Lacanian Discourse Analysis in Psychology

Seven Theoretical Elements

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Abstract. This paper describes seven key elements of the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan that have a direct bearing on the development of theory for discourse analysis in psychology and implications for discourse-analytic reading of text. The paper reconstructs an account of discourse from Lacanian clinical and cultural practice and elaborates upon the way this practice conceives of: (i) formal qualities of text; (ii) anchoring of representation; (iii) agency and determination; (iv) the role of knowledge; (v) positions in language; (vi) deadlocks of perspective; and (vii) interpretation of textual material. While some of the elements outlined here are compatible with current social constructionist perspectives, Lacan's work takes us beyond these approaches to something quite new.

Key Words: analysis, discourse, Lacan, language, psychoanalysis

Jacques Lacan is often grouped together with other assorted French intellectual figures—such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault—under the heading of 'post-structuralism' (e.g. Parker, 1992; Sarup, 1988). This misleading rubric, which is but one attempt to make sense of a range of different continental European theoretical perspectives viewed from Anglo-American culture (Dews, 1995), has also served to make Lacan's work all the more intriguing to those studying discourse in psychology (e.g. Adlam et al., 1977). Whilst there has been some use by critical writers in discourse analysis of Derrida's (1978, 1981) discussions of difference and deconstruction and of Foucault's (1976, 1981) analyses of surveillance and confession, and critical reflection on whether our readings of their work are accurate (e.g. Hook, 2001; Mather, 2000), there has been little direct systematic use or discussion of Lacan's contribution. His name is invoked, but it is often not at all clear why he is relevant to what we do or how we could apply him to discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis in psychology takes many different forms, but most variants that are used in contemporary critical work build on the 'turn to

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language' in social psychology (e.g. Harré & Secord, 1972) to focus on how the language we speak is organized in patterns of discourse (e.g. Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984). The analysis of discourse, then, can be very useful for showing how powerful images of the self and the world circulate in society (and in psychology), and for opening a way to question and resist those images (Willig, 1999). Patterns of discourse in capitalist society hold in place chains of demeaning images of human beings divided from each other on the basis of different categories (of class, race and sexuality, for example), and so the analysis of language is also necessarily an analysis of ideology, with 'discourse' to be conceptualized here as the organization of language into certain kinds of social bond (Parker, 2005a).

Discourse analysis has been concerned primarily with written texts, and even when the analysis is of naturally occurring conversation or of interviews the speech is invariably turned into writing (the transcripts of the spoken interaction) before the analysis proceeds. Even when discourse analysts have attempted to go beyond speech and writing, the representation of the text is still invariably as something written (e.g. Parker & the Bolton Discourse Network, 1999). The notion of 'text' in this tradition of work therefore encompasses all forms of socially structured signification. While this facilitates connections with Lacan's work, we need to keep in mind that he was concerned with the speech of the 'analysand' (the subject positioned as 'client' or 'patient' in other humanistic or medicalized discursive practices) in an encounter with an analyst, and a Lacanian analysis of writing as such requires some specific attention to the particular qualities of 'letters' (Thurston, 2002). There are profound consequences for who speaks in the kind of analysis being proposed in this paper that will be flagged below, but which require a more detailed discussion beyond the scope of the argument that is being elaborated here.

This paper explores the various descriptions of 'discourse' in Lacan's work and the potential contribution of Lacanian theory to the analysis of discourse in psychology. It should be noted, before we go any further, that Lacan was not a psychologist and his development of psychoanalytic clinical practice and theoretically guided readings of Freud is antithetical to notions of the subject and social relationships that underpin research in Anglo-American psychology (Malone & Friedlander, 2000). Lacan's hostility to psychology is often underplayed in critical writing in the discipline, which often wants to use his ideas to amend or improve the way we do things (e.g. Burkitt, 1991; Parker, 1997a). While this has made him more attractive to some writers, it also serves to distract us from what is most radical in his work. So, an assumption that governs this paper and runs as a thread through it is that a Lacanian approach demands a quite different conception of what human beings are. It is one of the most critical strands within 'critical psychology' precisely because it is not psychology at all (Parker, 2003).

Reading Lacan for a Theory of Discourse

The strategy adopted in this paper is three-fold. First, I take psychoanalysis seriously, and treat its claim to truth as discursively grounded. This is to take our cue from the intimate link between Freud's development of psychoanalytic concepts and the way he viewed language in the 'talking cure' (Forrester, 1980). Second, I make use of Lacan's reworking of classical Freudian stages of development and personality structures precisely only insofar as they too ground those things in the operations of language rather than in universalized hard-wired human psychology (Malone & Friedlander, 2000). Third, I treat the forms of psychoanalytic subjectivity that are relayed through western culture and experienced at depth by many people as historically and culturally constructed, but also, by very virtue of that construction, materially effective in the way that people use and are used by language (Parker, 1997b).

