

drive to signifier] produced by the thetic is registered only as an inter-syntactical *division* (modified-modifier, 'feature-placing' or subject-predicate). This transformation, which produced the speaking subject, comes about only if it leaves that subject out, within the heterogeneous. Indeed, although he is the bearer of syntax, the speaking subject is absent from it.

But when this subject re-emerges, when the semiotic *chora* disturbs the thetic position by redistributing the signifying order, we note that the denoted object and the syntactic relation are disturbed as well. The denoted object proliferates in a series of connoted objects produced by the *transposition* of the semiotic *chora*⁴⁹ and the syntactic division (modified-modifier, NP-VP or the placement of semantic features) is disrupted. In the latter aspect of the signifying process – syntax – we note that the division of the grammatical sequence (which we have called the transposition of the thetic break into a homogeneous sign-system) is maintained; this means that syntactic categories, which ensure the possibility of both verisimilar denotation and communication, are also preserved. But the *completion* of the grammatical sequence does not take place because the division is not completely rejoined in a NP-VP, modified-modifier, etc. whole. This ellipsis or syntactic *non-completion* can be interpreted as the thetic break's inability to remain simply intra-syntactic – a division within a signifying homogeneity. A heterogeneous division, an irruption of the semiotic *chora*, marks each 'category' of the syntactic sequence and prevents the 'other' from being posited as an identifiable syntactic term (subject or predicate, modified or modifier, etc.). In this realization of the signifier, particularly as it is seen in poetic texts, alterity is maintained within the pure signifier and/or in the simply syntactic element only with difficulty. For the Other has become heterogeneous and will not remain fixed in place: it negativizes all terms, all posited elements and thus syntax, threatening them with possible dissolution.

It should be understood that the path completed by the *text* is not a simple return, as in the Hegelian dialectic, from the 'predicate' to the 'subject', from the 'general' to the 'particular'; it does not constitute a Hegelian synthesis operating in judgement and realized in the syllogism. Instead it involves both shattering and maintaining *position* within the heterogeneous *process*: the proof can be found in the phonetic, lexical and syntactic disturbance visible in the *semiotic device* of the text.⁵⁰ The disturbance of sentential completion or syntactic ellipsis

lead to an infinitization of logical (syntactic) applications. Terms are linked together but, as a consequence of non-recoverable deletion,⁵¹ they are linked *ad infinitum*. The sentence is not suppressed, it is infinitized. Similarly, the denoted object does not disappear, it proliferates in mimetic, fictional, connoted objects.

8 BREACHING⁵² THE THETIC: MIMESIS

Signification in literature implies the possibility of denotation. But instead of following denotative sequences, which would lead, from one judgement to another, to the knowledge of a real object, literary signification tends towards the exploration of grammaticality and/or towards enunciation. *Mimesis* is, precisely, the construction of an object, not according to truth but to *verisimilitude*, to the extent that the object is posited as such (hence separate, noted but not denoted); it is, however, internally dependent on a subject of enunciation who is unlike the transcendental ego in that he does not suppress the semiotic *chora* but instead raises the *chora* to the status of a signifier, which may or may not obey the norms of grammatical locution. Such is the *connoted* mimetic object.

Although *mimesis* partakes of the symbolic order, it does so only to re-produce some of its constitutive rules, in other words, grammaticality. By the same token, it must posit an object, but this 'object' is merely a result of the drive economy of enunciation; its true position is inconsequential.⁵³ What is more when poetic language – especially modern poetic language – transgresses grammatical rules, the *positing* of the symbolic (which *mimesis* has always explored) finds itself subverted, not only in its possibilities of *Bedeutung* or denotation (which *mimesis* has always contested), but also as a possessor of *meaning* (which is always grammatical, indeed more precisely, syntactic). In imitating the constitution of the symbolic as *meaning*, poetic *mimesis* is led to dissolve not only the denotative function but also the specifically thetic function of *positing* the subject. In this respect modern poetic language goes further than any classical *mimesis* – whether theatrical or novelistic – because it attacks not only denotation (the positing of the object) but *meaning* (the positing of the enunciating subject) as well.

