

Interpretation, *Semblant*, and *Sinthome*

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The movement of Lacan's teaching leads from the prevalence of the symbolic to the orientation towards the real outside-of-sense [*hors-sens*]. Jacques-Alain Miller has been unfolding this movement in his Course for several years and he always questions further what consequences we have to draw from this final teaching of Lacan. The binomial "*semblants* and *sinthome*" arises from the field of aporias and questions of this final teaching, which is constructed on the incompatibility of the real and of sense, or of the real and the true, or, again, of *jouissance* and sense. This binomial causes the burning question that Lacan posed in 1977 in his XXIVth *Séminaire* – which I designate here by a short cut, "*L'une-bévue*" [the one-blunder] – to resonate: How can psychoanalysis operate, as a practice of sense or meaning, on what is excluded from it? I cite this passage from the lesson of March 8th, 1977:

(...) starting with the idea that there is no real except that which excludes any form of sense is exactly the opposite of our practice, because our practice swims in the idea that not only nouns, but simply words, have a scope [*portée*]. I do not see how to explain this. If the *nomina* do not hold to things in any way at all, how is psychoanalysis possible? Psychoanalysis would in a certain way be a put-on, I mean something of the *semblant*.¹

It is in relation to "the idea of the real itself [which] involves the exclusion of any sense" that psychoanalysis is "of the *semblant*."² One might be tempted to hear in this: it "is *only* of the *semblant*," with a depreciative note. But Lacan says this with a certain prudence; he uses the conditional ("would in a certain way be...") and he qualifies this idea as "extreme": "I am quite irritated at having entertained this kind of extreme with you today. In any case, this will have to take another form [*tournure*]. In fact, starting with the idea...."

The last lesson of the seminar ends with the same qualification of “extreme.” Lacan, once more, poses the question of how psychoanalysis operates; “how does it happen that it constitutes a practice that is efficacious even some of the time?” He refers, then, to the invention of a “new signifier”; another kind of signifier, which, unlike the signifier producing effects of sense ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$),” would be a signifier “which, like the real, would not have any kind of sense”:

A new signifier which would not have any kind of sense would, perhaps, open us to what, in my clumsy words, I call the real. Why would one not try to formulate a signifier which, contrary to the usage that one currently makes of it, would have an effect?

All this has an extreme character. It is not without scope that I am introduced to it by psychoanalysis. Scope [*portée*] means *sense* [*sens*], it has no other effect [*incidence*]. We always remain stuck to sense. How is it that we have not yet pushed things so far as to test what would be yielded by forging a signifier that would be other?³

One recognizes the same statement as in his *Écrit* on Joyce, except that in the place of the term the “real,” there we find “symptom.” This symptom, of which Joyce gives us the abstraction, is, like the real, “unintelligible”; Lacan says it is “de-subscribed from the unconscious” and it is “unanalysable.”⁴ The “*jouissance* proper to the symptom,” to which Joyce testifies, is an “opaque *jouissance*, excluding sense.”⁵ In relation to this *jouissance*, in its absolute value, analysis can only take recourse to sense and, thus, make itself “the dupe of the father”:

There is no awakening except through this *jouissance* which is devalorized insofar as analysis, taking recourse to sense in order to resolve it, has no other chance of succeeding than by making itself the dupe...of the father as I have indicated.⁶

A Saying [dire] that has some Effects: Interpretation

Even while posing this “exclusion” of sense and of the real or of *jouissance* as an absolute, “extreme” principle, Lacan maintains and repeats in his final teaching that words have a scope. In November of 1977, in initiating *The Moment of Concluding*, he reminds us of this again, almost in the form of a reprimand: the analyst would have to “know how to operate suitably, that is to say, he would have to understand the scope of the words [*mots*] for his analysand – of which, incontestably, he is unaware.”⁷ Analysis ought to arrive “at undoing by speech [*parole*] what has been done by speech.” Interpretation is, thus, at the heart of the problem of the analytic operation and of this contradiction between the exclusion of sense and the scope of the words. “Some words have a scope and others do not. This is what one calls interpretation,” he said at Nice in 1975. Interpretation is a “saying which has some effects,” which goes “farther than the simple chatter to which a subject is invited,” that is to say, which has “a power of modification.”⁸ Under what conditions does this interpretive saying have this power? And on what does it bear? What can it modify?

