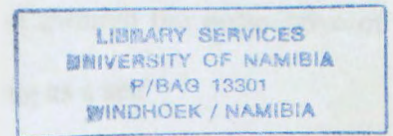


**A POST-STRUCTURAL INVESTIGATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION
OF MEANING AND UNDERSTANDING**



A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ART (PSYCHOLOGY)

OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

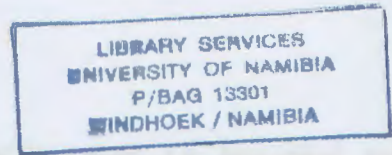
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Abstract

The thesis offers a poststructural perspective on the way of making meaning and understanding. It contains seven chapters covering theory, research and practical application in the form of the analysis of a birthday speech. To put it simply, the objectives of the present study are: how do we say what we say, where does the meaning of our words come from, and what do we understand? What do we say when we say something? These issues will be explained through the perspective of post-structuralists who advocate that there is no such thing as a self.

Chapters 3 and 4 covers the study of metaphor and metonymy, both from a linguistic perspective to show how they work, and a psychological perspective in terms of repression and desire as advocated by Lacan. Because the person does not recognise her real desire, she is constantly attracted by lures. Metaphors as signifiers point to repressed material. Lacan equates metonymy with desire and the signified belonging to the realm of metonymy slides under the signifier. Metaphor and metonymy stem from a pre-verbal stage which the author, borrowing from Kristeva, calls *khôra* in her study. People often tend to think that babies do not feel nor understand, but the early disappointments, enjoyments, satisfactions, frustrations and pains particularly give meaning to their future lives. The new material we accumulate throughout education and life builds up on this matrix or *khôra* and forms that which we call a self. This self appears and makes itself in language.

The present study develops the double function of language, i.e. biological and social. The person must abide by laws and regulations and this complicates the task of satisfying desire. Foucault, in chapter 5, shows the social and cultural impact on the self. He provides us with an interesting perspective on how laws and regulations are subtly applied to people, internalised by them, and how the self makes meaning out of this.

The sociocultural aspect is stressed by the fact that the study of the birthday speech is an interaction between reader and author as analyst. François, the author of the birthday speech, uses signifiers from his sociocultural background and thus, the study becomes the product of this interaction and the struggles encountered by reader and listener/author. The study of the speech is the result of the specific concerns of the two, and of differences between Afrikaner and Franco-German cultures.

The analysis of the birthday speech shows that our words are in fact not our words and that we say more than that which we say. What we say refers to ingrained material from our sociocultural environment and to material springing out of our actual experiences.

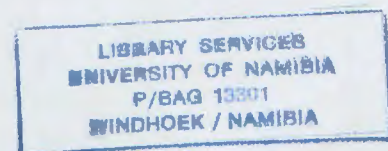


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Thanks also to Salomie Swarts who translated the speech from Afrikaans into English, and to all my friends who supported me through the past years.

Declarations

I declare that this thesis is my original work, and that it has not been submitted for a degree or any other purposes elsewhere.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The present study has been motivated by the author's participation in a birthday celebration where the attached speech was held. As a guest at Jan's fiftieth birthday party, she was struck by the seriousness of the matter, which was in total contrast with her French cultural background. The solemnity impregnating the atmosphere was so overwhelming that for her, the speech held by Jan's brother, François, was similar to the memorial speeches held at funerals. A nagging feeling of death somehow cooled down her party-mood. The message of the birthday speech seemed to be that when you are fifty, your life is behind you, to use a colloquial metaphor: you have done your job, created a family, had a nice career, settled down; all those things expected by the society in which you live. So what: what about the coming years? Are they supposed to be the ante-room of death? What are you supposed to do now? Waiting calmly for death to come, or enjoying the fruit of your work and efforts, if possible of course? Why and how has this way of thinking been built up in language over time? She thought that she was close to this society, and now, a mere birthday speech showed her that there was something else, something more important she did not seize, something she shall have to investigate in order to name it.

That example shows that people are faced today with the problem of meaning, because they are exposed to a proliferation of meanings due to the fact that

increasingly there are many cultures interacting with one another. One of the main features of the post-modern era, namely the reduction of time and space made possible by the development of new technologies is in favour of the vicinity of different cultures. The best example for this kind of interaction might be provided by the author's participation in this birthday celebration.

The crisis of meaning we are facing today shows that there is no single meaning and no single understanding which is superior to another meaning and understanding. Lyotard (1979) refers to our day and age as the post-modern condition, and he specifically speaks about the death of metanarratives. This means that the 'super stories' like Marxism, capitalism, socialism, Freudianism, and various other -isms no longer direct our meanings and understandings of ourselves and the world. These grand narratives or super-stories alienate us from ourselves as much as they lead to the regulation of meaning and understanding of ourselves. More disturbingly, the super-story of the self as propagated in the scientific approach of modernism, also cannot guide our understanding and meaning of ourselves any more. This view of the self is challenged by post-structuralists who claim that there is no such thing as a self, but the self by which we make meaning is an invention. Nevertheless, we are pretending all along by claiming the authorship of our utterances, because we still stick to the globalising and globalised view of the self Enlightenment provided us with. This narcissistic feature of the self is now challenged. The self appears and makes itself in language. A person who speaks is submitted to the tension between unconscious material and the pressure of her society.

The unconscious is this part we do not understand, which stays obscure, uncanny. It is the place of that which Lacan (1966) calls the 'Other'. The word 'unconscious' is thus imparted a wider meaning than just 'unaware'; it becomes a dimension, or a dynamic infrastructure. This dimension opens up meaning and understanding. The unconscious crosses the level of consciousness in speech devices such as metaphor (a word standing for another word), metonymy (a part standing for a whole) and in punctuation and rhythm (stopping in the middle of a sentence, silences for example). It manifests also in the form of symptoms which would then be the language of the body. In short, we speak metaphorically by using words for other words, metonymically in the way we displace and combine elements (words, or morphemes which are the smallest units of language making sense) to make sentences, and from a specific sociocultural background. The unconscious becomes a structure underlying language, or rather an infrastructure, understood as a hidden or unnoticed, but dynamic structure supporting language. It will be demonstrated how this unconscious material or dynamic structure determines our speech and our actions, and how it is determining in crises (such as Freudian slips or symptoms).

References to the birthday speech will be used to show how we construct meaning, how we do not say what we mean, and how we do not mean what we say. There is a constant double-intent or double talk between that which the person says and that which she means. How this movement appears in the birthday speech will be presented in this study. This infrastructure is made of sundry components, some individual, some other transindividual including a general human (in the sense that we

incorporate the whole of humanity) dimension through our culture, society and environment. These sundry components have a formative power, permeate language and constitute the fabric of our meaning-making and understanding. These elements speak in us, govern us, thus we are spoken rather than that we speak.

Many factors are involved in the way a person speaks. The formation of the unconscious begins at a very early stage, before the person enters into the realm of language. The elements of this pre-verbal stage are decisive in the way she behaves and speaks. These elements are inscriptions of sensations (auditory, olfactory, tactile, visual, gustative for example). They will constitute an affective load of her future words/language. Her language, her words are motivated by this obscure scene she is not aware of. We hear a coherent sentence but still we might not hear what the person is saying. In times of distress, the role of the therapist is precisely to hear what she is saying, hear what the underlying painful material that makes her sick is all about.

In order to see how the unconscious is working, how language is functioning will be expanded on: first from a linguistic perspective on the level of the structure to isolate the mechanisms at work, second, from a psychological view on the level of the infrastructure or unconscious.

In the third chapter on metaphor and the fourth chapter on metonymy, the concepts of metaphor and metonymy will be unravelled. The analysis might seem to be somehow linguistic, but it appeared to the author to be the best way to explain how meaning is

shifting from word to word or sign to sign or, as it will be called in further development, from signifier to signifier. The unravelling of these concepts is very important because it shows us how a person is associating (in the case of metonymy) and substituting (in the case of metaphor) elements. In order to understand what a person is saying we have to reverse her process of meaning-making and try to see how she is associating and substituting this material. People substitute because they do not know any more; they have 'forgotten' important events that occurred. These events have been repressed, but not effaced. A sort of thriving strength forces repressed elements to the surface of language; Lacan (1966) calls this strength 'desire'. Because material has primarily been forced into us and because of our sociocultural embeddedness, our words become metaphors. Our words are submitted to power relations.

Letters/words are signifiers, everybody sees/hears them, but nobody knows the content of these obvious signifiers. This is because the unconscious is quite close to and hidden ('dérobé' meaning 'stolen' in French) from us. Meaning is repeatedly teasing in the sequence of signifiers. Literal, apparent, manifest discourse is only a chain of signifiers, covering other signifiers, and also unconscious signifiers.

Shifting of meaning is precisely what happens in the unconscious. When Lacan (1966) claims that the unconscious is like a language, he means that similar laws, namely the laws of metaphor and metonymy, are operating in the unconscious mind, according to specific associations the person is making unbeknown to herself. When a person is

speaking, she is linking unconscious elements according to such laws. How this shifting is made will be explained in these two chapters by means of concrete examples abstracted from the birthday speech.

Furthermore, Ricoeur (1990) makes the difference between two types of metaphors: 'alive' (innovative and surprising) and 'dead' (we do not recognise the word/expression as a metaphor). He adds that meaning is metaphorical, and stands under the directives of the 'dead metaphor'. The 'dead metaphor' which directs meaning and our understanding of ourselves is the metaphor which is commonly used in society, and which excludes any other term or metaphor. According to Ricoeur (1975), the dead metaphor infects us in ourselves when we make meaning as selves. Dead metaphors carry the weight of repressed elements. When we speak, we do not innovate, and the words we use are loaded with meaning given to us by our sociocultural environment, and more individual elements.

In chapter 6 on the analysis of the birthday speech, the focus will be on the detailed text of the birthday speech. The author's understanding of the work of language, growing out of the synthesis of diverse post-structural views, will be developed in this chapter.

It will be demonstrated by way of examples how the fabric of François' words is constituting the Lacanian 'necklace', simply put, a chain of rings, the rings being the elements we associate or link to one another in order to make meaning and to

generate understanding among an audience who certainly will, in its turn, add supplementary rings to the existing necklace, and form an infinite number of inter-linked necklaces. This chain of association is a signifying chain provided by history, society and culture.

The text of the birthday speech will provide us with concrete examples of how we build up our speech in such a way that we are linking 'rings' of thoughts with one another in order to obtain a coherent flowing text which makes sense and can be understood by the audience; it will also be shown on what basis we choose a word rather than another. However, our choosing is restricted and what we say is censored (see chapter 4 on metonymy, section 3: *Censorship*). To explain how we choose, we have to undo the 'necklace' to remove the elements 'ring' by 'ring', in a regressive way, i.e. by operating like an archaeologist, layer by layer. This type of procedure will be demanding for the author, the stranger in the Afrikaner society.

When the author claims that we choose, it is controversial and seems to be in contradiction with the poststructuralists' view of rather being chosen. In fact, as will be shown in chapter 4 on metonymy (section 6: *Negativity*), we do both: we choose or rather think that we choose because we are still influenced by the modern view of the self as being autonomous, self-sufficient, independent and powerful, and we negate it; we quote and pretend to be the author. Lacan (1966) points out that there is no such thing as an intentional self which guides and directs meaning, and the person comes to discover herself as a self by the meaning which she strangely circulates as

her own private property (chapter 4 on metonymy, section 7: *Intentionality*). The person always quotes and at the same time, the person claims to be the author of what she says. This state of affairs clearly points out that we have a problem with the construction of meaning. On the one hand, the person constructs her 'own' meaning, and on the other hand, this construction of meaning is what alienates the person from herself.

Meaning is embedded in society and culture. As we are born into a specific milieu, so we integrate unconsciously elements from the culture, society and geographic environment in which we live. These elements might be stories we are told as children, or ideologies to name a few. They permeate our mind and constitute a sort of data bank which will be part of the unconscious. These data are used in language and help us to make meaning and to understand what other people mean. Inculcated ideas lead and guide us. They are not our own, but a sociocultural patrimony. The words we use are full of our past, and we must keep in mind that we are in a sociocultural bath.

Foucault (1984) claims that there are various regimes of meaning and the person is being managed by these various regimes she strangely deploys as her property. The person is being disciplined (discipline contains a notion of power which will be discussed in chapter 5 on the postmodern self and meaning, section 2: *Power relations*) in the construction of meaning, and by means of her language, the person cares for a self. Insofar as the person takes responsibility for the meaning she constructs, the person has a self and is a socially responsible entity. Simply put, a self

is constructed in the construction of meaning, and to this end the person is disciplined. Are these regimes of meaning universal, or specific to a social group, or both? Kristeva (1981) says that when we make meaning we are invariably social. She more specifically insists on the fact that we are 'a mosaic of quotations', and when we make meaning we merely quote the social order, and we negate the fact that we quote. We merely quote and we deny it in order to say: 'I damn well mean'.

We try to make a certain unity out of the fragments we are made of by taking responsibility for what we say. But what we say belongs to the whole of humanity, and therefore we take responsibility for the whole of humanity. That taking responsibility appears in our speech in the form of metaphor, metonymy and other rhetoric devices, stereotypes, rhythm, punctuation, and shifters such as 'I' and 'you'. Our speech includes more than that which is literally expressed. There is a 'larger text', what Lacan (1966) calls the 'discourse of the Other', in other words, the unconscious. We become aware that the speech of an individual is not so individual any more. This larger text is the structure of language itself, a kind of law that governs human interchange. From that, we might infer that the meanings of a text are plural, and an interpretation is just one of the possibilities to understand the text. Words are not determined on a one-to-one basis, by the idea of the thing they supposedly represent.

The objective of this study is to explore how people construct meaning and how they take responsibility for what they say. There is a problem of meaning and inevitably

with understanding between the text of the birthday speech and the author of the thesis. What did François, Jan's brother, mean? And what did she understand? She therefore decided to unravel the speech and to analyse it through a post-structural perspective in order to understand what was meant here. What is said and left unsaid?

The traditional psychological view of the self as an accountable, coherent, integrated and autonomous whole is challenged here. It will be stressed that the construction of meaning is that which alienates the person from the self, and, insofar as the person asserts a self in the construction of meaning, the person is social. A young child receives and is submitted to the order of language. It is submitted to society, its culture, or organisation and language. The entry into the symbolic realm (or order of language) marks its access to the social order. This study will show how François is submitted to the order of language, and how he tries to make meaning out of it.

The case study of the speech will be conducted in the qualitative framework opening up the dynamics of language in terms of metaphor, metonymy springing out of powerful discourses, used by people in order to make meaning.

The author's focus will be on what people say and how they say what they say. The discourse analysis of the text she chose, namely a fiftieth birthday speech, will be conducted from a post-structuralist perspective with emphasis on the above-mentioned dynamics. More specifically, it will be considered how these issues are strategically deployed so that the person discovers herself as 'having meant'. The

irony of such a speech is that, if the self as such does not exist any more as advocated by post-structuralists, it is nonsensical to celebrate a self. The analysis will reveal that the birthday speech is about something totally different from such a celebration.

The method for this discourse analysis will be based on the tradition of discursive uncertainty as advocated by Lacan (1966), Derrida (1987, 1998), Lyotard (1983), Foucault (1972, 1984), Ricoeur (1990), and Kristeva (1981). Although these authors stand in the post-structural tradition, they provide different perspectives on the problem of the construction of meaning. The post-structural approach of this study will be a synthesis of their work.

The analysis will be an exegesis which consists in abstracting a text from another text. In Lacanian terms, that means undoing the 'necklace' and isolating the rings. The author's aim is to hear what is articulated silently in the birthday speech, and especially what provoked the overwhelming feeling of sadness when she listened to it. Her work will be to move from the apparent text of what François is saying to the invisible text of what he is meaning through the lens of his sociocultural environment.

Chapter 2

Presentation of the birthday speech

The birthday speech is a narrative provided by François and held on his brother's fiftieth birthday. Jan is the protagonist, and direct addressee. If we talk in terms of literature, François is the narrator. The birthday speech is a rich mine of speech devices, especially metaphors and metonymies. They mainly refer to registers of religion, life and death, gender, sexuality, love and feelings, politics and apartheid system as well as to some other domains. They reveal the coding of the text or, in other words, the themes out of which it is written.

As the author will use examples from the birthday speech to unravel the different concepts which will be met during the study, it is best, though unconventional, to present it now. This piece of writing will be used for the application of the theoretical material. Numerous references to the birthday speech motivate this novel approach. By presenting the raw data so early in the thesis, the reader can 'enter' the text, feel the atmosphere conveyed by François, and become familiar with the miscellaneous expressions that will be used to develop the theory. As such, the reader will feel part of the birthday celebration and integrated in the work.

The interest of the birthday speech lies in the fact that it tells a number of events which lead to Jan as the person he is today. Jan's identity builds up and

transforms with the progression of the narrative. The expression 'red ants' (in § 14, 24, 33) for example constitutes a sort of golden thread throughout the speech. It is not a metaphor in Afrikaans, but its translation into English made it again a metaphor. (How this happened will be explained in detail in chapter 3 on metaphor). 'Red ants' opens up concepts such as metaphor, connotation, signifier, and raises the question of neutral language. It will also show why we use speech devices instead of more general words, and what additional meaning they might provide us with. 'Red ants' reveals to us the complexity of a word and the consecutive complexity of language. François plays with the connotation of this expression to depict his brother Jan. The metaphor 'red ants' forms a continuity in the birthday speech and in Jan's identity as will be shown in this work.

Sometimes we invent words if the available vocabulary does not seem to express exactly what we want to say. We might also transform words into 'Witz' (jokes). This game brings us pleasure. 'Fedopiel' (§ 21) and 'corpus delecti' (§ 8) are such words, invented by the author of the birthday speech. It will lead us over the path of the 'Witz' and show us the interplay of signifiers and the infrastructure of language. Also, both 'red ants' and 'fedopiel' help us to understand the meaning of substitution, selection, and supplement of meaning.

Another category of words, namely metonymies, such as 'bantam' which is a mistake in the speech (mistakes are also referred to as crises by Lacan, 1966)

give us an insight in how we put words together and how we say things we do not want to say, or things we are not aware of. What we avoid saying and how we do this is explained by means of this example. The word 'bantam' shows us that it is possible, and even certain, to say more than what we want to say.

'Anointed of Satan' (§ 21), 'corpus delecti' (§ 8) and 'healthy aversion' (§ 21) are expressions which unveil underlying meanings, and show that, in fact, our messages are coded. Expressions like 'kaffir' (§ 9) and 'hold the fort' (§ 32) for example disclose ways of speaking which we shall call discursive practices.

By means of the speech devices, the birthday speech shows us how social the person is. It reveals the material we assimilated over time through our family, education, and power relations pervasive in society. The way the author of the birthday speech speaks introduces the Christian setting and the system of apartheid. That will be unravelled in more detail in chapter 6 on the discourse analysis of the birthday speech.

Birthday speech held by Francois

1. One of the nice things about having an elder brother, is that he precedes you like a guide through life. You never need to fear, or feel uncertain about what lies ahead for you because your elder brother is always there to show you where the thorns, stones and potholes are along the footpath. He is the first to go to school, go into the army, enter university; he is the one who is first to start working, get married and set up home; he is first to turn fifty and all you have to do as the younger brother, is to stand back and observe how all these dangerous and daunting things are done and then you can work up enough courage to face the unknown, because, if my elder brother survived, so can I.
2. Of course, there are disadvantages attached to having an elder brother, such as inheriting all his old stuff, starting with his cot and pram and his tricycle right down to his old clothes and schoolbooks. In addition, you also have a certain degree of inferiority because he is bigger and stronger than you, and he knows more than you, and can do all things you don't have the dexterity yet to do yourself, such as tying your shoelaces and ride a bicycle. He and his pals chase you away and send you back home, if you try and follow them around - and if you refuse to go home, they run away from you.
3. Generally, though, there are more advantages than disadvantages, and in the end it is great to have a big brother from whom you can learn all kinds of things, even if you never admit it. I was most fortunate to have an elder

brother with a very astute intellect, a wonderful sense of humour and an unconventional, adventurous approach to life, from whom I learnt so much more than I would ever admit to myself.

4. When celebrating a half century like this one, it is probably best to begin at the beginning. Jan saw the first light at a small, dusty little town in the Northern Cape where about seventy years earlier hordes of fortune hunters had gathered to start digging the biggest man-made hole in the world in their search for diamonds in the blue volcanic rocks. The hamlet consisting of tin shanties that shot up there was named after a British Arch-Colonialist, the Earl of Kimberley. That was where our father started his teaching career at the technical college and here Jan first saw the blinding light of the summer sun of Africa in February 1947.
5. Jan and I were only about three and five years old respectively when we moved from Kimberley to Stellenbosch. I don't recall much about Kimberley therefore, but there are a number of indelible memories, one of which being the heat, the way the hot ground burnt your footsoles no matter how fast you ran from one shade spot to the next.
6. At a very early age Jan manifested the exceptional characteristics which would later distinguish him from other, less interesting beings. One of these was, of course, a predominant curiosity. It was due to this curiosity that he nearly ended up back with the angels very soon after being delivered by the

stork. We had a nanny who had to take us for a walk; Jan on foot, barefoot, on the hot-as-hell gravel, while I sat like a Lord, reclining in the pram, sucking the teat of the bottle I recently inherited from Jan. No wonder he was not quite filled with joy at my arrival.

7. Not far from our house there was a railway line, and when Jan heard the train coming, he took off at a wild gallop, ignoring nanny's frantic call and ran across the street, right in front of an oncoming ambulance. It was a paradox that he should be run down by an ambulance, but perhaps the lesson to be learnt was that life is full of surprises, shocks and paradoxes. Surely there has to be whole squadrons of guardian angels whose task it is to flutter after impetuous children in order to save them from the jaws of death, otherwise Jan would certainly have been killed. Fortunately, only his leg was broken and it cost him a few weeks in hospital. He had such a purple scar next to his knee which I always found fascinating; I imagined that that was where the broken bones stuck out their splintered ends. I would never admit it, but I was a little envious of that scar; living proof that my brother survived the ambulance attack.

8. Jan's love for poultry, as evidenced by the assortment of chickens and bantams in his yard in Windhoek also dates back to his childhood days at Kimberley. Apparently our parents kept a tame duck with whom Jan developed a very close friendship in time. Unfortunately our folks weren't exactly sentimental where it concerned edible pets, and the duck was destined

to grace the Christmas dinner. When Jan started asking awkward questions regarding the sudden disappearance of his bosom buddy, he was led up the garden path; as the proverbial white lie will have it, (or, the more modern version, he was told a 'cock and bull' story) but they did not reckon with Jan's curiosity and detective skills, which were already well developed at a very tender age, and it did not take him long to discover the corpus 'delecti' in the fridge. In righteous fury he immediately wanted to take revenge - an eye for an eye? The murder weapon that brought an end to the poor duck's life happened to be near at hand (an axe), and were it not for the fact that Jan was scarcely knee-high and in a completely different weight class as his mother, he and I would have been orphans at a very early age.

9. Jan's regard for his fellow human beings, his empathy, also dates from this period. People who only know him superficially and judge him by his rough and abrupt manner, will never suspect it, but his stubbornness, his fire-and-brimstone curses, are only the exterior armour-plating with which he hides his tender-hearted interior. Our mother told the story about when we were small and had to say our children's prayers, (I am a tiny tender child, Jesus keep my little heart pure) Jan always prayed for the welfare of all our acquaintances, from grandparents to uncles and aunts, pets and the nanny Georgina, the gardener, the milkman, the garbage man, the whole tutti. One evening I am reputed to have complained bitterly: Jan, stop your 'Jesus-keep-them' now! (Jesus keep all the old kaffirs). So, unlike his younger brother, Jan was never a racist, and forty years of apartheid's rule could not make him

one either. Maybe since Uncle Sam's (Independence) he has a slightly less idealistic viewpoint.

10. In his youth, Jan was a true Samaritan, in contrast to his contemporaries who paid little attention to the suffering of fellow human beings. During our high school years at Stellenbosch, it was not unusual to see drunkards lying at the side of the roads on weekend evenings, and nobody seemed to take any notice. Except Jan. One evening near our house, he found a guy who apparently had been overcome by a combination of alcohol and gravity. Instead of passing by, he went closer to see if the fellow was still alive. Shrewd Sherlock Holmes that he is, he noticed a different odour on the man's breath, not alcohol. One of Jan's many hobbies was a chemistry laboratory he operated in the lean-to shed in our backyard, mainly with the intention of manufacturing gunpowder and other explosives. Due to his knowledge of chemicals, he recognised the smell of acetone on the drunkard's breath. What is more impressive, is that he had read somewhere that the smell of acetone on a person's breath was a sign of diabetic coma. Jan put two and two together and summoned the ambulance, which he then followed on his bicycle to make sure the young doctor in casualties makes the right diagnosis.

11. Another incident illustrating Jan's characteristic Samaritan nature, was in his second year at university. We had an old Anglia which Jan later called the A.coli, and one evening he and his girlfriend were travelling in this little car to Jonkershoek for a romantic evening in the moonlight. Suddenly a wildly

gesticulating figure jumped into the road in front of A.coli's headlights. Most people would have 'put the pedal to the metal' (stepped on the petrol) but my Samaritan brother immediately stopped. It appeared that a woman had just given birth to a baby at the side of the road (in one end and out the other, and there it lies, as the song goes), in the ditch, placenta and umbilical cord and all. Jan wasted no time and loaded baby, together with appurtenances into the car. On the front seat, his shocked girlfriend holding the baby on her lap and the placenta between her feet. Gone were the romantic illusions of moonlight and roses, now she just had to hold tight while Jan sped to the hospital, and the baby slimy and slippery. Both baby and placenta arrived at the hospital in an excellent condition. When Jan later told the story to Prof. Van Eyck Kirsten, Head of Anatomy at the time, and whose daughter he courted for a time, the old man said: But Jan, you should have bitten off the umbilical cord!

12. From these two incidents one would come to the conclusion that Jan should have become a doctor and I have no doubt he would have been an excellent doctor. However, his interest in things mechanical gave an early indication that he would choose engineering. From a very tender age he was a master of design and construction, as witnessed by the complicated Meccano models he could make that immediately collapsed in a pile. Jan excelled at building model airplanes, something he still does skillfully today: Spitfires, Stukas and Messerschmidts, American Hurricanes and Japanese Zeroes, aeroplanes we played with for hours at making war. Jan had a large number of Dinky

toys, many of which were war vehicles that were bombarded with clods of soil and strafed with stones in the many battles of the second world war re-enacted by us.

13. Similarly, Jan was ahead of most of his peers when it came to electricity. He could solder circuits and make battery-operated cars run, he could dismantle the insides of a radio and put it together again, something I always admired about him: I could take things apart, but I could never put them together again. Whether it was the three-speed gears of a bicycle or a watch, Jan could open up, clean and fix any defective mechanical thing to be functional again.

14. So it was clear very early on that Jan would become an engineer. The only problem was that he would have to pass matric, with maths on top of that, and with a university exemption to boot, what a pain! Because, let's face it, school work was never one of Jan's many interests, on the contrary, he did as little as possible, undoubtedly because school work was so boring and also required of you to sit on your backside in front of a stack of dull books for long periods. And, as our mother with her inexhaustible store of idioms always said, Jan had red ants in his pants, to which our father soberly added: yes, and he has to attend every dog fight too! I had a suspicion that it wasn't red ants that made Jan restless, but I didn't think the old folk would know about balls: I was under the impression that they were totally ignorant about sex.

15. So, back to school work: in the middle of his matric year, Jan had something like an E for maths, and his average was too low to gain university admission. Just as well, because he was jolted to his senses, and for the first time he sat down on these ants and, as old aunty 'Stalk' would say, he passed 'right through'. The big fright lasted a year or two because Jan passed his first year without having to rewrite any subject, including the dreaded maths. But then he probably realised that, if he continued in that way, the delights of student life would pass too soon, and so he decided to stretch out the road at a lazy pace. But that's a lo-o-o-ng long story to which I might come back.

16. Our childhood years at Stellenbosch were filled with interesting and eccentric adults, we had enough pals and there was no lack of adventure. Our house stood on the edge of a kind of wilderness where we played in the woods and on the river banks, and also often fought. We formed gangs, broke up and formed new gangs. We played cowboys and crooks, pelted each other with clods and acorns, fought with stick-swords, and shot at each other with bow-and-arrow.

17. There were times too when our conflicts weren't quite so friendly. Jan and I sometimes let the sparks fly. At one stage dad bought us each a pair of boxing gloves, probably in the hope that we would once and for all have enough of fighting. Unfortunately, this did not work out so well. Jan was bigger and stronger than I, of course, but I was more vicious, and I was a terrible loser, so that no victory could ever lead to lasting peace; it was merely cause for a

subsequent retaliatory attack or assassination attempt. Be that as it may, we both somehow survived although we actually only became friends after a number of years at university and several long periods of separation.

18. At high school Jan was singled out as a 'colorful character', unlike his more conventional peers. On the one hand, he was non-conformist, apparently not paying any attention to what people said or thought about him. At our first teenage parties, clouded with shyness, where a bunch of young, flustered bull-calves from the boys' school were for the first time confronted by a small herd of heifers-in-heat from the girls' school, Jan was the first guy who had enough self-confidence to break the ice, and to start twisting to the music of Chubby Checker, to the great entertainment of the less brave, who, nevertheless, followed suit and proceeded to make fools of themselves.

19. Contrary to most high school boys who came over aware of their appearance and clothing (to impress the girls, of course), Jan seemed to care little about such things: He normally wore a pair of shorts and short-sleeved shirt, usually crumpled and dirty, sometimes even tattered, to the extent where it earned him the nickname 'Ampie', but there were also times when he was all 'spruced up', as old folks say, the reason being that he started taking part in 'volkspele' - to be able to 'handle' a few feminine bodies, of course, something us 'monks' from the boys' school found utterly desirable. With his

embroidered waistcoat and shiny shoes Jan was a gallant fellow who would cause the knees of any volkspele¹ maiden to go watery.

20. Since early days Jan was someone who believed in freedom of speech. Even in a time when the ruling authorities advocated the norm that 'children should be seen, and not heard', Jan would speak his mind, loud and clear. According to mother, who had a memory like the proverbial elephant, especially where faux-pas and misdeeds were concerned, Jan's boisterousness started on the day he was born as he could scream non-stop, especially when things did not go his way. Later, he never feared to speak his mind and his language did not exactly omit swear words. Halfway through high school, one of our neighbours, oom Jan Myburg, once remarked with a smile: "Old Jan does not call a spade a spade, he calls a spade a bloody shovel". Well, his repertoire of adjectives was considerably increased when he went to the Airforce Gymnasium for a year after matriculating, and since then his language has just become more and more colorfull.

21. From time to time, as Jan exercised his freedom of speech, it caused him some anxious moments, as when he hurriedly had to seek political asylum in his own wardrobe, an incident which led to a considerable amount of good-natured (and less good-natured) banter from his family (especially me). This incident is so typical of Jan's healthy aversion for all hypocrisy that it should be told in greater detail. There was a 'Tokkelok' who, within a short time,

¹ Volkspele are folk games such as folk dances and singing folk songs.

became a dominating and influential figure in Jan's beloved 'voortrekker'² movement. This slippery smooth psychopath (let's call him cousin X) managed to mislead young and old alike with his devoutness and patriotism. What nobody suspected, was that he was a homosexual pedophile with sadistic tendencies. When Jan discovered this (with a huge shock and disillusionment) he did not hesitate to warn his pals against the guy - at the time 'Bunny' was the only known term for such a thing. Naturally, cousin X immediately realised that his career as student of divinity was seriously threatened by Jan's freedom of speech and he came to our house, insisting to speak to Jan, without doubt to silence him. Jan sought refuge in his wardrobe and left it to aunt Lena to confront the 'Fedopiel'. This task was just her cup of tea as she herself had a healthy aversion for sanctimonious talk. When cousin X insisted that Jan withdraw his libellous allegations since he as 'Tokkelok' was the 'Anointed of the Lord', aunt Lena cut him short by saying : " You are the anointed of Satan! "

22. Jan probably got his skillfull use of the spoken word from our mother as she was an inexhaustible source of idiomatic expressions and proverbs with which she could permanently silence any opponent. Over many years she and Jan perfected the art of verbal duelling, taking it to dazzling heights that at times caused any listener to become dizzy. But what was wonderful about these verbal fights was that there were no rules (except perhaps 'no holds barred' and 'no quarter asked, none given') and although it sometimes

² Voortrekker can be literally translated by 'pioneer'. It was also a political movement.

sounded like a fight to the bitter end, both of them survived every time and the very next day they were ready for the next round. The therapeutic value of this continuous, titanic argument was beyond doubt, neither of them would ever need a psychotherapist because there were no pent-up feelings that could lead to inner conflict and all kinds of aberrations.