In thus eroding the verisimilitude that inevitably underlaid classical *mimesis* and, more importantly, the very position of enunciation (i.e.,

the positing of the subject as absent from the signifier), poetic language puts the subject in process/on trial through a network of marks and semiotic facilitations. But the moment it stops being mere instinctual glossolalia and becomes part of the linguistic order, poetry meets up with denotation and enunciation – verisimilitude and the subject – and, through them, the social.

We now understand how the thetic conditions the possibilities of truth specific to language: all transgressions of the thetic are a crossing of the boundary between true and false – maintained, inevitably, whenever signification is maintained, and shaken, irremediably, by the flow of the semiotic into the symbolic. Mimesis, in our view, is a transgression of the thetic when truth is no longer a reference to an object that is identifiable outside language; it refers instead to an object that can be constructed through the semiotic network but is nevertheless posited in the symbolic and is, from then on, always verisimilar.

Mimetic verisimilitude does not, therefore, eliminate the unique break Frege saw presiding over signification. Instead it maintains that break because it preserves meaning and, with it, a certain object. But neither true nor false, the very status of this verisimilar object throws into question the absoluteness of the break that establishes truth. Mimesis does not actually call into question the unicity of the thetic; indeed it could not, since mimetic discourse takes on the structure of language and, through narrative sentences, posits a signified and signifying object. Mimesis and the poetic language inseparable from it tend, rather, to prevent the thetic from becoming theological; in other words, they prevent the imposition of the thetic from hiding the semiotic process that produces it, and they bar it from inducing the subject, reified as a transcendental ego, to function solely within the systems of science and monotheistic religion.

To note that there can be no language without a thetic phase that establishes the possibility of truth, and to draw consequences from this discovery, is quite a different matter from insisting that every signifying practice operate uniquely out of the thetic phase. For this would mean that the thetic, as origin and transcendence, could only produce (in the Husserlian sense) a tautological discourse, which, having originated in a thesis, can only be a synthesis of theses. We maintain therefore that science and theological dogma are doxic. By repressing the *production* of doxy, they make the thetic a belief from which the quest for truth departs; but the path thus programmed is circular and

merely returns to its thetic point of departure.⁵⁴ If mimesis, by contrast, pluralizes denotation, and if poetic language undermines meaning, by what specific operations are these corruptions of the symbolic carried out?

As we know, Freud specifies two fundamental ‘processes’ in the work of the unconscious: *displacement* and *condensation*. Kruszewski and Jakobson⁵⁵ introduced them, in a different way, during the early stages of structural linguistics, through the concepts of *metonymy* and *metaphor*, which have since been interpreted in light of psychoanalysis.⁵⁶

To these we must add a third ‘process’ – the *passage from one sign-system to another*. To be sure, this process comes about through a combination of displacement and condensation, but this does not account for its total operation. It also involves an altering of the thetic *position* – the destruction of the old position and the formation of a new one. The new signifying system may be produced with the same signifying material; in language, for example, the passage may be made from narrative to text. Or it may be borrowed from different signifying materials: the transposition from a carnival scene to the written text, for instance. In this connection we examined the formation of a specific signifying system – the novel – as the result of a redistribution of several different sign-systems: carnival, courtly poetry, scholastic discourse⁵⁷. The term *intertextuality* denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign-system(s) into another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of ‘study of sources’, we prefer the term *transposition* because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic – of enunciative and denotative positionality. If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its ‘place’ of enunciation and its denoted ‘object’ are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. In this way polysemy can also be seen as the result of a semiotic polyvalence – an adherence to different sign-systems.