Components of the Reading of Lacanian Discourse

Within the parameters of my strategic choice to focus on the discursive grounding of Lacan's contribution to how we might analyse discourse, I also need to specify how we are to read Lacanian theory in such a way as to make it relevant to our work. There are four components to this reading.

The first component concerns Lacan's own comments on the nature of discourse. A problem here is that his elaboration of the work of discourse is typically and necessarily elliptical, and so to read Lacan is also to engage in some measure of interpretation and reframing. Lacan makes use of Saussure's (1974) writing, but also that of Jakobson (1975), and it often appears that these writers provide *post hoc* support for ideas that Lacan was already formulating rather than providing discrete conceptual particles that can be specified and then applied as part of a Lacanian approach to discourse (cf. Hollway, 1989). Another complication is that other theorists of meaning and experience, from within the phenomenological tradition—ranging from Hegel to Heidegger—also bear upon the way that Lacan approaches discourse (Macey, 1995). This means that each interpretation is also to some extent a motivated reconstruction of what might be meant for us in what he says.

The second component—which is the Lacanian corpus of work in literature, cultural studies and social theory—already has warrant in Lacan's own reflections on the emergence of psychoanalysis as a practice in western culture: for example, in his accounts of 'the discourse of the analyst' (e.g. Bracher, 1993; MacCannell, 1986). Although there is much academic writing that employs Lacanian theory, the resources that are particularly worth attending to are those that have themselves been developed with a view to developing psychoanalysis as such rather than those that have over-

hastily appropriated aspects from it to 'apply' them (Feldstein, Fink, & Jaanus, 1995, 1996). It is, of course, no easy task to borrow certain useful ideas without abstracting them from their own context. Even Lacan's own readings of literary texts are not really 'Lacanian psychoanalysis' as such, and insofar as they open up a path to what we might term 'Lacanian discourse analysis' they pose new research questions as to how we should conceptualize the relationship between analyst, analysand and language (Rabaté, 2001).

The third component lies in accounts of Lacanian clinical practice. Lacan's own innovative suggestions as to how discourse functions are grounded in an attempt to interpret or not interpret what an analysand—the psychoanalytic patient—says to the analyst, and how the speech of the analysand and analyst is structured by the peculiar nature of the psychoanalytic process (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986). Lacanian psychoanalysts have commented upon these suggestions, and the clinical literature is one of the key resources for making sense of what Lacan was getting at (e.g. Fink, 1995, 1999). Much of Lacan's work on discourse is only applicable to the analytic setting, to guiding the direction of the treatment and conceptualizing how psychotherapy differs from psychoanalysis (Nasio, 1998). A certain motivated distortion of concepts will always take place as we translate Lacan's work from the realm of clinical practice, in which the analysand is interpreting the formations of his or her own unconscious, to the reading of texts, in which the discourse 'analyst' interprets what is going on.

There is nevertheless a fourth component of this reading of Lacan and Lacanians on discourse, which is where the reading may mutate into a version accessible to social psychologists, or at least to those already critical and discursively oriented (e.g. Gough & McFadden, 2001; Hepburn, 2003). To accomplish this it will be necessary to specify how the different notions of discourse that Lacan elaborates may play out with respect to the kinds of texts that are usually studied by discourse analysts in psychology. Psychoanalysts and cultural theorists do not, for example, as a rule study transcripts, and so a description of a Lacanian approach will necessarily be modified in certain ways when it is brought to bear on transcript material (cf. Georgaca, 2001, 2003).

Lacan does not provide a theory of discourse any more than he provides a coherent delimited theory for psychoanalysis. Still less does he provide a surefire way of analysing discourse, even when psychoanalytic practice within a Lacanian frame does necessarily entail something of this kind insofar as the analyst attends to the structuring effect of the signifier in the speech of the analysand (e.g. Nobus, 2000). The theory we need is distributed in Lacan's writing and practice and in that of his followers, and so this reading is also a rewriting of scattered comments on elements that we might find useful. Now we can turn to this process of rewriting.

Elements of Lacanian Discourse Theory

The seven elements outlined here are distilled from a variety of sources, and do not pretend to represent a fully formed theory of discourse, still less a 'method' that might be applied to texts. In common with much discourse analysis, the notion that there should be a fixed method or grid for reading text is anathema to Lacanian psychoanalysis. Neither does Lacanian psychoanalysis treat as empirical definable substance any of the paraphernalia that characterize accounts of psychoanalysis in psychology textbooks. This approach 'implies no recognition of any substance on which it claims to operate, even that of sexuality' (Lacan, 1979, p. 266). The 'unconscious', for example, is a quality of speech, 'that part of concrete discourse qua transindividual, which is not at the subject's disposal in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse' (Lacan, 2002, p. 50). The moment-by-moment reconstruction of consciousness and what has become structurally unavailable to it makes Lacanian analysis already quite compatible with studies of rhetoric, social construction and discourse (Billig, 1999; Burr, 1995; Edwards, 1997).