23. Jan's eloquence led him to being the top speaker at the university's 'waffle' club or debating society, where many a trophy was awarded him for making amusing impromptu speeches on any given subject. He was also a leading figure on the engineering student's council and he was a popular and sought after speaker at courses for female students who wished to know more about the inside of a car's engine (presumably some of the ladies were also educated about other less mechanical secrets of macho engineering, but that is purely subject to speculation). In later years when he was organiser of Water Affairs' popular fishing club, the annual price-giving was a highlight everybody looked forward to thanks to Jan's humorous speeches and the slides he took of the fisherman in unguarded moments.

24. As already mentioned, Jan was not only a top speaker, but also a top Voortrekker. There he had a group of close friends and a place to exercise his leadership potential. He was team leader and would have become chief team leader, were it not for the fact that his main opponent was also the son of the chief commander. Jan's Voortrekker activities, I suspect, were mainly due to the red ants (in his pants) because there were never ending camps and

excursions over weekends, route marches, and of course the fact that one could get within touch distance after dark around the fire (or outside the circle of light) of the enigmatic entity, the female of the species. Jan was never a 'blind' patriot, on the contrary, his political inclinations were rather subversive than conservative. I still recall when he returned from a big camp at Broederstroom near Pretoria, how upset he was about the military nature of the Transvaal Voortrekkers. And then there was the camp near Durban one school holiday from which he returned gravely stricken by that incurable disease the French call 'Maladie d'Amour'. Something he suffered from more than once in his life, and of which he was also cured more than once, even if it was not without much hardship.

25. It is said the San people have a proverb: A woman is as old as the number of nights she had to sleep alone, and a man is as old as the number of disappointments he has had. Measured in this way, Jan is about five years old because there aren't many things he wanted or wanted to do that he did not get or do. But the most important thing is not to have a disappointment, but how you react to it and this is where Jan distinguished himself from most of us poor strugglers. I know he was very keen to become a pilot and that was the main reason why he went to the Airforce Gymnasium. Our father often quoted the Scottish poet Robert Burns, especially when he thought, I was conceited and opinionated: 'Oh, wad sum power te gift te gie us, to see oursell as others see us'. Well, Jan saw himself as this short arse aggressive pilot who would break the Red Baron's dog fights record. But the guys doing

the selection probably gave this giant (heaven's broom) one look and said he would not fit into the cockpit of a Harvard. To spare his feelings they consoled him by saying there was something wrong with his one ear. Our mother always alleged that he was deaf (would not hear/listen) and over the years he mastered the art of only hearing that which he wants to hear (and often that which he should not hear). When he was thus not selected for the flying course, he selected the second best option and did the flight control course, reaching the rank of lieutenant, and what could be better than being a fighter pilot but to be a flight controller and fuck around the fighter pilots?

26. Later, after coming to South West Africa in the mid-seventies, he had the chance to fly across the length and breadth of the country, and often the pilots allowed him to take over the controls. Since he became a Namibian he has been flying all over the world. His interest in planes and those who make them fly has remained alive and even intensified. He keeps accurate record of the names of all pilots and planes of flights undertaken by him. Recently on the way back from Europe, he sat in the cockpit of a 747 and I suspect old George had a hard time stopping him from taking over controls.

27. But Jan will probably say that it was in the field of romance that he had the most disappointments. In his youth our father looked a bit like Clark Gable - the Hollywood ladies man - but none of these good looks were passed to either of us. It is a fact that the most beautiful women fall for the ugliest men, but that is because the ugly guys do more to charm them and keep them.

However, it is a fact that the majority of women fall for handsome guys and will climb over a whole horde of ugly, adoring men to reach one of these narcissistic Adonises. Contrary to what Jan's boorish exterior would suggest, he is actually a very emotional guy who can become deeply involved. In his second year at university, he fell in love 'over his ears' as our mother would have said, with a girl who was beautiful, intelligent, talented and also sexy. She was going to spend the holidays at a beach resort and invited Jan to visit her. All through exam time, his head was 'full of mice nests' about sunshine days, bikinis, moonlight nights on the beach and nudy dips, etc, etc. and suddenly he received a telegram: The handsome stallion from her high school had arrived at the beach and things were really humming now, so Jan had better not come any more. Now, normal mortals would either have committed suicide or subsided in a morass of self-pity and despair - but not Jan. He immediately sent her a telegram with a message that was brief and to the point: 'Go and shit' (get stuffed).

28. Fortunately, Jan then met Annekie, which is one of the best things that ever happened to him, although I don't know for sure whether he realises it. Our mother often said that, were it not for her, the crows would have made their nest in Jan's pants long ago. Well, the daunting task of keeping the crows out of Jan's pants has now been taken over (willy - nilly) by Annekie, with great success. Nobody knows how she managed all these years to stay with Jan, but perhaps it was her sense of humour because, to appreciate Jan's sometimes

bizarre, and mostly scatological sense of humour, one needs a good sense of humour oneself.

29. But there is also a serious side to Jan's personality although he won't easily admit it. He is also sentimental with a weakness for nostalgia. He likes to look up family members and acquaintances from our childhood and stays in touch with people I had forgotten long ago.

30. Last year Jan attended the thirtieth anniversary of his matric class at Paul Roos. As could be expected, it was a big affair, among other things, Jan was selected as one of the guys to have gained the most weight: at school he was as slim as a reed and anybody who had not seen him for thirty years would never recognise him from looking at his physique. One of the ex-teachers at the reunion was our neighbour across the street at Stellenbosch. At school his nickname was old Cowboy because on Saturday evenings he showed cowboy movies in the school hall with an old projector that kept breaking down to the great amusement of the schoolkids. Old Cowboy is now over eighty years old, but he recognised Jan right away and told him he still remembered what father said to him the night he died.

31. Jan was in his first year and I was in the navy. The old man, as we lovingly referred to him, had apparently been feeling ill for a few weeks, but was not in the habit of going to the doctor and preferred self-medication with old boer remedies like Buchu-vinegar. So the aorta-aneurism remained undiagnosed

and when it ruptured the doctor immediately sent him to Karl Bremer hospital by ambulance but he never came back. Just before leaving in the ambulance, he said to Jan: 'Hold the fort, old Jan'.

32. One of the good things about an older brother is that you know there is someone to hold the fort. Jan accepted this responsibility as a matter of fact. Our father could not be called a militarist, but during the second world war he was a member of the Ossewa Brandwag, and during the unrest in the early sixties, he was in the commando at Stellenbosch. Jan's interest in military matters could have come from our father and his long-standing relationship with the civil forces, first in the airforce, later the army of the South West African Territorial Forces occupied much of his time and energy, but he was rewarded when he was promoted to the rank of commander. In his way Jan helped hold the fort, as our father asked him to.

33. I would like to think that Jan's decision to come to Windhoek in the mid-seventies had something to do with the fact that I was here and he wanted to be near me, and perhaps that was behind his decision, but I suspect it was the red ants again that made him come to South West. Once he saw the endless plains he realised that he had reached the paradise of all nomads, from the Bushmen to engineers with red ants in their pants - here there is enough space to become totally lost in it. This was one of the best things he could have done because here in Water Affairs in Namibia, Jan had the chance to best realise his many interests and talents. The great challenge to provide water in

one of the most arid regions of the world was precisely one of those paradoxes that always attracted him.

34. Jan, big brother, Ouboet, Brer Bear, on your fiftieth birthday I want to thank you for everything you ever meant to me over the years. Together we had wonderful times, much too intricate to try and tell here. Thank you for all the times we could visit you and your family, thank you for holidays we spent together. There are hundreds of precious memories I will always cherish. I hope you have a wonderful birthday and wish you many more years.

35. I know we grew up with a partly inherited, partly learnt dislike for all sentimentality and a healthy disgust in demonstrative outpourings of any kind, especially expressions of praise and love, but I would still like to say, even if I find it very difficult to become soppy and sentimental; you are not a bad old shit and I do like you in a way.

Your little brother, Wiliewalie Spoetnik.

Chapter 3

Metaphor

Language makes human interaction possible. When we speak we participate in communication; when we don't, either by choice or because of any kind of speech impairment, we stand back and might feel put aside. Also, when we speak, we simultaneously put words together to make a sentence and use one word instead of another. Lacan (1966) calls these two operations respectively combination and selection. There is logic in the way we combine and select words, but this logic often happens unbeknown to us and we often do not understand it. Thus, language is not only what we say but is far more complex. Language allows us to make meaning: we say things and, at the same time, we might mean something else, or an addressee might hear something different from what we say.

Lacan's (1966) emphasis on language is motivated by the fact that the interaction between a client and a therapist is based on language. For Lacan, language is a formation of the unconscious, and language is at the same time the action of a person, the place where the person exerts her art, and the product of her action. Lacan uses linguistics to demonstrate how the unconscious is revealed to us through signifiers that might be slips of the tongue, 'Witz', dreams and symptoms for example, and to explain what he means by saying that the unconscious is structured like a language.

In order to understand what is happening when we speak, we have to explore how language is functioning. This work will be carried out through a linguistic approach first. This 'un-psychological' part is necessary to understand Lacan's (1966) main idea, namely that the unconscious is like a language and functions according to the law of metaphor and metonymy. Furthermore, his very choice of these two concepts, instead of keeping the Freudian concepts of condensation and displacement (Freud, 1993), points at how important it is to know what metaphor and metonymy are, and how they work.

It will be shown that what the person says covers a whole range of meanings. The motivation of her words lies in the unconscious. It is not at random that words appear in our language, but we are not in control of the words, nor of their choice. Sometimes, when we speak, we make a mistake by saying something which does not seem to fit in the sentence. We might refer to this as a *lapsus linguae* or slip of the tongue. The sentence becomes nonsensical, but this nonsense is apparent and carries meaning. How meaning arises from nonsense will be discussed in this chapter.

We need linguistic laws to say what we say, but language is not only linguistic, it is psychological by the fact that there is an infrastructure made of unconscious material. There is another language running under the words we pronounce. The infrastructure reveals the speaker or, in other words, tells a story about him. It gives another meaning or adds meaning to our words. Language is then not a mere tool any more and loses its

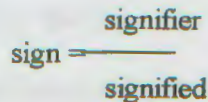
neutrality. There is a constant double talk provided by both the structure and infrastructure of language.

Once we have seen how language is functioning and unravelled the concept of metaphor, we shall see how we make use of metaphors in colloquial speech, what motivates their use or, simply put, why we say a word rather than another. It will be shown by means of theories provided by Jakobson, Dupriez, Ricoeur, Lacan and Derrida how metaphors work in the structure of language and how the infrastructure determines them. Lacan (1966) stresses the importance of language; his aim is that the patient be heard when he speaks because it is the only way to grasp that which is happening in the person. The way of speaking, the signs displayed by a person are in connection with her problem.

In the present chapter, a link will be established between the linguistic part of metaphor and the psychological aspect in terms of repression (i.e. repressed elements constituting the unconscious mind of the speaking person): hearing that which is behind the words. Lacan (1998) maintains that meaning is metaphorical and springs out of the substitution of a signifier by a signifier in the symbolic chain. The author's argument will flow out of the following assumption: metaphors are signifiers that refer to repressed elements. The concepts of metaphor, signifier and repression will be unravelled in this chapter.

1. Language and the 'Other' of language

Language is a system of signs. Language and signs can be verbal or non-verbal. A sign can be a word, a hint or a symptom for example. (We shall stress verbal language and the verbal expression of a symptom in this study.) We perceive signs through our senses. For structuralists (Muller & Richardson, 1994), a linguistic sign combines a concept and an acoustic image. This acoustic image is not the material sound, but a mental imprint of this sound. It is the natural representation of the word. Saussure calls the concept signified, and the sound-image signifier. He represents this relationship by the algorithm:



as the rule for how language is working. Signifier and signified constitute an indissociable combination in the human mind, but the link is arbitrary. For example, when we pronounce the sound 'cat', we hear [cat] and we have the picture of a cat in our mind. At the same time, we might hear [katze] or [chat] and still have the same picture if, of course, we understand German and French.

The difference between linguistics and psychoanalysis lies in the fact that the linguist operates on cultural signifieds which are socially institutionalised and structured, and the psychoanalyst considers the signified as influenced by individual variations (events

specific to a person such as a loving environment, abuse, or a traumatic event). That different perspective points at the difficulty to seize the signified.

Lacan (1966) pays great attention to the signifier. Adopting a post-structuralist view, he moves away from this definition by demonstrating that the signifier does not refer to a specific signified. Signifier and signified do not overlap. The picture we have of a cat might be different: Siamese, Persian, black, white, a specific cat we like more than another, and many other possibilities. He maintains that the signified is constantly sliding under the signifier, and that meaning insists (demands notice or attention) in the signifying chain, a chain of signifiers as explained by the Lacanian 'necklace'. However, there are anchoring points ('points de capiton' in French) where the signifier stops this otherwise ceaseless movement of the signified. Lacan (1966) calls 'anchoring points' the moment by which a signifier is tied to a signified in a chain to allow meaning. To illustrate this, Lacan provides the analogy of a mattress: the anchoring points maintain one layer of material to the other thanks to a piece of thread, restricting the sliding, but allowing some elasticity in the ties between the two points. The same kind of relation may be applied to the two terms (signifier and signified) on a linguistic level. If one term moves, the other one will move as well.

On the level of language, there is some elasticity between the words we pronounce and the unconscious. We have the impression that the signs we use are appropriate to express

that which we want to say and that we are understood. We think that what we say is coherent and expresses our thoughts. However, sociocultural influence, enriched by individual material, load our words/signs with meaning. Like in the example of the mattress, conscious and unconscious discourse are sliding upon one another within the limits allowed by the anchoring points. These anchoring points link the said to the meant. This link is often unseizable and non-sensical but never broken. Moreover, discourse is more complex because of the auditory nature of the signifier; we talk in time. To understand a sentence, we have to wait until it is completely formulated.

Thus, when we talk, we use the material part of language, its sound and code, to deliver a message which can be understood by a listener. According to Saussure (in Dubois, Giacomo, Guespin, Marcellesi, Marcellesi, & Mével, 1989), a code is a convention which comprises the nature of the signs, their number, their combination and the rules governing these combinations. Furthermore, there is another level which makes it possible for the words to be decomposed, interpreted in a different way, appealing to other possible meanings by the work of substitution. That is where metaphor comes in with the work of the signifier, and the code Lacan calls 'a common lexical storehouse' (in Lemaire, 1997).

Words are chosen from this sort of 'common lexical storehouse' (in Lemaire, 1997). In other words, we are born into a specific sociocultural environment and as such, we are fashioned by the structure proper to this social order and by the structure of language.

The condition for understanding is that speaker / writer and listener / reader know this code. That way, a word might gain more meaning. It is interesting to note that it gains more meaning by the very fact that the possible meanings are limited.

From Lacan (1966) we know that signifiers are substituting signifiers by the law of similarity and dissimilarity. This operation occurs on an unconscious level. Lacan does not say that we can never completely seize the meaning a person is conveying in her language, in that which this specific person is trying to say. For Lacan, there is an unconscious knowledge. He says that truth which represents the moment of interpretation, of healing, can be retrieved; it is mostly already written somewhere else, a place that Lacan calls the place of the 'Other', or the 'Other', which is also a rich mine of signifiers. Truth hides in strange places such as:

- in our body in the form of symptoms;
- in childhood memories which are undecipherable because their provenance is lost;
- in the storage of our vocabulary constituted by what we consider to be our own words;
- in traditions, myths, legends which, through their specific messages, direct our way of thinking, feeling and behaving: we strive to look like the hero or heroine;
- in distortions which leave traces in our memory.

Truth hides in these elements which exert a formative power, permeate language and constitute the fabric of meaning-making and understanding. We do not recognise the

universal value of these elements. We tend to confer on them an individual character and proclaim them as our own property, as our creation. The self is not master, but is dominated by the Other. In other words, Lacan gives the supremacy to the signifier which points at, without expressing literally, a hidden knowledge. For Lacan (1966), the person is supposed to know.

The first concern in this study will be to see how truth permeates language in the form of metaphor and metonymy.

2. What is a metaphor?

A metaphor is a word or an expression standing for another word or expression. Dupriez (1984) maintains that the shifting of a sense to another occurs through an individual operation based on interpretation or impression which asks to be retrieved or re-experienced by the person. It is not synonymous with image, but is a very condensed form reduced to a single term and substituting another term.

We can compare metaphors to hieroglyphics. Hieroglyphics contain meaning and their meaning is different from that which they show us pictorially. It is a language which is originally figurative. They bring us back to the origin of language as advocated by Rousseau. Rousseau (in Derrida, 1967) assumes that human beings first communicated with screams/sounds and gestures, and that these screams/sounds were progressively replaced by more sophisticated vocalisations leading to words. This obliteration of the

scream consisted in effacing and substituting. They needed overt ways to communicate abstract ideas: a sign which would be both word/picture and concept like the type of figuration we observe in hieroglyphics.

Rousseau (in Derrida, 1967) tries to tell us that it was not possible to name affect, and as such people had to resort to inadequate designations which we might call metaphors. He gives the example of 'giants'. When primitive people said that they saw giants it did not mean literally that they saw this type of huge impressive persons. The word 'giant' contains their fear of the foreign, and as such is the designation of that fear. Feeling distorted reality and gave birth to the image 'giant'. 'Giant' became their reality, the fear of the newcomers. Once they recognised their error, namely that these people were not giants, but that their fear made giants out of these persons, this image could be reconsidered and became a metaphor. 'Giant' is a signifier, but the signified is not the 'huge impressive person'; it is fear.

Now, for Lacan (1998), a metaphor is a substitution of a signifier, or of several signifiers, by a signifier in the signifying chain. He writes this relation:

$$\frac{S}{S_1, S_2, S_3 \dots}$$

Metaphor is that which gives 'zest' to language because it is creative and innovative. Metaphors allow us to say something else than that which is literally expressed. It will be

elaborated now by means of concrete examples from the birthday speech on the issues of substitution, on how this substitution is carried out, what individual impression and/or interpretation consist of, what motivates the use of metaphors, and how we recognise a metaphor.

2.1. Neutral language

As metaphors are usual words, taken from the vocabulary available in the specific language of a group, we could say that they need a basis from which they could arise in order to be recognised as such. This basis could be a text (understood as an articulated ensemble of words) of a neutral language. Barthes (1972) calls this neutral language 'degree zero of writing'. However, language is a social phenomenon establishing the link between the person and the world, and that questions the issue of neutrality. An example for neutral language would be mathematical symbols that are fixed signs that cannot be equivocal. Moreover, mathematical signs are international and have the same meaning in various cultures. There is no interference of unconscious material coming from a specific sociocultural environment in this type of language. Furthermore, neutral language is free from emotional content. 'Giant' can be considered as an example of non-neutral language.

The neutral basis would be constituted of non-metaphoric words. That would allow the metaphor to function. In the dictionary, words are indicated with a proper meaning and a

figurative meaning. The less figurative language is scientific language. And as Ricoeur (1975, p. 181) adds: "In scientific language, digression is not nought, but tends toward zero; such a language is therefore the best approximation of the 'degree zero of writing'". That again stresses the fact that there is no neutral language as such. In the same breath, we could say that we cannot come to pure understanding, understood in terms of strict correspondence of signifier/signified. Meaning and understanding are both contaminated by elements provided to us by society, culture, ideologies, stories we are told for instance. So, when a writer produces a piece of writing, or when we talk, we inevitably use the language of our own society, with its unavoidable infrastructure of, for example, social taboos and myths. As such, language is not neutral any more and any word can then play the role of a metaphor.

Derrida (1987, p. 75) points out that the word we use as a metaphor is considered to have another meaning than the proper meaning: it is, so to speak, in a "rented house". In the birthday speech, 'ant' is used in the figurative meaning, meaning shifting from material to non-material, from animate to inanimate (see table p. 47). A certain digression ('écart' in French, in Ricoeur, 1975) therefore occurs between the said/written and thought, "between letter and meaning" (Ricoeur, 1975, p. 179).

Earlier, we said that there is an individual operation based on interpretation or impression. To understand this, we must consider that a person perceives the world

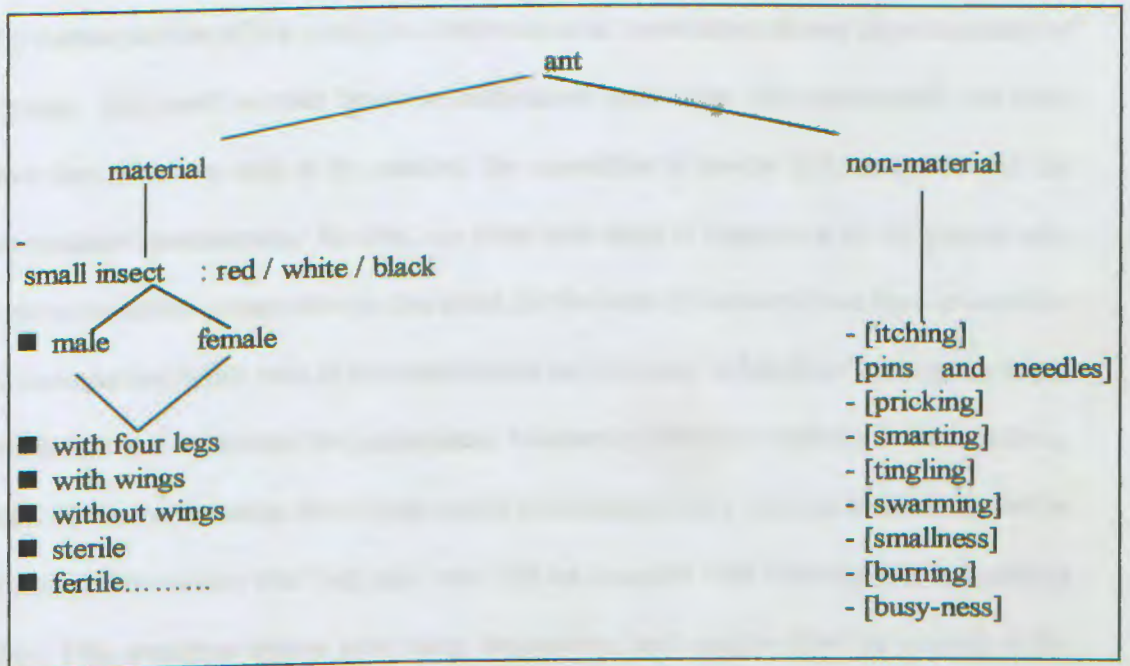
through her senses, and translates these perceptions into words. Now, the words she uses spring out of a particular sociocultural environment, the one in which she grew up and from which she inherited these words. Barthes (1972, p. 16) calls this phenomenon "an infra-language building up at the limit of the flesh and the world". He means that the way we speak is born from our body and our past, and that appears for example in the rhythm and in the speech devices we use to express ourselves. The speech devices contain fragments from another reality than the reality of words. There is a cultural print in language, grafted on an individual residue, appearing in the use of words. The said or written word is as if printed on a palimpsest, superimposed on other words which are not totally erased, which have left a trace. Metaphor would be functioning like that. To decipher a metaphor, we must try to hear/see the trace of what has been 'overwritten', to go back to the net of signifiers. For Derrida (1999), metaphors are derived from the proper meaning. Drifting is happening incidently, like an accident deriving from a cause. We can see how this is in contradiction with the word 'choose'; in fact, we do not choose, we are rather chosen. We could locate this cause in the unconscious mind, and a metaphor would therefore function like a slip of the tongue.

We can already see that neutral language is impossible because of the influence of the 'Other'.

2.2. The structure of a word

Metaphors often play with the opposition between denotation and connotation. As long as meaning moves within these two edges of denotation and connotation, understanding can happen. That is obvious in the case of 'red ants' (§ 14, 24, 33 in the birthday speech) as will be shown in the following paragraphs.

For the author, of French mother tongue, as an outsider to this group, 'red ants' is a metaphor. This metaphor springs out of environmental conditions. It is not used in the French context as 'red ants'. The author chose this expression because it is used by François as an extended metaphor. It becomes a sort of red thread through the birthday speech and François plays with different meanings as will be shown. If we decompose the word 'ant', through a polysemic (as having several meanings) perspective (the list the author gives is not exhaustive), we obtain the following picture:



Structure of the word 'ant'

A word can be decomposed into denotation and connotation, i.e. material and non-material field. Connotation refers to the emotional content of the vocabulary. This emotional content of a word is felt within a specific culture and created by this culture. It is not an individual process. The material field corresponds to the denotation, the non-material field to the connotation. Lacan (in Fages, 1997) calls practical, available language denotation. He considers connotation as a sort of secondary language involving individual material.

The decomposition of the word into denotation and connotation shows the complexity of meaning. We could wonder how we understand each other. To understand, we must place that which is said in its context: the ensemble of words and sentences and the sociocultural environment. To this, we must add what is happening in the person who might add another connotation to the word. In the case of 'red ants', we have to consider the connotation in this text. If the connotation for 'red ants' is burning / itching, we might infer that it is a substitute for restlessness. Moreover, there is a shifting in the signifying chain of this restlessness, to a more sexual connotation (in § 14, see birthday speech in chapter 2). We notice that 'red ants' can only be invested with meaning in the signifying chain. This metaphor comes into being, innovative and creative (for the author) in the signifying chain. It has to be contextualised in order to be understood. The introduction of the metaphor 'red ants' makes the discourse witty.

In short, we must remember that the connotation is important because it enriches metaphors. Metaphors are creative, they create meaning. Furthermore, connotation excludes neutral language. As such, metaphors become signifiers.

2.3. The work of metaphor

Lacan (1998) says that, in this verbal interaction, there is a pure signifier, 'red ants', and a play of signifiers creating an equivocal situation, the shifting from one meaning to another thanks to the play of signifiers. The pure signifier 'red ants' is the support of the whole

story here. 'Red ants' is the vehicle of the metaphor and confers a new meaning onto the figure of Jan. Through a mental movement from denotation to connotation, and thanks to the shift from mere restlessness to sexual restlessness, Jan becomes a seducer. If the combination of words is essential in language, meaning only arises through the work of substitution as we just saw. We can see here how the signifier 'red ants' does not refer to the specific signified which would be the concept of red ants. There is a sliding between signifier and signified, and no more as maintained by Saussure (in Muller & Richardson, 1994) the strict correspondence 'signifier / signified'. Transposed to the Lacanian formula as indicated page 42, we could write:

Red ants

Restlessness, sexual arousal, moving

The new approach to the relation between the signifier and the signified by Lacan (1966) introduces the idea of sliding of meaning. There are two levels: the one we hear when somebody is speaking; the second is that which allows us to interpret, to understand through the work of metaphor and metonymy. There is always another voice talking behind our speech, and an ear hearing behind our hearing. We could thus understand the discourse on the first level as the story of small red insects in Jan's pants, including the characteristics listed in the material semantic field. However it is the second level mobilising the non-material semantic field, and the shifting of meaning from restlessness to sexual restlessness which makes understanding possible, creates and introduces new meaning into the speech.

There is an intersection between the two levels, between that which we say and that which we mean. We say 'red ants' and we mean seducer for example, according to the context. There is constantly a reference to something else. Lacan (1998) refers to this something else as the 'Other'. To avoid confusion in the following paragraphs and chapters, let us say that when the author uses the 'other' with a small 'o', it refers to the other person, whereas the 'Other' with a capital letter refers to the Lacanian definition as follows, and the 'o/Other' contains both 'other' and 'Other'. For Lacan (in Dethy, 1998), the 'Other' (he calls 'big other') adopts different meanings according to that which it designates in a sentence; it might signify the almighty power of the law, the analyst, the admired father, an imaginary strength or God. It also means the culture of the subject and the unconscious. It is this 'Other' which makes discourse alive, takes it out of the state of dead language.

In the case of 'red ants', the metaphoric effect is wanted. The rhetoric device is used consciously. At the same time, it introduces more: when we talk, there is an underlying discourse crossing the signifying chain, often without us being aware of it. That phenomenon becomes obvious in slips of the tongue for example. We constantly speak metaphorically in terms of substituting signifiers for signifiers. In the birthday speech, François tells the story of his brother Jan. François describes different events and recognises Jan in these actions. He establishes a correlation between Jan's actions and the person he is. By the choice of 'red ants', François shows how Jan remained faithful to

himself over time. François' narrative constitutes Jan's identity. Ricoeur (1990) calls this type of identity narrative identity. It became a habit for Jan to 'move'. 'Red ants' allows a permanence over time in the speech and in Jan's identity in the feature of restlessness; many anecdotes related by François circle around this feature thanks to the various meanings attached to the metaphor of 'red ants'.

This example shows how François builds up Jan's identity in his narrative. In the same way, he builds up his own as we all build up our identity in our words. That corresponds to what Lacan (1966) says, namely that the person makes herself in language.

3. Metaphor and repression

Repressed elements come back in our words and in the signifiers we use. These signifiers stand for the repressed event; by a work of substitution, they signify it without naming it literally.

3.1. The work of substitution

We mentioned earlier that a signifier substitutes another signifier by the law of similarity (or dissimilarity). Let us see how similitude appears in 'red ants' and restlessness. We can easily imagine what might happen if we inadvertently would sit on an ant hill, especially of red ants. The burning, itching and painful sensation they provoke would make us immediately move from this place to a safer one. In the same way, we mentally shift from

the material semantic category to the non-material one. The metaphor makes an abstraction concrete: restlessness is made concrete in red ants. The words 'red ants' are diverted from their original meaning of small insects, and at the same time something concrete (red ants) is rendered abstract (restlessness). 'Red ants' is substituting for these sensations and the movement resulting from their action. "Red ants" therefore stands for restlessness. There is a transfer of meaning from one object (ant) to another (Jan) thanks to a characteristic which is common to both and which is 'itching', leading to restlessness. It can be considered as a signifier standing for another signifier which in its turn stands for another signifier. The shifting of meaning here happens on the level of feelings. Resemblance is therefore found in the parallelism between different situations and recognised in spite of the difference between them. Resemblance comes up in the very shifting of meaning. By drawing on the context, the audience can understand. As Ricoeur (1975) maintains, this connotation is not free but forced; it stays within the semantic field of the word. This brings us back to the Lacanian analogy of the mattress where anchoring points stop the movement of the signified. If this movement is not stopped, we do not understand any more, or there is misunderstanding.

When we say, for example, 'this man is a fox', we suggest that he is cunning, and we think about a property, a characteristic of the fox that we attribute to the person. There is an analogy between the person and the fox, and so between Jan and ants in our example. In the case of 'red ants', we do not call forth a property, but rather the effect which could

be provoked by a property. Verbal communication partly consists in wrapping a content in a word. These words are sometimes cheating us, and if they do, the signifier becomes fallacious.

According to the Lacanian definition of substitution of signifiers, we speak metaphorically all the time. Substitution then, means that something (a word, an expression) serves in place of or stands for another thing (word, expression). However, Lacan (in Fages, 1997) says that the substitute is not just a word standing for another word which has the same meaning as we have seen in the example of 'red ants'. On which criteria is the substitution founded?