By proposing the binomial “*semblants* and *sinthome*,” Jacques-Alain Miller invites us not to be paralyzed before the impossible relationship of sense and *jouissance*, but, rather, “to articulate a dialectic of sense and *jouissance* in the analytic experience and to bring out in our work the *edge of the semblant* that situates the knot of *jouissance*. Not to erase the semblant, but to recuperate it.”⁹ In taking support from these recent Courses and in starting principally with the “last Lacan,” I propose some paths for exploring interpretation and *sinthome*, their definitions, their relations. This ought to clarify the “edge of the *semblant*” and, perhaps, to problematize the binomial “*semblants* and *sinthome*,” which I have, up until now, superimposed on the other binomials of Lacan’s last teaching, which have become a little more familiar.

From the Other to the One

Interpretation and symptom are concepts that are modified in the course of Lacan’s teaching, in parallel with those of the subject, of language, and of the unconscious. In

order to situate them, I am keeping in mind the perspective that Jacques-Alain Miller has traced for a number of years in showing how Lacan explores different articulations from two heterogeneous dimensions, present from the start in Freud: the unconscious structured like a language and the slope of the drive [*le versant pulsionnel*]. After having first placed the drive on the imaginary side, in opposition to the symbolic, Lacan “significantizes” it by way of the concepts of phallus and desire.¹⁰ Then he introduces with the object *a* an element heterogeneous to the signifier, but, if this element is at first very much incarnated,¹¹ it is afterwards taken up again in the signifying logic of discourse and becomes a “logical consistency,” then a “*semblant*.” This true reversal of perspective is produced with *Seminar XX, Encore*, where the function of the signifier is completely subverted: conceived up until then as producing effects of the signified and of mortification, it now has some effects of *jouissance*. “There where that speaks, that enjoys [*Là où ça parle, ça jouit*].” The concept of language finds itself, based on this, devalORIZED to the profit of *lalangue*. The definition from *Encore*, “language is a lucubration of knowledge about *lalangue*,” is declined in diverse ways in Lacan’s final teaching and the concept of *lalangue* is at the forefront there.

This is the case, for example, in the conferences of 1975, at Geneva, at Nice, and in the United States.¹² It is no longer a question of “abstract language [*langage*],” as structure, but of the very particular language [*langue*] that a subject, also particular, receives, is “impregnated” by. It is no longer “theoretical language,” language as an instrument of communication; it is “*lalangue* which has been spoken and also heard by someone or other in its particularity.” It is the signifier taken in its sonority and its materiality – from which comes the neologism “*mot [word]térieur-isme*,” which constitutes the substance of the unconscious. The unconscious is constituted by marks left by “the encounter of these words with the body,” particular marks, since they carry the trace of the desire of the parents. Let us note here, already, that this definition of *lalangue* goes together with a redefinition of the symptom. Lacan defines it in “R.S.I.” as “that which of the unconscious is translated by a letter.” In Nice, he makes it clear that these marks are the trace

of a missed encounter of two speaking beings: “The symptom is the inscription, at the level of the real, of this projection of the unconscious” – he utilizes the image of the projectile that holes, that riddles a surface; “the symptom is the inscription of this riddling of the speaking being with the desire of two conjoined people.”¹³ It is in this context that he will say, also, that the symptom is “what for many people is the most real [thing] that they have.”¹⁴

One can only stress, as J.-A Miller has done,¹⁵ that Lacan puts the accent on the elementary unities which precede any S_1 – S_2 articulation. The whole conceptual renewal of this last teaching is clarified by this: *lalangue*, speaking being [*parlêtre*], *sinthome*, a-blunder [*une-bévue*], are so many of the concepts that are substituted for those of language, subject, symptom, and the unconscious by this displacement of the accent on the Other toward the One; on the prevalence of the structure $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ toward the falling-short-of [sense] [*l'en deçà*] the materiality of the “all alone; on the connection, which induces sense, to the disconnection S_1 – S_2 , which abolishes the effect of sense. These important shifts do not leave the concept of interpretation unharmed. J.-A. Miller remarks at the beginning of his course “The flight of sense” that in the classical doctrine, interpretation is like a fish in the water; the subject being defined as an effect of the signifier, one easily understands what is at work: “in touching on the signifier, in handling the signifier, one should obtain a transformation of (...) its subjective effect.” But he adds, “interpretation becomes one of the most problematic of concepts as soon (...) as the mode of enjoying [*jouir*] is installed at the heart of the analytic experience.”¹⁶ To use a recurrent expression of Lacan’s, “interpretation with *jouissance* is like a fish with an apple!” [*l’interprétation est embarrassée de la jouissance comme un poisson d’une pomme !*]. Is interpretation still an adequate term when it is no longer a deciphering, an application of the structure S_1 – S_2 , relay of the formations of the unconscious? What is interpretation when the point of departure is no longer language, but *lalangue*, when what is aimed for is no longer the revelation of unconscious truth or of the sense of symptoms, but the kernel of *jouissance* included in the fantasy, the *sin-*

thome as a singular mode of enjoying? We need a new word to designate this “post-interpretive practice,” he seems to suggest by his repeated questions on this subject in those last years; for, in fact, “interpretation will never again be what it was. The age of interpretation, the age when Freud upset the universal discourse by interpretation, is closed (...) What Lacan continues to call ‘interpretation’ is no longer that.”¹⁷ Before examining the paths he proposes to us, I would like to outline, without being exhaustive, some of the successive routes Lacan took to answering his question “how does this work?” and what was interpretation at these different moments?