The first two elements, which concern the formal qualities of text and the anchoring of representation, offer points of fruitful connection with these studies. There are certain specifications for the way subjectivity should be understood in Lacan's work that need to be reframed for discursive research in psychology, and these specifications of agency and determination, outlined here as element three, then have consequences for the way we may conceive of knowledge in discourse, element four, and positions taken up by the subject, our fifth element. As we move through these notions we will arrive at a distinctive view of the real, element six, and of the place of interpretation, as the seventh element in our account.

1. Formal Qualities of Text

An influential early formula for reading Lacan in the English language was 'Freud + Saussure = Lacan' (e.g. Bird, 1982). While this misled many readers into reducing Lacan to a species of structural linguistics, the formula does draw attention to the way a Lacanian analysis of language emphasizes *form* over content. The interpretation of a text does not aim to uncover unconscious meaning that lies hidden beneath the surface, or even to retrieve the 'signified' content, the 'concepts' that Ferdinand de Saussure (1974) assumed to be attached to the 'signifiers' (the sound images). Rather, it is the organization of these signifiers in the text as such that is the object of study, and the formal structures of a text are decomposed by treating language, as Saussure did, as 'a system of differences *without positive terms*' (Saussure, 1974, p. 120).

The aim of Lacanian psychoanalysis is 'to obtain absolute difference' (Lacan, 1979, p. 276), and we can read Lacan's specification of this aim as an injunction addressed to the analyst of a written text (as well as a lesson which is driven home to the author of a text spoken by them when they participate in analysis). In this reading, the end of psychoanalysis includes bringing the subject to the point where they are a perfect Saussurean, such that they recognize that the language that bears them is made up only of differences without any positive terms. We will come to the role of the discourse analyst presently, when we turn to the activity of interpretation. For the moment, the motif of 'absolute difference' will serve to highlight the task of searching for patterns and connections between signifiers, but as connections that differentiate them from each other and hold them in tension rather than divining connections that reveal an underlying order.

This focus on differences accords with one of the founding principles of discourse analysis in psychology, in which the analyst looks to the 'variability' in accounts rather than divining a deeper unitary principle that would bring diverse statements together (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). For Lacanians this variability is not itself traced only to the creative activity of a subject who is attempting to communicate to another subject and then finding that language gets in the way; 'A signifier is that which represents a subject' (Lacan, 1979, p. 198), but this signifier is neither something that is given meaning by concepts that lie inside the head of the author or speaker nor is it something that can be discovered and taken up by another subject as addressee, because when a signifier represents a subject it is 'not for another subject, but for another signifier' (Lacan, 1979, p. 198). The signifying value of a term or phrase would be identified by an analyst, then, by way of an orientation to later terms in a sequence, though not, as conversation analysts would have it, by the orientation of other speakers as subjects (e.g. Antaki, 1994).

The end point of a specific analysis, therefore, would not be to arrive at words or phrases that sum up what has been said as if they were 'themes' that expressed what the real meaning of the text was, or repertoires or discourses that were responsible for producing what occurred in the course of the text. Rather, a Lacanian analysis aims 'to bring out irreducible, *non-sensical*—composed of non-meanings—signifying elements' (Lacan, 1979, p. 250), and Lacan is claiming here that for each subject there is a signifier that is 'irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning' to which they are 'as a subject, subjected' (Lacan, 1979, p. 251). A Lacanian discourse analysis would not, in sum, be attempting any kind of reduction to the biographies of the characters, but it would be searching out the signifying elements that do *not* make sense and specifying the role these nonsensical elements play in organizing and disrupting the flow of a text.

The deliberate shift in Lacan's work from a reading of content to the analysis of formal qualities of a text—expressed in the focus on differences,

the representation of subjects for signifiers and the search for nonsensical signifiers—is also rendered explicit in his theoretical mapping of discourse through 'mathemes'. As we shall see in the following sections, the relations between signifying elements are captured by the arrangements into mathemes made up of algebraic symbols as 'absolute signifiers' (Lacan, 1977, p. 314).

2. Anchoring of Representation

The analysis of a piece of text, whether it is spoken by a particular subject or assembled by one or more subjects as writing, aims at how the text is structured. While text may seem to flow seamlessly from one topic to another, perhaps in a series of spontaneous exchanges between speakers, a close examination should enable us to show how it is structured and held in place so as to give it a certain character. Lacan alerts us to ways of identifying points of blockage where nonsensical signifiers may be at work, but specifying these points may be the furthest we can go in any particular analysis. This theoretical framework is useful for locating fixed points around which one text may revolve, locating a text in broader patterns of discourse, and examining how the temporal logic of a text is constructed.