We approach the environment through our senses. However, the object which is captured or seized becomes, in a sense, a different reality for everyone. If we want to express the object we captured with a word, the word we shall use will be re-worked unconsciously according to the lexical storage we gained over time, and according to more individual approaches to the world and others linked with feelings such as pain or joy. The signifiers into which we are born, which do not only come from our sociocultural embeddedness, but also from the smaller unit of the family and the individual variations, determine how we perceive the world. We use words that were given to us in this specific environment and conditions. According to Ricoeur (1975) we select these metaphors on the basis of something that is similar, as for example in ants and restlessness. He maintains that it is

the apperception (dynamic work referring to how a person symbolises things and how she approaches situations according to these symbolisations) of this similarity which motivates the choice. There must be a resemblance between the metaphor and the replaced term. If the digression between metaphor and replaced term is too big, we cannot understand the metaphor any more.

Lacan (in Chaitin, 1996) stresses that 'meaning can only be understood as a matter of the relations of signifier to signifier'. In order to talk about the world, we use the words which are the most appropriate for us, those which express most precisely our perception of things. It will be our reality, and it might be different from somebody else's. For example, the color 'turquoise' is blue for one, and green for another one. We see the world not like it is, but in an idealised form because we project elements from the 'Other' into our words. On a more psychological level, in the case of symptoms, substitution works in a similar way.

3.2. The signifier and repression

Lacan (1981) says that very often the unconscious is in the open air or unrestrained. Leclaire (in Fages, 1997) provides an example of that and relates how a metaphor can lead to, and be a symptom. On their way home, two drunkards loose their balance and fall. They are picked up and brought home by two policemen riding bicycles. Some days later, one of the drunkards develops a bird phobia. To understand what happened here,

we have to re-place the story into the French context where it occurred. In France, town policemen used to ride bicycles, replaced today by motor-cycles. These policemen are called 'hirondelles' (French for 'swallows'). The drunkards do not remember anything of their nocturnal adventure; the event has been foreclosed. The foreclosed element in form of the metaphor 'swallow' gives birth to delusion and phobia. Similarity between 'bird' and 'swallow' has been established on an unconscious level by an association of thoughts.

The signifier 'bird' does not directly stand for 'policeman'. There is a sort of ricocheting from 'bird' to 'swallow' to 'policeman'. There is a shifting of meaning and the thing which is signified is the great fear experienced by the drunkard who developed the bird phobia. In his numbness, he must have been able to grasp the presence of the swallow/policeman and made the connection with what would happen next, namely his arrest for having done something wrong. Policeman is just another signifier for authority. The phobic man constantly displays his problem, but it is only possible to understand him if we decompose the word 'bird'.

What is exactly happening here can be explained by the work of synchrony and the way it is done. There is a first inscription in the mind of the phobic person: the event experienced by the drunk man which now is foreclosed. 'Swallow' is the substitution of that event, and 'bird' is the substitution of 'swallow' which itself is a substitute for police. This constitutes a chain of signifiers. When the phobic person sees a bird, a repetition of

the forgotten event occurs because the first inscription is awoken and the person suffers. As the event has been foreclosed a signifier substitutes it. Repetition is necessary to trigger the first inscription. The repetition is here the mere sight of birds.

Lacan (in Lemaire, 1997) says that a metaphor (as a signifier for another signifier) refers to a repressed or foreclosed event. The metaphor is the signifier standing for the original signifier which becomes a signified. There is a link between the signifiers of this chain based on similarity: 'bird' and 'swallow' and 'police/swallow'. This link is specific to the phobic person because it is founded on an individual variation (the event is proper to this person). At the same time, there is a sociocultural aspect because 'swallow' as 'policeman' is common to a whole group. It has become unconscious, and it forms now an infrastructure of this person's language. We see that this infrastructure is dynamic: it repeatedly causes the symptom. The memory of the event is denied access to consciousness and becomes unconscious. All the substitutes are built on the first symbolisation the person made. Here, birds represent authority and fear. The first symbolisations constitute the 'Other'.

In the bird phobia, the signifier 'bird' (S) stands for other signifiers (S1, swallow; S2, policeman). All the signifiers that are under the bar of separation that Lacan calls substitution bar, are the repressed signifiers replaced by a single signifier. Let us go back to the relation signifier/signified: something is represented phonically. To understand the

bird phobia (where something is replaced by the bird phobia) we need a second signifier 'swallow' because the single signifier bird cannot explain the phobia. The bar on 'swallow' indicates that the signifier 'swallow' has been excluded, it is not pronounced. Then, the effect of meaning is not immediate, it must be replaced in a context, i.e. combined with at least one other signifier to be understood. Meaning can only arise under these circumstances and meaning seems to be produced by non-sense.

Metaphor opens up meaning, transporting our mind to other dimensions. Lacan (1966) stresses the importance of the effect of meaning ('effet de sens' in French) of metaphor. Lacan (in Dethy, 1998) says that it is the use of a word in a peculiar sense which betrays the imprint of the unconscious. Metaphor seems to compensate for the defect of language, or, in other words, the incapacity of a word to fully express that which we mean. The phobic person cannot express in words that which has been forgotten, and then, metaphors seem to be more appropriate to express unconscious material. Meaning or sense ('sens' in French) is produced in non-sense. Non-sense must be understood as something which does not make sense rather than something which is absurd. In the case of the bird phobia, 'bird' does not seem to make sense because the signifier 'swallow' got lost.

3.3. The realm of dead metaphor and meaning-making

In the case of the bird phobia, we see that bird is a common word of our vocabulary. However it is a metaphor here because it stands for something else. To come back to the

birthday speech, we see that on the one hand, there are obvious metaphors such as 'red ants' (§ 14, 24, 33), or 'thorns, stones and potholes along the footpath' (§ 1), 'hold the fort' (§ 31), and many more. The metaphoric meaning of these expressions, however, tends to lessen to such an extent that they are not perceived as metaphors any more. On the other hand, there are metaphors which we do not recognise at all as such any more. For example: 'saw the first light' (§ 4), and more disturbingly (because we are so used to them and use them in colloquial speech) words or expressions such as 'stand back' (§ 1), 'attached', 'right down' (§ 2) to name a few. Amazingly for the author, 'red ants' is not considered as a metaphor in the Afrikaner society of Namibia and South Africa. We might thus infer that, like the words and expressions we do not recognise as metaphor any more, they became "dead metaphors" (Ricoeur, 1975), because they made their entry into colloquial speech and use. The 'leg' of the table is a perfect example of dead metaphor: a table has no leg, but there is no other word to name this part of the table. The presence of dead metaphors makes us aware of the extent to which we speak metaphorically without even noticing it. Many banal expressions such as 'above' (from sky), underneath (from earth), phenomenon (from visible), essence (from invisible) have been constituted metaphorically. Metaphors have a symbolic dimension.

Now, if 'red ants' ('rooimiere' in Afrikaans) is not considered as a metaphor in this society, this expression has become worn out. 'Ants in the pants' might be a dead metaphor in English, however, the translation of 'rooimiere' into 'red ants' sets it alive

again, because the apposition of the adjective 'red' revives it. It reveals meaning: red ants are known to be much more aggressive than other ants, and thus, we should understand that Jan's restlessness might be compared with red ants' action, i.e. tremendous. In French, we could say that we have 'ants' in the leg or the arm, for pins and needles, when the member is numb and when we have the sensation that hundreds of ants are running over the skin. We would not say 'ants in the pants', and that makes 'red ants' appear as being an innovation for the author. In the Namibian and South African societies, this expression is widely used; it is not an individual creation and is consensual. It is an idiomatic expression, or idiom, i.e. a form specific to a community or to a language. If it is translated literally, it becomes non-sense. 'Red ants' becomes meaningful when it is replaced in its context.

A metaphor becomes 'dead' when it is used constantly and automatically. Ricoeur (1975) and Derrida (1987) give the analogy of money: when a coin is used over a long time the relief and inscription on its sides progressively effaces, and it becomes a mere piece of metal. Very often these types of metaphors become catachreses or clichés. However, when worn out, these elements of language still represent or allow communication. Like blurred coins, they continue to circulate among us, making meaning, keeping an exchange value. The signifier 'swallow' continues to circulate underneath the signifier 'bird' and determines the symptom phobia and, as such, the signifier 'bird' is a dead metaphor. The phobic person has no other word to express her pain. 'Bird' substitutes a whole range of

meanings. In the same way, in colloquial speech, the words we use carry the load of sociocultural material which has been imprinted on them. When we learn to speak we accept the words with this load and do not recognise that they stand for something else.

That fact shows that the person is divided between that which she says and that which she wants to say. There is something enigmatic that the person does not understand, that which could allow the phobic person, for example, to make meaning out of his phobia. This something constitutes a hidden knowledge. Because of this hidden knowledge, the person cannot adapt to reality (i.e. that birds are harmless), but adapts reality to himself (i.e. birds are dangerous). The self creates a new adaptation to reality (being afraid of birds) and the person strives to maintain some cohesion with this double.

There is a discordance between the person who speaks, between that which the person says, that which she takes responsibility for and the unconscious. In a person, there is a co-existence of two persons who ignore each other: the one who speaks, and the one of the unconscious, the o/Other. That creates an impression of strangeness. We are constantly together with a stranger and moving between these two poles of the person. Metaphors show the o/Other, and this o/Other is invested with imagination or fear, or anxiety, or desire.

Words have then the function to picture dead affects. Dead affect is maintained in metaphors. We might be allowed to assume that metaphors, as containers of feelings, would therefore be vestiges of the first ways of communicating with screams and sounds. Screams and onomatopoeia for example represent the affect when it is felt. Here affect and representation of affect are superimposed, simultaneous. The affect can then be related after the person cooled down, taking distance from her emotions.

In the case of the bird phobia, we see that the event causing the phobia has been forgotten and repressed. This history escapes from the phobic person, but does not completely disappear. It stays active and continues to infect his language by appearing and disappearing according to circumstances. Situations, such as the sight of birds, trigger its awakening. Thus, even though the traumatic event got effaced from his memory, the affect attached to it persists and goes on disturbing the life of the person by appearing in the form of a symptom. The symptom belongs to the realm of metaphor because it is the substitution of a bodily signifier by a repressed signifier. It points at the episode that 'disappeared' from the experienced history. The metaphor keeps the traumatic event at a distance. The missing episode constitutes a disruption in the discourse of the phobic person. A painful trauma is inscribed in the body and in the vocabulary specific to this person (i.e. the specific meaning of bird). The disruption is marked by a metaphor.

In other words, metaphors replace first inscriptions in the unconscious of the person. Further inscriptions are made on the first inscription and interpreted by the person according to the first one. These inscriptions determine how the person will internalise external elements. This constitutes the part speaking in place of the person and needs to be unveiled in order to reconstitute meaning.

4. A supplement of meaning

Furthermore, Derrida (1998) points out that from the Greek etymology, 'metaphorikos' designates 'means of transport'. What happens more exactly in 'red ants', a metaphor carrying the meaning of 'restlessness' and in 'bird' carrying the meaning of 'fear of authority'?

Metaphors carry us along passages, the edges of which they touch without cutting them, or transgressing them. To explain what a metaphor is can barely be done without using metaphors. We could say that, within this passage, 'restlessness' undergoes a movement of 'Bahnung' (German word for opening a path with force) between two parallels: Jan and ants. 'Restlessness' is touching both, but is neither one nor the other. Jan and ant are close, but not superimposed, and as such meaning is different and deferred: restlessness is a characteristic of Jan and ant, but it is neither Jan nor ant. This 'trait' (Derrida's word in French for feature, touch, 1998), common and differential, attracts them and marks the

difference between them. The 'trait' is like the trace left on the palimpsest, a trace which might by turns be printed or blurred by the work of re-printing.

We understand that metaphors bring things which are remote or different together. 'Red ants' and Jan are different, but are brought together by the common trait of restlessness. The presence of the signified 'red ants' as little insects, got effaced, but remained readable or visible. 'Red ants' becomes a "signifying trace" (Derrida's expression, 1967, p. 38), it is plurivocal: the signifier 'red ants' does not refer to a transcendental signified. The signified rather has the function of a signifier.

What happens here is that we say 'red ants' and we mean 'restlessness'. Therefore, we might infer that meaning can be found in the 'Bahnung', and as such we see that meaning is fluid, neither one, nor the other (edge). This is precisely the play of 'différance' (different and deferred). We can indefinitely play with signifiers, refer to other signifiers (restlessness referring to ant, referring to Jan, or, 'red ants' referring to restlessness, referring to Jan, and eventually to François) in the signifying chain. The signifying chain indicates a certain limit between signifier and signified, as advocated by Lacan (1966) when he describes the sliding of the signified under the signifier.

The same process happens on the level of a symptom: 'bird' sends back to 'swallow', then to policeman, authority and the fear of this authority. 'Bird' is a threat and means

'fear'. On the surface, it is the fear of birds, but in the reality of the phobic person, there is a shifting of meaning from bird to police/authority.

It is important to note that we do not go off track; we stay in the 'Bahn'. Drifting is still somehow restricted. In Derrida's words (1999), metaphors allow us to travel, to experience an odyssey through language. Metaphors are expressions which are deviated and derived from proper meaning, and metaphoric meaning is a drifting of proper sense. For him, the departure point would be proper meaning, and then, meaning is 'deriving' (in the sense of drifting) in a figurative way. The word is temporarily deviated from its proper meaning, from that which is familiar. Metaphor upsets the relation between proper and figurative meaning. Metaphor is the death of the proper.

Derrida (1967) claims that metaphors provide a supplement of meaning. He says that a supplement acts both as surplus and as substitute. If we consider metaphors as substitutes, we must now add the idea of surplus, more particularly, surplus of meaning which is plural. 'Red ants' is supplementing something which does not suffice itself. It supplies a lack, a deficiency, the deficiency of another sign (word) to fully express what the author is striving for. The surplus of meaning is provided by the hidden knowledge and appears in our words.

There is a big discrepancy between 'bird' and 'policeman' because the signifier 'swallow' is silenced. The supplement appears to be provided by sociocultural considerations and reveals, in an unexpressed way, or indicates that which is not acceptable in a society, things we cannot talk about such as taboos, and repressed elements. In the case of the word 'ant', we saw that a sign or word is heterogeneous, decomposed into material and non-material parts. 'Restlessness' and 'sexual restlessness' are supplements of meaning. The supplement as such would not make sense without the support of a context likely to clarify it. The supplement provides us with the 'invisible' which opens up and somehow defines meaning. Derrida (1998) says that supplementarity is *différance*, submitted to the same movement. We feel here the link between the Derridean idea of supplement and the Lacanian view of the signified as sliding under the signifier. Both Lacan and Derrida maintain that meaning is deferred. The signified can never be seized, but is contained in the signifier we use to make meaning. We can say that the signified provides a supplement of meaning.

A word is powerful. A metaphor for that is provided by the Judaeo-Christian culture which rests on the image of a God, unique, but split into three 'persons'. Nobody ever saw him, but some people have heard him. That stresses the importance of the voice and, by extension, of speech. We hear the word, but cannot catch the meaning. That issue is strengthened by the following passage of the Bible (n.d.). The first words of the Gospel by Saint John (p. 806) sound: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with

God, and the Word was God. It was with God from the beginning. Everything has been done through it." We might be allowed to compare the Word with a god. Then, the Christian God represents a wonderful postmodern metaphor, as putting the emphasis on language and especially on speech, and as presenting the Word as being 'split', and as such, the Word does not have only one meaning.

A word is then more than a word; we must mentally restore the whole meaning, signifier and signified, by including the supplement. By using 'God' for 'Word', we characterise 'Word', it is more than a mere substitution of words. By this replacement 'Word' becomes almighty, powerful, master. It is loaded with meaning. We think we can play with words as material objects we shift on a draught-board, but we forget the signifier which often becomes independent. It becomes independent because it is submitted to elements from another scene that we do not control, and that contaminate our utterances. Of course, we cannot maintain that every single word refers to the transcendental signified as God, as a creating principle.

4.1. Sense and senses

We shall see now how speech ('la parole', in French) is located between the body, expressed in terms of metaphors, and the code which defines the social and cultural modalities. Simply put, we might say that metaphor concretises the non-verbal in an imaged way. Metaphor seems then to be the place where sense and feeling meet and are

articulated. If we say for example, that Jan is restless, it makes sense, but it is rather a flat sentence. If we talk about 'red ants' in his pants, our imagination is working because our senses are aroused: we see the scene, we laugh by visualising it as it is said, and we might even feel the itching effect of the ants. Alive metaphors mediate non-verbal elements, release sensory impressions and we know immediately what is meant. Ricoeur (1975, p. 265) says that "poetic language presents a certain fusion between sense and senses which distinguishes it from non-poetic language where the arbitrary and conventional character of the sign discards sense from the sensitive". In other words, we can understand that for Ricoeur dead metaphors do not arouse our senses. That makes sense if we consider it from the perspective of linguists who define the signified as culturally induced.

Now, let us consider it from the view of psychoanalysts who include the dimension of individual variation into the signified. As babies, we scream or express ourselves by means of echolalia (prattling); these screams and sounds are progressively replaced by language as we grow older. The author would like to see metaphors as the extension of these original screams as our bodily expression, now replaced by signs and/or words which are socially acceptable. In the bird phobia, 'bird' would refer to such a 'scream' because it is the expression of the suffering of the person.

In the birthday speech, the expression 'anxious moments' (§ 21) is a way to express own anxiety without acknowledging it, especially in a society where it is not acceptable to talk

about feelings, where feelings are repressed. A moment is a period of time; it has no feelings, therefore it cannot be anxious. Rather, we have to understand that the person who experiences these moments is anxious. This association is less shocking because we can relate to it and make sense out of it. We understand what it means because we all might have experienced anxiety some time. Poetic language gives birth to a mood and metaphors expressing this mood restore the link between body and language, establishing fusion between the logical and the sensual. Emotions which are essentially felt can be shared thanks to the descriptive and evocative power of metaphors. We might infer that metaphors depend upon bodily functions such as perceptions and feelings. They express emotions and give rise to similar emotions in the listeners. They operate on a subjective level and might be considered as sort of models used to allow us to see or feel. 'Red ants' (§ 14,24,33) says more than mere restlessness. It precisely expresses the ant-like movement as we perceive it, running around, not being able to stay in the same place for longer than five minutes. Furthermore, it expresses an inner restlessness: not knowing exactly what is going on with us, why we cannot sit down and concentrate on a task. We feel uncomfortable, agitated, worried, sometimes anxious, somehow irritated, finally dissatisfied with ourselves; it is an indefinable feeling which makes us move. That again entails another discourse which arises from the Western culture where 'not moving' relates to laziness which is considered as detrimental for a society of production. The issue of how our bodyliness is submitted to particular sociocultural ways of being will be discussed in a later chapter under 'bio-power'.

By opening up meaning, metaphors provide us with a different reality and we see how relative the notion of reality is in fact. The shifting of meaning occurs, however within certain limits. The image is not free because it remains in the field of the connotation authorised by the boundaries of a sociocultural environment. If, as in the case of the bird phobia, there is too big a discrepancy between the material and non-material field, it is difficult or impossible to establish meaning: 'bird' is too estranged from 'policeman' whereas 'policeman' belongs to the polysemy of 'swallow' in French. But 'bird' constitutes the spark allowing meaning. It is the fear felt by the phobic person which is expressed in the bird phobia and makes sense (phobia being fear).

In short, metaphors might be seen as an attempt to make sense of repressed elements. As such, the surplus of meaning contained in metaphors has an affective load.

5. The technique of the signifier

The author chooses to deal with the 'Witz' in this chapter because the 'Witz' is a verbal technique that Lacan (1998, p.21) calls the 'technique of the signifier'. This section will also lead us progressively to the next chapter on metonymy.

The metaphor 'bird' for 'policeman' shows that meaning and understanding can only arise if we stay in a familiar environment. This is relevant for metaphors, symptoms and 'Witz'. 'Witz' might be commonly translated by joke. For Lacan (1998), the 'Witz' is the

mimed equivalent of the language of the unconscious which itself is 'Witz' 'mot d'esprit' (literally 'witty word' or witty play on words), and either failed or successful metaphor. It is a formation of the unconscious. The 'Witz' shows the 'Other' because it allows to see that which is not there.

Both 'Witz' and metaphor establish a relation between heterogeneous thoughts and things. We also talked about metaphors functioning by the law of similarity or dissimilarity. An example of 'Witz' might be 'the anointed of Satan' (§ 21) qualifying the theology student. Freud (1988) would call that expression a figuration by the contrary, which is not quite exact here because the contrary is fully expressed, or a 'Wörter Witz' (we could translate that by 'joke on/by words'). The expression stands in contradiction with the image we could have of a student of theology, and becomes an ironic 'Witz'. The words used, 'anointed' and 'Satan', belong to the field of religion; they are both elements of a same context. However, putting them together results in an oxymoron (rhetoric device which consists in joining two words apparently contradictory (Dubois, Giacomo, Guespin, Marcellesi, Marcellesi, & Mével, 1989), forming a strange association which makes the passage witty.

Another example of 'Witz' is given to us by the word 'fedopiel' (in § 21). Here the 'Witz' or 'mot d'esprit' appears in a slight modification of the word by the displacement of the letters p and f (ph), by the technique of spoonerism, and would be what Freud

(1988) calls a 'Gedanken Witz' (we could literally translate by 'Witz' occurring on the level of thoughts'). This 'mot d'esprit' or 'Witz' reveals the author's hidden thought by putting the accent on the student's sexual perversion. Both 'the anointed of Satan' and 'fedopiel' disclose the feeling of reproof and despise experienced by François and his aunt. The play of words takes place between pedophile and 'piel' (in Afrikaans, crude word for penis), throwing abjection onto the student by stressing the sin of flesh.

If we analyse the play of the signifiers, like in the case of alliterations (repetition of a same consonant or vowel) the sounds f and p themselves give a contemptuous note to the word. These sounds become signifiers. The word which might appear non-sensical produces a bigger effect by the sense it contains. Lacan (1966) teaches us that sense comes out of non-sense. Non-sense carries meaning and makes us laugh. How can words provoke pleasure and provoke laughter?

If we would decompose into words what a 'fedopiel' is, the whole effect of surprise and comical character would be elided. There is a surplus of meaning in 'fedopiel', as well as in 'the anointed of Satan'. This type of expressions might generate various reactions among the audience. People might smile or be embarrassed by 'the anointed of Satan'. 'Fedopiel' is cruder and generates laughter. These expressions are tendencious. What is certain is that 'fedopiel' triggers laughter, whereas 'red ants' only provokes a smile. 'Fedopiel' is a *détour* (deviation) of meaning, expressing in a word play something which

would appear as reprehensible. We note here the sociocultural impact in the repression of sexual matters. There is no place for broad jokes here in this type of society. The way to say it, the technique used to express the thought makes all the difference. 'Fedopiel' sounds like a mis-pronunciation of the word pedophile. It is the phonic element which allows the word game. The broad joke is skillfully deviated into a witty, socially acceptable word. We actually laugh about an obscene 'Witz' presented in a subtle way. Rendering the theology student despicable is also a way to utter a bitter critique on the paradoxes found in religion, to push it away from us like excremental stuff. It is dirty.

A 'mot d'esprit' aims at providing us with pleasure. Pleasure is obtained by saying in a skillfull and smart way elements such as sexuality and hostility which are repressed by our society / culture / education. Pleasure is only possible if, as for metaphor, the 'mot d'esprit' is new. The 'Witz' allows us to pass the sociocultural barriers, and a factor for its success is the common sociocultural background. If it were a mere mis-pronunciation, the whole process would be a formation of the unconscious and reveal François' feelings for the theology student unbeknown to himself. The unconscious would then penetrate into conscious discourse in a veiled form, as advocated by Lemaire (1997).

By a 'mot d'esprit', a certain achievement is met because we manage to suppress in/prohibitions. Sociocultural barriers and taboos are transgressed in an acceptable way and with enjoyment. Kristeva (1998) points out that humour is the noble side of hatred which

allows us to abject the m/other and become ourselves. 'Witz' is then a way to avoid acting violently and to stay within the norms of the environment while releasing this type of feeling.

For Lacan (1998, p.13), "meaning is metaphoric, and meaning only arises from the substitution of a signifier by another signifier in the signifying chain". The double talk and problem of understanding come from the relation signifier/signified, and that is obvious in the case of metaphors, 'mots d'esprit', and symptoms such as the bird phobia.

How does it work in the case of 'fedopiel'? We might say that when we talk, we want to give a message to another/other person/s. The object of our rational discourse is pedophile. Now, this word has certain similar phonic characteristics to the Afrikaans word 'piel'. Due to this fact, something is moved in the signifying chain, giving birth to a new signifier 'fedopiel'. The message is unusual because it does not belong to the code, creating surprise. We might say that, in this case, the signifier is violating the code. The message differs from the code. The work of the 'Witz' is interesting here because of the work of substitution of signifiers. At the same time, it consists in the perception of two images for a single object: pedophile and 'piel' in 'fedopiel'.

A signifier has more possibilities than a signified; it is creative. In this type of substitution, we have condensation of two words and phonic modification. Both 'red ants' and

'fedopiel' throw a new meaning respectively on Jan and the student. For Lacan (1998) it is precisely in the substitution that the creative power of metaphor, or of 'Witz' lies and meaning emerges. The word 'fedopiel' is consciously created by François and raises a whole range of meanings. The substitution of pedophile by 'fedopiel' brings a surplus of meaning, something new. A new dimension is added to the word.

We must note that the word 'fedopiel' is first the combination of two words. As such it is not a pure metaphor, even though there is a strong metaphoric induction. There is a phenomenon of formation and deformation happening here as it is the case for slips of the tongue.

The substitution 'fedopiel' (§ 21) of course is only meaningful for a person raised in Southern Africa. The author could not relate to it, before she got the translation. Maybe we should not underestimate its meaning in this text which has been originally written in Afrikaans by a person whose mother-tongue is Afrikaans. The author can say and write the word 'piel' as if it was any correct word, just because she cannot, as being French, relate to it. She would certainly not use its French translation as casually in an academic writing because as a child, she learnt the rules of how to 'behave' in society: you must not say rude words, watch your language, be correct (correctness suggesting abiding by the Law, following the norms of her sociocultural environment).

Kristeva (1981) introduces the notion of equivalence: for example, kid, infant, brat, youngster for child. All these words mean child, but contain a different connotation. These words contain more elements of meaning due to the interplay of signifiers. According to her (1981), we could say that the word 'piel' is an equivalence for penis. 'Piel' and penis refer to the same anatomical part. They are equivalent, and yet, they are not the same. In the dictionary, the English version of 'piel' is indicated as being a "taboo word for penis" (Collins, 1989). Using such a word is provocative, daring, shocking and challenges the social convention. If we find it difficult to pronounce such a taboo-word that shows that there is something powerful in signs or words. There is a surplus of meaning. If we cannot pronounce words such as 'piel' it means that we might be embarrassed and ashamed. That is due to diverse factors.

A 'Witz' is a source of pleasure, a verbal activity aimed at obtaining pleasure. Freud (1988) stresses that saucy jokes emphasise in language the sexual aspect of facts. They are often used by men in the presence of women (or vice versa) by whom they feel sexually aroused. The 'Witz' is used to inform the woman of this and, eventually, to provoke the same type of arousal in her. As such, an obscene 'Witz' might be considered as a means of seduction. But, instead of being aroused, the woman might be ashamed or embarrassed. When people hear such a 'Witz', they laugh. In fact, they are witnessing an act of seduction or eventually sexual aggression.

Moreover, another vestige of the Christian religion is that a good woman should not be a seductress which equates her with a prostitute. As such it is not her role to make the first step since the woman has the passive role and the man the active. She is, therefore, not supposed to talk about sex and it is certainly not appropriate for her to talk about it in crude terms.

When a person tells an obscene 'Witz', she forces the listener to imagine the part of the body which is involved. It also tells the listener that the speaker has this type of thought. An obscene 'Witz' aims at showing the genitals naked. Genitals laid bare become shocking. To explain the reason why it is so, we have to go back to the Judeo-Christian religion which stressed the aspect of reproduction and denounced the sexual aspect and the idea of pleasure. Furthermore, pornography puts the emphasis on bare genitals and on sex. That discards the romantic dimension of love provided by the fairy tales we listened to as children.

Lacan (1998) advocates that language is a chain within which there is the permanent possibility of substitution. By analysing the signifier, we can understand the infrastructural movement which is operating. The work of condensation acts on the two words 'pedophile' and 'piel'. The censorship applied by sociocultural norms would repress the crude word 'piel' which is again brought to the surface by the formation of 'fedopiel'. The signifier 'piel' carries the major signifying function in the word.

In the word 'pedophile', we have both 'pedo' and 'phile'. It is interesting to note that 'phile' coming from the Greek 'philos', means friend, and 'philia' means love / friendship. Here, 'philia' is transformed into 'eros' because of the emphasis put on 'piel'. The etymological meaning 'love ('philia') for a young boy' ('paidos') in an educative sense ('paideuien'), was commonly accepted in Ancient Greek society (Foucault, 1984). It now appears as an abject vice in Western societies. On the other hand, irony arises because it is precisely a theology student who is a pedophile. We can see that 'philia' nearly disappears from the scene of the signifier because of the negative connotation of the word pedophile. It has no place in the meaning attributed to pedophile and 'fedopiel' is actually closer to the real meaning. Philia is dead.

Colloquial language is filled with a great number of metaphors which are manufactured on the basis of common psychological experiences. Among those, we find sexual experiences which are often used in 'Witz' and humour. It might be as sublimation of the fear of defective performance, a way to hide anxiety under exorcising words. These experiences are symbolised in a way that everybody is able to understand them, nevertheless in a displaced or distorted way.

In a nutshell, we might say that symptoms and 'Witz' show us how metaphors work as substituting something for something else, or, in Lacanian words, a signifier for a signifier. When Lacan (1966) says that a letter always reaches its destination, he means

that 'the letter' or, in other words, the signifier, determines the person in her choices. However, meaning can only arise when we combine the metaphorical term or first signifier with another signifier providing a context. How this combination works will be our concern in the next chapter on metonymy.

Chapter 4

Metonymy

In the previous chapter on metaphor, we saw that a signifier needs to be combined with another signifier in order to make sense. The signifier determines the signified because a combination (either metaphorically or metonymically) of at least two signifiers is necessary to produce meaning and understanding, or, in other words, to produce a signified. The realm of metaphor is concerned with the substitution of a bodily signifier by a repressed signifier, whereas in the realm of metonymy, unconscious desire is attached to language. There is a tension between that which we 'can' say and the pressure of repressed elements trying to make their way through language. Some repressed elements cannot be expressed because they are too painful. By keeping them unconscious we protect ourselves. What we say becomes the 'sayable' for us, but also the socially correct which fits within the limits of sociocultural norms. That shows that what we say has been re-arranged in order to be acceptable.

Providing a context and re-arranging things belongs to the field of the metonymic process (metonymy can shortly be defined as a part standing for a whole: we do not articulate everything in words, we rather suggest it). The repressed material is transformed and displaced in language. How we displace and transform constitute the metonymic process or the diachrony of language and will be the focus of this chapter. What precisely is displaced is the signified, now replaced by a chain of signifiers. For

Lacan, the diachronic axis of language is also the realm of the signified. The signified refers to the repressed material which got lost. It is the missing part, something which constitutes a lack. The signified opens up the dimension of lack and desire as advocated by Lacan (1966). The person makes meaning out of a double movement: she says things and negates them at the same time. On the diachronic axis, meaning is produced by associations, unlike with metaphor where signification is immediate, coming up like a spark. The effect of meaning obtained metonymically is restricted.

Sometimes our efforts to be socially acceptable fail and unconscious material comes up in language in the form of parapraxes³. Censorship has been thwarted. We shall see how censorship can be thwarted, and how precisely the double-intent of meaning appears through censorship.

In short, unconscious desire lies in the 'Other' and springs out of a lack. If we conceive of the primordial desire as being incest, we see that desire will be masked and submitted to the law before coming up in language. We shall negate and censor it.