Scansions in Lacan’s Teaching

The beginning of his teaching, marked by the domination of the symbolic, affirms the power of language. Interpretation by “semantic resonance” (in “Function and field...”) or by metonymic “allusion” (“Direction of the treatment”) permits the revelation of unconscious truth; it is a “delivery of the imprisoned sense” of the symptom (“Function and field...”) or points toward desire (“Direction”).¹⁸ To interpret is essentially to work with a signifier on the signifier¹⁹ and to aim in this way for what escapes the signifier. All the while using the signifying articulation’s powers of production of sense that are metaphor and metonymy, interpretation, like the raised finger of Saint John, indicates an inarticulable point: the confession of desire bumps up against “the incompatibility of desire with the word [*parole*].”²⁰

The object *a*, this element which is heterogeneous to the imaginary and to the symbolic, and of which linguistics is unaware, will then be what is at stake. In 1972, in “L’Étourdit,” the formulation “interpretation must bear on the cause of desire” is taken up again in a context where Lacan believes that logic is “a science of the real” – an axiom he will renounce a little later, as J.-A. Miller indicates in his presentation of the theme of the Congress: “Lacan’s last teaching advances toward: *there is no science of the real.*”²¹ In “L’Étourdit,” the real is defined as “impossible,” as “what does not cease not writing itself”; this is the real proper to psychoanalysis: the impossible writing of the sexual rapport. Interpretation must encircle this

real by equivocation [*l'équivoque*], which is certainly homogenous with the unconscious made of *lalangue*, but which knots, before anything else, its three modalities (homophony, grammar, logic) under the logical requirement “without which interpretation would be stupid.”²²

“Interpretation must be equivocal,” Lacan repeats in the United States, but it is no longer a question of logic here. *Lalangue*, place of the equivocal, is the alpha and omega of the analytic operation in the lectures of 1975. “In the *lalangue* from which one has received the imprint, a word [*mot*] is equivocal,” he says.²³ “Interpretation bears on the level of *lalangue*.”²⁴ He gives Freud’s famous example of the (germanophone) fetishist attracted by the “shine on the nose,” where the German “Glanz”(shine) echoes [*consonne*] “glance” (gaze) in English, the language he had been given at birth. Lacan insists on the fact that “in what is said, there is sonority, and that this sonority must resonate [*consonner*] with what there is of the unconscious.”²⁵ Hence, he said at Nice, “there are (...) good chances that what is the most operative is a saying [*dire*] that has no meaning [*sens*].” Referring back to the Freudian discovery of the relation of the joke [*mot d’esprit*] with the unconscious, and making of language no longer an abstract structure, but equivocation, he deduces: “If the joke has a meaning, it is precisely from equivocating. It is in this that it gives us the model of the correct analytic interpretation.” Thus, interpretation is here a kind of operation of *lalangue* on *lalangue*.

The reference to the joke and to the equivocal is always present in “*L’une-bévue*,” but Lacan is not satisfied with what he has elaborated up to this point. Posing the radical disjunction of the real and of sense, Lacan seeks a route that would be, let us say, adequate to the real. Calling on his wished for “new signifier” that would not have any kind of sense, like the real, he finds in poetry the paradigm of what should “inspire analytic interpretation.” “Only poetry (...) permits interpretation,” [he says], adding even that he is “not enough of a poet” [*pas assez poète*] (“*pas poète-assez*”). How is this reference to poetry different from what he might have done with it before? I refer to the course of March 2007 of Jacques-Alain Miller who proposes some illuminating paths for deciphering

these very difficult lessons. I am retaining only a few points here.