Lacan's use of Saussurean linguistics raises a question about the way meanings are fixed in language so that the speaker may at least have the sense that they are directing their message to an audience. If language is 'radically powerless to defend itself against the forces which from one moment to the next are shifting the relationship between the signified and the signifier' (Saussure, 1974, p. 75), then how does a particular subject defend him- or herself against those forces? For Lacan, the question is even more urgent because the process of 'repression' proceeds by pushing signifiers out of the circuit of communication, and the creation of metaphors allows these signifiers to slide under that circuit. Lacan (1977) claims that certain key 'quilting points'—or points of *capitonnage*, named after the *points de capiton* that hold upholstery material through the stuffing—keep the fabric of the signifying system in place, and this claim cues us into noticing the way certain signifiers or metaphorical substitutes recur in a text. This repetition of signifiers then signals the presence of the quilting points.

There are also certain recurrent signifiers that exemplify wider patterns of structural 'repression', and it is here that one of Lacan's mathemes is helpful. Still in line with structural linguistics, Lacan represents the relationship between one particular signifier (depicted as S_1) and the rest of the signifying system (depicted as S_2) by way of the matheme $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$. A signifier only takes on value by virtue of its relation with the other signifiers, and Lacan's matheme also serves to represent the way in which certain signifiers stand out, operating in a dominant position over the rest of the text such that they effectively operate in broader discourses as the *points de*

capiton in a symbolic system. These 'master signifiers' function as anchors of representation in a text through such rhetorical tropes as the insistence that 'this is the way things are', that it is not subject to challenge or dissent. A speaker adopting the position of S_1 here makes a claim to authority that is maintained by repetition of the claim rather than reasoned argument, and the point where a façade of reasoned argument breaks down may thus reveal certain signifiers in their function as master signifiers.

There is an important twist that Lacan adds to our understanding of the process of fixing meaning through repetition of certain signifiers or metaphorical substitutes in their function as quilting points or master signifiers, which is that the process of anchoring occurs *retroactively*. In a narrative of life history the appearance of trauma is something that is constituted after the event as an attempt to give sense to an event that could not be comprehended by the subject, as a 'retroversion effect' (Lacan, 1977, p. 306). The retroactive constitution of traumatic, nonsensical and otherwise inexplicable anchoring points makes everyday narrative into something that is determined 'after the event', and such an 'event' may be something that occurs at the level of a particular sentence. Lacan argues that the punctuation of a sentence retroactively determines what that sentence will be understood to have meant, and so the temporal logic of apparent cause and effect is, in a Lacanian reading, reversed. An analysis of discourse, then, will search out anchoring points that serve as the 'conclusion' of sentences or other stretches of text, anchoring points that only then, at that concluding moment, posit their own original starting point.

Together, the quilting points and master signifiers operate through rhetorical processes of deflection and avoidance that one might see as very close to recent discursive re-readings of psychoanalysis (Billig, 1999), and an attention to the retroactive effect of signifiers would thereby distance Lacanian discourse analysis even further from any 'predictive' study of language. The reading of a text will always be provisional, for the meaning is determined not only by the last signifiers to appear but also by signifiers that may appear even later (to reconfigure what will come to serve as the key points that serve as anchors of representation). These operations of language have consequences for how we view the determination of meaning and action.

3. Agency and Determination

There is an explicit debt in Lacanian analysis to the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966), and this is evident, for example, in the claim that 'signifiers organize human relations in a creative way, providing them with structures and shaping them' (Lacan, 1979, p. 20). What is distinctively psychoanalytic—and discursive—about Lacan's use of structuralism, however, is the emphasis on the 'creative' aspect of signification together with

the reflexive re-making of the present and the past such that simple prediction of behaviour is rendered impossible. The classic psychoanalytic description of the 'overdetermination' of meaning (Freud, 1999) means that one interpretation does not preclude others, and one possible interpretation should not aim to fix and limit what may be said by the subject.

Lacan (1998) describes the interlinking of three 'registers'—the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real—in such a way as to sidestep a simple distinction between what lies 'inside' and what lies 'outside' discourse. We will focus on the relationship between the Symbolic and the Imaginary briefly here to show how both figure as qualities of discourse (and we will turn to the Real below). While the Symbolic corresponds quite neatly to the sphere of mediated social exchange that Lévi-Strauss (1966) describes, the Imaginary is somewhat more of a Janus-faced concept. On the one hand it has allegiance to the realm of narcissistic and rivalrous identifications with others, and in this sense it is of particular interest to clinical psychoanalysis. On the other hand it operates as a certain mode of interaction, in which relations of similarity and opposition are constituted and reproduced, and here it is also of use to discourse analysis. The discourse analysis of 'Imaginary' aspects of interaction would pick up those specific kinds of textual operation that hold antagonistic positions in relation to each other.