1. Mergence of substitution and combination

Lacan (1966) introduces the paternal metaphor to explain how substitution and combination are working hand in hand. He claims that there is a first inscription in the unconscious of the person that can never become conscious. The first inscription is

³ For Freud (1967), parapraxes are misreading, misspelling, misunderstanding and slips of the tongue for example.

placed in the real (the first stage of development where the child is in fusion with the mother) which is impossible. The person is confronted with a reality that is excluded from symbolisation and she has no access to this reality (it is not possible to go back to this state of fusion). This reality is the matrix on which meaning builds up. The person, then, attempts to bring together these two parts of herself in an imaginary relation (the imaginary being the second stage of development, or mirror stage where the child makes a sort of unity of itself), and takes responsibility by saying 'this is me'. Every event experienced by the person is articulated around the unconscious part to which Lacan ascribes a symbolic function.

In the symbolic order (last stage of development), the father has a function of nomination by giving his name to his child (and wife) besides the biological function. We understand that another gives the name (to children as his production) and changes names (of his wife). More specifically, this other becomes the 'Other'. For Lacan (1966), as the father gives the name, he incarnates the signifier. He describes the father as dominating and mastering any possible situation. That is exactly that which is expected from the signifier. The signifier imposes its law. The law of the father becomes the law of the signifier.

From Lacan's model of development (real, imaginary and symbolic), we might be allowed to infer that if somebody else, or the 'Other', gives the name, the person is not powerful. She is then 'spoken', and that challenges the notion of intention and intentionality. The speaking subject has no freedom of choice because the person is

determined by the existence of the 'Other' which directs her actions and words. The person pretends mastering a truth by means of a technique (language). By doing so, she is, however, mastered by the 'Other' and divided in herself.

Giving a name for another name is a metonymic process and belongs to diachrony. The vertical axis of the signifier, or synchronic axis (i.e. father, authority, naming) is governing the horizontal axis, or diachronic axis, of the signified (i.e. relation between individuals such as members of the family, the father being excluded from this relationship). This configuration points at the function of a leader in a society, and the powerful position of this leader.

Saussure (in Lemaire, 1997) ascribes a great importance to the relation between things, not to the thing itself. He provides the analogy of an ancient building to explain the simultaneously horizontal and vertical work of the signifier. He says that every linguistic unit is similar to a column of the building. The column stands in a relation of contiguity with other parts of the building such as arches. At the same time, the column might refer to a specific architectural style or era. The arch which represents the combination can only subsist if it rests on the columns which represent the verticality or synchrony. The same thing happens in language.

For Lacan (1966), the unconscious is working like a language; that means that there is a work similar to metaphor (the column) and metonymy (the arch). Therefore, it is problematic to treat metaphor and metonymy separately. They cannot be dissociated

in the production of meaning because metaphors can only be expressed on the diachronic axis where morphemes (smallest unit adding meaning such as prefixes, suffixes, endings) are linked, connected and contextualised. Furthermore, they might be mistaken for one another. For example: 'thirty sails' standing for 'thirty sail boats'. Why is it a metonymy and not a metaphor? As the metaphoric and metonymic movements merge, the author sometimes uses the same example for both because a signified is always sliding under a signifier.

Jakobson (in Jakobson & Halle, 1963) explains that along the axis of combination or diachronic axis, linguistic units (from phonemes to sentences) are linked to one another in *praesentia* (Latin word for presence), because they are co-present. The words are contiguous. They are linked horizontally (like the rings of a necklace to form the necklace) in order to make sense. Words are signifiers. (Signifiers can be words, but not necessarily, they might as well be non-verbal such as symptoms or gestures). Signifiers do not refer to specific signifieds (the rings might be linked vertically to other rings forming other chains). On the synchronic axis, signifiers refer to other signifiers according to connotations provided by culture, society, as we have seen in the chapter on metaphor. Signifiers alone cannot provide us with meaning; only their combination on the diachronic axis of language can. We see that both operations of selection and combination are indispensable to utter a meaningful sentence or in other words, to make meaning. More precisely, for Jakobson (1963) and later for Lacan (1966), meaning occurs at the intersection of both axes of selection and combination.

When we talk we associate phonic elements called phonemes (such as a, o, p, ei ..) to make bigger elements called morphemes. Morphemes are then themselves combined into bigger linguistic units like words. Linguistic units such as morphemes and words gain meaning through their connection with other words, by abiding by the laws of a closed order, which are the laws of grammar and lexicology. Without abiding to a syntax, this type of language would be completely incomprehensible. Let us give a concrete example to illustrate how combination is working in language. The sign 'dehumanised' is a complex linguistic unit made of the following linguistic elements or morphemes: de - human - is - ed. The central part or root of the sign is 'human'. Each of the morphemes gives another nuance or meaning to it. It might become dehumanise, humanise, and the past dehumanised, humanised making it from active to passive. In its turn this linguistic unit 'dehumanised' which is a sign, or a word, can be combined with other signs to make the most complex linguistic unit which is the sentence. Now, we see that in the case of a slip of the tongue, we might easily use the active for the passive or vice-versa, or use/drop 'de' for example. Speech ('la parole') is functioning like that: each element of language (different from the next or previous one) diachronically follows the previous one, and refers to the synchronic system of language.

Thus, in an analytic setting, it is important to grasp that which is circulating under the surface, i.e. the meaning of the word used, the meaning wrapped in the word. Meaning is wrapped in such a way that we do not recognise it or do so only barely. Lacan (1966) calls that movement the sliding of the signified, according to the law of

contiguity (in a word-to-word relationship). That means that there is no strict relation signifier / signified, but rather that the signified is again replaced by a signifier working by contiguity. The work of metonymy is different from the work of metaphor where we have a word-for-word relationship, a superimposition of signifiers. The best way to explain the difference between a word-to-word and a word-for-word relationship is by free association. If we say 'cup' the person who is free-associating might answer 'coffee' or 'mug'. 'Coffee' points at contiguity because we associate it with a cup in our mind (coffee being served in a cup, these words go together). If the person says 'mug' she substitutes one word for the other by giving an equivalence.

We can see that speech is more complex than a mere association of constitutive parts. There is an underlying structure of signification, made of unconscious material. We shall illustrate that with an example from the birthday speech (§ 21). When François talks about the student of theology, the underlying discourse is one of strong gender differentiation and of heterosexuality where homosexuality has no place, of the prevailing influence of church and strict moral guidelines prevalent in this society. Moreover, the choice of the word and change of name 'fedopiel' tells us about how François thinks about sexuality.

The whole package of an underlying knowledge appears in the mere signifier. Like in the case of hieroglyphics, meaning has nothing to do with what the images themselves pictorially represent. Displacement from a signifier to another signifier occurs according to association of meaning.

In the example of the 'giant' (chapter 3 on metaphor, section 2: *What is a metaphor?*), we see how fear is shifted onto the antagonist by transforming him into the giant which he is not. We see that we replace words by others and shift meaning at the same time by associating this word with something else which is hidden. Through this word which is also a defence device, fear is justified. We relate to others in this to and fro movement. Meaning is consistently displaced. Our words mean something else. When we try to understand what a person is saying, we often tend to stick to the meaning of the word which is used, the meaning which is currently prevalent in our sociocultural and temporal/historical context.

However, to attain a perfect understanding, we need to do more than that: we must decompose the word, consider all its facets (linguistic and synchronic) and its semantic evolution. When we have undertaken this work, we can seize the associations the author made in his mind, sometimes and often unconsciously. For practical reasons, we then tend to stay with the face value and tacitly stick to a more superficial meaning. That might protect us because we refuse by that fact to become involved with the problem a person might experience. We do not want to hear nor to see.

There is a motivation in the use of a given word, even though this motivation remains unconscious, or even though motivation is passive, i.e. that we are unconsciously motivated by culture, society and environment, and, as we shall see later, by subjective elements.

2. What is metonymy?

2.1. Definition

Fontanier (1977) distinguishes metonymy from synecdoche. Furthermore, he teaches us that tropes (expressions used in a figurative way such as metaphor and metonymy) occur through a relation between the first idea attached to the word and the new idea that the person attaches to it. This relation may vary, being a relation of correspondence in the case of metonymy, and a relation of connection for synecdoche. Metonymy occurs when we express the content by the container as 'drink a glass' for drink a glass of water. Synecdoche is produced when we express the whole by a part as in the case of 'the sails' instead of the sails of the boats.

According to Fontanier (1977), tropes by correspondence designate something by the name of something else, quite different and apart. It is the change of names by other names. A cup becomes coffee or a glass becomes water. Tropes by connection designate something by the name of something else with which it forms an ensemble, a whole, be it physical or metaphysical. The existence or idea of the one is contained in the existence or idea of the other. Lacan (in Fages, 1997) stresses the property of inclusion of metonymy. Thus, 'glass' includes the idea of container and beverage; in § 8 of the speech, 'bantams' (according to the Collins Concise Dictionary (1989), bantam is any of various small breeds of domestic fowl, a small but aggressive person, a village in Java said to be the original home of this fowl) comprises chicken, place and person. As it comprises different meanings it could be a metaphor, but the name

of the place became the name of the whole thing, namely a chicken. As such it is a metonymy.

Fontanier (1977) provides different categories for both metonymy and synecdoche, unlike Lacan (1966) who only retains the term of metonymy for both metonymy and synecdoche. As this writing is not about linguistics, we shall stick to Lacan's use of the term when we talk about metonymy. It is however interesting and meaningful to consider different categories of metonymy because this is relevant in psychology where a word might express an important element, shedding a new light on the disorder/unease of a person. Let us see these different categories to elucidate how the change of name occurs in the case of metonymy, how words might be associated in the 'Other'.

Metonymy is a procedure by which:

- Cause is expressed by the effect: Latin poets often used 'light' to designate the eyes because eyes were supposed to produce light; eyes are considered as the cause and light as the effect (or vice versa the effect might be expressed by the cause);
- the content is expressed by the container: for example, drink a glass;
- the whole is expressed by a part: as in the case of the 'sails' for the sails of the boats;
- the place stands for the thing itself: like 'Bantams' (§ 8) instead of ducks / chicken from Bantam (§ 8);
- a sign designates the thing which is meant: for example the 'cross' standing for Christianity;

- an instrument replaces a person using it: such as feather for writer;
- parts of the body designate the feelings: 'heart' for love, courage, noble feelings;
 - the name of a person stands for the car: Citroën.

Lemaire (1997, p. 240) explains what is happening in this type of expressions by pointing out that metonymy is based on a substitution of signifiers which have relations of contiguity, or contextual contiguity. In the expression 'bantams', the name of the place 'Bantam' is put instead of ducks / chickens. It makes sense because of the meaningful connection of the signifiers duck / chicken and Bantam. (We keep the meaning of 'duck' and 'chicken' even though 'bantam' stands in fact for chicken, because François relates to it that way).

2.2. The work of metonymy

In metonymy, there is a displacement from one thing to the other. To explain the work of metonymy, let us take a concrete example from the birthday speech: the 'bantams' (§ 8) for the ducks from Bantam, and try to explicate the mechanism of such an expression. We must mention first that François refers to 'bantams' as ducks and not as chickens which would be the exact meaning. We said in the previous paragraph that the name of the place stands here for the thing it signifies, i.e. ducks. 'Bantams' stands for ducks. There is an elision of the thing in favor of the place. Such an expression can only be meaningful if there is an immediate connection of thought between the two signifiers 'duck' and 'bantam'. On the axis of selection 'bantams' would rather refer to Java. Now, here there is a relation of contiguity because

'bantams' refers to chicken/duck. Even though the immediate connection is problematic here ('bantams' being chickens), connection is provided by the context ('chicken and bantams', followed by 'our parents kept a tame duck', in § 8). That justifies Lacan's formula: a signifier must be combined by contiguity with another signifier to allow meaning. The last word of a sentence can completely modify its meaning (this is the case in German and French). 'Bantam' is the S1, 'duck' becomes the S2 (see Lacan's formula in chapter 3 on metaphor, section 2: *What is a metaphor?*).

However, if we do not know, a nuance is escaping, and we do not have a clear picture of the bird. It is precisely this nuance which is of utmost importance in interviewing people suffering from psychological disorders. It is even more crucial if these people come from another cultural background and that poses the problem of cross-cultural evaluations. If, as in the case of the bird phobia (see chapter 3 on metaphor, section 3.2: *The signifier and repression*), we cannot establish the relation between bird and swallow, we shall not be able to make the connection with police and, as such, we cannot efficiently help the person.

What does it mean in the case of 'bantams' (§ 8)? The adjunction (that corresponds to the work of metonymy) of the signifier 'duck' provides another picture of the 'bantam'. If we say 'bantam' instead of chicken, we immediately see a white long-legged variety of fowl. Now, by using this word rather than simply 'duck', we might infer that the duck looks like a bantam chicken: white with long legs. The chickens

(which are white) in Jan's yard might have awoken this childhood memory and brought François back to those days in the past when his parents had some poultry. He relates the story with nostalgia.

The duck is in fact not important any more. It is only the trigger of the subsequent chain of meaning in the speech. It is actually unimportant that bantams are really Bantam ducks which in itself is already wrong. After the author checked with the family, another element appeared to be wrong: that specific duck was not white. So, already here something happened, and we wonder how meaning shifted from bantams / chicken to the duck which was served for a Christmas meal (§ 8), on behalf of which connection a chicken became a duck. An element is missing in this signifying chain, the signified cannot be grasped, and meaning remains enigmatic. Something has been censored by François' unconscious mind.

We can even go further by analysing the symbolism of duck. According to Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1982), a duck represents an infallible guide for some Northern-American Indians. This issue is amazing when we go back to the very first sentence of the birthday speech where François compares his brother with 'a guide through life'. It is a fascinating example showing us how our unconscious mind is working. We might be allowed to think that the 'bantam' could be the reminiscence of a story told when he was a child.

The example of bantam explains why Lacan (1966) says that the unconscious is working like a language. On the unconscious level, we associate elements, which again appear in our speech in the form of slips of the tongue for example, or forgetting of names, difficulty of expression, hesitations or interruptions. Fages (1997) explains to us that in our speech, we provide some tiny indications of our personal (which is, as will be shown in the next chapter, at the same time cultural and social) history which will form a net of unconscious signifiers, the fabric of our thoughts.

We are not talking about a duck nor a chicken any more. Meaning is distorted. The signified is sliding under 'bantam'. The sliding signified is 'guide', but the way François perceives this guide. The signified can be found by going up the signifying chain from signifier to signifier. This operation consists in reaching what Lacan (1966) calls full speech. Lacan (1966) re-reading Freud, teaches us that the work of the unconscious is based on transposition / transference which is also the precondition of the dream. It is the sliding of the signified under the signifier. He also refers to this operation as 'veering off of meaning' or distortion.

In colloquial speech, we do not always bother to find that which is hidden because we have no time, or because we are stressed, or just, as said earlier, to protect ourselves. In one sense, this gives birth to a lack of or to poor communication. If then, a severe communication problem occurs in a couple or a family for example, only the analyst can see that which is, however obvious. In the speech, nobody, not even François,

sees what is under the signifier 'bantam'. But it is there from the beginning, from the first sentence of the speech.

We understand why Lacan (1966) maintains that meaning 'insists' in the signifying chain, but in no way does any specific element of the chain or any particular signifier consist in the meaning it suggests at that time. In the case of the bird phobia, the phobic person constantly expresses what is wrong, but nobody can understand him. Understanding can only be established if we shift from 'bird' to 'swallow' (i.e. the metonymic movement, 'swallow' is contiguous to 'bird'). We must also see that 'swallow' is a metaphor for 'policeman'. Only by establishing the right relation between 'swallow' and policeman can we make the connection with fear. 'Bird' needs to be associated with 'swallow'. Therefore, we can say that meaning insists because it is already there, but we cannot see it, it is veered off. It is as if the person was saying: 'but I am constantly telling you that I am afraid of birds'. We have the signifier 'afraid' for 'fear' and 'bird' standing for 'swallow' which itself stands for 'policeman'. We see here how selection and combination are intermingled, and how meaning arises from their intersection. Meaning might be compared to the Benguela Stream in the Atlantic Ocean; we do not see it, but elements like temperature, fauna, and flora for example point at its presence. Thus, meaning is like a flow in another flow.

It is in that which pierces through language, like in the example of 'the anointed by Satan' or the bird phobia that meaning comes up. When we do not want to say something literally, or when we cannot say it because it is not socially acceptable, or

when we do not know it because it is unconscious, we consciously or unconsciously transform our words, according to both a metaphoric and metonymic process. Meaning arises from this process. There is constantly something that is unsaid, but present in what we say. This is why Lacan (1966) defines the unconscious as 'the censored chapter'.

3. Censorship

For Lacan (1973), censorship is the function which crosses out, or obliterates something. A signifier is effaced. The unconscious is another type of language which has its roots in a sociocultural locus and in individual variations, and appears in the signs of language. The unconscious discourse is the infrastructural movement in our utterances. It makes what we say plurivocal. It is not the obvious or surface message conveyed by words; it is another text written underneath. In the case of the bird phobia, it is not the message 'I am afraid of birds', but the underlying text of 'fear of the police' and 'fear of authority' which is relevant. Now, which signifier that is significant in the meaning-making of this person got effaced?

Lacan (1966) repeatedly says that the veering off of meaning is the most appropriate device to elude censorship. Through the very operation of displacement, unconscious material can have access to our discourse. In fact, we must understand that something is happening on two levels. In our example, the event experienced by the two drunkards is foreclosed. It cannot be remembered any more. However, this event is apparent in the bird phobia. This type of phobia is the displacement of the fear of the

police onto the fear of birds. The signifier 'bird' becomes the whole thing. In the mind of this person 'bird' is contiguous to 'swallow'. The signifier 'swallow' is effaced and the fear of the police is censored. The traumatic event experienced by the phobic person is the censored chapter and is denied access to consciousness.

The unconscious is the logic behind language. It is the 'Other' which is, for Lacan (1966), the place of language. It appears under the camouflage of our words. The unconscious only shows itself in disguise. As such, the unconscious already behaves in a metonymic way by displacing meaning, shifting it from a signifier to another signifier.

A good example for that is the name of God. In many cultures, it is prohibited to pronounce the name of God; it is taboo. From Benvéniste (1974) we know that we unconsciously need to transgress prohibitions. This need then, finds its expression in a short and sudden utterance due to the intensity of feeling, and is expressed in a displaced way such as in the case of 'Gosh' for 'God'. The euphemism 'Gosh' replaces the name of God (a name for a name as in the work of metonymy), mutilates the word and creates a non-sense. We said it, enjoyed transgressing a taboo, but by displacing and disguising it. The same sort of transgression appears in the 'Witz' (in chapter 3 on metaphor, section 5: *The technique of the signifier*).

Displacement puts in place censorship. It allows censorship and at the same time, censorship is thwarted by displacement. This operation appears quite clearly in

dreams. We might dream about a story which seems to be quite insignificant: about nature, insects, crushed insects for example, like in the case of the dream about May bugs analysed by Freud (1967). Freud shows us how this dream in fact is about sexuality and cruelty. Our first reaction is to be shocked by the interpretation. But we are constantly acting like that in daily speech: wrapping and shifting meaning. Censorship is not only imposed by the individual on himself, according to his personal history, but also by sociocultural taboos and norms.

3.1. How censorship is thwarted

Lemaire (1997) claims that the formations of the unconscious are not the unconscious, but its expression through censorship effected by the conscious mind. As such, the material from the unconscious is already modified. Elements which seem unimportant to us are in fact loaded with meaning which is not the meaning given by the words as such. Meaning has been shifted or displaced.

The unconscious adds a supplement to the words we use and makes meaning problematic. Unconscious material wants to come up and exerts pressure on language. Stress comes from the infra-structural movement of language. In the case of 'bantam', the mistake is the way to thwart censorship: an event or trauma which has been completely forgotten appears again on the scene.

If we consider the bird phobia, the drunk person does not remember having been picked up by the police. This event is replaced by the bird phobia. The censorship,

however, has been thwarted and reveals something about that event. Because 'bird' belongs to the same category as 'swallow', a trace is left in the mind of the person, and this trace appears in the chain of the signifiers.

4. The signified

Meaning functions horizontally and vertically. On the synchronic level, signifiers carry meaning which is borrowed from culture, society, history. As such, we might infer that there is already a sort of censorship referring to our sociocultural environment operating at this level in an unconscious way. We are already censored. Now, horizontally, on the diachronic axis we might dodge this censorship through the agency of the signs we use, i.e. the way in which we arrange the signifiers in our attempt to make meaning, and the intonation we put on words or morphemes for example. On this level, elements are distorted: the signified is floating under the signifier.

To explain the incessant movement of the signifier and the sliding of the signified, Lacan (1966) provides us with the analogy of the 'Purloined letter'. By way of this analogy, Lacan (1966) demonstrates that meaning is 'hidden' in plain view: the minister has hidden the letter in plain view, in a place where everybody can see it, where it is apparent. When we transpose this on the level of language, we shall see that indeed meaning is 'hidden' in plain view. Like the 'letter', the 'bird' (in the bird phobia) is audible/visible; it is the concrete part of language. 'Bird' (like the letter) is the signifier. However, the content of the letter is never disclosed and, as such, the

signified is never seen. The signifier 'bird' does not refer to the concept of bird. We are led from signifier to signifier and never see the real fear of that person.

The birthday speech might be considered as a 'purloined letter' because it is displaced from Jan to François and finally to the author herself. It is not Jan who presents his speech, but François who wrote and now reads it. Finally, what François says about Jan is interpreted by the author of the thesis. That widens the sliding of the signified. The birthday speech will be the signifier providing the meaning hidden in plain view.

Lacan (1975) explains that we are constantly sent back from signifier to signifier. However, if these signifiers are not related by a law within an ensemble, neither meaning nor understanding might be produced. Lacan (1966) claims that it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning 'insists'. Meaning insists, but is not given; it is only foreshadowed by the signifiers. None of the isolated elements can provide meaning. Meaning can only be produced by their connection, their inter-relatedness, and by the fact that signifiers relate to one another horizontally (in a word-to-word relationship on the diachronic axis) and vertically (in a word-for-word relationship on the synchronic axis).

The verticality of language refers to synchrony and has its roots in a first inscription in the mind of a person. Over time, we are confronted with situations that stimulate this first inscription, and we re-interpret it. From repetition to repetition, new signifiers are grafted on this inscription which is constantly over-written. The evolution of the

signified belongs to diachrony. Lacan (in Muller & Richardson, 1994) points out that a signification depends on its reference to another signification, and that it is an illusion to believe that a signifier refers to a specific signified. The signifying chain therefore signifies something different from that which it says, like in the case of 'bantams'.

Everything is concretely pronounced, but we do not understand. Truth is located outside the signs, in another dimension. Truth is in the signified, but the signified got lost and is replaced by a chain of signifiers. Sometimes our utterances go beyond that which we want to say. Truth is said through us and in spite of us, as in the case of slips of the tongue for example, or in the birthday speech, in the case of the oxymoron provided by the example of the 'anointed of Satan' (§ 21) to describe the theology student, in mistakes like in 'bantams' (§ 8), or in symptoms such as the bird phobia.

Lacan (in Fages, 1997, p. 23) states that 'the net of the signified is the ensemble of concretely pronounced discourses'. In other words, meaning is provided by signs: words, body language, and symptoms for example. It means that speech ('la parole') is an individual variation of language. Our words therefore, express, without saying it, the first inscription. The concretely pronounced discourse is constituted by signifiers. According to a metonymic movement, the signifier comprises the signified. Lacan (in Fages, 1997) says that metonymy is including ('englobante' in French): 'bantam' includes both place and chicken. In the same way, 'bird' includes 'swallow' and 'authority'. We can say that the signified is hidden or wrapped in the signifier. As a

child, we embody the words given to us with their sociocultural connotations. Moreover, connotations referring to actual lived experiences are added. The signified can only get coherence when it is linked to the net of signifiers used by a person.

Furthermore, Lacan (1966, p. 414) elaborates more on the signified by telling us that the net of the signified is the diachronic ensemble of discourse which 'historically reacts on the net of the signifier'. The term 'historically' precisely refers to diachrony, the evolution of linguistic elements in time (definition of Le Petit Robert, 1991). Lacan goes further by saying that diachrony refers to a series of transformations over time. On an unconscious level, associations are made among signifying elements and with elements which join them little by little. These elements can be substituted for one another or displaced. That is why we do not understand them when they come up in language. In the case of the birthday speech, we do not understand why there is a pervasive feeling of sadness underlying funny anecdotes. We must consider this as being part of François' own history, as related to him. That makes it subjective and we can rightly talk about subjective elements. In order to speak, to tell our stories, we need the linearity in space and time of language to make meaning, even though we know that linearity is not sufficient. It is not sufficient because the net of the signifier governs another net, the net of the signified. There is a meaning which is at face value and another meaning, for example 'anointed of Satan' (§ 21) and contempt, funny anecdotes and sadness. Now, let us come to the analysis of that meaning which is sliding under the signifier. We shall develop what is transformed over time and what motivates its come back in our language.

5. Desire

The concept of desire is crucial in the work of metonymy. Desire is the insistence that animates the signifying chain in so far as the signifier which could provide completeness is missing. Stepping away from the Freudian notion of drive, Lacan (1966) introduces the concept of desire. Desire for the mother is precisely forbidden by the Law of the Father, namely, the law of incest. If the fundamental desire is incest, then, desire is affected by the law which opposes culture to nature. Satisfying desire means death, death of desire. Fages (1997), explaining Lacan's ideas, gives the following definitions of desire:

- For Freud, desire is a movement of the psychic system concerning the perception of that which is pleasant and unpleasant;
- For Lacan, it is a striving aiming at filling in the split opened by the lack of being (being the mother). This lack of being is the condition for the existence of the subject separated from the maternal complement. Desire is a dynamic power that propels the subject.

Before expanding more on the issue of desire, we have to explain what the lack of being is all about.

5.1. The lack of being

Lacan (1966) calls the love object 'objet petit a' (translated by 'a-object' by Chaitin, 1996). It is the maternal complement from which the child has to separate in order to become a subject. The 'a-object' is the original missing 'thing' or 'Nebenmensch' (German for neighbour, Lacan, 1975) to whom the person relates in a dimension of

loss, regret and nostalgia. This 'mother', at the same time, implies the dimension of prohibition, she is the goods that are forbidden by the law of incest. The person is inscribed in the real (in Lacanian terms); this inscription is marked by the 'a-object'. The 'a-object' is the 'real' meaning of the division of the subject, and stands between that which the person says and that which she means.

A child strives by its games to fill the lack by replacing it with something which guarantees the being of the subject. Interestingly, at an adult level, that guarantee might be the body of language of a scientific discipline that reassures the subject of his identity. We might infer from that, that we strive to get back the unity with the mother by belonging to something which then completes us. The 'a-object' is a symbol for lack which will appear in language in the form of desire. It is that which is missing and which produces a surplus of meaning by inflating our words. How lack appears in language will be elucidated by the following example.

The connection between the two signifiers 'ducks' and 'bantam' allows us to make the elision of one signifier 'duck'. The signified becomes present through the elision, but its action remains unconscious. The signified becomes elided in the signifying chain where a signifier stands for another signifier. Elision does not mean that there is no signified as such, but that the signified has been effaced. It is not materially present in language. It is assumed; it is replaced by an apostrophe, marking an absence, not an inexistent thing. It was there, but it is not here any more. However, its trace, in the

form of an elision, remains in our discourse. The elision resembles a hole in language, a disruption. This rupture appears as non-sensical, as a mistake.

Language is a veil suggesting the hidden part, sometimes in a weird way. Like the veil, language shows us shadows as in a shadow-theatre, hiding the essential. The 'thing' is behind the veil. It does not concretely exist, it is only a shadow. As such, that which is behind the veil can never be present. It is only suggested, evoked. Lacan (1994) calls the meaning which is constantly sliding, threading its way to the signifier, the metonymic object. It is the 'come back' of a repressed element. The repressed element is that which is missing, that which is lacking. Lacan (1966) points out that lack and desire are intrinsically linked. There can only be desire if there is a lack to be satisfied.

The metonymic object refers to the 'a-object', something that is missing, to a lack, and, motivated by desire, we strive to fill this lack. Desire then, becomes the law which governs us. But, as we do not recognise the first lack which is repressed, we tend to shift our longing from that primordial lack to other objects, whether affective or material. We can never satisfy the 'right' desire because of the misrecognition of the 'a-object'. As such, we can never attain *jouissance*⁴ (as satisfaction of the desire). There is a gap between desire and satisfaction of desire, between desire and *jouissance*. Lacan (1966) says that this gap is structural and concerns the person by

⁴ *Jouissance* can be described as a way to reach sexual satisfaction/compensation in eating/drinking, writing or speaking for example.

the way her parents, for example, talked about her before birth, talk to her, and by the way she speaks. The 'a-object' designates that gap and occasionally, fills it.

Lacan (1966) often writes 'jouissance' as 'jouis-sens' (French for enjoy meaning). If we then consider that jouissance is not matching with desire, we might infer that meaning is not fully possible. We can never fill the gap between the words we say (or signifier) and that which causes them (or signified). Because desire is constantly aiming at the 'wrong' object, there is a lack in the satisfaction or, in other words, a frustration. The aimed-at or desired object is a lure. We are constantly mistaken and misled. In the mirror stage, the child is seduced by its image. This image is not the child itself, it is a lure. The person will be seduced by images, lures and discourses. The result of this is that the person disappears in a discourse and merges with an image. This is the death of the self because the person becomes a simulacrum. François is seduced by Jan and wants to become like Jan or, in other words, become a Jan. The birthday speech is invested by François' desire. He is seduced by his brother and, in turn, tries to seduce Jan and the whole audience with his speech. However, the 'jouissance' he will obtain is partial and ephemeral; it is a lure. That creates anxiety and the feeling of sadness.

According to Leclaire (in Lemaire, 1997), desire is a strength which maintains signifying elements of the unconscious in a coherent ensemble. In the case of the bird phobia, the different signifiers belong to a same ensemble, or same chain of signifiers. They are coherent in the system of the phobic person. Now, because the signifier

'swallow' got lost, the link between bird and police cannot be established anymore, and there is no apparent logical link among the signifiers. A person makes various associative (different from substitutive) links in order to make meaning. When a drive is alienated in a signifier, it becomes desire. A person with a drinking problem might alienate unconscious desire in the 'desire'⁵ to drink (for a bulimic person it would be to eat). The lack of being is expressed in the desire to have, to possess or to know. The primordial unconscious desire (to be the complement of the mother) alienates the subject in his demand, by displacing one signifier to another.

5.2. Desire and language

After analysing 'bantams', we might infer that lack would be inscribed in this specific signifier. By decomposing the signifying chain, we saw that it is not so much the duck which is important as the feelings and memories attached to it. An unconscious desire is expressed through the mask of the signifier. It is something that needs to be recognised. According to Lacan (1998), this something that is inscribed and articulated might be related to an event which happened during childhood, and which has been repressed and displaced.

It is precisely the actual experience constituting the subjective elements as Lacan (in Chaitin, 1996) puts it that we do not consciously express, because it forms part of ourselves. For the phobic person, the fear of the police is real, but finds its expression

⁵ The word 'desire' is used with a wider range of meanings in French: you can desire to eat, to drink or to go to the cinema for example when you want or wish to do these things.

in the fear of birds. The fear of the police is unconscious, but part of the person because it motivates the phobia. Thus, François would not need to express 'guide' in his text, it escapes from the sign 'bantams' which contains it. Absent signs or signifiers such as 'guide' show what Chaitin (1996) calls 'pure signifieds'. The pure signifieds are non-existent, yet certain because they are present to intuition. What is certain does not need to be expressed because it is 'immediately present to the self'. It is that which we earlier called actual experience of the person, it is the inside which does not need to be signified; it is that which the person is supposed to know. In other words, on a more concrete level in our example, the word 'bantams' belongs to a completely different category than 'guide'. It points at 'guide'.