It is not a question of just any poetry; this is a poetry “which is an effect of sense, but also an effect of a hole.” He encountered it in François Cheng’s book, which had just appeared, “Chinese poetic Writing,” and he recommends analysts to “take a leaf from it”²⁶: “. . . you will see that this is the forcing by which a psychoanalyst can make something sound other than sense.” He adds: “Sense is what resonates with the help of the signifier. But what resonates, does not go far, it is rather soft. Sense mops it up.” Thus, it is no longer a question of the “semantic resonance” of 1953; it is no longer just a question of obtaining a sense with a play on sense. Besides, as he says in one of these lessons, sense puts us to sleep; poetry, too, puts us to sleep if it goes from sense to sense; it is when we do not understand that we wake up. With this “new signifier” another usage of the signifier is in question, which would have an effect of “dazzlement” [*sidération*], which would emerge from the sleep of sense. This forcing operates through poetry. Lacan accounts for it in by himself operating a forcing of the minimal signifying articulation S_1-S_2 . He modifies it by giving another scope to the S_2 : it is not “second” but has a “double sense,” and what is particular about Lacan’s construction of this double sense is not so much that it would be a doubling of sense (in the sense of “with a double sense” of “*aequivocus*”), but that the second sense would in fact be absent: the poet’s “*tour de force*” is “to make it so that a sense be absent”²⁷; it is to eliminate a sense, “by replacing this absent sense by signification. Signification is not what a vain people believe. It is an empty word.”²⁸ This signification with which the poet doubles sense is the equivalent of the hole, Jacques-Alain Miller says. It is “the hole in the real that is the sexual relation.”²⁹ According to Lacan, then, poetry produces, at the same time, an effect of sense and an effect of a hole. Interpretation, which ought to be inspired by this, by a usage “by which sound and sense are tightly unified,”³⁰ “can make sound something other than sense,” as in Chinese poetry. It is a question of another “resonance,” the “resonance of the effect of the hole,” J.-A. Miller says, and he concludes on March 28, 2007: “interpretation is

not simply an equivocation from sense to sense,” but “the forcing by which a sense, always common, can [make] a signification resonate that is only empty, that is only empty on the condition that one devote oneself to it.”

There would be much to say about the reference to Chinese poetry, notably about the fashion in which this poetry succeeds in creating emptiness, as Cheng analyzes it in his book; also about the importance of the notion of a “Median Emptiness,” which Lacan does not take up in his seminar “The one-blunder,” but which interested him directly, as Cheng testifies concerning their meetings.³¹ This Median Emptiness, also called Median Breath, is a dynamic concept, and a third term that reconnects [*relie*] the opposites at the heart of the binaries, that introduces a circulation between the One and the multiple, between “what has a name and what has no name.” On this point I refer you to Eric Laurent’s article, “The Purloined Letter and the Flight over the Letter [*La lettre volée et le vol sur la lettre*],” which develops how this Median Emptiness is “a kind of version of the littoral, what separates two things that have between them no means of holding together, nor any means of passing from one to the other”;³² it is the possibility of “making hold together what does not hold together, the real and sense (...).”³³

A Post-Interpretive Practice

In exploring Lacan’s final teaching, J.-A. Miller brings to light what constitutes its “Roman Road.” Lacan introduces a “new realism,” which supposes “that short of [*en deçà*] structure there is a real of immediate data,” “a previous real to which structure gives sense and which, in keeping with this, cannot even be defined, as unthinkable as this might appear, except as outside sense [*hors sens*], in relation to which structure appears not only as a construction, but as a lucubration. These two terms are correlative, the real outside of sense and the lucubration of knowledge.”³⁴

The Real Unconscious and the *One-Blunder*

J.-A. Miller has shed some light on a statement of Lacan’s in the final text of *Autres écrits*, which he re-baptizes

“*L’esp d’un laps*”: “When (. . .) the space of a lapse no longer has any scope of sense (or interpretation), only then is one sure that one is in the unconscious. And a little further on Lacan evokes Freud, “unassailable theoretician of the unconscious (which is not what one believes, I say: the unconscious, the real that is, if one believe me).”³⁵ This is the reverse of the classic thesis “unconscious desire is interpretation.” Lacan disjoins interpretation and unconscious, which up to that time were always knotted; he separates the signifier of the lapse and the signifier of the interpretation: $S_1 // S_2$.³⁶ This disjunction undoes the principle of the signifying chain, $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$. “This attacks what is, for us, the principle itself of the analytic operation, in as much as psychoanalysis takes its departure from the minimal establishment, $S_1 - S_2$, of the transference.”³⁷ The algorithm of the subject-supposed-to-know writes this signifying connection; the birth of the transference is a mobilization of the unconscious knowledge. J.-A. Miller calls this unconscious that supposes the link of S_1 and S_2 – this is the Freudian unconscious – and he opposes it to the real unconscious, which sometimes appears under Lacan’s pen, and which is, itself, of the order of “the one all alone.”

