets rid of the picture by putting it into words.

A final note from the 1901 account (p. 13, note 1): "I am not entirely convinced of the absence of any internal connection between the two groups of thoughts in the Signorelli case. After all, if the repressed thoughts on the topic of death and sexual life are carefully followed up, one will be brought face to face with an idea that is by no means remote from the topic of the frescoes at Orvieto."

of “Mosen” in the first parapraxis (where the paramneses ended in “au,”), he had retained the first name “Julius,” it was not until “Signorelli” was supplied to him by an Italian stranger that he remembered the painter’s Christian name:²⁸ Luca, *λύκη*, light—the lights of Breslau, “like souls burning in hell” at Orvieto.

Lack of space prevents further examination of the seemingly inexhaustible implications of the repression of “Signorelli,” but the topic cannot be left at this point without an essential correction to the schematization employed to represent the mechanism involved, a correction necessitated by the fact that the topographical regression in the dream is described by Freud as “*through* the unconscious to perception” (rather than “in the unconscious”), and by the fact that in the case of Signorelli we have an extra element (the image), which will allow us to reinstate the missing unconscious subject.

Since we are dealing with a *discourse*, that is to say with a chain of signifiers of which only *one moment* is represented by the symbols “S” and “S¹,” we cannot avoid being brought up against the problem of the status of the subject. A subject speaks the discourse: but where is the subject of the discourse? Sooner or later the discourse will designate the subject—but always by what Jespersen called a “shifter” (I, me, etc.)—and the “shifter” does not *signify* the subject, but only *designates* him in a polar relation to another in reference to the discourse being emitted. The subject signifies, but he is not a signifier. The subject is rather something “rejected” from the signifying chain, while still subordinated to the signifier.

The question in any discourse whatsoever, is therefore to know who is designated by the “I,” or in other words, to know *who is speaking and from what place*. Is it the *ego*, that Imaginary alienation of the original subject (as Freud’s remarks on narcissism make very clear)? Or is it the unconscious subject (*Es*): what Lacan calls the subject barred from consciousness, the barred subject (\$) ?

It certainly was not a conscious subject who said “Botticelli,” for it is perfectly obvious that Freud had no conscious control

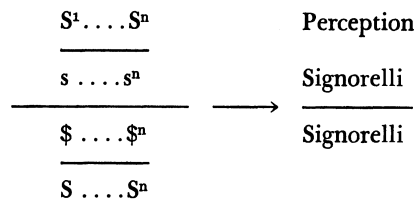
²⁸ Cf. Letter 96: “Eventually I found out the name, Signorelli, and the fact that I then at once remembered the Christian name, Luca, showed that repression was at work and not true forgetfulness.” The question remains as to why this should be so.

whatsoever over this utterance. For a man of his culture and genius it is even incredible that he could have made such a "mistake." Moreover what was really said was "Signorelli," but a transposed or distorted "Signorelli," a "Signorelli" spoken by the unconscious subject and distorted by the censorship.

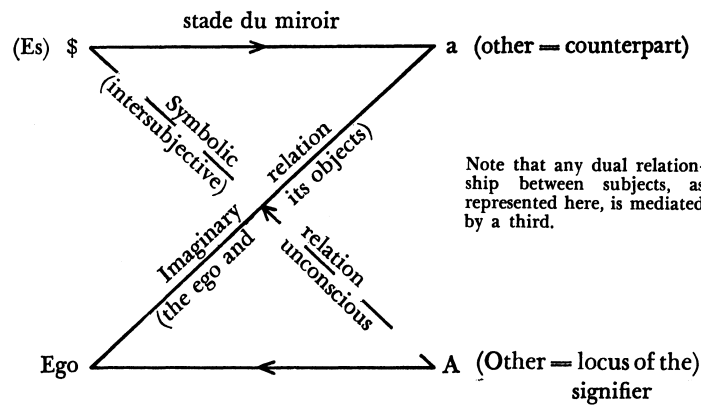
Consequently, when the chain of signifiers comes to enunciate the shifter "I," since the conscious and unconscious sub-

ject are in the relation of $\frac{S^1}{\$}$, the representation is as follows,

with the image of Signorelli properly separated from the unconscious subject:



This representation (of a moment in the discourse) can be immediately related to the representation of the double subject in the four-way relation of intersubjectivity given in Lacan's "Schéma L" (see the notes to the translation of the *Discours de Rome*), the early development of which I shall summarize as follows:



The Imaginary axis (other-ego) of the constitution of the “self” as a result of the alienating identification of the *stade du miroir* (primary narcissism) is anterior to the possibility of the subject as such, since human subjectivity is dependent upon the insertion of the *infans* into the pre-existing symbolic code of language through the appeal to the Other. The function (or the effect) of the Other is to permit the advent of humanity to the human subject through the *desire* expressed (but not articulated as such) by symbolic (linguistic) communication—*for without speech the subject is unthinkable*. The Other controls the signifier at the origin, and at the same time defines the child in relation to the presence or absence of the signifier of signifiers, the phallus—which is the same thing as saying that animals neither speak (they signal), nor desire (they play), nor suffer the incest prohibition, nor live through the castration complex.

But, when Freud comes to designate himself in his discourse on “Signorelli,” it is not the shifter “I” which we shall ask to tell us who is speaking, but rather its polar opposite. For when Freud unconsciously names the Other (“Signor”) by his very inability to consciously name the other (“Signorelli”), it is *himself* he constitutes (or nominates) in that relation. The Other *must* be absent for his symbolic presence to mediate the intersubjective relation with the other. And by naming the *Herr*, Freud did not nominate himself (in the sense that he believed himself to be Sigmund Freud), but rather he named one unconscious subject with whom he had identified himself in a particular relation: Jacob Freud. No doubt that, as with Luca Signorelli, the key to the repression revolves around the Christian name. The Father of fathers, as Freud said himself, is the dead Father (in another context one might call him the *Dieu caché*). The barred subject is *Signor (Herr)*, and whereas for *Sigmund* Freud both his father and the God of Abraham and Isaac had long been dead, the new master, the new father, was still alive. And *only* alive in so far as Freud’s relation with him and with his (Freud’s) alienated “self” was constituted by a reciprocal desire for the death of the other, and consequently for the death of his doubled self, Freud the father.

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