Along with condensation (*Verdichtung*) and displacement (*Verschiebung*), Freud also speaks of *considerations of representability* (*die Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*), which are essential to dream-work (*die Traumarbeit*). Representability comes about through a process, closely related to displacement but appreciably different from it, that Freud

calls 'ein Vertauschung des sprachlichen Ausdruckes'. We shall call *transposition* the signifying process' ability to pass from one sign-system to another, to exchange and permute them, and *representability* the specific articulation of the semiotic and the thetic for a sign-system. Transposition plays an essential role here inasmuch as it implies the abandonment of a former sign-system, the passage to a second via an instinctual intermediary common to the two systems and the articulation of the new system with its new representability.⁵⁸

Poetic mimesis maintains and transgresses thetic unicity by making it undergo a kind of anamnesis, by introducing into the thetic position the stream of semiotic drives and making it signify.⁵⁹ This telescoping of the symbolic and the semiotic pluralizes signification or denotation: it pluralizes the thetic doxy. Mimesis and poetic language do not therefore disavow the thetic, instead they go through its truth (signification, denotation) to tell the 'truth' about it. To be sure, the latter use of the term 'truth' is inappropriate, since it no longer refers to denotative truth in Frege's sense. This 'second truth' reproduces the path which was cleared by the first truth (that of *Bedeutung*) in order to posit itself. Both mimesis and poetic language with its connotations assume the right to enter into the social debate, which is an ideological debate, on the strength of their confrontation with *Bedeutung* (signification and denotation) but also with all meaning, and hence all enunciation produced by a posited subject.

But mimesis and poetic language do more than engage in an intra-ideological debate; they question the very principle of the ideological because they unfold the *unicity* of the thetic (the precondition for meaning and signification) and prevent its theologization. As the place of production for a subject who transgresses the thetic by using it as a necessary boundary – but not as an absolute or as an origin – poetic language, and the mimesis from which it is inseparable, are profoundly a-theological. They are not critics of theology but rather the enemy within and without, recognizing both its necessity and its pretensions. In other words, poetic language and mimesis may appear as an argument complicitous with dogma – we are familiar with religion's use of them – but they may also set in motion what dogma represses. In so doing, they no longer act as instinctual floodgates within the enclosure of the sacred and become instead protestors against its posturing. And thus, its complexity unfolded by its practices, the signifying process joins social revolution.

9 THE UNSTABLE SYMBOLIC. SUBSTITUTIONS IN THE SYMBOLIC: FETISHISM

The thetic permits the constitution of the symbolic with its vertical stratification (referent, signified, signifier) and all the subsequent modalities of logico-semantic articulation. The thetic originates in the 'mirror stage' and is completed, through the phallic stage, by the re-activation of the Oedipus complex in puberty; no signifying practice can be without it. Though absolutely necessary, the thetic is not exclusive: the semiotic, which also precedes it, constantly tears it open, and this transgression brings about all the various transformations of the signifying practice that are called 'creation'. Whether in the realm of metalanguage (mathematics, for example) or literature, what remodels the symbolic order is always the influx of the semiotic. This is particularly evident in poetic language since, for there to be a transgression of the symbolic, there must be an irruption of the drives in the universal signifying order, that of 'natural' language which binds together the social unit. That the subject does not vanish into psychosis when this transgression takes place poses a problem for metaphysics, both the kind that sets up the signifier as an untransgressable law and the kind for which there exists no thetic and therefore no subject.

The semiotic's breach of the symbolic in so-called poetic practice can probably be ascribed to the very unstable yet forceful positing of the thetic. In our view, the analysis of texts shows that thetic liability is ultimately a problem with imaginary captation (disorders in the mirror stage that become marked scopophilia, the need for a mirror or an identifying addressee, etc.) and a resistance to the discovery of castration (thereby maintaining the phallic mother who usurps the place of the Other). These problems and resistances obstruct the thetic phase of the signifying process. When they fail to prevent the constitution of the symbolic (which would result in psychosis), they return in and through its position. In so doing, they give rise to 'fantasies'; more importantly, they attempt to dissolve the first social censorship – the bar between signifier and signified – and, simultaneously, the first guarantee of the subject's position – signification, then meaning (the sentence and its syntax). Language thus tends to be drawn out of its symbolic function (sign-syntax) and is opened out within a semiotic articulation; with a material support such as the voice, this semiotic network gives 'music' to literature.