When Lacan begins his XXIVth seminar by saying that he wants “to introduce something that goes further than the unconscious,”³⁸ when he translates, in playing on the equivoque, the Freudian *Unbewusste* by “*l’une bévue*,” he puts into operation the same movement: “this is an effort to situate the unconscious at the level of the real outside of sense.”³⁹ The *bévue* is the “base material of the unconscious as immediate data; it is the tripping [*l’achoppement*], the stumbling [*trébuchement*], the slipping from word to word.” It is the materiality that precedes the signifying finality – the sense, the connection $S_1 - S_2$, that is. Lacan here situates the *bévue* before the unconscious. Taking my inspiration from the schema from J.-A. Miller’s course of March 14, 2007, where he proposes distinguishing the anterior logical time (number 1) of the *bévue* from that of the unconscious (number 2), I inscribe the difference of the real unconscious from the transferential unconscious, the disconnection of the articulation that produces sense, that which arises from the register of the One or from the register of the Other:

1. <i>Une-bévue</i>	$S_1//S_2$	real ucs	Un
2. Ucs	$S_1 \rightarrow S_2$	transferential ucs	Other

Thus, the unconscious only appears when one adds a signification. This is a transformation that in Seminar XXIV Lacan calls “making-true”: “(. . .) psychoanalysis is what makes true. But how should we understand this? It is a trick of sense [*coup de sens*]. It is a *sense-blant*.”⁴⁰ Psychoanalysis gives a truth sense to the immediate data, Miller comments, a making-true which, in regard to the real, is only a *semblant*.⁴¹

	1. <i>Une-bévue</i>	real ucs
Making-true ↓		
<i>Semblant</i>	2. ucs	

Articulation, Disarticulation

For J.-A. Miller, the term interpretation classically designates the operation of the connection S_1-S_2 . To draw out the consequences of the last Lacan, we must conceive of an interpretive practice that would aim for the One. He already gave its principle in an intervention at the ECF in 1995, which marked the labors on interpretation, “Interpretation in Reverse”: “The reverse of interpretation consists of encircling the signifier as an elementary phenomenon of the subject, even from before it is articulated in a formation of the unconscious which gives its delusional sense to it” It is a question “of leading the subject back to the properly elementary signifiers over which he has, in his neurosis, become delusional [*sur lesquels il a, dans sa névrose, déliré*].”⁴² Rather than favoring the delusion, which has the same structure as interpretation, $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$, we must “hold back the S_2 , not add it to our efforts to encircle the S_1 .” This interpretive practice, rather than being a punctuation, which buckles the sense, is founded on the cut, on the separation $S_1//S_2$. One finds again a formulation very close to this in the recent course of December 10, 2008. [Miller] takes up again the distinction between chance and destiny, contingency and the destinatorial weave, an issue of the Conference “Joyce the Symptom.” “From the fact alone that we speak, a thread is instituted between the chances (. . .). An order emerges based on

facts of repetition (. . .).” This is a “transformation of contingency into articulation.” Post-interpretive practice aims, then, to “lead the subject back to the absolute elements of his contingent existence”; that is to say, “lead the destinatorial weave of the subject of structure back to its primordial elements, outside of articulation, that is to say, outside of sense, and which one can call, because it is absolutely separated, *absolute*.” This changes the function of interpretation, which is no longer to “propose another sense,” to reveal a hidden sense ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$), but to “unmake the destined articulation so as to aim for the outside-sense, which means that interpretation is an operation of disarticulation.”

Revelation/Satisfaction, Truth-Events/*Jouissance*-Events

Just as he extracted the unconscious-interpretation from “*L’esp d’un laps*,” Miller underscores yet another sentence, which presents us with a kind of “short-circuit,” and develops its consequences: “The mirage of the truth, from which only the lie is to be expected (. . .) has no other term than the satisfaction that marks the end of the analysis.”⁴³

Two registers are adjoined here: that of the truth – which is the “lying truth,” Lacan says in the same text – and that of satisfaction. The truth lies, in relation to the real. J.-A. Miller reminds us at Buenos- Aires,⁴⁴ “The lie of the truth is structural, since the true and the real are distinct.” Lacan speaks in this text of the end of the analysis and of the *passé*. The end of the analysis is not formulated here in terms of an ultimate revelation or of a demonstration, but in the register of *jouissance*. There is no truth on *jouissance* either; analysis instead leads to a “reconfiguration” of the relation to *jouissance* that “allows [the analysand] to pass from discomfort to satisfaction.”⁴⁵ If interpretation is classically thought of in terms of revelation, what would be “an interpretation informed by (. . .) the real not being able to lie?”⁴⁶

