

## MATERIALITY AND DISCURSIVITY OF LACAN'S SEMINAR<sup>1</sup>

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My work started as an interrogation of the analytic discourse in Lacan's Seminar XX, and of the discursive character of the Seminar in general. My reading strategy was to single out the analytic discourse as one thread among several in Seminar XX, and to extract some knowledge of how it operates in the text.

I soon tripped on the fact that the analytic discourse is often too intimately interwoven with other threads in the seminar to single it out. One compact passage in particular stopped me in my track, when Lacan states that "where [man] comes into play as a signifier, he comes in only *quoad castrationem*", from which the analytic discourse "posited that the precondition of what is written is that it be sustained by a discourse", as a result of which "you'll never be able to write the sexual relationship".<sup>2</sup>

We often ask ourselves what Lacan means by such or such phrase, and we often call the matter closed once we have found a verisimilar enough answer. However, giving a signification to this passage was beyond my ability. I therefore elected to embark on an archaeological voyage through Lacan's earlier seminars to understand the composition of this passage, and my interest progressively shifted from the analytic discourse towards Lacan's discourse.

Lacan evokes both *his* discourse and the analytic discourse in his first talk in Sainte-Anne in 1971. In this talk, Lacan takes great care, via several examples, to warn us against the temptation to pin such or such signification too hastily onto the words he uses.<sup>3</sup> This opened a novel way of reading Lacan to me, by focussing on the literality of the text itself rather than on what it means. A direct and artless corollary of this was that, because they are distinct in the text, Lacan's discourse and the analytic discourse should not be conflated - even though both might be seen

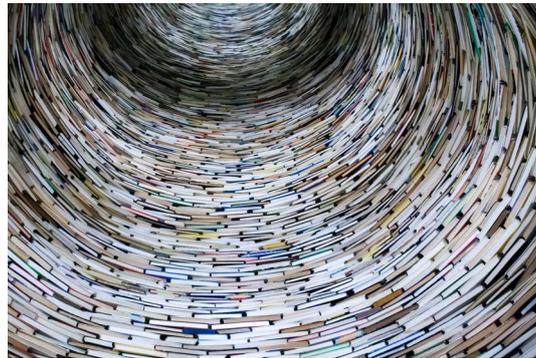
as a "new type of discourse", which ensues from the unwitting knowledge at stake in psychoanalysis.<sup>4</sup>

Liberated from the libidinal compulsion to (fail to) find signification, I continued my archaeological voyage and developed a new sensitivity to Lacan's method, to the minutiae of his readings, to the diachronic unfurling of his enunciation, and to the asymptotic structure of his demonstrations.

Lacan's extraction of the real father from Freud in the middle section of Seminar XVII would eventually stand out to me as a paradigm of reading the real – both in Freud and in Lacan – or reading

truth insofar as truth is what approaches a real by means of language.<sup>5</sup> Lacan's vignettes on Freud can indeed be read as a series of palinodes, which allows Lacan to *circumscribe*, name and transmit the non-signifying gap in Freud's writings.<sup>6</sup> A positive reading focusing on signification would have missed this. This kernel of real, transmitted in the fabric of the text itself, seems

to substantiate the discursive character of Lacan's Seminar, whereby "what is to read passes-across (*passe-à-travers*) writing while remaining unscathed in it."<sup>7</sup>



1. Product from the cartel on *Encore* (London).

2. Lacan, J. (1998). *Encore - On feminine sexuality, the limits of love and knowledge. The seminar of Jacques Lacan, book XX, 1972-1973*, (B. Fink, Trans.). New York: London, Norton, pp. 35-36.

3. Lacan, J. (2017). *Talking to Brick Walls*, (A. R. Price, Trans.). Cambridge, Polity, pp. 5-13.

4. *Ibid.*, pp.10-11, pp. 16-18.

5. *Ibid.*, p.54.

6. Lacan, J. (2007). *The other side of psychoanalysis, the seminar of Jacques Lacan, book XVII. 1972-1973*, (R. Grigg, Trans.). New York: London, Norton, pp. 99-132.

7. Lacan, J. (2001). « Postface au Séminaire XI » 1973, *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, p. 503.