The reworking of psychoanalytic categories into forms of discourse that Lacan's work invites also has profound consequences for how we conceptualize what is 'unconscious'. For Lacan, language is the condition for the unconscious. The unconscious is constituted at the moment the subject starts to speak and figures as '*the discourse of the Other*' (Lacan, 1979, p. 131). Analysis of what is 'unconscious' to the subject in a piece of text, then, is an analysis of the 'gaps' and 'holes' where what is said at any moment presupposes that something else cannot or will not be said (cf. Billig, 1999). It is this that makes Lacanian discourse analysis radically different from forms of 'conversation analysis' that aim to carefully redescribe only what is present (e.g. Antaki, 1994; Edwards, 1997). The unconscious in Lacanian discourse analysis is what functions as absence in the text.

A productive new concept Lacan elaborates in his work is that of the *objet petit a*, and this concept too can be viewed as a property of discourse. He speaks 'of that object whose reality is purely topological . . . which rises in a bump, like the wooden darning egg in the material which, in the analysis, you are darning—the *object a*' (Lacan, 1979, p. 257). What this evocative description draws attention to is the role of something indefinable and fascinating which we suppose in an analysis to be a 'cause' around which a speaker circles. The object is not empirically real, but is an analytically fruitful device to explore the orientation of a speaker, around which they move in a manner that does not reduce their orientation as only being to another empirically present speaker. In this sense, the *objet petit a* can

operate as an equivalent to gravity in the field of discourse, and we can use it to trace patterns in discourse, not to move out of discourse into a specification of what it really is (cf. Parker, 1998).

There are crucial assumptions in Lacan's work that make his account of 'determination' simultaneously an account of 'agency'. The two are not separated and counterposed to each other. Instead, the overdetermination of meaning is at the same time an overdetermination of the subject, and what is most 'intimate' to the subject is what is outside it. Lacan's neologism for this intimate exteriority of the subject in discourse is 'extimacy', and the symbolic, unconscious and *objet petit a* do not lie outside discourse and inside the subject (Miller, 1986). They are extimate to the subject, not reducible to it, and this is one reason why they are relevant theoretical concepts for discourse analysis.

4. The Role of Knowledge

For Lacan, what defines a human subject is the act of speaking, together with the effect of the system of language—Symbolic, Imaginary and Real—on the speaker. Psychoanalysis is predicated on the effects of speech, and in the attempt to disentangle the ways in which the subject has been constituted by language: 'speech commits its author by investing the person to whom it is addressed with a new reality' (Lacan, 1977, p. 85). The necessary otherness of language to the subject makes all 'analysis' an analysis of discourse. While we speak to particular others—through the line of the Imaginary—the system of language also operates above and beyond us, and it is in this realm, of the Symbolic, that we speak in relation to the big Other: 'The Other in this framework is not an entity but the function of validating the subject's discourse and guaranteeing him/herself a subjective position' (Georgaca & Gordo-López, 1995, p. 166). This has consequences for the knowledge that one is able to arrogate to oneself when one speaks, and the knowledge that one imputes to the Other when one is faced with the field of language; it is something we face with each utterance, including when we are speaking about psychology (Malone, 2000).

One way of making use of this account of the subject's relation to discourse as a relation to knowledge is to trace the points in a text where knowledge is presumed. The 'supposition' of knowledge by the speakers or characters in a piece of text will indicate, for example, where authority and power are presumed to lie. The counterpart to the address made by the speaker to the Other as a necessary function of any speech, an audience without which it is not possible for human communication to take place, is the sense of being addressed by the Other. It is this function that Althusser (1971) uses to identify the work of ideology in the hailing or 'interpellation'

of the subject into a certain position. For Lacan, this is a function of the Other in all speech, summed up in the (usually implicit) question 'What does the Other want of me?' (Lacan, 1977, p. 316).

Lacan's (1993) elaboration of psychoanalytic categories of psychopathology as discrete clinical structures—hysteria, obsessional neurosis, psychosis and perversion—embeds each of these structures in a relation to language (Miller, 1996; Soler, 1996). This does not mean that discourse analysts should employ these structures to diagnose authors or characters in written texts, but it does mean that forms of speech may be analysed in such a way as to reveal something of the structure of the discourse that is at work and the position of the subject within it (e.g. Quackelbeen, 1997). Each clinical structure presupposes a certain relation to knowledge and to what the Other wants of the subject: obsessional neurosis displays stereotypically masculine refusal of dependence; hysteria an accusation addressed to the Other; psychosis a paranoiac sense that there is 'an Other of the Other' manipulating things; and perversion an attempt to make oneself the instrument of the enjoyment of the Other (Fink, 1999).