The two registers of truth and *jouissance*, which are incompatible, are constantly put in a relation and in a tension [with one another], as much as in what concerns the end of analysis and the *passé* as in what happens in the analysis itself. There are some revelations in analysis, and often a

whole beginning phase is a thrilling time of putting things into form and of revelations. Then comes a more or less long and painful period of “turning in a circle,” where the *jouissance* seems stronger than the unconscious knowledge. “One waits for that to give way.” Then something empties itself out, loses its sense; and some mode of enjoyment [*jouir*] can extract for itself a satisfaction.⁴⁷ Is interpretation the same at these different moments? Miller distinguishes between the “truth events” that are produced in analysis and the “*jouissance* events.” We indeed know interpretation as an “aid to revelation”;⁴⁸ we must think of an interpretation in relation to what is produced of *jouissance*, and must ask ourselves “the question of what can be displaced of *jouissance* in the psychoanalysis?”: “the interpretation is yoked to the *jouissance* event that it is capable of engendering at its conclusion.”⁴⁹ This question is essential in the measure that, with the last Lacan, psychoanalysis is approached from the perspective of the *sinthome*.

Interpretation and Sinthome

The symptom Lacan formulates starting from the teaching he draws from Joyce – and that he writes *sinthome* – is no longer the symptom as a formation of the unconscious to be deciphered; “the symptom is no longer a metaphor.”⁵⁰ J.-A. Miller has gone over this passage from the symptom to the *sinthome* many times and has approached the nature of the *sinthome* from many different angles. In his courses of March 12 and of May 10, 2008, for example, he builds a series of oppositions on the binomial advent of signification/body event to circumscribe the conceptual change, which echoes the disjunction of sense and *jouissance*, of truth and the real: he opposes the formations of the unconscious – in as much as they are decipherable and have a meaning [*sens*] of desire and start from the presupposition of language and communication – to body events which have a meaning of *jouissance* and presuppose *lalangue* and satisfaction. Interpretation-deciphering and interpretation-cut are equally distributed on these two axes.

J.-A. Miller has stressed how much the symptom is a composite in the last teaching of Lacan, who says some things about this that go in diverse directions.⁵¹ The symptom as letter,

as “enjoying the unconscious like a letter,” the *sinthome* as the S – R staple, the *varité*⁵² or real of the symptom, the knowing-how-to-do-with-it [*savoir-y-faire*] with the symptom, the *sinthome* as fourth ring of the knot, the *sinthome* as body event, etc. : all of these dimensions let loose after *Encore* have been brought to light by J.-A. Miller, who is progressively marking out this immense field of investigation, accentuating turn-by-turn certain facets, and constructing along the way certain notions (like the notion of “partner-symptom,” in 1998). I will retain two moments of this trajectory, which, it seems to me, show a change of accent in these courses as to the symptom.

Between Sense and Real

The two interventions of 1997 in Spain published in the volume *Le symptôme charlatan*, start from the exclusion of sense and the real [from each other] and ask the question: “how can one think the unthinkable of the sense-in-the real?”⁵³ In Lacan’s distinction between “symbolically real” (presence of the real in the symbolic, namely anxiety) or “really symbolic” (symbolic present in the real, namely the lie), where is the symptom to be situated? In making it “the only thing truly real, that is to say, conserving a sense in the real,”⁵⁴ Lacan makes it an exception. “In a certain fashion, the symptom is situated between anxiety and the lie, which is to say, between something that lies and something that cannot deceive,”⁵⁵ says J.-A. Miller. There are two faces to the symptom, the side of sense and the side of the real – the *Sinn* and the *Bedeutung*. The analyst’s only business is with the words [*dits*] of the patient, with the *Sinn* of the symptom, which refers to the symptom as to their reference, *Bedeutung*. In inscribing them at a distinct place in the discourse of the analyst, J.-A. Miller differentiates between them: on the one hand, at the place of the truth, the S_2 , the variable truth of the symptom (*varité*), a knowledge that is only supposed, and on the other hand, at the place of the real, the S_1 , the symptom as “what of the unconscious is translated by a letter,” the symptom as fixation:

(T) S ₂		S ₁ (R)
Sinn		Bedeutung
varité		fixation
supposed		letter
knowledge		

How does interpretation touch on the *sinthome*? One can distinguish two modes, J.-A. Miller says on March 21, 2007, depending on whether one thinks of it as starting from the really symbolic or from the symbolically real. Either it is only a lie, only acting on the *semblants* and remaining impotent concerning the real, or else one thinks of it, as Lacan did, in reference to poetry in *L'une bévue*, starting from a new usage of the signifier which at the same time makes sense and a hole. This would be “a forcing of the lie, in the direction [*sens*] of the real.” The equivoque, I would say, which is the paradigm of interpretation, would then perhaps be a means of touching on the *Bedeutung* by way of the *Sinn*.