In the mistake of 'bantams', there is a truth which strives to appear. This shows us that truth comes up in interruptions or discontinuities of the discourse, in the form of parapraxes, dreams, symptoms, jokes, free associations, mistakes. Chaitin (1996) specifies that only parapraxes can reveal the insistence of something which is underlying by disturbing the flow or harmony of our speech. In fact, we say everything, we just need an ear to hear it. Our words are filled with lack. Desire is expressed in an enigmatic language out of the first inscription. In the case of the bird phobia, an important signifier has been rejected from the symbolic world of the phobic person. The foreclosed signifier, or the signifiers representing it, are not integrated into the unconscious of the person, but come back to the real during delusion, invading the speech or the perception of the person. Only a part of the whole is

available to the person because she does not recognise the part coming from the 'Other'.

Truth is not where we situate ourselves in our discourse, where we take responsibility for what we say by saying 'I'. Between truth and what we say, there is a sort of spark in the form of metaphor or a symptom for example. This metaphor is then the signifying element, the meaning of which however is not accessible to the conscious subject.

Because we cannot go back to the real or state of complete fusion, this original desire is then replaced by other desires and we see that desire can never be satisfied. The person, in fact, ignores the cause of desire. She strives for a lost object. The voice of the baby is then the first sign to express desire (through screaming), and the mouth the first location of pleasure (through sucking). The voice is also that which marks the distance between the baby and the object of its desire. This voice will be progressively replaced by the word when the child enters the symbolic order of language. Lacan (in Muller & Richardson, 1994) tells us that the moment in which the child is born into language is also the moment when desire becomes human. Access to language also gives access to society. The primordial desire is repressed and stands under the Law of the Father. When desire is expressed it is therefore first channelled through sociocultural norms. This censorship makes it human. That is why desire is veiled in the signifier.

In the case of the bird phobia, the word 'bird' is the confrontation between the power of language and the power of sensations. If one of the two drunk men developed a bird phobia, we are allowed to assume that he has been very frightened by the 'swallows'. Let us imagine the scene: the two men are so drunk that they cannot walk anymore. They are lying along the road. Now, two swallows/policemen riding their bicycles pounce upon them like birds of prey. Their arrival must have been a shock for the one man. We might also assume that the 'swallows' were not nice but rather rough. They might have shouted at them, or even hit them. A bad and maybe painful experience is linked with 'swallows' in the mind of the man who developed the phobia. By displacement and a relation of contiguity, the swallow became a bird. We might also be allowed to assume that this new experience was a re-awakening of another event which happened further in the past. It might be a painful sensation inscribed in the body, a first inscription. That person might have suffered from the same type of treatment by one (or both) of his parents: beaten and submitted to their authority. The treatment inflicted by the policemen is a replication of this first inscription. If we transpose this logic onto the birthday speech, we might say that there is a painful inscription in François generating the feeling of sadness.

6. Negativity

The example of the bird phobia showed us how an event leaves a trace in our mind. Even if that trace is effaced, there is always the trace of the trace. It is functioning like a palimpsest or magic writing pad. Derrida (1993) points out that it is inscribed, re-inscribed, over-written in a locus or space called *khôra*. This space is also a matrix, an

imprint-carrier, a nourishing space. Kristeva (1977) says that the material inscribed in khôra has a future: in the case of the phobic person, the future of this inscription is the phobia.

Kristeva (1977) defines khôra as the locus which is the seat of all the elements which 'have a future' in our discourse. By that she means that all the elements inscribed in khôra are meant to appear in our discourse at one stage or another. This locus determines how we make meaning. For her, this place is a net of drives and pre-verbal semiotic operations.

Kristeva (1974) also explains that semiotic comes from the Greek 'semeion', and means trace, distinctive mark, precursive sign, proof, engraved or written sign, track, figuration. It is a sort of pre-language, before the words and the symbolic. Therefore, there are unconscious connotations attached to words (music/sound, odor/perfume, rhythm, color). We might then infer that the trace is semiotic. She specifies that some non-verbal signifying systems (vocal, visual, tactile, musical to name a few) can only belong to the semiotic realm. Moreover, she claims that semiotic and symbolic are inseparable in the process of meaning. From that we understand that desire is very complex, and is halloed by semiotic material. The 'a-object' is not the absent mother; it includes all that which constitutes the mother: her voice, her odor and the touch of her skin for example.

The metonymic process involves displacement and distortion. Lacan (1975) says that desire is first the experience of solitude: the child must experience the absence of the mother in order to be able to wish her coming back. Desire is linked with the presence – absence of the thing. He also explains that desire is negativity. In order to be desired, the object needs to disappear.

In desire there is a constant part of 'real' that cannot be tamed. Desire gives a name to that which has not yet been named, and that which can never be named. Desire is conveyed by the signifier. When we speak, we articulate more than that which we say. What we articulate is often unbeknown to ourselves. We do not know and we negate. When we negate, we cancel what the signifier reveals. Negativity is therefore a 'méconnaissance' ('connaissance' is the French word for knowledge, 'mé' would correspond to the English prefix 'mis-', and we might say that there is a misknowledge) of a part of that which we say. There is a knowledge unbeknown to ourselves, or a hidden knowledge. We think that we are very informative, and in a certain way, we are. A part is negated but present through unconscious connotations. Freud (1959) states that the content of a repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness on condition that it is negated. When we negate, we take cognisance of repressed material without acknowledging this material by saying 'No, I do not think that'. From that we might be allowed to infer that, in the birthday speech, François talks about himself, but he negates that fact by talking about Jan. He projects his own concerns (such as being fifty or 'red ants') on his brother.

Kristeva (1974) explains to us that negativity is that which makes fluid; it acts like a surfactant. It does not destroy, but calls forth new organisations. Negativity is the necessary link between the world and the subject. In other words, we apprehend the world according to elements that we carry with us from another scene. According to those inscriptions, we have another understanding of our material surrounding, of other people. What we perceive will call back elements stored in us, and we shall act and speak according to how we internalised them. We constantly refer to something we once perceived in the past.

The words we use articulate the instructions given by the 'Other'. These instructions are based on how we interpreted a situation, and on the trace that this interpretation left in our mind (like the relation fear / giant). A new situation or stimulus will re-activate this trace and make us react accordingly in a certain way which might as well be non-rational as we have seen in the case of the bird phobia.

There is a language in a language or in other words, an individual structure in a social structure and the other way around. We take position and responsibility for what we say, and, unbeknown to us, for that which we do not say explicitly. There is a double movement of taking responsibility and denial. Repressed material appears in a rationalised form in language. The person says 'I am afraid of birds', but the real fear is elsewhere.

7. Intentionality

On the one hand, we said that on the diachronic axis of language, words are related in praesentia. On the other hand, the birthday speech shows us that there is non-presence in this presence, all the unsaid referring to a lived experience of François, about which the listener/reader does not know. François wants to say 'happy birthday', but it is as if he was saying 'unhappy birthday'. Derrida (1998, p. 17) explains to us the decomposition of sign into 'expression' and 'indice' (French for hint), and that operation reveals that there is more than in a mere sign. Signs give us a hint of something more which precisely is not expressed as such. These hints come up in spite of us. That poses the problem of intentionality.

If sadness comes up without François knowing about it, that shows immediately that he is spoken rather than that he speaks. This phenomenon of 'being spoken' appears then on both levels of diachrony and synchrony. Under the words he pronounces, there is the 'Other' giving sense to what he says.

Maybe we should first explicate 'intentional'. From Freud (1967) we know that parapraxes are non-conform to intention. Now, we see that we are spoken rather than that we speak. That means that intention is located in the unconscious. The unconscious produces meaning effects ('effet de sens' in French), makes sense ('fait sens') in Lacanian terms (1966). These meaning effects are beyond conscious intention and are not understood, because they are replaced by parapraxes which are formations of the unconscious, and are symbolisations. The speech is a symbolisation.

Freud (1967) maintains that behind each parapraxis there is a repressed element. In our speech, mistakes are informative upon our unconscious.

The underlying discourse, the 'Other' of language, is important because it determines us. This discourse is how we symbolised events that occurred in our past. This symbolisation occurred very early in our interactions with our family. Lacan (in Dethy, 1998) teaches us that before the child talks, before even language occurs, a work of interpretation is established in relation to the surrounding objects. Thus the teddy bear represents love of the mother for the child. (Here also, we might open a parenthesis by making an interesting comment: Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1982) indicate that the bear often symbolises the mother in some cultural groups). It influences our behavior toward the world and others.

Muller & Richardson (1994) seem to define intention as a tending, an inclination toward some object. In Lacanian terms, we could understand it as desire toward an object. That makes intention possible on both conscious and unconscious levels because we saw earlier that foreclosed desire is replaced by more available desire. It is rationalised. We always strive to meet a goal, whether consciously (we think that this is always the case) or unconsciously. In the latter case the unconscious goal is met through parapraxes. If we are meant, that means that we are moved by something we are not aware of, and that is desire.

Lemaire (1997) points out that in any use of a symbol, there is the incidence of a supplementary individual motivation. The subject enriches his vocabulary with individual psychological marks/traces or significant elements. In a metaphoric way, we might say that we color our words with the palette of color shades available to us.

We think that we dominate language and feel *jouissance* or satisfaction from this act of domination. If we support this type of argument, we tend to consider language as a mere tool at our service. We think that we possess language and enjoy the satisfaction it might procure us. But this is 'méconnaissance', because, as we saw, we do not possess language, we do not speak, but we are spoken on behalf of symbolisation.

Lacan's (1966) perspective shows how the person appears in and through language, how the person is constituted through language and her interaction with the world and others. This view also delineates the concept of meaning itself:

- the real as the mergence signifier/signified where there would be no distance between signifier and signified, and, thus, no shifting of meaning. A signifier would refer to a specific signified because the signifier would be the signified,
- the imaginary as the split between signifier/signified, revealing how the self is narcissistic and how it sees itself in others / is reflected by others, and how it engages in negativity,
- the symbolic as the disciplining and managing of the self by the environment. There is not only the mother in the child, but also a part of the father.

Catachretic elements govern our speech. Dead elements or rather 'inactivated' elements are kept in lethargy in our mind, waiting for the right moment to come back to life again. The next chapter will show more precisely where these dead elements (but still active) come from, and demonstrate how social the self is.

The whole issue of intentionality will even be challenged more by Foucault's notion of power, as will be discussed in the next chapter on the postmodern self and meaning.

Chapter 5

The postmodern self and meaning

From the main sources the author uses to support her arguments, only two are psychoanalysts. The others are philosophers and linguists. The intention of this thesis is to come to an insight of how language works from outside to inside the person and from inside to outside in a dialectical movement of ingestion/vomiting. The question is what is a self in this dialectic. If the self is multiple and fragmented, what are the fragments and multiplicity all about? How is such a self handling the situation? The answer is the postmodern self and her⁶ concerns.

Lacan (1966) maintains that the person is divided and that the person is social. The person is meant because meaning arises from the relation between signifiers. Moreover, desire invests language, but if the person abides by desire rather than by the law, no social bond can be created.

Furthermore, Lacan advocates that there is a structure coming from the 'Other'. Language is the 'Other' in us and the unconscious is the social. If we are meant, if the self is not powerful, and if the unconscious is the social, we might wonder how we internalised this social. Foucault (1972, 1975, 1984) provides us with an answer to

⁶ Self can be masculine or feminine, but for the sake of simplifying the writing, we choose to focus on one gender.

this question by showing how the person is disciplined. The person is disciplined by the part of 'real' that cannot be tamed, and by the outer world.

We shall unravel here how the self is constructed and how a person makes meaning out of a mosaic of quotations (Kristeva, 1974). Furthermore, Foucault (1984) speaks about the problem of meaning by pointing out that there are various regimes of meanings, and the person is being managed by these various regimes of meaning which she deploys as her property. This person is being disciplined in the construction of meaning. Insofar as the person takes responsibility for the meaning she constructs, the person has a self and is a socially responsible entity. Simply put, a self is constructed in the construction of meaning, and to this end the person is disciplined. If the self is constituted by the o/Other, how does she cope with this state of affairs and how can we understand the double-talk the person engages in?

When a person comes to psychotherapy, she wants to be relieved of symptoms. The person comes to talk, easily or less easily, about what is perceived as a problem. Psychoanalysis is the field of speech and also silence, and Lacan (1966) often talks about a 'talking-cure'. Verbal and non-verbal communication are of utmost importance, and represent the tools enabling patient and psychotherapist to go back from signifier to signifier in the signifying chain. It is not just about replacing a signifier by another, it is about deciphering signifiers and looking at how they are associated. Another important issue is the influence of the sociocultural environment

of the person who is suffering and of the therapist who has to understand and interpret the suffering.

Speech is located between the body and the code which defines its social and cultural modalities. The emphasis will also be put on the way bodies are disciplined and how people make meaning out of discipline and power relations.

Supported by the indicated literature, the author's goal in this chapter is to show how ingrained material makes us what we are, talk the way we talk, even makes us sick. This is how we produce meaning and come to understanding. It is necessary to understand how the fragments of the ingrained material are associated to understand how the self is functioning. A self is interacting with other selves, and, to use a social constructionist view, the self comes up and makes herself through language. Language is all around, we are born into it, approach the world and others with it. It is a flow in which we are bathing and which drives us.

1. Postmodernity's fragmentation

In order to understand the formation of a self in postmodernity, and how she manages to make meaning, we must briefly outline the environment in which she lives.

We are born into a specific family, itself set in a specific society. The family has its rules, the society has its own, and the family regulations are themselves traced from the society's. From birth we are submitted to the rules of the symbolic order without

even noticing the oppressive effect they have upon us. The subject becomes subjected to dominant discourses, and is subjugated by them. Foucault (1984) advocates that a dominant discourse gives birth to a certain thinking structure from which the subjects of a specific era cannot escape. As an example we can cite the Christian discourse in Western society which appears clearly in François' speech. In spite of the importance of scientific discourse dominated by rationality, the irrationality of a religion, of the invisible prevails. That shows us that we are surely submitted to more than one dominant discourse.

The postmodern discourse gives us the picture of a decentered world made of shards, and where things are falling apart. A new representation of time and distance leads groups and individuals to mingle with one another. We are now in a transitory period where an old order is dying and a new order, or better, a new constellation struggles to be born. People from different cultures and different languages cohabit. This state of affairs unfortunately creates tension between groups. The way to deal with this situation is to make what Pynchon (in Parry & Doan, 1994) calls 'local arrangements'. For Lyotard (1979), postmodern is the state of culture after the transformations which affected the rules of the games of science, literature and arts. This state was born from the nineteenth century onward. Postmodernism might be considered as the realm of consumerism, mass production, mass media and mass marketing. That again gives rise to marginalised groups which are forced to remain silent in a final consensus which excludes minor opinion. Clearly, there is a tension between homogenisation and

fragmentation; there is no 'better' story. There will be more local stories shattering the consensus of a totality of statements.

Such a situation is worldwide: in Namibia, German, Afrikaner, English, Owambo, Damara, Nama, Herero, so-called 'Colored' split into 'Colored' and 'Basters', Bushmen, Owahimba, form a fragmented society; in France, French people themselves are divided into Black French (from Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion, Guyane for example) and Maghrebin French who cohabit with Maghrebin (who are not naturalised French, but still Moroccan, Algerian and Tunisian) and Turkish communities. In these main groups, there are still minority groups coming from East Europe. This shatters the terminology of minority/majority by introducing an intermediate category. And we might wonder: what is a Namibian, what is a French person?

We are already fragmented in ourselves and live in a fragmented world. In the postmodern era, traditional values are challenged. Family life, for example, cannot be considered as a shelter which guarantees a unity. Young children already leave the house very early and bring back ideas which are foreign to the family system. So do the parents who bring new ideas from their working place. Moreover, the family is the cradle of multiple marriages and relationships with different children. It is not the extended family, nor the nuclear family any more. A new family pattern is arising. There are many stories in one story, many texts in one text. For Lyotard (1979), metanarratives died in favour of small narratives, more local stories shattering the

consensus of a totality of statements. And yet, at the same time, there is the globalisation as expressed in Mac Donald's with all the uniformity that it entails.

If cohabitation and juxtaposition are not physical, they are brought into our homes by media. Television becomes the device which makes us closer and at the same time distances us from the world and from others. Television makes us live in a world of simulation. Popular consciousness has become so inundated with images that it is no longer possible to determine what is and what is not real. Horrors are dissected on our tables and we keep cool, anaesthetised in front of death. Death is distanced from us, it is for others and we feel powerful. We learn to deal with misery and death by intellectualising them, i.e. dealing with them in an abstract way. We might also use reaction formation by flattening terrifying things, make them less horrible by making them comic.

Traditional values such as reason, progress, science, work, ethics and nation have lost their meaning. They made room for the values of pluralism, heterogeneity, fragmentation, globalisation, cross-culturalism and image for example. Pluralism and eclecticism are created by the collapse of traditional values, and favor the emergence of new behaviors. Everything becomes 'normal' and is possible. The self becomes more and more fragile in a society that lost its landmarks. The person is submitted to the power of images and led over a market of ephemeral things. The self is constructed by pervasive, subtle and powerful discourses.

2. Power relations

In different writings, Foucault (1972, 1975, 1984) demonstrates how the self and the world are constructed through knowledge and social dictates which exert power on the subject. Power is pervading all human action through significant narratives which serve the dominant discourses. It is happening as in hypnosis, seeping through our minds, suggesting the 'right' thing to do. Power is not an oppressive and repressive discourse of some sort of dictatorship. It is more subtle. Parry and Doan (1994) give an apt metaphor by comparing power with a capillary system that pervades the body. Foucault (1975, 1976, 1984) demonstrates how power is increased by knowledge, and exercised in different domains. This generates acts of exclusion and division: people are divided into categories according to a norm. For instance, in a society of production the focus will be on employment rather than unemployment. Unemployed people will therefore not belong to the group; they will belong to another category.

'Dividing practices' and the practices of scientific specification (classification, separation, opposition, resemblance, regrouping) support practices of objectification. For Foucault, human beings are divided into categories of sane/insane, healthy/sick, law-abiding/criminal. This classification leads to discourses of normality (sane, healthy, law-abiding) / abnormality (insane, sick, criminal). The DSM-IV (2000) provides us with an example of objectification and classification of persons through categories of mental disorders. Western society is a product of scientific specification and dividing practices. Can there be some space for a private self if we conceive of the self as being an object of power?

In the modern world, the study of the human being within the field of medicine opened a new dimension in the realm of human sciences: the knowledge of the human mind. Man is determined by the unconscious or the Other, by something which escapes consciousness, but constitutes it. As such, the person is divided: alterity constitutes identity.

Foucault (1997) posits that people are managed by a type of power that produces a discourse of truth and that constitutes society. He stresses that it is not the power exerted by an omnipotent sovereign over a population and the resulting obedience of this population. Domination and subjugation are applied through more subtle forms of power because their aim is to normalise and to discipline. Selves are normalised and disciplined and as such, they are fashioned. Foucault (1997) claims that the person is managed through a 'disciplinary power' which is applied to bodies by techniques of surveillance, normalisation, and discipline, and a bio-power applied to the entire population, life and living beings by techniques of regulation.

The element which circulates between the disciplinary and the regulatory is the norm. A norm might be defined as belonging to a community in which all have a role to play, and must fulfil moral and social obligations. The norm will be applied to the body and to the entire population. The norm allows for the disciplining of the body and the regulation of variables such as birth and death. The establishment of a norm entails the creation of self-discipline and self-regulation. Human sciences are used to imprison

people within the frame of a norm. Social identity is shaped by the relationship between the image of the 'normal' and 'non-normal'.

2.1. Disciplinary power

The particularity of this type of power is that it comes from disciplines such as the human sciences. Human sciences cover psychological (cognition, perception, memory, consciousness), social (groups, classes, beliefs and ideologies) and cultural (myths, literature, symbolic and semiotic systems) aspects. Domination and subjugation of people occur through the various disciplines. Each discipline has its own discourse, but for all, it is a discourse of norm and normalisation. People are now controlled and observed. They become the object of research and investigation.

The development of science brought innovations in knowledge which have been important in the process of governing people. This new knowledge gave birth to 'human technologies' (Foucault, 1984) or 'technologies of the self'. That means that the selves are organised into functioning networks of power in time and space, thanks to a combination of diverse techniques (structure of buildings and timetables, hierarchies, motivation) in order to achieve certain outcomes. The development of human sciences such as psychology and medicine allowed new techniques for structuring the self according to norms and criteria. The self became the object of health and sexuality.

The human body has become object of knowledge (number of subjects, age, longevity, sicknesses, types of death, habits and vices, rates of reproduction). People observe and study people in order to use them more efficiently. People are disciplined in the name of an increased social productivity and enhanced political stability. Conduct, speech and emotions have been put under scrutiny, evaluated and categorised. Thoughts, feelings and actions are not produced by a self, but are socially organised and managed through policies, sets of priorities, bureaucracies. Nowadays, in many school systems, mathematics, rationality and objectivity are promoted to the detriment of arts, literature and languages. Such a system produces a certain category of individuals who can only be winners or losers according to their gift for mathematics.

A simple example to show the pervasiveness of power without feeling that there might be power, but where we act as slaves of a system follows. When the author was in France in May, she wore a wool jacket, because the weather rather required it. A person told her: 'your jacket is too warm now.' Even though in reality this jacket was just appropriate, the underlying discourse was: we are in spring; from Easter to the first of November, you have to wear summer items, even if you are freezing. If you do not follow the rule, you can only be an outsider to this community. So please, arrange the situation as fast as possible. Do not disturb us. This was the clear message. If you do not fit within the frame of the norm, you are excluded. You belong to another category. The refusal to be 'disturbed' also shows that this person does not want to see that she is managed by a discourse.

That example shows us that people are governed, and simultaneously govern themselves because the exercise of power is indirect by acting upon people's choices, values, conduct and desires. Their activities (work, leisure, lifestyle, family life) are shaped by seductive images, within the frame of the socially correct and prized standards. To have a nice house, one or two cars, lots of electronic gadgets, satisfying job, to go on winter and summer holidays, have one or two children, friends, parties seem to belong to a successful young French couple/family. Now if you are a successful professor living alone in a small apartment, very modest in your needs, that is suspicious. It does not fit into the picture of success, i.e. in the political values of consumption, profitability, efficiency and social order.

This anecdote clearly demonstrates what Foucault (1975) means by the 'panopticon'. In other terms, people are under the gaze of a ruling system, and under each others' gaze. They feel constantly observed. To explain this phenomenon, Foucault (1975) provides the analogy with a system of surveillance in a prison. The observer is in a tower from where he can see what the prisoners are doing, how they react and behave. The prisoners cannot see him because of the higher position of the tower. So, they never know if in fact there is somebody in the tower watching them. The consequence is that they will behave as if they were constantly under the gaze.

We are not only disciplined by judicial personnel, but by prison warders (Foucault, 1975), by teachers in schools, by doctors and psychiatrists or psychologists in hospitals (Foucault, 1972) for example. People will obey social rules because, as

children, they learnt to obey their parents. If Foucault talks about modern times, we can still talk in the present tense because, as the example shows it, such practices are still actual. The self is still managed today, even though 'isms' are shattered in favor of smaller local discourses.

Power constitutes people's lives, and produces reality. Social conventions, community scrutiny, legal and social norms, familial obligations and religious injunctions governed, and still govern, the self. Paradoxically, the self never cared so much for herself as nowadays, as corroborated by the proliferation of beauty salons or sport clubs (especially the so called 'body building' or 'body conditioning').

2.2. Bio-power

This type of power does not turn its attention to knowledge, but to the human being as a living being. Biology becomes a matter of the state. According to Foucault (1997), this new technology does not exclude disciplinary power, but integrates it. This new technique addresses the body, the person, not as an individual but as the human species as a whole, or as a population concerned with combined processes such as birth, death, production, disease, accidents. Foucault calls this managing of a whole population 'bio-politics' or 'bio-power'. These processes or collective phenomena are linked with economy and politics, especially with the problems arising in these fields such as employment/unemployment, sick leave and retirement (in terms of reduction of production and costs involved in care). People are advised to save money, contract insurances, and they are provided with examples which show them

the positive results of this type of behavior. The subtlety of this kind of managing lies in the fact that people are given the illusion that they are cared for, have rights and lead their own lives.

These practices change the meaning of words like life and death: life is optimised (through the emphasis put on the care system and the medical field). Death becomes something you nearly can avoid: medicine has the power to prolong life. Death is no longer a natural ending of life; it is considered as a failure.

An example of how bio-power is applied is provided by Foucault (1976). He explains how 'hysterisation' of women was the result of a process of analysing, characterising and disqualifying women as a body saturated by sexuality. Through this process, based on the assumption of an intrinsic pathology, the female body became the object of medical practices. A further effect was the connection female body / social body: reproduction, familial space, rearing of children. Reproduction becomes socialised: economically by social or fiscal measures for motivation or restriction; politically, the couple becomes responsible for the whole society; medically by the practice of birth control. The couple has the responsibility to fit into the paragon of the family and society as prescribed by the current discourse. It might be argued that reproduction became individualised through birth control and, thus, had another effect than the one that was expected. This is visible in the low birth rate in some European countries, and leads to the problem of retirement funds (the younger generation providing the

money necessary to pay the monthly pensions of retired people). At the same time, by becoming individualised, reproduction escaped from bio-power.

The discourse on sexuality shows the power of the medical establishment over the mind and body of women through this particular medical discourse. A good example of bio-power appears in Chinese society where couples can only have one child. A second child is not forbidden. However, if you have the courage to have a second child, you need the courage to face the other members of society who are judging you as irresponsible, endangering society, undisciplined, shattering the precarious balance. A new discourse is also created around the single child becoming a little prince whom you must value and care for in order to produce a healthy productive citizen. This little self is a social construct.

Let us take the example of racial discrimination. Foucault (1976, p. 196) supports the idea that the 'concern with blood and law haunted the management of sexuality during two centuries' (the 18th and 19th). Racism springs out of the discourse on sexuality: control of reproduction, cleanliness, concern with the maintenance of the purity of blood and consequently of the race. The German national socialist party carried that idea of purity of the race to its extreme. We can see how differences themselves have been constructed, and how people have been managed according to these constructed differences.

Local power relations are embedded in these practices of objectification of the person for the purpose of subjugation. Bio-power is not only exercised through repressive means such as laws, regulations, prohibitions and moral precepts. Practices of objectifying the persons lead people to relate to themselves and others as objects.

Language is a tool to exercise power and to control people. Language talks about the person in terms of 'subject'. When a person becomes a subject i.e. a topic of study and analysis, the person is subjected. In other words, it means to put her in a box and define her limits. The person becomes both objectified and subjected. Foucault maintains that these cultural practices serve the subjugation of people in order to improve and extend social control: in the field of madness, medicine, incarceration systems, sexuality, factories, knowledge, political economy. The person is disciplined, submitted to dressage. Time, activity, behavior, speech, body, sexuality are guided, already outlined patterns.

2.3. Discursive practices

Power does not only or necessarily involve physical power; it also operates through cultural practices and the ideas that circulate within a society. Foucault's theoretical framework is an analysis of knowledge and truth, especially how certain accounts of the world came to be accepted as expressing truth. He argues that it could only occur through discourse. What we assume to be reality, our perceptions, are structured by a discursive framework. Power creates fictions and politics of truth. It structures the way of life and thinking of the subject through discourses and practices.

Foucault (1976) maintains that the association power/knowledge is an agent that is able to transform society by means of discursive practices. In order to be viable, people must support discourses by taking them up and engaging in them in their daily practices. People are shaped and shape their lives and themselves within the framework of these practices unbeknown to themselves, because these practices become natural. Both actions are simultaneous and spontaneous, and it makes us think about social constructionism: the person makes herself and is made by the ideologos, the discourse of ideas. Power operates within the realm of knowledge and governs the discursive practices of people. For Foucault (1969) power is a multiplicity of force relations, the interplay of various discursive fields. Foucault argues that the power of knowledge is not only present in demonstrations (as practical examples), but also in fiction, narratives, thinking processes, in regulations of institutions, ideologies and in political decisions. The person is located in the fields of discursive practices. As children, for example, we are told stories, legends and fairy tales. In these narratives we learn about good and evil, family structure (married couples have children, single persons have none), relationship between man and woman. They contain schema which are transmitted from generation to generation, kind of ready-made formulas for behavior. They hand over an ensemble of rules which constitute the social bond.

Moving away from the concept of 'langue' (which, for Foucault, refers to grammar, and where a signifier would correspond to a specific signified, as advocated by Saussure, in Lacan, 1966), Foucault puts the emphasis on discourse which he defines as the transmission of knowledge. On the basis of the example given earlier (about the

wool jacket), we see that discourse is not the possession of a single individual. Our discourse stems from a sociocultural environment and social interdependence. Discourse is a praxis and meaning is the product of our interaction with others. Furthermore, Foucault (1969) maintains that discourse is essentially historical: it has to be placed into the context from which it was born in order to be analysed. It is not constituted by available elements, but by successive elements. A discursive practice has its roots in a system of prohibition and values.

By studying the way in which a society can exercise power through its discourses, Foucault (1969) came to define discourse as the way in which people speak about things and give meaning to their actions. Discourse does not just consist in the words we pronounce. Rather, discourse is contained in the words, and the words we use say more.

François' birthday speech is the discourse of the Afrikaner society. He displays the values circulating in this group, and the reaction to the upsetting of these values. He speaks out of a male discourse. The patriarchal discourse is the 'Other' which speaks through him. Even though we do not mean these underlying insinuations, we speak out of the context where this type of discourse is pervasive. We think (and are convinced) that we are not biased and then, we utter such words and sentences which are impregnated with male discourse.

In the birthday speech, we hear a discourse on sexuality. Foucault (1976) provides the following example of the discourse on sexuality within the field of bio-power. In the 19th century, medical discourse saw women in terms of their reproductive potential, as ruled by their wombs (as it appears in the birthday speech in the expression 'heifers-in-heat', in § 18). From that we easily understand how women were considered as 'hysterical' ('hysteria' is the Greek word for womb). Let us consider the meaning of 'hysteria' as given by Collins (1989): "a mental disorder characterised by emotional outbursts and, often, symptoms such as paralysis", and the definition provided by Charcot (in *Le Petit Robert*, 1991): "the ensemble of neurological symptoms taking the appearance of organic lesions without the presence of an organic lesion". From these definitions, we might infer that, if there is no lesion, the problem might be simulated. An emotional outburst might then become a symptom of 'hysteria', and a woman with such an outburst was then 'hysterical' or, in other words, mentally sick. The husband of this woman was thus protected, did not lose face, and kept a position of power over his wife. This explanatory model was used and misused by men at this time (Ussher, 1991).

Furthermore, Foucault (1976) demonstrates how sexuality, from a natural instinct became a distinct form of pleasure, and how the Christian practice of confession made of sexuality a pervasive notion by attaching connotations of secrecy (and its opposite voyeurism through the very practice of confession), of bad and evil, good and right. The discursive practice around sexuality has its roots in the power relations deriving from the Christian religion. Sexuality which was more overt in the Greek society

became a secret, something you must feel ashamed and guilty of and something you must avow (as in confession). Psychoanalysis then came to exert a similar type of power over the individual: the patient reveals his secrets during the therapeutic session, in a sort of medical confessional.

Foucault (1976) shows the evolution of sexuality from moral discourse to scientific discourse. First, control and normalisation of sexuality were carried out through a system of avowal during confession. After the discovery of asepsis, modernity then emphasised the pathological aspect of sexuality (unhygienic and pathogenic in terms of venereal diseases). Avowal now occurs in a therapeutic setting. Foucault (1999) talks about letters in which the sick person avows everything concerning her body (diseases, sensations, practice of masturbation for example, from childhood onwards). This is especially relevant for masturbators. Masturbation was considered as being the universal cause of all the ailments, even causing death. The child who masturbates becomes indirectly responsible for its life, diseases and death. Foucault (1999, p. 227) relates that "if your body is sick, it is because you touched it". He adds that by controlling sexuality, psychiatry becomes the science of the biological protection of the human species. Psychiatry has the right to interfere in familial sexuality.