Lacan (1991) outlines a distinctive way of describing discrete discourses in his seventeenth seminar on 'the other side of psychoanalysis'. The four discourses he outlines each consist of a relationship between the speaker as 'agent' and the kind of 'other' that is addressed by them. The agent is underpinned by a form of 'truth', and in each discourse there is a certain kind of 'product' of the relationship between agent and other. For example, 'the discourse of the hysteric' as a certain kind of 'social bond' consists of a speaker as agent who is lacking something—represented here as a subject who is 'barred' (*$*)—complaining and challenging an other positioned as a master (a master signifier). The 'truth' of this agent is something that 'causes' them in a way that cannot be grasped and which they cannot let go (the *objet petit a*). The 'product' of this activity of complaint and challenge is knowledge (S_2). We will describe below the other three discourses in Lacan's seminar—the discourse of the master, university and analyst.

A Lacanian view of the relation of the subject to others and to the Other as a 'function' that validates the subject's discourse does risk sliding into a categorization of individual 'clinical structures'. Any analysis of the way discourse 'interpellates' a subject also takes that risk, for it may presume to know something of the way a subject will be addressed that is the same as or different from the way the analyst reads the text. The delimiting of these as rhetorical strategies and social bonds in a form of critical discourse analysis would also require an analysis of the 'political' projects and suppositions about the nature of the world that each calls upon. This analysis would also require a reflexive analysis of the position of the analyst, something Lacanians insist upon in the argument that 'there is no other resistance to analysis than that of the analyst' (Lacan, 1977, p. 235).

5. Positions in Language

For Lacanians it is not possible to produce or receive language without being positioned by it, but the positions are not simply determined by images of the person or roles set up in discrete discourses (cf. Parker, 1992). 'Discourses' do not fully define subject positions, but it is the activity of speaking itself that positions the subject in relation to another. This activity of speaking is crucial to psychoanalysis, and Lacan's distinction between the 'empty' speech of repeated clichéd formulae and the 'full' speech that appears when a subject in analysis speaks the truth, was one key starting point for his own 'return to Freud' (Lacan, 2002).

What is being said does not, according to Lacan, lie outside existing chains of signification, but always leads the speaking subject to 'lie' inside those chains. This is why Lacan repeatedly argues that 'no metalanguage can be spoken' (Lacan, 1977, p. 311), that there is no external point from which it is possible to speak that is not also necessarily implicated in a certain kind of position. This is not at all to warrant a simplistic refusal to acknowledge that there is an extra-linguistic dimension to speaking. While this argument that no metalanguage can be spoken is specifically directed toward psychoanalysts as a warning that they should not imagine that they can work out what an analysand really means by drawing on other information about them to fill in the gaps, it has implications that go beyond clinical practice. Another way Lacan puts the point is when he argues that 'there is no Other of the Other' (Lacan, 1977, p. 311), and this point again draws attention to the way language manifests itself as other to the speaking subject (but not because there is something behind it pulling the strings).

The activity of speaking divides the subject between the various things they say about themselves as they address an other and the activity of speaking as such, an activity which opens up a realm of truth. Lacan refers to this as the 'division between the statement and the enunciation' (Lacan, 1979, p. 139). This theoretical account of the subject divided in the process of speaking can be usefully reworked into an analytic distinction between the array of characters and positions that constitute a text as if it was 'an abstract system of signs', which is the kind of text usually studied by discourse analysts, and the process by which utterances are 'produced in concrete situations' (Georgaca & Gordo-López, 1995, p. 164).

One of the characteristics of human language for Lacan is that it makes possible 'communication in which the sender receives his own message back from the receiver in an inverted form' (Lacan, 1977, p. 85). Lacan argues that the analyst's task is to take the message the subject sends, and send it back 'in its true signification, that is to say, in an inverted form' (Lacan, 1979, p. 140). Because this task is structured by the nature of language, not by the intervention of the analyst from outside it, there are some interesting consequences for discourse analysis. What this idea leads us to look for in a

text is the way modes of speech call upon a response, and the way that a response may send the message back to the speaker as if in reverse, thereby revealing some truth that was concealed in the original message.

A Lacanian analysis of discourse carries with it, then, a certain 'ethical position' in which, for example, one speaks not from within a 'meta-language' but as always reflexively positioned in relation to the text. The grounding of analysis in a relation to the Other means that every communication is viewed as directed to an audience, as an appeal for recognition (Lacan, 1992). It is this that makes every act of speaking into an act woven into discourse, with performative effects on others and effects on the speaker. The translation of Lacanian concepts from the clinical domain, in which the analysand may interpret and speak the truth, to a discourse-analytic domain, in which the 'analyst' is given free rein over the interpretation of a text, poses new ethical problems and questions about academic practice that require further work (Parker, 2005b).