“The *Jouissance* of the Symptom, Opaque in Excluding Sense”

In these last years, the accent bears rather on the *sinthome* as opaque *jouissance* beginning with Lacan’s formulations in his écrit on Joyce: the symptom as “body event” and “the *jouissance* belonging to the symptom. A *jouissance* that is opaque in excluding sense.”⁵⁶ The *sinthome* is here “something that has happened to the body due to *lalangue*,” a consistency of marks resulting from the encounter between *lalangue* and the body.⁵⁷ The *sinthome*, beyond the fiction of the fantasy, is the incurable, “singular mode of enjoyment,”⁵⁸ which is not traversed.⁵⁹ The opaque *jouissance* of the symptom is “impossible to negativize” and does not lie.⁶⁰ One again finds the question of how interpretation can touch the symptom. The interpretation is solicited, Miller says in his recent courses, for its effects on *jouissance*, “its embodied effects.” It would then be a “special mode of saying (. . .) that is not of the dimension of signification, of truth, and which accentuates, in the signi-

fier, materiality, sound”: this is how “Lacan could say that the efficacious interpretation is perhaps of the order of the jaculation,” of the cry. In this way, interpretation “could ring the bell of *jouissance*.”⁶¹ It would have an effect on *jouissance*; what Miller calls a “rectification of *jouissance*” (60) – in distinguishing it from “subjective rectification.” It would produce some “mutations of *jouissance*”⁶² or again a “fluidification”⁶³ or a “reconfiguration (re-engineering),” which allows the analysand to pass from discomfort to satisfaction.”⁶⁴

Is interpretation a *semblant*? I will leave the question of the *semblant* open. But it seems to me that the effort of Lacan, and that of J.-A. Miller, is to make a saying always more adequate to the real, a means of touching on *jouissance*. In this sense, it is an “edge,” a *semblant* the most possibly emptied of sense, a *semblant* destined to make the *semblants* falter [*vaciller*].

Translated by Ellie Ragland and Jack W. Stone

Endnotes

¹Lacan, J., “L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue s’aile à mourre,” lesson of the 8th of March, 1977, *Ornicar?*, 16, Fall 1978, p. 13.

²Lacan, J. “Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines,” *op. cit.*, p. 41an, J. *Ibid*, p. 12.

³*Ibid*, May 17th, 1977, *Ornicar?*, 17/18, Spring 1979, p. 23.

⁴Lacan, J. “Joyce le symptôme,” in *Le Séminaire Livre XXIII Le sinthome*, Paris, Seuil, 2005, p. 164 and p. 167.

⁵Lacan, J., “Joyce le symptôme,” *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p. 570.

⁶*Ibid*. See the commentary of J.-A. Miller in his course of the 14th of May, 2008.

⁷Lacan, J., “Une pratique de bavardage,” *Le moment de conclure*, lesson of the 15th of November, 1977, in *Ornicar?*, 19, p. 7 and p. 5.

⁸Lacan, J., “Le phénomène lacanien,” (November 30th, 1974) *Les cahiers cliniques de Nice*, 1, June 1998, pp. 9-25.

⁹Miller, J.-A., “Semblants et sinthomes. Présentation du thème du VIIe Congrès de l’AMP, *La Cause freudienne*, 69, p. 131.

¹⁰See J.-A. Miller, notably “Les six paradigmes de la jouissance,” *La Cause freudienne*, 43.

¹¹See Lacan, J., *Le Séminaire Livre X: L’angoisse*, Paris, Seuil, 2004.

¹²At Nice: “Le phénomène lacanien,” (November 30th, 1974) *Les cahiers*

cliniques de Nice, 1, June, 1998, pp. 9-25. At Geneva: “Conférence à Genève sur le symptôme,” (October 4th, 1975) *Le Bloc-notes de la psychanalyse*, 5, 1985, pp. 5-23. In the United States: “Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines,” (November-Dec., 1975), *Scilicet* 6/7, Paris, Seuil, 1975, pp. 5-63.

¹³Lacan, J. “Le phénomène lacanien,” *op.cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁴Lacan, J. “Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines,” *op. cit.*, p. 41.

¹⁵See notably J.-A. Miller, “L’orientation lacanienne,” “Le tout dernier Lacan,” course of the 14th of March, 2007.

¹⁶Miller, J.-A., “L’orientation lacanienne,” “La fuite du sens,” lesson of November 22nd, 1995, unedited.