Sexuality became a '*scientia sexualis*' (Foucault's term, 1976) and this science of sexuality opens the path toward management of social sexual life in our society today. Censorship and liberation, morality, medicality, psychoanalysis, anthropology, law and pleasure, and erotic literature cohabit in the actual discourse of sexuality: sex is

supposed to be the cause of all phenomena of our life and to govern social existence. A 'truth' of sexuality was established by banishing masturbation and homosexuality for example, and by placing them into the register of pathology (In the DSM-III, homosexuality is still counted among mental disorders). In the birthday speech (§ 21), we see that this type of discourse is still relevant in François, though postmodernity marks the fading of the patriarchal model and the fading of the distinction between genders.

Discursive practices are complex. A discursive formation is not only a juxtaposition of stories, but rather a fabric of stories, interwoven and overlapping. The speaking subject moves between these formations and is not sovereign. Like Foucault (1969), we find it unbearable to think that there is no genius, no freedom in our utterances. We can hardly accept the idea that we are not the exclusive author, the creator of what we say. The idea and nostalgia of the modern self as autonomous and omnipotent are still present in this type of thought. Postmodernists posit that the self has no core, that it is fragmented. There is no core to be at the origin of utterance. Instead, meaning is constantly displaced.

In other words, meaning is added progressively and successively to a word (diachrony) and based on former meanings (synchrony). The term 'kaffir' (§ 9) provides us with a good example of how a signifier changed over time and how it is passed over to us by our parents or peers. As a child, we do not understand the enigmatic message (of the inferiority and incompetence of the black people, for

example) impregnating that word. The child's role is passive vis a vis the intrusion of adults' messages. There is power and violence in such a process.

The Christian religion is a perfect metaphor to explain the birth of a discourse. The origin is never present, it is unseizable. However, it is pervasive, present through the unsaid. François' speech is maculated with religious metaphors (Satan (§ 21), guardian angels (§ 7)). It is a steady whisper murmured into our ear. It became so normal that we do not pay attention to it any more. A discourse is always already there. We are born into it, and that makes it already so subtle and insidious. When we engage in interaction with others, we propagate this discourse in our speech.

2.4. Language games

In the example of the discursive practice of sexuality, Foucault (1976) showed us that there is a certain way to speak about sexuality. People engage in this way of speaking which suggests a whole range of meanings: that which is forbidden, allowed, and the transgressions in this field.

Lyotard (1979) takes Foucault's argument further by saying that the person speaks within the limits defined by institutions. In other words, there are different ways of speaking specific to each institution: we do not speak in the same way in a school, at home or in the army. In each institution, language carries the 'marque de fabrique' (French for the mark specific to the factory). The use of the words is different from institution to institution, there are different connotations attached to them. The

instructions are quite clear: orders are not discussed in the army, information is not questioned in schools, language within the family is more intimate. There is an infrastructural pattern in each of these ways of speaking, specific to each.

The person makes herself in language within these limits. Lyotard (1979) compares the self with a network of communication with intersections like in a distribution network. He calls this network language games and says that the person makes herself in language games: there are things to be said, and ways to say it. By language games, he means that an utterance can be interrogative, assertive, persuasive, or narrative for example. Moreover, we do not speak in the same way with a friend and a boss. When we interact with others we might involve emotions. The fact that we include emotions affects the flow of our speech, and introduces hesitations and silences for example.

According to Lyotard (1979), language games are the smallest condition for the existence of a society. Since the person speaks from within the limits set by a discursive formation, and/or an institution, she transmits the rules inherent in her society through her speech. These rules are contextualised and create a kind of social bond.

2.5. Truth and the crisis of meaning

Power produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. We tend to think about truth in a positivist view: truth would be what accurately describes an object. For Foucault (1969), truth consists in constructed ideas. Regimes of truths are established in

different ways: extension of social control, medicalisation of social problems (growth of divorce rate considered in terms of psychological stress), interest of industrialists, to name a few. It is false, only a pseudo-truth, but sounds so attractive and seductive. Regimes of truth are enabled by the knowledge of the human being (psychiatry, psychology, medicine to name a few), and expressed through manipulation of selves. The production of truth is imbued with relations of power.

Manipulative power is insidiously exercised by the media over selves. The author will briefly relate a personal experience. From 1979 to 1982, she lived in Germany. During her stay in Germany, the author used to read the same French magazine every month. In Germany people are very aware and care about ecological problems. That was far from being the case in France at that time. Little by little, from month to month, first a sentence, then a little picture, then a very light article introduced the idea of ecology between the lines without really naming the problem. That took three years, and then a shocked concern about the pollution of the ground water was expressed by the media. Additionally, recommendations were suggested to the population to help them take the necessary measures to bring the problem under control.

This example shows us how easy it is to discipline people and to push them into a wanted direction. Another example illustrates the reaction of people to subjugation: the wearing of safety belts is compulsory in France and Germany, and to make it effective, awful pictures of accidents are shown. Now, let us say that there is a problem with the belt one day, and the belt cannot be locked. However, an emergency

leads the person to take the car over a short distance. The fear is not so much to be caught by the police and get a fine, but rather: 'I am sure I shall have an accident because I do not wear the belt'. Fear has been instilled in the person and is now managing her.

This type of behavior does not seem to be problematic. People do not even notice that they engage in it because it seems so natural. As such, they are not unhappy about it. The action of power is already in the unconscious mind. There is discipline (wearing the security belt), and if we do not accept it we shall be punished (accident, fine or simply feeling guilty). People are not aware of the fact that they are completely governed. They take things for granted without questioning them and discipline themselves.

Foucault (1969) argues that claims to the status of truth and knowledge could only be made from within a discourse, and that we could only have an understanding of the world through our ideas about it. Our perceptions are always structured by existing discursive formations. Knowledge claims represent a truth about social relations, not because they claim to be objective and scientific, but because they are accepted as true, and therefore people act as if they were true.

For Lyotard (1979) power and knowledge go hand in hand: someone decides what has to be known and how it has to be taught. Knowledge is within the hands of

deciders or decision-makers. However, the deciders themselves already follow a trend of ideas. This is for example obvious on the political and economical scenes.

Furthermore, he says that in modern societies, science replaced the metanarrative of religion which was worn out, in order to define the purposes in life. Now, postmodernists argue that metanarratives have been shattered and that there is a proliferation of meanings in the actual world, and no single constructed meaning is superior to another constructed meaning. He posits that grand narratives have been replaced by local language games which direct meaning and which manage our understanding of ourselves. They alienate us from ourselves as much as they lead to the regulation of meaning and understanding of ourselves. Furthermore, he argues that there is no truth anymore. This is very threatening because people believe that there must be an underlying logic to human events, that there must be a reason for everything that occurs, and that it must fit into some grand, even imperceptible plan. That rings the bell of Christianity and mythology. If postmodernists proclaim the death of metanarratives, we already see that there is a problem. They are not dead because they still direct our language games by the way they impose a set of ideas (beliefs and values) onto us. People used to rely on systems (institutional, mystical, personal, professional) to which they could cling in times of distress or trouble. They believed that if something was part of a system, it had a reason and then it was under control. This issue of control is important if we consider that the lack of control is a factor for generating stress, a more and more common feature of many societies.

People feel lost without specific guidelines. In order to overcome their anxiety, they seek for reasons to their lives, in short they look for meaning. They will find it in narratives provided to them by the media for instance. Again, they will take this truth for granted, living in the imaginary, in the simulacra. Paradoxically, in the era of post-feminism, many women (and men) need Rambo to save and protect them and the world. Action movies seem to be on top of the demands if we consider the number of weeks such films are playing and the number of tickets sold.

In the previous chapters we saw that elements are inscribed in us very early, constituting a sort of matrix from which we make meaning. Very early, we are disciplined by the outer world through the stories, fairy tales and legends we are told. These narratives are powerful and might be considered as further metanarratives because they are presumed to have a great generality and represent a final apodictic truth (that means an imaginary truth in which it is supposed that we know something). Much more could be said about the power of these narratives, however, it is not possible within the limits of this thesis.

The words we use carry the nostalgia of infra-linguistic communication systems. In other words, there is an infrastructural movement in our language which Lacan (1966) calls the unconscious. Our words carry the mark of desire and also the constraints of the Law of the Father. The way we speak allows us to inscribe desire into language. Metaphors would, according to Anzieu & Anzieu, Gibello, Gori, Barrau, Mathieu, Bion (1989) refer to semiotic material from *khôra*, as we tend to re-create the

symbiosis mother/child, and establish distance (not too close, not too far) at the same time. In our narrative, we feel the opposition between re-creation of symbiosis and establishment of distance.

Anzieu et al. (1989) seem to suggest that the way we speak is the individual component of the narrative. They support the idea that the way to speak is a preconscious elaboration of a primary bodily experience: coenesthetic (organic sensation of ease/unease for example), proprioceptif (related to muscles, bones, ligaments), kinetic (internal sensation of movement of the body parts as enabled by muscles), sensori-motor.

2.6. Power through an act of seduction

Desire is displaced from object to object; the self is seduced by lures and can only reach a fictive jouissance. The postmodern self is seduced by discourses and images. As such, people are managed on the level of desire. When we are seduced, we refuse to see the world like it is, and we prefer to stay in an imaginary world. An adult, unbeknown to herself might be governed by ancient life directives coming from the legends and fairy tales heard/read during childhood. How many young (and older) females can deny that they are still waiting for Prince Charming?

Sternberg (in Anderson, 1995) says that postmodern firms devote themselves to generating images that appeal to consumers' desires and longings. He calls these images 'icons'; they might be the expression of new myths serving the purpose of

consumerism. Such myths are for example French wine and cheese, femme fatale, French cuisine, German punctuality which we can call mythical signifiers. The imaginary is set free around icons which are only visual, without any verbal message being attached to them nor are these needed.

People long for immaterial things: Product X in the advert becomes a means of liberation, or success for example. Because people are disoriented by small narratives and because they still need guidelines, they engage in what Baudrillard (in Anderson, 1995) calls simulacra. Virtual reality is then more real than the immediate personal perception. Danger specifically lies in icons which are the most subtle tools to manipulate selves within the realm of consumerism. That issue allows us to make the link with disciplinary power which is pervasive in a society. People are disciplined and discipline themselves by means of the myths circulating among them.

Barthes (1957) points out that myths participate in making the world. Every day people are confronted with myths which direct their lives and invade magazines, television, radio, and the walls of the houses in the form of gigantic posters for instance. People cannot escape from icons which often depict tiny events of daily life, especially of the relational field, in ways which look innocent. People still have the choice to follow or not the suggestions provided by these icons. However, sooner or later, those who refuse to follow these trends feel as outsiders in their own group by not being like the others. This is particularly relevant for teenagers. Many people will then succumb to myths and come to think that, after all, the touch of your skin after

the use of product X might be sexy, the taste of wine might bring with it a cosy atmosphere, driving the car Y must be really exciting and adventurous. People begin to anticipate these good feelings and finally engage in the myth. A self is then a product of the external world. Postmodern times show how our status is determined by fashion and style. If they change, we have to change in order to fit into the mold, with our peers.

This is actually very ironical: first the self is constructed, and then, icons are created to touch the specific fields of the created self. Desiring selves with created desires and neuroses.

3. The postmodern self and the process of meaning

In the previous sections, we feel the tension within the self who takes the responsibility of the whole of humanity, and we wonder what a self is. Apparently the vogue of New Age movements shows that people still need metanarratives to comfort and guide them. Unlike Lyotard, we must not fool ourselves: metanarratives are not dead. They have just taken another face; one of them is the face of consumerism. We think that we can buy everything: health, material goods, knowledge. However consumerism falls short in crucial moments of life and death matters. Neither money, nor science can buy us free from cancer or AIDS.

In such a society of production and consumerism, we even try to buy an identity, to constitute a self provided to us by advertising: if I buy Product X, I shall be powerful, hero-like. The mot d'ordre is 'Better living through chemistry'. By buying that

product we grow in value and self-regard. Everyone wants to be a hero, and television asserts that everyone CAN be a hero, from school teacher or pupil to doctor or fireman. The range of possibilities is very broad.

What about the self if we are still able or allowed to use that terminology? Anderson (1995) qualifies the self

- as multiphrenic by reference to many different voices in our culture telling us who we are and what we are,
- as protean because the self is capable of changing constantly to suit the present circumstances.

That fits with Kristeva's (1977) view of the self in process. Kristeva (1974) posits the self as being heterogeneous (material, bodily and social). The person is embodied, speaking, and embedded in specific discursive structures in specific historical and social contexts. Kristeva (in Weir, 1996) states that it is thus influenced both by biological (the semiotic developing at the very early stage of closeness with the mother) and social dimensions. This formation of the self is pre-linguistic, i.e. semiotic, contrary to what Lacan (1966) is arguing, namely that the self is constructed by language. The author's argument would be that the self is both semiotic and linguistic.

Kristeva (1977) equates the process of meaning with the movement of an impersonal thought. By that, she means that, in fact, the person is not thinking, but the whole society for example is reflected in her and constructs meaning. This brings us back to

the Lacanian view of the fading subject: the subject disappears from what it just said. It is interesting to note that Lacan (1966) puts the subject in a neutral form (there is no equivalence for the neutral shifter 'it' in French), in order to underline the non-involvement of the subject in its speech. It is the o/Other that is speaking. Lacan precisely says: 'It' ('ça' in French) speaks in the person. However, it must be noted that Kristeva and Lacan give room to individual variations, whereas Foucault focuses on disciplining and subjecting. He seems to exclude a matrix on which discourses are imprinted, and where these discourses are submitted to a transformation due to the first inscriptions. For Foucault, we are made. For Lacan, we make ourselves in language.

Kristeva (2001) says that there is a receptacle language before language, before the Lacanian symbolic realm. She calls this the 'infrasingnifying substratum' of language. Moreover, for her, language is signification and 'signifiance'. Language for her consists in words and signs which are articulated within a system, that is signification. The underlying substratum is made of rhythm, echolalia (the language of a child before language), the music of words and signs, and constitutes 'signifiance'. 'Signifiance' is dynamic and a semiotic modality. In the production of meaning, 'signifiance' and signification overlap. Furthermore, she adds that the person is divided between biological drives and the ability to sublimate them by constructing meaning. The person 'desires' meaning. Meaning is a process: it is always to come, to be constructed, and is never absolute. Meaning is changing because the person is interacting with others and is changing.

In the process of meaning, the person is confronted with the 'uncanny' (Kristeva, 1988, says that it is hidden, it is the 'stranger' in ourselves, the one we tend to reject by repressing it), but is not able to face it and to reconcile with it. The subject is not lost in this process, but multiplied because of the presence of 'signifiante'. 'Signifiante' opens up meaning by introducing the uncanny. When this happens, i.e. when we are confronted with this stranger, we feel strangers to ourselves. It is as if we were another person, one we do not know. We are multiplied because we are the one and the o/Other. We do not want this uncanny because it is destabilising. We want to be in control of our lives and utterances, and pretend that we have a proper and powerful self. When the person speaks, she rejects the uncanny of 'signifiante' and, as such, engages in negativity. She says 'no' to impersonal thought which comes from the o/Other by taking responsibility for what she says.

By a negating movement the person has to reject these discursive practices in order to produce change and renewal in a structure or system. Rejecting existing structures to produce new ones is a revolutionary practice. Furthermore, Kristeva (2001) specifies that the human being needs revolt. She says that if the child does not revolt against the mother or the father, if an adolescent does not undertake anything against school or the state, he is dead because there would be no possibility for innovation and creation. He would be a robot. Kristeva (1980) calls 'abjection' the revolt of the person against elements coming from an outside or an inside which seem to be threatening. At the same time abjection is also directed towards the mother. Abjection is the condition sine qua non for individuality. We have to 'abject' the mother by

whom, at the same time, we are fascinated. And that makes it very difficult and creates tension. In other words, on a more practical level, we have to say 'no' to the o/Other that is so seductive.

In order to individuate, the child must abject the mother. Abjection can be felt as nausea. It is a violent movement of disgust, the sort of disgust we feel for a dead body; disgust for crime, betrayal, because they upset a structure. We can empathise with Jan when he discovers the crime committed by his parents (§ 8 of the speech). At that specific moment, he might have felt abjection because he felt betrayed. Death is present in the form of the duck which, at the same time, was there to be his bosom buddy, part of his life, of the pleasant and secure moments of his childhood. A problem arises from that which he liked most: his parents. Abjection might be disgust, hate, rejection. Here in Jan's case, the parents killed a part of himself. This can be equated with and experienced as some sort of emotional abuse: they love the child, however, they make him suffer.

Kristeva (1980) advocates that the abject is repressed and brings modifications in the discourse (in the form of slips of the tongue, mistakes, for example), in the body (in the form of symptoms), or in both discourse and body (in the form of delusions, hallucinations). The abjected element is the signified whose contour got lost. In other words, we do not recognise the signified which is sliding under the signifier expressed in our discourse.

Lacan (1966) posits that the self is decentered. If the subject is fading in its discourse, then the subject is not the 'I' who speaks. The 'I' who speaks is the 'Other'. We are shaped by outside forces. We are socially constructed. To be socially constructed means that, as we saw in previous chapters and paragraphs, the values of our society, its language, the arts, in short culture define who we are. Our identity is not separable from our sociocultural environment. When we change the environment, we change according to the laws of the new environment, and we graft new elements onto the substratum, adding more pieces to the pre-existing mosaic. These new pieces will change us and that illustrates how we are in process.

The postmodern self is heterogeneous, fluid, unstable, plural, a sort of chameleon. It is changing and defined externally by the various relations it has with others. We might wonder which figure is the 'true' or 'more true' one. Kristeva (2001) says that we can live with others because we are split and fragmented. We do not reject the others, neither integrate them. More precisely, we welcome them, and become a mosaic.

As the self is fluid, it is historically situated: not quite the self of yesterday any more, not yet the self of tomorrow. Our life is like a story, a text which is constantly rewritten. We can only empower ourselves by taking responsibility for our own story, defining ourselves. This is paradoxical, because there is a double movement of taking responsibility and negating. Indeed, empowering ourselves already entails a subjugation as Foucault points out. And again we are in the vicious circle, because the

story we account for as ours is the story of the 'Other'. We want and pretend to be 'ourselves', and are therefore by the mere definition of ourselves contradictory in and to ourselves. We are subjected subjects.

We are subjected because we need to satisfy desire caused by the lack-of-being. We are submitted to seductive elements from the outer world, and we internalise them as ours. These elements meet repressed material and are interpreted in a way specific to each person, but within her sociocultural environment.

Should we then consider the postmodern self in a negative way as shattered, made of meaningless fragments, or rather in a positive way as made of many voices and allowed to take responsibility for all these voices?

Chapter 6

The analysis of the birthday speech

As François is very much at ease in the art of playing with words, it becomes a pleasure to read the speech and to become aware of the wealth of information his glossolalia contains. By playing with the words, François works on the signifier. The speech is the surface into which the text digs the verticality where meaning occurs.

François' text is both

- a signifying system: he wants to tell us something,
- and a social process: social by the fact that the self is social, that it makes itself through language and shares its story with a community.

What does François tell us, and what does he expect from Jan, and also from the witnesses, through the birthday speech?

If we say 'it is cold in here' and mean 'shut the window', or 'light the fire', or 'turn down the air conditioner' for example, we say something else than what we mean. Amazingly, this something else could be expressed by existing linguistic signs. However, we do not say it like that; we express desire. 'It is cold in here' contains what the person wants, and what she expects from others. Substitution and desire are happening simultaneously.

From that, we might infer that:

- linguistic expressions can mean different things on different occasions,

- linguistic expressions are used to refer to things in the world,
- the meaning of linguistic expressions is explained in terms of metaphor and metonymy because they respectively substitute and displace, and refer to repressed material and desire.

In the birthday speech, 'red ants' (§ 14, 24, 33) shows that the meaning varies from use to use. This expression is a metaphor motivated by François' desire. That might mean that what he actually attributes to Jan, or projects onto his brother, refers to himself, i.e. that he himself might be restless. François' words are tied up to a signified which is his desire. Meaning refers to other things than linguistic expressions as such. It refers to intention as we have explained it earlier (chapter 4 on metonymy, section 7: *Intentionality*), to a result (what is expected by the speaking subject), a cause or explanation (we find in desire), and a consequence (the satisfaction of desire).

Through his narrative, François makes a unity of Jan's life. Jan's life is taken as a whole and the narrative becomes a sort of totality: this constitutes the conscious part of the narrative, a sort of continuity. Another dimension which is the unconscious, or the 'Other', marks ruptures and discontinuities in the story. François does not merely tell childhood memories, but includes the other dimension, his own by the way he speaks about things. Like in the example 'it is cold in here', if we said 'shut the window', we would not know why we have to shut the window. However, by saying 'it is cold in here', we involve ourselves by signifying that we are cold. This matter of fact made the author aware that she should have asked permission to analyse the

birthday speech from François rather than from Jan. It will be about François' 'Other', and about how he internalised things.

François is represented by his speech. He appears in the speech through the words he uses, but also disappears from it by the very words he uses. He is divided between that which he says and that which he means, namely that he is sad and unhappy. It is as if he was saying 'I am laughing, joking and recalling happy memories, but in fact, I am crying. These were the good old times, now it is different. I am worried, but you had a good life' (a good life being considered as the achievement of ideals and dreams current in a specific sociocultural environment). The feeling of sadness marks a discontinuity in the narrative, it is unexpected here.

By making a unity out of Jan's life, François allows the audience to judge if Jan has done the 'right thing' to achieve a life which can be considered as socially correct, acceptable and successful. Every related event becomes significant, that means that it contributes to show that Jan stayed faithful to himself throughout life. The events are articulated in a narrative structure in the form of a totality because they are tied together by the idea of 'restlessness' expressed in the expression 'red ants'. Furthermore, François remembers these events because they did something to him and, as such, he anchors himself in the narrative.

This chapter will focus on the analysis of a discourse in the form of a birthday speech. The analysis will illustrate how François as a self is made of different fragments, and

how, in his speech, these fragments come all together in order to make meaning. The fragments are present and reflected through the words he uses. They tell us the truth, his truth, better than any explanation could do because they have, as will be shown, the ability to go right to the point.

The birthday speech will show us in a practical way how François (and all of us) make meaning. The text will be analysed within a qualitative framework and with reference to the theoretical material developed in the previous chapters. The method of discourse analysis will rest on the Lacanian perspective on language in terms of metaphor and metonymy. Furthermore, from Lacan (1966) we learnt that language games are haunted by desire (see chapter 4 on metonymy, section 5: *Desire*). We shall see in the analysis of the speech how desire appears in François' language, in the rhetoric devices he uses, in the 'Witz' he makes. His words are linked in a signifying chain constituting a fabric of meaning and tell us his truth.

Furthermore, the speech reveals itself as a textuality which is about the symptomatology of the Afrikaner society: it is deeply inscribed within the ideological construction of the Afrikaner society, within a specific historical frame, the period of time from apartheid to post-apartheid, covered by François' and Jan's lives up to now. It demands to be read as a cultural statement.

Before beginning the study of the birthday speech, we have to mention that there are texts within the text, forming an intertextuality. This intertextuality is widened by the

contribution of the translator (female South-African Afrikaner) and the author's (French), and opens up a cluster of meanings, a wide array of understandings. Thus, the insight which is provided is the one of a stranger, the author, exiled in a different sociocultural environment. It is just one understanding amongst others.

The author's duty and attempt will be to look behind the words, to see what is speaking underneath, and to name François' desire. To carry out that task, some words, some sentences and some rhetoric devices which are signifiers carrying meaning will be isolated. She will try to unravel one by one the different elements to 'catch' the signified running under the signifier, to identify the negated 'stuff' or absence, the 'Other' in order to show the double-meaning of the speech.

The proper analysis will reveal how François posits himself in the speech, how the speech is structured, how the different material coming from François' sociocultural background is introduced, and how this background becomes the unconscious speaking in François. This analysis is not meant to be exhaustive. Only the themes directly referring to the theory developed in the previous chapters will be approached. Furthermore, as the study springs out of the concerns of the author that limits the array of the fields of investigation.

1. Generalities about the speech

1.1. Author and audience: 'I' and 'you'

François takes responsibility for his speech by positing himself as the 'I' who speaks. The 'I' who speaks is, for Lacan (1966), the subject of desire, desire being the revelation of truth. The general talk is punctuated by some 'I's and, by that, François anchors himself in his speech and reveals himself. More often, he stands behind the screen of a more general 'you', in a sort of self-protection, in a game of 'I show' and 'I conceal'. The narrator does not constantly stand back, but makes himself present and takes responsibility for the speech. 'He' himself presents the panegyric to his brother. Sometimes, the 'I' becomes 'we' including both children and youngsters. There is at times a certain neutrality in the speech due to the use of the pronoun 'you'. This 'you' replaces 'one', i.e. François, and makes language impersonal, however more personalised than if he used the mere personal pronoun 'one'. 'You' is more directive: 'he precedes you' (§ 1). Moreover, the 'you' makes the audience participate in the speech.

Furthermore, the 'you' is not an individual interlocutor, it takes on the generality of a type. The 'you' is only directly specified at the end of the speech (§ 34-35), where, in that case, it means 'Jan'. In the rest of the speech, 'you' represents all those who have the luck to have an elder brother, or sister. The 'you' therefore includes people from the assembly, those who 'know', who can understand what is meant.

The narrator changes: sometimes it is the child-narrator, even baby-narrator: 'No wonder he was not quite filled with joy at my arrival' (§ 6). There is another voice talking behind the baby, which can be the mother's (sometimes the father's or any of the influential characters who participated in his education). We can easily imagine the scene when the mother (or another person) tells the boys little stories about their childhood, his brother's and his, how they reacted to one another when the oldest lost his position as little omnipotent king, having to share love and things with the little brother.

1.2. Structure of the speech

This text has a purpose: it is a birthday speech addressed by François to Jan, from brother to brother. Here precisely, François wants to express admiration and love for his brother, and thank him for being his elder brother, for having taught him about life, about the practical as well as the emotional side of life. François chooses Jan's fiftieth birthday to give the general message of love and admiration. This involves talking about feelings, that which is particularly difficult for François. Therefore, the general mood of the speech is humor. We use humor to say things we could not say in a more serious way, such as when we want to talk about feelings, because of sociocultural dictates, or to transgress taboos.

Paragraphs one and two of the birthday speech constitute the introduction of the speech. This section outlines the entire flow of the text: the educational, religious and social background of François and Jan. The speech is written in the form of a life

story, relating childhood memories. It is the story of becoming a man. It is like a train on a journey going from one point to another, with a series of wagons from one to fifty, loaded with miscellaneous items of which the driver is not always quite aware. It is precisely this load which determines the journey. The load is a metaphor for the unconscious. It is the journey, to use the common metaphor for life, of a person from birth to the present day where a sort of balance sheet is established. It also resembles the film of your life which is recounted just before you die.

François talks in terms of metaphors and metonymy in so far as what he says carries meaning in a displaced, deferred way. Meaning is transferred through language. François imposes meaning on words in so far as he takes responsibility for what he says. He is represented by the signifier where the unconscious is anchored in language. He is also represented by a chain of signifiers where what he says does not correspond to that which he means. By taking responsibility for his utterances, he negates what he says. We shall try to unravel that which François is negating. The words he uses are impregnated with his-story. In other words, the history of his culture, society and environment is all there, in his words, added with the excess of his more personal experiences the author called 'actual experiences' in the previous chapters.

1.3. Three dimensional (Afrikaans, English and French, or rather Franco-German) linguistic and sociocultural divergence

The birthday speech was originally written in Afrikaans which is François' mother tongue. That version certainly better corresponds to his utterance, and the Afrikaans words could give a better insight of that which is meant. For the purpose of this study, the speech has been translated into English by an Afrikaner lady who 'understood' the birthday speech in her way. The third dimension comes in with the author's Franco-German background. (People of her region, Alsace, have repeatedly been pulled from one side to the other, the German and the French, and their mother tongue is a German dialect mixed with French expressions.) There are already three, if not four, texts that are superimposed. Every new text brings a new interpretation which is the result of the superimposition of ingrained material. Each one of these three persons has been submitted to powerful discourses giving shape to their way of speaking and looking at things. François' words will be understood differently in each context because understanding flows out of a sociocultural environment. François' background is different from the translator's and again, different from the author's. The author will therefore understand François' words according to her Alsatian background where people have repeatedly been exposed to different cultures, the German and the French.

The following metaphor can provide us with an example of how such a superimposition occurred. An interesting point worth noting is that the Afrikaans language marks a split which occurred over centuries: Dutch and French Huguenots

were first alienated from their language and culture, i.e. from Europe. These elements now constitute some of the heterogeneities of the Afrikaans community. Being also separated from their original linguistic bath, their language developed differently from Dutch or French. A metaphor of *différance* might be concretised in a geographic situation in Franschhoek, for example: one side of a street being populated by the French Huguenots, the other side by the Dutch which gave somehow birth to the Afrikaner society. We can easily imagine children playing the role of *différance*, seeking their identity in this path opened up between two groups from different cultures, but linked by a similar traumatic history. We see how these children became 'contaminated' by both edges, taking over material (linguistic and cultural) from both sides. We might infer that meaning proper to a specific group went adrift, creating new idioms which best appear in the form of language. The author herself has been moving between two 'edges', and is herself contaminated by two cultures.

1.4. The message conveyed by the speech

The condition for the success of the speech is that it be understood by the audience, and that requires a common language. A common language does not only mean that everybody speaks the same language. There are elements lying beyond the mere tool language represents; there is a whole sociocultural and environmental tradition, as it became apparent in the previous chapters. The success also implies that the listeners are open to what François has to say. Conveyance of the speech and understanding can only be achieved under these circumstances.

The message is plural because there is a double intent: the message of admiration and acknowledgement addressed to Jan, and an underlying message generating sadness and nostalgia. The text is about the experience of having an elder brother and this experience is shared with an audience. Sharing these elements of Jan's life makes us belong to the same big family. The meal we are sharing is put on a higher level: it becomes the Holy Communion. The solemnity of the moment is emphasised by the prayer said in common in the beginning of the meal. Communion, conceived as the union of people who profess a same faith, becomes the metaphor of perfect understanding. But is it perfect? The birthday becomes a sacred celebration where François shares with a community the feelings he has for his brother. By attending the party, we support Jan in a sort of rite of passage from the known to the unknown. The analysis of the speech will shed some light on what is actually celebrated here under the cover of the birthday.

1.5. François and Jan

In the speech, Jan's identity is constructed by François. By 'storying' Jan's life, François makes a sort of reflexive 'come-back' to himself. He constructs and introduces himself: his place in the family and respective place vis-a-vis his brother (the younger). François is the direct witness to Jan's journey through life, and thanks to this representation, the audience witnesses the storied life. Moreover, François wraps Jan in a veil of admiring, sometimes ironical tenderness. He presents us Jan's life through his own perspective. This is done with humor. Furthermore, words such as 'courage', 'work up', 'face' (§1) set the mood of the text. Though presented with

humor, they are said. Life is all about 'survival' and 'struggle'. It is hard work to live. The listeners are moved by the speech and sometimes have an expression of sadness and nostalgia on their faces.

We can see the picture: a three year old boy holding his toddler brother by the hand to lead him over the obstacles in the road, showing him the dangers they represent for his fragile little feet, explaining him everything thanks to the wisdom and experience he already gained in this field. We can even hear the recommendations of their mother: 'take care of your little brother'. We feel the small dramas of a child's life: 'chase you away', 'send you back home', the 'degree of inferiority' (§ 2) resulting from this kind of treatment. We can empathise with that child's desire to do what the elder brother he admires so much is able to do, to participate in the games of the bigger ones, and the frustration and disappointment consecutive to the rejection.

The two boys are moving in a world outside their family, but they can come back to the shelter of their home at any time. That is very obvious in § 21: the problem with the 'tokkelok' seems to have been a very emotional episode in Jan's life and reveals the familial support as well as unity of the family. The rhythm is faster due to the number of actions happening here and the emotional turmoil experienced by the family. That it is so present in François' style, i.e. in the rhythm of the text, points at a very emotional and exciting event in his life. 'Political asylum' (§ 21) is the expression for a secure retreat, a place where the boys feel protected. An asylum is a place where you cannot be pursued, which is inviolable. Somehow it evokes a game played by

children: the pursued ones jump into an imaginary sacred place called 'home' where they cannot be caught by the pursuers. It is a place where you are safe from danger embodied here by the student of religion. Access to such a place is provided by an authority represented here by aunt Lena. By association of thoughts, asylum becomes here 'political' for François.