6. Deadlocks of Perspective

A Lacanian approach to discourse has consequences for the way we think of 'criteria' for research. It sets itself against attempts to arrive at a richer, more complete understanding of a text, something proposed by advocates of 'triangulation' in research (e.g. Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994). Lacanian discourse analysis would require a quite different perspective on the reading of texts, a perspective that focused on deadlocks of perspective (Parker, 2005a).

For Lacanians, the idea that there was 'agreement' over an interpretation between analyst and analysand would indicate the operation of 'the line of the Imaginary'. It would signal not only an analytic failure to keep to 'the line of the Symbolic' but also an ethical failure to allow the distinctive irreducible truth of the subject to appear. The desire of the analyst 'to obtain absolute difference' (Lacan, 1979, p. 276) will necessarily lead to a representation of the analysis that is structured by disagreement rather than agreement. Instead of a common view of what is going on in a text, there would need to be a specification of what the stakes of the disagreement are. In Lacanian psychoanalysis the account given of analysis by the analysand is seen as part of a research project to 'validate' the work as well as testimony (Dunand, 1995), and there are implications here for how we build into a discourse analysis the accounts of those subject to it.

One of the stakes in this theoretical position, one which is emphasized by Lacan, concerns the constitution of sexual difference. The statement 'there's no such thing as a sexual relationship' (Lacan, 1998, p. 12) is designed to draw attention to the specific different discursive positions that men and women occupy, and we can read those discursive positions as culturally constituted at the same time as we take those differences

seriously (MacCannell, 1986). Masculine and feminine speech genres would, then, be viewed as structurally incompatible by virtue of the organization of discourse. The task of analysing these structural differences is clearly an important one for discourse analysis as part of critical and feminist research (Frosh, 1994; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995). Furthermore, from within the Lacanian tradition, to say that there is no sexual relationship is 'precisely an attempt to delineate the real' (Nasio, 1998, p. 112). In this perspective the point of contradiction between different speech genres would be a point of deadlock that would function as 'real'.

A Lacanian view of a constitutive 'antagonism' that makes human communication possible, and impossible, also makes for a distinctive approach to the 'Real', and this has consequences for politics as well as for academic work (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Lacan's (1998) account in his later work is of the Real as a third register that is knotted together with the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The Real is not a realm 'outside' discourse that can be identified and described, but it is something that operates at a point of breakdown of representation, at a point of trauma or shock that is then rapidly covered over in order that it can be spoken of. Those points in a text that indicate something unspeakable, something 'unrepresentable', can be interpreted as points of encounter with the Real, and this is the closest we can speak of something 'outside discourse' (Frosh, 2002, p. 133).

As one Lacanian writing in the field of political theory puts it, 'The field of discursive representation, a field extending from the linguistic to the social in general, is constitutive in all our doomed attempts to achieve a perfect identity with ourselves' (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 52). The conclusion to be drawn here is that an understanding of the nature of discourse as constituted by deadlocks of perspective means that it is the *failure* of agreement that needs to be displayed rather than an attempt to cover that disagreement over. At the level of supposed 'criteria' which attempt to determine what a 'correct' reading of a text would be as well as at the level of political argument, we do then indeed need to take up a discursive framework as 'a view of politics and academic work as a more partial, incomplete, contingent and corrigible activity' (Wetherell, 1999, p. 405). Attending to deadlocks of perspective would be a Lacanian way of doing that, and the space this would open for application of 'criteria' in qualitative research in psychology would then be more constructively permissive than prohibitive (Parker, 2004).

7. Interpretation of Textual Material

Lacanian analysis eschews a form of interpretation that aims to reveal 'signifieds' as concepts that lie submerged under the 'signifiers', and this also means that it is not 'hermeneutic' (Lacan, 1979, p. 8). The interpretation of a text would not explore the 'horizon of meaning' of the text, still less the

internal world of speakers viewed as responsible for producing it. The reflexive position of the discourse analyst is an issue here, for when one approaches a text in hermeneutic mode as something we can 'understand' because it is like our own framework (or even because we recognize it as being the mirror opposite of what is familiar to us), this, for Lacanians, would betray the stance we are taking as lying on 'the line of the Imaginary' (imagining that we interpret from outside the text). The task of an analyst is to work on 'the line of the Symbolic' (working within the domain of the text), and to open up the text by disrupting and disorganizing it so that its functions become clearer, including its functions for us.