¹⁷Miller, J.-A., “L’interprétation à l’envers,” *La Cause freudienne*, 32, p. 11.

¹⁸Lacan, J., “Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse” and “La direction de la cure et les principes de son pouvoir,” in *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966.

¹⁹Miller, J.-A., “La fuite du sens,” *op. cit.*, March 20th, 1996.

²⁰Lacan, J., “La direction de la cure...,” *op. cit.*, p. 641.

²¹Miller Lacan, J.-A., “Semblants et sinthomes,” *op. cit.*, p. 130.

²²Lacan, J., “L’étourdit,” *Autres écrits*, *op.cit.*, p. 492.

²³Lacan, J., “Conférence à Genève sur le symptôme.”

²⁴Lacan, J., “Le phénomène lacanien,” *op. cit.*

²⁵Lacan, J., “Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines,” *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²⁶Lacan, J., “L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue...,” *op. cit.*, lesson of April 19th, 1977, *Ornicar?*, 17/18, p. 15.

²⁷*Ibid.*, lesson of March 15th, 1977.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹Miller, J.-A., “L’orientation lacanienne,” “Le tout dernier Lacan,” lesson of March 28th, 2000.

³⁰Lacan, J., *op. cit.*, April 19th, 1977.

³¹See les interviews with Cheng, in *L’Ane*, 1, 1981, and *L’Ane*, 48, 1991, and his presentation “Lacan et la pensée chinoise,” published in the volume *Lacan, l’écrit, l’image*, Paris, Champs Flammarion, 2000.

³²Laurent, E., “La lettre volée et la vol sur la lettre,” *La Cause freudienne*, 43, p. 4.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁴Miller, J.-A., « Le dernier enseignement de Lacan », *La Cause freudienne*, 51, p. 31.

³⁵Lacan, J., « Préface à l’édition anglaise du Séminaire XI », *Autres écrits*, *op. cit.*, p. 571.

- ³⁶Miller, J.-A., « L'inconscient réel », *Quarto* 88-89, p. 7.
- ³⁷*Ibid.*
- ³⁸Lacan, J., “L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue...” *op. cit.*, 16 novembre 1976.
- ³⁹Miller, J.-A., “ Le dernier enseignement de Lacan”, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
- ⁴⁰Lacan, J., “L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue...”, *op. cit.*, 10 mai 1977.
- ⁴¹Miller, J.-A., “Le dernier enseignement de Lacan,” *op. cit.*, p. 31.
- ⁴²Miller, J.-A., “L'interprétation à l'envers,” *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- ⁴³Lacan, J., “Préface...”, *op. cit.*, p. 572.
- ⁴⁴Miller, J.-A., “Semblants et sinthomes,” *op. cit.*, p. 130.
- ⁴⁵Miller, J.-A., « L'orientation lacanienne », « Choses de finesse en psychanalyse », leçon du 18 mars 2009.
- ⁴⁶*Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷*Ibid.*, lesson of January 10 , 2009.
- ⁴⁸*Ibid.*, March 18, 2009.
- ⁴⁹Miller, J.-A., “L'orientation lacanienne ,” “Tout le monde est fou” [“Everyone is Mad”], lesson of March 12, 2008.
- ⁵⁰Miller, J.-A., *ibid.*, May 14, 2008.
- ⁵¹Regarding this, see J.-A. Miller, “Le Séminaire de Barcelone” and “Le symptôme : savoir, sens et réel,” *Le symptôme charlatan*, texts brought together by the *Fondation du Champ freudien*, Seuil, Paris, 1998.
- ⁵²*Varité* is a Lacanian portmanteau of variety [*variété*] and truth [*vérité*] [tr.].
- ⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 58.
- ⁵⁴Lacan, J., “ L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue...,” *op. cit.*, March 15, 1977.
- ⁵⁵Miller, J.-A., “ Le Séminaire de Barcelone...,” *op. cit.*, p. 52.
- ⁵⁶Lacan, J., “ Joyce le Symptôme”, *Autres écrits*, *op. cit.*, p. 569 and p. 570.
- ⁵⁷Miller, J.-A., “ L'orientation lacanienne,” “Pièces détachées,” *La Cause freudienne* 61, p. 152.
- ⁵⁸Miller, J.-A., “L'orientation lacanienne ,” “ Chose de finesse.... ,” December 3, 2008.
- ⁵⁹*Ibid.*, February 14 and March 13, 2009
- ⁶⁰*Ibid.*, May 13, 2009.
- ⁶¹*Ibid.*
- ⁶²*Ibid.*, March 11, 2009.
- ⁶³*Ibid.*, March 25, 2009.
- ⁶⁴*Ibid.*, March 18, 2009.