Jan's and François' lives are necessarily intrinsically linked and intertwined. Somehow we get the feeling that François was standing in the shadow of his elder brother: 'inheriting the old stuff' (§ 2), 'bigger and stronger', 'stand back' (§ 1), terms and expressions used to show a certain hierarchy in the family. However, that does not make him feel bitter nor resentful. The feeling of admiration for his brother pervades all over the text (such as for his gift in things mechanical (§ 12) or for repairing electrical circuits, § 13): the elder brother becomes a 'guide' (§ 1), a provider of self-confidence: 'if my elder brother survived, so can I' (§ 1). Jan participated directly in François' education as a role-model.

'One' of the nice things (§ 1) is that an elder brother is a guide. We might wonder what the other things are. François says that there are advantages and disadvantages. If you are a single child you have some prerogatives, you are the centre of attention. If you have siblings, you have to share. As a second child, you are confronted with a child who already has a strong position in the family but who must now struggle because he is not the centre of this universe anymore. To be 'brothers' implies that you cope well and care for one another, and/or you do not cope and compete with

one another. Tension springs out of this new situation. How the whole family reacts to such an event is important for the further development of both children.

Jan is perceived as special, different from the others (§ 6). François puts him on a sort of pedestal. One of the major qualities is his curiosity as shown by the episodes of the train (§ 7), the duck (§ 8), 'shrewd Sherlock Holmes' (§ 10), his interest in different things (such as mechanics in § 12 for example) which opens the path to knowledge, but is also linked with a manifold of dangers such as the ambulance accident (§ 7), and disappointment in the case of the Bantam (§ 8). Jan very early developed astuteness and a big sense of justice.

François pictures for us his older brother as a rather independent person, independent in relation to François (§ 2: 'he and his pals chase you away and send you home') and in relation to others (as shown in § 11 where he displays novel ideas in that time by helping a black woman). The two years difference made Jan powerful and somehow airy and detached: he does not have time to waste with babies.

'The attack of the ambulance' (§ 7) shows by the choice of the word 'attack' that this accident is perceived as danger coming from outside. It is not Jan's fault that he has been run over by the ambulance. He is rendered passive as responsibility is put on the ambulance. Like in a cartoon, the ambulance suddenly appears from nowhere, rushing at its victim like a bull at a red cloth in an arena. That certainly caused a shock to the small child François was at that time. How could an irreproachable brother, worthy of

so much admiration be at fault of anything? François had at this stage an unconditional faith in his brother (they were about three and five). If this faith was so unconditional, we might feel that nothing could detract from it.

We feel a sort of togetherness between the two. They used to spend a lot of time with one another, witnessing one another's pains, joys and struggles. François became aware that one does not always appreciate the real value of what one has until separation reveals the lack, and thus the attachment they felt for one another, and which survived the early years of competition (§ 17 'only became friends'). Siblings are indeed, not always friends.

François presents himself as scared of the future ('you never need to fear, or feel uncertain about what lies ahead for you..', in § 1). Jan seems to play out the future, making it concrete and somehow available ('show ... the thorns, stones and potholes along the footpath', § 1). That way, François sees the future, how it works, what it is about and completely relies on Jan (you have just to 'stand back and observe how all these dangerous and daunting things are done' in § 1). Jan becomes his guide, giving him self-confidence and trust in the future. He is his role model and François identifies with him.

François thanks his brother for imparting education to him, even though he says he would 'never admit it' (§ 3, 7) not even to himself. That shows pride (you don't want to owe anything to anybody) and also a form of modesty. Because you learnt not to

talk about feelings, not to show them, you do not easily tell someone that you 'love' him. This pride is the displacement of the difficulty to express feelings. It might also be that François still feels as the second child and does not want to admit or still represses this feeling of inferiority. He still stands behind because he is not yet fifty which seems to represent an important milestone for him. There is still something he has not achieved. At the same time, it might be a false pride to hide a feeling of ingrained inferiority toward Jan because it was not easy to compete with such a brother, originally because of the age difference.

François presents Jan as astute, intelligent, having a big sense of humor, unconventional and adventurous. He says it is 'great' to have a big brother. Maybe it was not always so great. In § 10, Jan is pictured as generous (Samaritan), ready to help needy people who find themselves caught in difficult situations. He does not help out of mere moral principles, it is genuine (for example 'make sure that the right diagnosis was done'), due to his sensitivity ('armour-plating' opposed to 'tender-hearted interior', § 9). According to François, Jan has only qualities (in the birthday speech). We might wonder if François sometimes felt 'not good enough', or 'not as good' as Jan. This might cover some repressed resentment.

2. The Lacanian necklace of the speech

When the author heard the speech, she was filled with unease. A nagging feeling of the 'end' of something, of death was hovering over the assembly. Nostalgia and anxiety impregnate the text. The tone appeared to be sad; however, she must not

forget that her Latin origin might falsify this view. Latin speeches are indeed faster, more lively and 'singing'. The tone would not be as monotonous, but would rather have more peaks. A fiftieth anniversary seems to be threatening, because there might, at the same time, be a connotation of something which is ineluctably over, and a connotation of death. Was it actually a birthday celebration or a funeral? Who or what was actually being buried?

This speech resembles an epitaph whose intention it is to resuscitate a little boy. It appears to be an irony when we look at it from this perspective. It shows the pervasiveness of death, and a good way to hide the increasing anxiety or even to deny it, to chase away demons, is illustrated here: humor and talking about childhood.

As the author heard it in Afrikaans, she could only understand fifty percent of it, but the rhythm was eloquent enough to make her feel the wit and the humor, as well as the sadness. It might be the fact that she did not perfectly understand that language which made her more responsive towards the feelings expressed. The speech was definitely tolling the death of something. This feeling of sadness is sliding under François' signifiers and provides a double-meaning. What is François' desire that invades his words, what does he really mean? In the birthday speech, we have two things: an apparent message which is the speech itself, and a hidden message generating sadness. Kristeva (1969) calls this double-talk 'double dealing' or 'duplicity'; here it is the message addressing Jan, and the underlying sadness or nostalgia for a past time. There is a juxtaposition between love/tenderness and

sadness. If we expand on the signification of 'duplicity', we might wonder who François is deceiving: others or himself?

The text of the birthday speech is a chain of rings (Lacan's metaphor of the 'necklace', 1966). Lacan calls the elements 'rings' because they always come back to the speaking subject; they are aimed at Jan, but are in relation with François here. This apparent chain is built up according to how François remembers childhood memories and to the following association scheme. The arrows mean 'leads to', the terms between the arrows refer to the rings of the necklace. These rings are words that call on other words according to an association or combination scheme. Furthermore, the study of the birthday speech will reveal how each of the rings can be linked with other rings by substitution: signifiers refer to other signifiers, and first inscriptions are overwritten.

The apparent chain of rings might be the following:

elder brother (§ 1) → advantages / disadvantages (§ 2, 3), 'adventurous approach' (§ 3) → 'fortune hunters' (§ 4) → 'diamonds' (§ 4) → 'Kimberley' (§ 4) → 'heat' (§ 5) → 'bare foot', walk (§ 6) → 'accident' (§ 7) → 'angels', 'flutter' (§ 7) → 'poultry' (§ 8), 'bosom buddy' (§ 8) → 'tender hearted' (§ 9), Christmas (§ 8) → 'prayer' (§ 9) → 'Jesus', not racist (§ 9) → 'Samaritan' → 'drunkard' (§ 10) → birth → hospital (§ 11) → medicine (§ 12) → 'mechanics' (§ 12) → engineering → Matric → school work → 'red ants' (§ 14) → studies → Aunty Stalk (§ 15) → childhood → games (§ 16) → conflicts → friends → colorful character, teenage party with girls (§ 18) →

discovery of the 'female species' → 'volkspele' (§ 19) → 'faux-pas' → language (§ 20) → 'freedom of speech' → mother → speech (§ 21) → 'waffle club' → fishermen (§ 23) → 'Voortrekker' → excursion of fishermen → girls (§ 24) → 'San people' (sleep alone) → Air Force (§ 25) → interest in planes → battle field (§ 25, 26) → field of romance → sex life (§ 27) → marriage (§ 28) → family members → friends (§ 29) → 'Old Cowboy' (§ 30) → 'Hold the fort' (§ 31) → responsibility for family (§ 32) → 'red ants' → Windhoek → water (§ 33) → family memories (§ 34) → 'outpourings' sentimentality (§ 35).

François speaks out of a discourse where you have to be cool, but warm, and communicative, far away from outbursts, where self-control reigns over sentimentality: you are a pacified person. Sentimentality is seen as a hindrance and must be avoided. The birthday speech, then, becomes a way to give some space to sentimentality and to allow it.

A necklace is not always open, stretching from one end to the other. It can be fixed around the neck and closed. As such, it is closed around François' neck and becomes 'his' thing: it is about his feelings in relation to Jan. François becomes the centre of the necklace. By closing the necklace, we obtain a circularity. The speech deals with both the brother and feelings: the feelings for Jan, but also how François feels about himself, his own struggles awakened by his words. The speech is meant to be an expression of love for Jan. It is difficult to talk about feelings such as love, especially for a man in a patriarchal society because it is considered as a weakness. Because of

taboos, François makes use of distortions to go from 'elder brother' (§ 1) to 'sentimentality' (§ 35) and to link both (or meet the two ends of the necklace) in the last sentence of the last paragraph: 'I do like you in a way'. The choice of the words 'like' instead of love, and the addition of 'in a way' which seems to set limits on this love or distorts it, is strongly marked by the taboos put on feelings. Love for his brother is also a desire to be loved by this brother. That closes the necklace.

In his speech, François wants to introduce a linearity, but, as he speaks in a very nostalgic way about the past, he goes back to this past and closes the necklace. The past is lost, but still present, and the past determines François and his words. There is a circularity between past and present. Our memory does not normally present us with remembrances in a chronological order. Memories are called upon through associations which appear quite clearly in the birthday speech, even though François seems to have put some order among them by reworking the text. However, the chain of memories is a cascade of metonymies and metaphors. Words are ricocheting from one to the other; each word is in relation with another word. They create small stories and become alive, pregnant with bigger stories, feelings and sensations. Repressed material is not dead, it is brought back to life. Meaning flows from one ring into the other, coloring one ring with the meaning of the next one. One of such rings might be 'red ants' (§ 14, 24, 33); by considering the connotation of restlessness, it tells us the story of Jan's studies, girlfriends and moving to Namibia for example. At the same time, it goes back to François. The latter seems to say 'you are restless, not I'. In fact, he is, but does not want to acknowledge it, and projects it onto Jan to feel 'clean'.

François' words open up the past. Displacement in time and space is necessary to let us taste the magic moment. Elsewhere is here, past is present. François' sentences teem with scents, colors, sounds, pain and joy, heat and cold, in short with life, given rhythm by the laughter and shouting of two children. His childhood memories are awakened by his brother's birthday, and re-enacted in the speech. We are in another time. The metaphors he uses allow us to empathise: we seem to feel the hot sand under the children's bare feet, we can imagine the pain caused to their little feet by a sharp thorn, or when they bumped their toes against a stone, feel the hurt knees when they fell into a pothole, we can nearly smell the dust of Kimberley and feel its tingling in our nose. We are blinded by the light. A red nimbus surrounds their childhood: dust, heat, light of the sun, later camp fires. The choice of words renders the text sensuous, points at material that has been inscribed very early in François, and makes us remember our own childhood. We are children again, playing the same games as the two boys.

3. The grand narratives governing François' life

In order to structure the analysis and to avoid repetitions, the rhetoric devices will be classified into categories according to the main discourses they refer to. There are ways of speaking about things which are specific to a sociocultural environment. These devices generate humor and distanciate François from his words through an exercise which is both technical and mischievous.

The author will call the themes appearing in François' speech 'grand narratives' because they are countrywide here in Namibia and in South-Africa, and as such they represent grand narratives for a big population. If we consider the speech on a worldwide scale, it represents of course a local language game as Lyotard (1979) advocates it. The following study will reveal what the speech tells us about François' grand narratives, how they are superimposed on each other, and how they direct his meaning-making.

The reading of the speech gives us information about the part constituting the 'Other' for François. The two boys are orienting themselves and moving on this background which has different levels and provides different codes, the most apparent of which are:

- their family and neighborhood,
- their embeddedness in the Christian religion, norms and values of the Afrikaner society,
- their geographic setting,
- their stories, legends and ideologies,
- their socio-political and historical background, the apartheid system.

These themes provide the frame out of which François is constructing his narrative. They are written on former inscriptions, and internalised according to these inscriptions. Their superimposition wraps the words into meaning. This text contains a rich mine of values and beliefs originating in a specific sociocultural and economic background, in the stories François has been told in his childhood, his education, and

at the same time the ideologies he internalised. The unravelling of the speech will show how François assembled these inherited fragments he took over from the discourse of the 'Other'. We shall try to see what these fragments are all about and what the 'Other' tells us here.

François' discourse is built on a discourse which is different from the author's, because of sociocultural determinations. Their common root is Western European society and way of thinking, but they got split some four hundred years ago. An ontological evolution took place and changed the basic data, like in the example of Franschoek. This break or split is interesting because it shows us how relevant external factors are in the formation of the self, how we are manufactured and managed. The discourse of the 'Other' changed. The 'Other' is speaking in us, through us; Lacan (1966) sometimes says 'it' is speaking in us. The unconscious becomes impersonal, because 'it' is articulated unbeknown to us. The speech represents the voice of the 'Other', and the distortions (in form of 'Witz' and speech devices for example) reveal the former inscriptions and former symbolisations.

François and Jan grew up in the mid twentieth century in South-Africa / Cape Province. This constitutes the sociocultural frame of their lives and comprises religion, political setting which is the apartheid system at that time, the Afrikaner culture and its dictates.

Grand narratives are internalised, taken for granted. They shape us and accordingly we shape ourselves. The Western way of thinking and the Christian religion with their different facets have been introduced into Africa and imposed upon people who had a quite different perspective on life and death. That was certainly at the origin of a huge misunderstanding between the groups, European and African. However, at the same time they were imposed, they were also accepted and transformed to fit into existing grand narratives. These fragments formed a cluster of sometimes contradictory elements. For example in Western Africa, people became Catholic, or, in some countries Muslim. They all have a traditional name and a Christian name (such as Diabiana and André). They are catholic or Muslim and at the same time attend secret Voodoo celebrations. As such, the person is torn between different beliefs.

3.1. Internalisation of fears

3.1.1. Fear of the future and finitude

At the beginning of the birthday speech (§ 1), François stresses the 'unknown'. The Christian religion best illustrates a part of the unknown (the most unknown being after-death) amongst people. The references to religion ('guardian angels' in § 6, 7; 'jaws of death' in § 7) François uses stress the idea of danger. The unknown also appears in the fear of the future ('you never need to fear [...] about what lies ahead' in § 1) which, in a certain way, also refers to religion. Indeed, the Christian religion provides the idea of eternal life after death which, for a pragmatic and materialist person, is in itself very problematic. Furthermore, the world of production puts the emphasis on the materiality of life and on possessions. We have to quit everything

when we die and as such, we tend to refuse death and to negate it. What lies 'ahead' (§ 1) also refers to the near future: the white community might be anxious about their position and security in the coming years, you can become sick and eventually die, or there might be many other ordeals you will have to experience.

The very first sentence of the speech introduces the theme of 'guide through life'. If you need a guide through life (Jesus was a guide), that implies that life is hazardous and somehow frightening: 'thorns, stones and potholes are along the footpath' (in § 1). These metaphors remind us of the Bible where you are advised to choose the narrow, steep, and uneven path. This points at a strict education, tinted with Calvinist principles according to which hard work, coupled with suffering is necessary to make you deserve what you get.

The ineluctability of death is pushed away. To alleviate the tragic finitude of death, Christians resort to 'Heaven', eternal life as opposed to eternal sleep. Human beings reach another state on a more spiritual level, namely the eternal life of the soul which is the origin of many philosophies providing meaning for life. Death is necessary to reach this state of blessedness and, at the same time, death is dedramatised by this hopeful image. Seen within the frame of religion, death serves both as a domain of danger and of comfort. The Bible becomes a metadiscourse providing guidelines about how to cross life and reach the realm of God.

There are ways to speak about Heaven and hell. What is good refers to Heaven: it is the realm of God. In Greek Antiquity also, greater gods were living on the summit of the Mount Olympus ('high', 'above'). What is bad refers to hell, the realm of the devil ('down'). This appears in colloquial speech in expressions such as go up, climb up, 'high' feelings as opposed to 'low' feelings, 'downwards', 'fall', to name a few.

The gravel is 'hot-as-hell' (§ 6) indicates the degree of heat though nobody could ever test the veracity of this expression. We are told by the Christian church that in hell there reigns an unbearable heat. We often qualify heat as 'infernal' by reference to this biblical image, whereas hell was the realm of the dead, cold and dark in more ancient religions. For Christians, hell became the realm of heat which irradiates red light, the place of eternal punishment, of forces of evil, of suffering, eternal torment, perversion, sins. It is 'Satan's' kingdom.

'Squadrons of guardian angels' 'flutter' (§ 7) through the sky and save Jan from the 'jaws of death' (§ 7). Death becomes personalised or rather, is compared with a ferocious animal. Osiris, the Egyptian God of Death, ruler of the underworld, had the head of a jackal which is a predator. The Greek myth of Eurynomos (Hamilton, 1978) also refers to the function of Death to devour the flesh of the dead. Death is traditionally pictured as frightening. It is a form of unknown condition. It is Thanatos, eternal sleep.

François uses strong signifiers to talk about life and death. A tiny string keeps us alive, and death is hidden everywhere, hovering over us like Damocles' sword. If 'angels' constantly flutter around a child, it means that there is a steady fight between life and death. This fear of death is instilled in us very early by our anxious mothers, and the idea of finitude is very present in François' speech.

The idea of death also refers to the death of an illusion and the death of a golden past. This golden past might be François' own past, or the past of the whole community. The speech addresses everybody, it is not only François' and Jan's past. It is everybody's around the table. Every single man and every single woman is 'interpellé', i.e. can relate to and is 'triggered' by the story. It is the story of a bygone time, it can never be the same any more: an adult cannot be a child any more, he can only remember, and nobody can go back to the time of the apartheid system or the time before independence. It is part of a past, but this past is still present in the unconscious, sometimes making a fool out of people.

3.1.2. Ways of speaking about age

Turning fifty is one of the risky things of life, in the same line as going to school, into the army, entering university, starting work, getting married and setting up a home. These events of leaving home are steps towards maturity. Interestingly, turning fifty is also so much more imperceptible than the other events which often involve changes in geographical location, or in relationships for example. Turning fifty is thus a corner stone belonging to the sociocultural norms, maybe emphasised here in the Afrikaner

society. It belongs to life events and might generate stress depending on the way it is perceived. It might also be an important corner stone for François. Life is presented in a sort of linearity which appears in metonymies such as 'precedes', 'lies ahead', going from one point to another, preferably forwards which, ironically, is a going towards death. These expressions point at a reality lying beyond us, and which affects us. Not all cultures will talk about the world and life in such terms. These are terms of a world of productivity and efficiency, of the Western industrialised world. Moreover, in a system of productivity, performance is associated with youth and dynamism throughout life, if possible. No weakness, either moral or physical, is allowed. If you exceed the biological age of youth, it means that you can no longer compete and, as such, you are put on the edge of social life. You are therefore compelled to fool (others and yourself), and live in a life of simulacrum.

In other cultural groups, the same reality might be perceived in different ways and transferred through other types of expressions. Here, the directive is clear: go 'forwards'. These expressions bring us information about how 'reality' is experienced or we might say 'has to be' experienced. They are culturally determined and determine us. We live according to them. They become ways of being, ways of life. We see here that there are different systems of naming. Life span is like a journey, it has a beginning and an end which are birth and death. As children, we hear and learn to say this type of expressions, we integrate them, embody them, and then we are determined by them. They become rules, ways of speaking about life and death or, in other words, discursive practices we do not even question.

The author likes the expression 'turn' fifty: you have curves in your life, it is not straight, and this is uphill, on top, the highest point; you do not see what is on the other side before you reach that point; it goes downwards towards death. You have to face the ineluctability of death: it is frightening. Normally you are not excited about death. The point is that you have no choice, you have to go on and through. Life and death are constantly present in our mind; we struggle to preserve the one and avoid the other. Our life is limited by the finitude of death, and that idea of finitude influences the way we live.

Interestingly, François decides to put the different life events in a chronological order up to the fateful fiftieth birthday. What is after all enjoyable after fifty: menopause / andropause, retirement, grandfather-/ motherhood (which have often a negative connotation for being linked with old age and finitude whereas this time can be enjoyed without the responsibility of father-/motherhood), disease, death? How 'dangerous', 'daunting', 'unknown' it is indeed.

From the birthday speech, we understand that a very daunting thing seems to be 'turning fifty'. Fifty is between forty and sixty: at forty you are operational, at sixty you are or are up to retiring. At fifty, you find yourself caught between these two stages and society expects you to be established. The speech appears to establish a balance sheet, and this makes this anniversary more special than the 40th or 60th. The use of the metaphor 'half century' (in § 4) puts even more weight on this age. It seems to be a long time because century rather relates to history, not to a person. It is

meant in general, as though you could not contain it. 'Century' is outside us: we are in the century; our age is part of us. But it is only fifty years and many people reach that age. 'Century' has a historical connotation, it is an era. We talk about the literature of the sixteenth century or twentieth century for example. A century becomes a collection of sundry elements: cultural, social, economic, political, artistic for example. It is also a subdivision of something bigger and fits in the metric system, remnant of a specific pattern of thinking. Time is put in small boxes (years, decades, centuries), then collected in bigger ones (millenaries).

When we conceive of a century through the historical meaning, we feel how much achievement lies in half a century, emphasised by the expression 'this one' (in § 4). Half a century represents the time for two world wars, literary movements like surrealism, nihilism, existentialism, postmodernism. That represents a whole range of action possibilities in one life (or a tremendous waste of time). Also, as the world experiences an accelerated evolution, that points at a rich diversity of events.

Depending from which perspective you consider it, it might mean that you achieved a lot and it becomes then the apogee of your life. From a more negative perspective it points at the fact that you have the best behind you and that now, life is rather on its down, and there is no time left to catch up. The author would like to stress that for some people life might have been hell up to now and that now they can at last enjoy it.

The expression 'like this one' (referring to half century in § 4) makes this birthday special and reveals François' admiration and respect for Jan. Jan must have achieved a lot. It might also be a reference to the historical past half century i.e. to all the events which happened in South-Africa and Namibia on the social, political and economic levels, as will be discussed at a later stage. At the same time it affects François because Jan's life is also part of his own life. He feels directly addressed by this birthday. Paradoxically, age is also described as relative, as indicated in § 25 by means of the San proverb where life is not measured in material performances. This idiom appears as a healing balm to soothe the wound of age.

We might wonder if the fear of the future or of the unknown as he calls it in § 1, is still present in François. Expressions such as 'stand back and observe' (§ 1) might refer to the mother's voice giving recommendations when he was still a small child. They could reveal the anxiety or worry of a mother who feared for the life of her child. The first thing we learn is 'to take care', 'be prudent' in order to prevent us from losing life. These first recommendations have an impact on a child and might develop into a behavioural pattern of fear (of dangerous things, but also of a possible punishment when transgressing these recommendations). Often, a mother feels that the womb is a guarantee of safety and that, once the child is born, there is no protecting shell around it anymore. It can be assumed then that one of the most frightening things a child might imagine must be 'leaving home', the warm cosy home, security, shelter because it is a sort of re-enacting of birth.

François' world seems to be shattered, made insecure. At several instances, we see that old values are upset: the girls seem to be too assertive, the tokkelok does not behave as one would expect it, the former social order is irrelevant, for example. The big question is the 'unknown'. The unknown determines François' life as well as his peers' and kin's. For the author, that is the signified threading its way through the multitude of signifiers without being verbalised. It is the 'Other', the incertitude, the loss of faith, and a problematic future. This signified is undermining each and single daily action. It is the death of a myth.

Furthermore, the material security a person has provided for herself or/and her family might be threatened by events which are beyond control, such as natural catastrophes, or in François' case, upsetting political changes. On a quite different level, the family cell might be threatened by an evolution amongst its different members: growing up of children and leaving home, or/and evolution of the relationship between the two partners.

3.2. The socio-political discourse

3.2.1. The historical background

The storied life takes place in South Africa, in the Cape Province and later on in Namibia. The text leans on a social and political practice, on the ideology of a specific group of that time, here the group of white people, more specifically Afrikaner people, in South-Africa. The attitude of that group will be represented in the signified, understood as meaning. The speech becomes the scene where this socio-political

practice is acted out and presented. We shall see now which are the different layers of the signifier in François' specific socio-political environment.

South-Africa was directly involved in the second world war after a proclamation stated that South-Africa was at war with Japan (Wessels, 1996). Cape Town, amongst others, was one of the towns directly involved due to its coastal situation, which necessitated coastal defences against a potential Japanese invasion.

More complexity arose from the fact that South-Africa entered the second world war as an ally of Great Britain whereas at the same time, the Ossewa Brandwag desired a German victory (Wessels, 1996). In this way, the history of South Africa is close to the French one when the Vichy Government collaborated with Germany while General De Gaulle constituted the Resistance from London. However, after the dramatic and reprehensible events attributed to Germany, nobody wants to acknowledge this double-dealing any more. The same thing must have happened in South Africa as well. As German deeds, especially the extermination of the Jewish people during the second world war, are negatively judged, many people do not want to be identified with the German nation. The fact that French or South Africans sympathised with Germany is repressed, but present in the ideology of the 'native policy' of the Nationalist Party:

- separate living areas, trade organisations, separate work places for white and 'non-white',

- job reservation for white and/or accordingly a fixed and 'just' quota for whites and 'non-whites',
- separate representation in legislative bodies for enfranchised Cape Coloured, for example.

From § 32 we learn that François' father was active in the 'Ossewa Brandwag'. That fact reveals his commitment to his country, and also a strong Afrikaner identity. He was a person respectful of traditions. The Ossewa Brandwag (Bunting, 1969) stipulated several commitments for its members, such as camps for men and women (§ 24), folk dances, folk songs, meetings of an educational and a social nature, celebration of Afrikaans national festivals and heroes' birthdays, erecting memorials, repairing places of historical interest as well as the graves of Afrikaners who perished on the 'Pad van Suid-Afrika' (Road of South Africa), to name a few. In spite of its cultural aspects, the Ossewa Brandwag also involved military drill and manoeuvres. We might then infer that such an organisation managed people. It had subtle control over them as Foucault (1975) described it, by pulling the strings of their 'voortrekker' (understood here as 'settler') soul and nostalgia for an adventurous past. People only saw what they wanted to see and were disciplined and manipulated toward a specific political direction which could only be one of segregation.

The Ossewa Brandwag tells us about the cultural priority of this society which is to promote the Afrikaner values and try to maintain the traditions inherited by the forefathers. The expression 'blind patriot' (§ 24) gives the picture of Foucault's

(1975) subjected subject. A good patriot would be preferably blind and deaf, would not question anything, and follow the directives which are suggested to him. This expression refers to the 'voortrekker' as a political movement.

3.2.2. The apartheid system

François and Jan grew up in a way of thinking which explains that apartheid ideology is present, even though François says that Jan was never racist. What the author wants to say here, is that a certain way of speaking about 'non-whites' is available in their storage and they speak out of this background as in § 9: 'Jesus keep all the old kaffirs' which is an offensive word for black people, but certainly not for the small child who learnt it. For him, it means 'black people' without racial bias at this stage. However, the fact is that this word is a signifier impregnated with meaning, namely that black people are inferior and incompetent. It is a whole verbal 'kit' which is handed over to the child, but the latter does not seize these enigmatic messages. The words are loaded with the 'Other' of adults. A big part of the 'Other' which is contained in the words remains obscure to the very adult who however uses the words. There is actually a contradiction in the sentence 'Jesus keep all the kaffirs' (§ 9) because the prayer takes place during apartheid which is excluding 'non-whites'. At the same time, the child includes 'non-white' people in his prayer. We might be allowed to wonder about the real nature of apartheid, i.e. who are the 'non-whites', all or only some? How is this concept defined? This represents a kind of double-bind internalised by children who then, as they grow older, have to reconsider that issue, oppose it to their background and to the new ideas they gained, and forge their own opinion.

Other references to the apartheid system appear in § 10 in the expressions: 'in contrast to his contemporaries', and in § 11 'who would have put the pedal on the metal'. We assume from that, that white people did not normally stop their car to help black people. There is more than mere racism at this; there is fear of the unknown, of the o/Other. Black and White do not know each other because they never learnt it, they had no opportunity to be together.

In signifiers such as 'kaffirs' and 'Uncle Sam's'⁷ (§ 9) Independence', the signified is never verbalised, but constantly sliding underneath. In the case of 'Uncle Sam', the proper name is rejected as if it was taboo to pronounce it, or because, as we are in a post-apartheid society, a black person is not worth being called President and by his proper name. As such, the signifier which is supposed to represent that subject is rejected. By denying him his name, he cannot be brought into being and is pushed away. In place of the proper name, François uses a substitute which is a metonymy (a name for a name) generating irony because it also refers to the name given to the president of the United States. The irony is strengthened by 'uncle' which is normally used as address of respect. This identity is undermined. The substitution becomes just a signifier like another and François' desire reaches *jouissance* in such substitutions.

François posits himself as a racist ('unlike his younger brother, Jan was never a racist', § 9) and Jan as non-racist. He points at the Namibian Government by the allusion to 'Uncle Sam' (making implicit the possibility of a change of mind in Jan

⁷ 'Uncle Sam' is the nickname given to the President of Namibia, Sam Nujoma.

who might have become racist). This might suppose that the black government is not what one would expect. There is a new sort of discrimination: one black group against all the others (black, white and coloured). His remark also implies corruption, incompetence, things which are not done the right way, and that would have broken Jan's idealism (about a black government or black people in general). That sounds rather bitter. 'Idealistic' also refers to the fact that after Independence, Jan became Namibian like many other South-Africans. Maybe François feels sorry for the eventual disappointment experienced by Jan in this matter. That also shows his own scepticism concerning black governments. We might wonder if a big part of the sadness the author felt does not come from this disillusion, from a loss of faith in the future. François and Jan might both wonder: where do we go in this shattered world? Is there still a place for white people here? Histories of independences are dramatic as the past has shown in Congo and Kenya for example. The killing, disempowering, dispossessing of white people are part of the concept of independence. We must look at 'independence' through the whole range of signifiers attached to it in order to understand what is happening in people's minds: Why should it not happen like this in South Africa or in Namibia? Nothing can guarantee it, especially if you look at other countries.

The abolition of apartheid caused fear, pessimism, uncertainty and lack of faith in the future that are undermining people's actions. To protect and comfort themselves, they rationalise and project by loading the other (all the 'non-whites') with the burden of incompetence, ignorance and corruption. Living this way is difficult because people

live in a compulsory contradictory situation in order to survive: doing as if everything was fine by keeping the other at a distance, but knowing that it is not fine. Some feel guilty of the past (not necessarily theirs but their peers' and kin') and lead an inner struggle, trying to re-adjust the injustice which was detrimental to the proper development of the other.

The feeling of uncertainty and of being overwhelmed by a multitude of others is pervasive in white people's daily life generating sadness and for some, nostalgia for a brilliant past. People feel powerless and a lack of enthusiasm. That condition can only undermine their action, and their desire (understood in the Lacanian perspective, see chapter 4 on metonymy, section 5: *Desire*) to have the life they had in a brilliant past is impossible.