Lacan was very aware of the problem that the analyst might be tempted to impose an interpretation on the analysand, and he warned against the interpretation of the transference as functioning as a form of 'suggestion' and against the attempt to bring an analysis to a successful conclusion by way of identification between the ego of the analysand and that of the analyst (Lacan, 1979). In his later work this kind of imposed interpretation would be viewed as exemplifying the 'discourse of the master' (e.g. Lacan, 1991), and there are lessons to be drawn here against the forcing of interpretation in discourse analysis. In the discourse of the master, the analyst assumes the position of master signifier in relation to the other signifiers, and that relationship ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$) serves to cover over the fallibility of the analyst, represented as the barred subject ($) in this matheme.

A further warning Lacan gives, which also serves as a reflexive injunction to discourse analysts, is that the position of the analyst as a kind of master can be masked in the name of knowledge. A form of discourse analysis that aims to 'educate' readers, rather than to illuminate a text and open up questions about it, would be represented in Lacanian terms as operating within 'the discourse of the university'. In this discourse, the analyst positions themselves as working in the place of knowledge (S_2), concealing their reliance on certain master signifiers. The analyst here would bring knowledge to bear as an agent who worries away at something inexplicable (as the *objet petit a*), producing subjects who end up knowing nothing, who end up as 'barred subjects' ($) (Parker, 2001). In this sense, Lacan's (1991) description of the 'discourse of the analyst' as one of the four discourses is apposite for the work of Lacanian discourse analysis (Verhaeghe, 1995). Lacan's description is relevant to the role that knowledge (S_2) plays as a theoretical underpinning for our reading of texts and the way that master signifiers (S_1) emerge as the product of the reading.

There is a further reflexive consequence of taking seriously Lacan's version of psychoanalysis, for the analysis always produces its object in a particular context: to name the unconscious 'is not simply to attach a name, naming is an act which not only instantiates an element, but gives it consistency and engenders a structure' (Nasio, 1998, p. 48). This argument is consistent with Lacan's argument that Freud 'invented' the unconscious,

and it means that when we carry out any form of psychoanalytic discourse analysis we are indeed reproducing and transforming what we name rather than 'discovering' things. This is what makes Lacan a most powerful and innovative resource for discourse analysis in theoretical psychology.

Lacanian Discourse Theory and Analysis

The account of a Lacanian approach to discourse in this paper is designed to be suggestive rather than prescriptive. There have been too many attempts already in psychology to tie discourse analysis to a set of steps or to certain methodological principles (e.g. Parker, 1992). The most open and flexible characterizations of discourse have been those that have defined it as a 'skill for negotiating social life' (Jaworski & Coupland, 1999, p. 38). The imposition of a grid of categories from conversation analysis or deconstruction, were such a thing indeed possible, has only been of use when it has served to open up further questions and to highlight certain processes. And the political options that have been adopted by different tendencies in discourse analysis—to restrict our attention to what is actually said or to locate our readings in historical context—are not really disputes only about 'technique'. If there are elements of technique that can be derived from the account in this paper, they will need to be explicated and warranted each time for each piece of analysis (Frosh, 2002).

I have argued that we need to beware of a simple appropriation of Lacan by psychologists (Malone & Friedlander, 2000). This would have the effect precisely of closing down what may be understood in it and by his work. Worse, it would then threaten to confine it to the contours of actually existing psychology and its preoccupation with clearly defined and replicable methods. For this reason the warnings about the perils of certain strategies for reading Lacan—the appeal to psychoanalytic theory as such, the presentation of an alternative psychology, and the extraction of linguistic techniques—are as important as the emphasis on the different components that need to be taken seriously: Lacan's own writing, clinical work in the Lacanian tradition, the cultural analysis linked to the Lacanian clinical tradition, and the attention to the specificity of each case when analysis is conducted (Rowan, 2001). There is a paradox in this translation of ideas of Lacanian clinical practice to the realm of critical readings of texts, a little caveat that any good deconstructionist will quickly recognize as the point at which the theoretical work carried out in this paper can be picked at so as to unravel the whole thing: when a discourse analyst interprets a written text using Lacan's work they are, in effect, more like an analysand than an analyst, but an analysand faced with chains of signifiers in a text that are not their own.

There is another lesson from clinical psychoanalysis here. Lacanians, like other psychoanalysts, refer to 'cases', but know that there is really no such thing as a 'case' at all. Analysis is conducted 'one by one', and the discourse of the analyst is underpinned by a theoretical account of what the parameters might be by which to interpret what is going on, an account that must always be ready to mutate in the face of each new case. This is why every good description of a 'case' is also an elaboration of theory. The same applies to Lacanian approaches to discourse. Each reading of Lacan and of Lacanian writing about discourse will need to be a rewriting of their reading when it encounters each new text.

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