3.3. The discourse on sexuality and gender specificities

3.3.1. Male versus female

From François' narrative we infer that the father holds the position of the *pater familias* responsible for the socio-economic well-being of the family. He 'holds the fort' (§ 31): it is the role of the man (passed over to the eldest son after the father's death) to provide material security, to be the breadwinner, the caretaker. He represents the Law and gives his name to any member including his wife. By giving his name, he takes possession of them, becomes the caretaker and provider, the others becoming the 'provided'.

As in the Bible, this power and responsibility are bequeathed to the eldest son, not to the mother, when the father dies (in § 31: 'Hold the fort, old Jan', and § 32). The son becomes responsible for the mother and the other child. That tells us about the gender relations prevailing at this time. We get the sense of a world ruled by man. It provides us with the stereotype of 'men are strong, (he wants his sons to become 'men', able to fight for their lives and rights (he buys them boxing gloves, § 17). Men do not cry, and men do not show their feelings' (in § 29 'he won't easily admit [to be] sentimental', the adjective 'sentimental' having also a slightly derogatory ring). This gives us the picture of a very conservative and patriarchal society (as portrayed in the Bible and still prevalent here) where women were submitted to the law of the father/husband.

Nevertheless, strong women, mother and aunts, were part of François' and Jan's lives. However, it seems that in a patriarchal society, a woman could never be a 'leader' (lead the family when the husband dies). That might have been perceived by men as threatening their power position. We might be allowed to wonder what would have happened if, at this time, Jan would have been too young to take over this responsibility.

The mother picture is reinforced by the two aunts, constituting the image of Woman in the children's unconscious mind. The mother picture would be: a woman who is caring, unconventional, open to discussion, present, helpful, supportive, reliable, able to cope with hardship, intelligent, has a sense of humor, straightforward.

We might wonder how François felt when the father died and when the structure threatened collapsing, but was rescued by Jan. The father's death might have been felt by François as the collapse of security. Jan certainly could not have allowed himself to feel (or at least show that he felt) like that because of the responsibility the father passed on to him. He had to be 'strong'. He could not show any weakness because he became the care-taker. As such, he is the fortress now. What a heavy load when you are so young and still a student! If we consider what the family constellation looked like: a young man still studying, another one in the navy, the mother who might not have been working because it was like that in the post-war time, we can imagine the difficulties that he faced. We can assume that the time subsequent to the father's death was hard until everything could be settled. That might also have been a conflictual time between the two brothers because Jan had to be father-like, but was not the father. Depending on how François experienced his father's death, that time might have been marked by resentment.

The mother is strongly linked with the house, the home. Her duty is to provide a cosy atmosphere, the physical and emotional balance and well-being through love, care and food, to raise and educate the children. If, by contrast, the father seems to be more unobtrusive, it might be that François tends to take the father's presence for granted. There are two opposed and complementary parents. The concept of family seems to rely on that pattern: father / mother / children, in short, the nuclear family.

We also become aware that duties are gender specific within this pattern and that provides the image of a rather conservative society. There are boys' games designed to breed male individuals who conform to the image of man, as already provided by the Bible, and by the forefathers. That the tradition of the forefathers is maintained, appears in the father's adhesion to the Ossewa Brandwag.

3.3.2. Sexuality, feelings, love and gender

Using rhetoric devices in these fields distanciates François from domains governed by taboos. He talks about the relationship between the two sexes in mere biological terms or he uses a foreign expression 'maladie d'amour' (§ 24). That way, he does not transgress directly the taboos of his society by expressing them or pronouncing the taboo. He does it in a disguised way, transforming the text into a sort of carnaval. The biological terms used point directly at the natural necessity of reproduction.

i. Marriage

It is interesting to mention the term 'girlfriend' here: before you get married, you need a girlfriend. This word is a product of our time and the result of a metonymic process, in other words, there is an evolution in time in the word 'girlfriend' (as female friend). It is not a simple female friend, but the female partner in a love relationship: since love assumes friendship between the lovers, the word friend is used to talk about an aspect of love (Kövesces, 2000). It is only a part (friendship), not the whole thing (love as friendship, sexuality and partnership for example).

We understand that marriage is a strong bond and commitment between two persons, a male and a female. That points at heterosexuality as the 'right' type of sexuality. This social bond is founded on the prohibition of incest and on sacrifice. The female's role is crowned by maternity and it is often, in many societies, the sacrifice of the mother herself for the benefit of her children and husband. In the fifties, it was still common in France for the woman to give up her professional activity once she had a child. In this sense, women had to sacrifice their profession and the satisfaction (financial, self-confidence, independence) they gained from it.

Marriage is conceptualised as the union of two persons who are compatible and who perform different but complementary tasks and roles in their relationship. It is expected to be shared and lasting. However, François seems to envisage the idea that a wife might leave her husband (§ 28: 'nobody knows how she managed all these years to stay with Jan') which points at the possibility and acceptance of divorce and shows an evolution in time of the marital system.

The development of the woman was normally allowed and only conceived within the frame of the family. It is exceptional that the mother studied, and that fact actually reveals that the mother's family was less conservative and defended more novel and non-conformist ideas. When the author came to this part of Southern Africa, she was asked weird questions such as: 'do you do needle work?' Her answer was not satisfying: she did but she doesn't any anymore. She did not fit into the category of women doing needlework, nor into the one of those not doing needlework. Thus, she

could not be rejected because in her past she did needle work. But she could not be accepted either in the group of women doing needlework for some charity purpose for example. Her intellectual development also seemed to be problematic. At fifty, you do not study, you better care for your grandchildren. She was shattering the process of labelling and categorising. Thus, still to-day, the Afrikaner society, compared to the Western, seems to be rather conservative.

ii. Sexuality

The behavior of the two children is determined by stories, fairy tales and biblical stories which contributed to the formation of behavioral / thinking patterns and gave rise to moral principles. That appears quite clearly in § 21 where François provides a rather sharp critique of homosexuality, which is also denounced in the Bible for being one of the biggest evils, something disgusting. François characterises the student in theology as 'slippery' and 'psychotic' (§ 21). This characterisation is reinforced by the expression 'healthy aversion' (§ 21). We might infer from this that it is healthy to be moral, unhealthy to be immoral. Meaning appears in the qualification 'healthy'. By the expression 'healthy aversion', François shows that it is right to feel aversion against hypocrisy and depravity represented here by the 'tokkelok' who is supposed to be a moral, irreproachable person and who appears to be one of the most ugly, despicable specimen of the human species here. The 'tokkelok' is not only homosexual but a pedophile and sadistic. He is perverse. A person uniting so many vices under the cover of religion can only be a psychopath in François' eyes.

We can feel some sarcasm in the expression 'student of divinity' (§ 21), a slight critique addressed to the Church. 'Student of divinity' rather than 'student of religion' sounds ironical and rightly depicts that feeling of contempt. There is a total clash between divinity and that which this student is. The thinking pattern would be: a student of religion has to act in the image of God if he wants to teach God's principles on earth; he must become a role model. We might say that contempt is physical in the word 'fedopiel' (see explanation of this neologism in chapter 3 on metaphor, section 5: *The technique of the signifier*) which sounds as if spat out due to the inversion of the consonants f and p. This manufactured word has a consistency: it is embodied and the feeling of disgust becomes physical (as if spat out). The word became a thing François is manipulating with pleasure. It is loaded with sensorial material.

François seems to be disgusted by the fact that the 'tokkelok' is not only a homosexual, but a pervert pedophile ('sadistic tendencies') on top of all. The 'tokkelok' unites several sexual deviances, sadism and pedophilia, in a nutshell when he should be able to feel and express 'agapè (universal disinterested love, neither lack nor power, neither passion nor friendship). The Christian agapè is spontaneous, free of charge, without purpose, without needing to be justified (Comte-Sponville, 1995). He expresses this disgust by means of the terms 'slippery smooth' (§ 21), meaning 'yuk!', words we tend to reserve for slugs, or sometimes for snakes (whereas the latter are not really slippery). We can understand François' aversion for this type of person: he has children himself and might have been confronted with sexually abused children during his professional career. As he uses what is practically an oxymoron

'healthy aversion' (§ 21), we understand that it is right to discriminate against sexual perversion. Foucault (1984) points out that in Socrates' time, 'mignons', i.e. young boys who underwent a sexual education by a man, were very common and part of the Greek culture. The advent of Christianity put an end to this type of practice and sex moved from pleasure to duty: that is, to reproduction and conjugal obligation. (However, according to the speech, in practical life, that sounds a little bit different). The 'tokkelok's' behavior becomes abominable, contrary to law, in short a crime and a disorder ('psychopath').

The Bible discriminates against homosexuals (Old Testament, Sodom and Gomorrah) and we might infer then that heterosexuality is considered as being 'normal' whereas homosexuality belongs to the 'abnormal', evil, to the field of depravity. Homosexuality has not always been considered as a sexuality amongst others. It was rather considered as a perversion or social deviation. The aim of psychotherapy was to bring homosexuals back to 'normality' which was heterosexuality. Heterosexuality as prescribed by the Bible, by the Christian religion and its ethics is grounded in the family and in reproduction. It is made natural (like in nature) and placed on a biological level by François in § 18, expressed by metaphors from the animal register 'bull-calves' and 'heifers-in-heat'. That is normal natural sexuality. Furthermore, the 'tokkelok' episode occurred at the time of adolescence when gender identity is defined. Jan shows a strong aversion to the 'tokkelok' who is homosexual, pedophile and pervert. That reaction posits him as heterosexual. Homosexuality is considered as being a sexual transgression, a vice and immoral. It seems to be a shameful horrible

crime. By rejecting the 'tokkelok', Jan is rendered safely as a man. The Bible does not only condemn homosexuality, but offers an ambiguity in gender provided by angels: are they male or female? This question might recall the ancient myth of androgeny. If androgeny, or this ambiguity, is accepted by God, why should homosexuality be rejected? Both do not fit in the paragon male or female.

Kristeva (1994) describes how homosexuality was defined in the 19th century and how homosexuals were classified into several categories: 'monovalent' (whose pleasure is found in a man), 'ambivalent' or fetishist (for whom women are not excluded), transvestites (who choose clothes like robes/dresses), 'historical' ('mignons' or Adonises), and 'anti-historical' (linked with concepts such as vice, guilt and shame). That shows how ambiguity about homosexuality might be present in people's mind. Angels are considered as asexual, 'neutral'. We can see that, within the field of sexuality, religion provides people with paradoxical messages which are internalised without being questioned. Contradictory messages co-exist in people's minds: on the one hand, they accept a problematic ambiguity in gender, on the other hand they regard it as pathological or morally reprehensible.

3.3.3. The way of speaking about love

Some expressions produce a Witz effect (see chapter 3, section 5: *The technique of the signifier*). They are working simultaneously on the vertical and horizontal axes of language. On the vertical axis, they might be considered as metaphors standing for something else. On the horizontal axis, within the articulation of signifying elements

around themselves, the sounds can be displaced, giving birth to new associations with completely different meanings. Let us analyse them one by one by isolating the signifiers they are calling into play.

'Corpus delecti' is a very fine and subtle joke that contains many elements. It refers both to Jan's detective skills by 'sending back' to the original expression 'corpus delicti' and to the anticipation of a delectable 'delecti' meal. On the one hand, we have a child who is angry, disappointed, betrayed and certainly grieving for his friend, the duck (§ 8, he faces his mother with an axe), and on the other hand, the parents who committed the crime and who are looking forward to the delicious meal (§ 8, the use of the word 'grace' shows that this meal is special). It appears to be some sort of a cannibalistic murder story because an alimentary taboo is transgressed (edible pets / friends). This expression is also a way to ironise Jan's sentimentality or 'tender-heartedness' (§ 9) as François calls it. By doing so, he pushes sentimentality away from him, and negates it.

The word plays ('corpus delecti' and 'fedopiel' are deliberate and are ways for François to distanciate himself from his speech. At the same time, as he is taking some distance, he shows himself. Lacan (1966) says that the unconscious 'embroiders' language. This appears quite obviously here, especially in the example of 'fedopiel'. Even though François' word plays are deliberate, they reveal a part of his unconscious because, even if we hide in the choice of our words, we can only hide or choose within a certain limit set by the unconscious (as described by Lacan by means of the

analogy of the mattress, see chapter 3 on metaphor, section 1: *Language and the 'Other' of language*). By hiding, we sometimes reveal more about the unconscious. So, even though we deliberately change words, the unconscious makes its way through the signifiers. The word plays reveal how François thinks about love (all types: philia (brotherly love), eros, agapè) and sexuality. Without articulating it with words, he actually condemns homosexuality / homosexuals and posits himself as heterosexual.

Word plays are polyphonic. By changing the order of phonic elements (f/p in the case of fedopiel) this word calls up a whole range of significations attached to it in this specific sociocultural setting: homosexuality is not welcome, a 'tokkelok' must be irreproachable, love without perversion, importance of the Church and religion. Phonic games reveal the plurality of signified obtained through a paradoxical connection.

The signifier 'red ants' reinforced by 'flustered' (§ 18) reveals lust without naming it. Lust is conceptualised in the domains of physical agitation / restlessness and heat by François. Love invades the whole body ('over his ears', § 27) like an infectious disease ('maladie d'amour' § 24, and 'watery knees', § 19) and is located in physical space. A notion of change of state is introduced by 'fell in love' (§ 27), 'cause' the knees to become watery.

François shows the first contact with the female sex by moving from metaphors denoting innocence of small children, shyness (love appears to be a natural force eventually generating blockages 'clouded', § 18), to the physical agitation due to desire.

The terms 'monks' (§ 19) and 'stork' (§ 6) suggest that there was certainly no sexual education, neither at home nor at school, and that a female body also belonged to a mystery ('enigmatic entity', § 24). 'Breaking the ice' (§ 18) to make this approach to the female gender possible is a rather funny expression to be used in Africa. This expression most certainly points at the remote European origin of the white society. This expression became universal and a universal catachresis, and reveals the difficulties faced in making relationships. It also shows how people of both genders have to behave toward one another, how society dictates rules and attitudes which have to be adopted, especially by women. Women are reserved, submitted. This learnt proper behavior stands in obvious contradiction with the expression 'heifers-in-heat' (§ 18) which suggests that these girls were not shy and rather emancipated. This expression is crude and makes them available for sex. But if we try to go back in time, we remember that only a few girls were self-confident in the field of romance. The majority were ignorant about sexuality and a good way to hide it is to giggle and adopt a look of somebody who knows.

Girls and boys were educated separately: there were boys' schools and girls' schools, boys' games and girls' games and professions specific to gender ('macho

engineering', § 23). The first contact (especially for those who have no sibling of the opposite sex) is difficult and clumsy, and requires courage and a great deal of self-confidence, even more when the girls were rather emancipated and more self-confident than the boys. That reverses the roles because subordination of the women engendered by patriarchal ideology seems to be irrelevant in that case. The young women are pictured as female seductresses. For François and his friends, the rules of this game seem to have been changed by the non-conformity of the girls. The rule is that men have to 'impress' women, not to 'be impressed' by them. Men are 'spruced up' (§ 19) to meet that purpose.

In patriarchal societies, female (and male) bodies and minds are disciplined (Foucault, 1975) by power practices: boys learn to 'handle feminine bodies' (§ 19). Women then see themselves through another, an anonymous patriarchal 'Other', and therefore, 'act' accordingly. They become mentally and physically shaped by men. When the mother's voice suggests that a girl is 'beautiful, intelligent, talented and also sexy' (§ 27), we hear the patriarchal 'Other' who intruded the female unconscious in a subtle way. When this balance is then disrupted, like here, by the unexpected behavior of the girls, the young men lose their self-confidence and do not understand anymore.

'Maladie d'amour' could have been written 'malady' which exists in the English lexicology, but François chose the French spelling which adds a supplement of meaning. This makes it more verisimilar, more exotic and more authentic/true. At the same time, this type of experience is pushed away from him. The stereotype of the

French lover might be hovering in this expression. 'Amour' seems to be a magic and mysterious word in many cultures, pulling in its track the memory of some famous French courtesans of the Renaissance. According to the definition (Le Petit Robert, 1991), in the sixteenth century, a courtesan was a woman of high social level behaving as a prostitute.

That might imply that the women Jan was seeing at this time were considered to be loose. It might also excuse Jan's behavior vis-à-vis his wife. The author would like to call them just emancipated, as a response to feminist precepts. It points at just one more indication of the dichotomy vice / virtue in which people are caught. On the one hand, we have the image of women as Marys, the mother, preferably sex-less and life-less (by reference to the Virgin), devoted to her family. On the other hand, the loose (prostitute-like) woman who however, is supposed to become Mary-like, once settled, i.e. married and having children. As men seem to enjoy both, they must be by turns living in contradiction to their moral principles and in line with them, moving between the two edges of the couple Mary / prostitute.

Even though this malady (*maladie d'amour*) is incurable, because once you contracted it you think you will die, the remedy exists: a new love with eventually renewed 'maladie d'amour'. That is nicely shown by François in the formulation of the sentence and the apparent contradiction it contains by just juxtaposing the two elements of the contradiction ('incurable disease' 'of which he was cured more than once', § 24).

Love is presented by François as a force which can make you sick ('maladie d'amour', § 24) or like an intoxication of the whole body ('over his ears', § 27), but also a pleasant state, rapture and confusion ('head full of mice nests', § 27). This type of metaphoric expressions shows a physiological, behavioral response to love. Love has the ability to transform a person who is 'emotional', has 'red ants in the pants' and becomes 'flustered', loses control because he is unable to think properly ('mice nests').

Furthermore, love is also associated with beauty. In § 27, François makes an interesting remark: 'the majority of women fall for handsome guys'. Prince Charming is expected by every woman: he is handsome, good, courageous, in short, he has many qualities, no defects, and is god-like (Adonises, § 27). In opposition to the handsome / 'good guy', the 'ugly guy' is equated with 'bad', dirty, violent, as having bad manners. This appears already in books and movies for children. Thus, 'ugly' carries the connotation of 'bad', 'handsome' the one of 'good'. An ugly person is therefore immediately associated with an evil person. There is some sadness or at least regret in this paragraph, some disillusion. We might be allowed to assume that François has been disappointed by a woman. The signified could be the disillusion and shock he experienced within a relationship: a woman who might have preferred a 'narcissistic Adonis', or that he might not have been (or he thinks he has not been) as successful, lucky and happy in making relationships as his brother was. The message is that 'ugly men' are caring, full of consideration towards women whereas adonises are selfish, vain, using others to satisfy their need of admiration. A problem within a

relationship might have wakened the desire to be like the elder brother, i.e. to be admired. François might feel that he failed somewhere.

His argument might be supported by Jan's experience where 'Adonis' is repeated by 'handsome stallion'. A stallion symbolises reproduction, and the assumption is then that such a guy wants only sex in a narcissistic (François' definition of narcissism here in this text) way without caring for the other.

4. Synthesis

The textuality of the birthday speech is made of different layers. The miscellaneous rhetoric devices open up plurality. The rich connotations (social, symbolic, historical, cultural for example) give access to a polysemy by their reference to other texts. The connotations disseminate meaning all over the speech and are the articulation of François' voice interwoven with other voices.

The author tried to unfold as many leaflets as possible without forgetting about the pleasure provided by the text: the pleasure to read it, to listen to it and to discover it. She isolated diverse codes (social, cultural, historical, chronological) that weave the text together in a sort of fabric without which the text could not be understood. The birthday speech provides us the example of how François is speaking out of the grand narrative of South Africa's and Namibia's apartheid system. The 'Other' is speaking through François' words. His language mobilises a variety of materials handed over to him. There is an infrastructure under the structure of language constituted by:

- the education given by the parents, the contact with kin and peers,
- the power exerted by society through institutions,
- the cultural bath with its myths, stories, legends, music, stereotypes, religion,
- the political environment with its managing and disciplining function.

We see that we cannot establish a linear listing of influences. By that, the author means that we cannot just say that there is an origin to François' archive; it cannot be defined temporally with a beginning and an end. Instead, the parents and society are part of the existing sociocultural and political environment. As such, they are already a ring of the necklace. François just becomes another ring which is already linked to other rings in an endless movement. The origin is therefore constantly deferred. A self has no choice to constitute itself on its own, but is constituted. The past is re-enacted in his speech, but as other, deferred and different. It is not the same past anymore, due to temporal deferral, but also because we are living in history. Therefore, the abolition of apartheid, amongst others, interfered and conferred another meaning to that past. On the basis of that, people do change. Thus, the self is not fixed but it is in process.

François' purpose was to hold a birthday speech for his brother in order to express love and admiration he feels for him. The work of 'différance' which occurred reveals anxiety for an uncertain future. The speech becomes a pretext to express a more serious matter, and as such it is a simulacrum. Under the birthday is concealed the real meaning which is about the lost object, the death of a myth. The speech is a sort of 'acte manqué', and François is alienated in his discourse from his discourse. He might

wear the mask of the new social order to hide disillusion, bitterness, sadness, anger and resentment, or he might 'drown' more personal concerns (such as 'malady d'amour') in a social issue. But sometimes these feelings just peep out as we have seen in the speech thanks to signifiers which are carrying meaning.

We cannot remain unmoved by the speech. The text becomes a polyphonic song rocking the listeners in the air of the myth of a golden past. It is like a music which wakens past emotions by tickling the unconscious. It is the same as what is happening at the evocation of Chubby Checker's music (§ 18): we are all twisting again in our minds and remember all the pleasant or/and less pleasant memories, the heterogeneity, attached to them.

The text of the birthday speech is a semiotic practice in which we can read the trace of different utterances which situate it socioculturally and constitute an intertextuality. Rhetoric devices provide us the material where meaning insists and François' verbal pranks provide a supplement of meaning. We already saw that the choice of words makes the text sensuous: we see the red light, we feel the heat and restlessness, we smell the dust for example. François' style is the coalescence of sensations and linguistic signs, as it is the case in 'red ants' for instance.

If we imagine the speech deprived of the figures of style like 'he precedes you like a guide' or 'the thorns, stones and potholes along the footpath', or 'red ants in the pants' amongst others, the text would be bland. François would talk in a sanitised

language, talk about mere facts, in 'degree zero' (see chapter 3 on metaphor, section 2.1: *Neutral language*). We listeners would be bored; we would not like to know that 'his brother gave him the instructions for life', said in these words. We want to know how he showed him and would like to 'feel' how it was done. In fact, he does not show anything, he just does them, and the little brother just sees things being done.

A certain way of life is bygone and enclosed in François' story, becoming a parenthesis in which he could make it alive again for some time, the time of the speech, between his introduction and conclusion which punctuate it. We find back the lost time. It is brought to the surface by another who pulls the strings of common material which, however, is perceived and symbolised differently.

The truth is death here: childhood, youth, early adulthood are dead. Furthermore, the foundation, the white Afrikaner society with its rules and regulations is dead. We might call that loss, the lost object. What remains in adulthood when you could earn the benefits of your active life is an uncertain shaky future.

This study shows us how the self is made of a cluster of fragments which determine his actions, behavior and thoughts. François deplures loss and his desire appears in the speech in the form of sadness. The fact that the lost object is negated all along makes understanding very complex and problematic for an outsider. In other words, meaning is undecidable. We are not master in our own house. Making meaning is not only manipulating a language in a gifted or less gifted way. François himself would

certainly say: I am talking about the birthday, childhood memories, not about a socio-political issue, and certainly not about myself, but about Jan.

Desire is articulated in the speech devices he uses all over the text. Each device or word is like a little book with several leaflets. François takes us from one layer to the other in a movement of *différance*, but it is neither one nor the other. It is vague: it is the repressed element, the lost object which cannot be named because it is too painful. It is distorted. He can only reach *jouissance* in speaking. *Jouissance* corresponding to his desire is impossible.

François created his own myth constituted by these hidden rules which structure his meaning-making, articulated through signifiers. François' myth explains the feeling of sadness, the grieving for the lost object. It is not that which he wanted to talk about, but it is the 'thing' which is being conveyed, which is present though absent. We do not mean; we are rightly meant because, as we just saw, meaning arises from desire. If François was 'meaning', the speech would not exude sadness. Desire is overwhelming here, blowing up the speech like a balloon ready to burst. The sadness exuded by the birthday speech is displaced in his words. The words become ways to substitute it, and negate it at the same time.

The birthday speech illustrates how our discourse contains a supplement of meaning. Events and actions generate meaning we called *signifiante* at an earlier stage, and we find meaning in the folds of language, as Lacan (1966) puts it.

There is no intentional 'I' who constructs meaning. Meaning does not lie in what François wants to say (in the sense of 'vouloir dire'), but lies beyond his intention, in the lack because it is the power of desire which determines our discourse. François' words are filled with 'absence'. This absence is Otherness. If Otherness is present in what we claim to appropriate as our own, then Otherness coexists with that which is identical, same. The same and the o/Other cohabit.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The person wants to be one in that which she says. She wants to 'mean', but is 'meant' by the condition of being separated from the 'Other' which has been gradually constituted from her early childhood on. When the child grows older, it becomes aware of the separateness from the mother and experiences loneliness. Lack and desire to re-unite with the mother appear. This is foreclosed, but the impression of togetherness stays inscribed in the person. That is why the person constantly wants to be 'one'; the fact is, she is divided. The striving to be 'one' explains why she can be easily managed: to escape that feeling of separateness and loneliness, she belongs to a group and merges with it. She internalises it. There is a need to conform, and François conforms to his sociocultural environment. That is another form of symbiosis, a passive symbiosis which is submission. François becomes again a fragment or a parcel of something else.

Our words carry the weight of our embeddedness and of desire. In our words we are 'one' because they substitute repressed material, but we do not know it and we negate it. That is why we remain divided in ourselves. The signifier considered as metaphor has a condensation power by which it signifies or means something. A hidden dimension is unveiled because metaphors open up the dimension of the unconscious. The author's interpretation of the birthday speech is based on the dimension of meaning allowed by François' metaphors and speech devices. Lacan (1973) says that

interpretation is not just any meaning, and is not open to all meanings. This is precisely because the sliding of the signified under the signifier is restricted and, thanks to this restriction, it allows meaning to occur.

The person approaches the world and others with a lack she will strive to fill, but, at the same time, her attempts to fill the lack are submitted to her sociocultural embeddedness. A way to make meaning is through her crises and powerful discourses by which she is seduced.

The translation of the birthday speech and the trust François and Jan gave the author, by allowing her to analyse it within the frame of a thesis, created the opportunity to open some doors and cast a glance into the Afrikaner society. In the introduction, we said that we are faced with the problem of meaning, and the author was really faced with it when she heard the speech. She was naïve enough to think that she was a Western amongst Western people. This naivety came from a journey she made to South Africa. What she felt there was very appropriate to cover her homesickness.

When she was in Franschhoek, she visited the Huguenot museum. She would like to call it 'La Petite France' (small France in English). Suddenly, she was back home, in these little houses built in the architecture common in the South Western region of France along the Atlantic coast. The objects displayed in the glass cases showed amongst others, silver cutlery, porcelain crockery from Limoges, and crystal glasses from Saint-Louis. Still today, French people use the same cutlery, crockery and

glasses, with the same design on special occasions like Christmas, Easter, birthdays for example, or everyday in aristocratic milieus. Suddenly, she could empathise with these exiled people, the French protestant refugees. They were certainly grieving about their lost homeland and their past life. Now, they had to adapt to new ways of life and thinking, and rest on new hopes for a better future.

This example clearly shows that the author is writing out of her own crises: as an outsider missing her homeland, as a person around the fifties, as a woman analysing the work of a patriarchal male upon/for another patriarchal male. François caused anger in her through the way he talks about women, and the way women are submitted to the patriarchal power. These issues tickled her touchiness when it comes to authority. Furthermore, she deals with translations: the speech has been written in Afrikaans and translated into English, then interpreted by an author who is Alsatian and, therefore, of Franco-German origin. That already means that she is constantly torn between two different cultures, being not the one nor the other, excluded from the French society because of the German features, or, because of these features, more easily included in the German society. Moreover, the authors she refers to in her work are mainly French and she had to translate their ideas into English for the purpose of this work and because she felt that the available translations did not always express the right nuance.

In addition to that, her linguistic background as a teacher teaching French and German as foreign languages allowed her to unravel in detail the concepts of

metaphor and metonymy, and show all the facets of association a person can make, unbeknown to herself, but this background was also problematic, though the analysis was done in the Lacanian and Kristevan perspectives. Moreover, her work will mirror her struggle with two supervisors of often divergent perspectives, and she had to write a text in a different tradition and language.

These above mentioned issues and the birthday speech itself raised crises that motivated the choice of the themes the author developed in her work. By awakening crises, there arose fears, concerns and aggression latent in herself. The analysis, then, became the speech between the author's feelings and the text, or, in other words, a sort of counter-transferential reaction to the birthday speech, counter-transference linked with the feelings coming from her own history. If she grasped that feeling of death, it means that a specific issue of the birthday speech touched her, or, rather, mobilised ('interpeller' as Lacan says, 1966) some unconscious material.

Also, while François wrote about their past (Jan's and his own) unconscious material was awoken in him and left an impression of unease and feeling of sadness in his narrative. In order to understand a person, we can make use of our crises, but at the same time, we should be able to detach ourselves from these crises.

Both François and the author are close to the fifties at the time the speech was written. The fifties can be seen as a developmental stage in life. It is often the time

when menopause and andropause break in. Menopause ineluctably marks the end of the fertility phase. By extension and metaphorically it might be equated with the end of 'productivity' (if we exclude genetic manipulation). It can therefore be seen as an age of restriction and change, closer to aging and mortality than to youth. This can be destabilising and create fear. The author's way to cope with that might have been to resume studies and maintain the illusion of going 'upwards' instead of 'downwards'. The issue of 'end of productivity' is stressed by the European trend in companies recommending pre-retirement. For men and women, performance is associated with youth, age with retirement (and death).

Nothing, i.e. no specific word in the text of the birthday speech directly refers to the idea of lack of faith in the future. It is rather a feeling which is allowed by the specific ambiance of the speech. François' language is inundated by the flow of superimposed inscriptions. The pain is not textually spoken out, but appears in the way he speaks: words he uses and, in that case, his tone and rhythm. If that mood is underlying the speech, then definitely, you cannot expect anything great after your 50th birthday. The 50th birthday becomes then a metaphor of grief for this specific group, and/or for François who himself is close to that age and, like the author, writes out of his own crises.

Meaning is made of the fragments coming from both cultures (her's and François'), and also from the actual experiences of herself and François. There is an external component (what the sociocultural environment provides) and an internal component

(provided by the actual experiences). However, how the internal component is perceived is linked with the specific sociocultural environment that gave language and set norms.

Owing to the work of translation, some important issues from the speech might have been lost and, thus, some nuances escaped. This inevitably creates shortcomings in the author's understanding. That state of affairs shows that empathy is not sufficient, and not even fully possible, in a cross-cultural setting if it is not completed with the knowledge of the culture with which we are confronted. Empathy and knowledge are then intrinsically linked. Indeed, we do not simply find this knowledge in literature; we must relate it with the person and see how this material has been assimilated by the person. This stresses the importance of listening, openness and acceptance. How a person assimilates things is not done at once.

It clearly appears here that dominant discourses of religion, gender, apartheid give birth to discursive practices of current use in this group of the Namibian and South-African society. François makes meaning out of a past which is the past of South African people, of sociocultural considerations and of more individual elements that might be related to the early death of the father, the threat of bodily decay, or sentimental problems for example. All these elements are lacking in his speech, but become present in the way he presents this fiftieth birthday. His words make that silent cry present. What he says is a distorted message from the 'Other'.

As such, the author's understanding is also a distorted message from her Other that had been shaped by her sociocultural background and by the 'adoptive' backgrounds (Niger, Burundi, Germany and Namibia) in which she spent many years. By talking about certain issues rather than others, the author names her own concerns. The birthday speech spoke to her in a way that moved her.

Much more could be investigated in the birthday speech. However, an ethical problem was raised because she asked Jan, not François in person, permission to use the birthday speech within the framework of a thesis, and also because Jan and François (and their families) are friends of the author. She felt that 'digging' more in the unconscious would be voyeurism.

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