

## LANGUAGE AND TRANSCENDENCE

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Shortly following lightbreak on August 2, 1986 the advanced seminar cadets of the Skinner Behavior Control Institute began to file into the newly erected geodesic cell. Here in the Neurobiological Division today was to bring their last lecture on protoplasmic diagnosis. All students were present—Chief Skinner was to personally present this lecture.

Following his customary and general comments on the Students Beta-wave progress indicators, Chief Skinner expressed his grave concern with growing student dissatisfaction related to protoplasmic diagnosis and its techno-application to mass behavior channeling.

"It has been brought to my attention that certain students of neurobiological pneumatology have manifested definite maladaptive characteristics. According to previously computed behavior probabilities this could only have occurred, allowing for normal deviancy, if our population-maxima field here at the Institute failed to include compensatory-regulative mechanisms sufficient to contain certain known, but as yet unbound, organismic variables associated with marginal, so-called, 'free' actions. As advanced students of neurobiology you know that the applied science of speech-reflex modification has lagged far behind our theoretical sophistication in this area of behavioral integration. The fact that a certain kind of speech is now gaining control over no less than members of our own cadre only indicates that our research in behavior adaptation and mental harmonics must be incrementally motivated by internal necessity. This student dissatisfaction and maladaptation presents us psycho-scientists with a great opportunity to explore the outer limits of our scientific resources. As the history of all such crises demonstrates this problem calls for a mechanical

solution. But since this mechanical solution is not yet on the drawing-boards, our total and unwavering commitment to the rights of maladaptives makes it imperative that we attempt to demonstrate the futility of their deviations. Towards this edifying end we are today allowing you to listen to an interview conducted by one of our great scientific pioneers in the synthesis of neurobiology and psychology. In this interview of October 1953 Miss Freud attempted, in the interests of increasing adaptation, to determine the exact nature of the disturbances which caused Jacques Lacan to deviate and eventually break away from the International Psychoanalytic Association."

A massive muscular spasm propelled Chief Skinner's right leg into the neoplastic base of the lectern. Ramming the control of his experimental neuro-stability set to high, he regained his composure.

"All of you," continued Skinner, "have been taught how the unscientific, mythological constructs and practices of classical Freudian psychoanalysis were rooted-out by the continued advances of neurobiology. It must not be forgotten that Miss Freud's strict adherence to the only true science of micro-behavior-neurobiology-directly contributed to the ever-increasing application of specific macro-scientific discoveries to behavioral deviations from the norm, and thereby to the progressive realization of the masses' mental harmonization. The counter-productive movement led by Jacques Lacan rallied its strength behind a large social disease. Thus their mystical doctrines and infamous obscurity appealed only to a group which eventually proved itself constitutionally inadequate for inclusion in a world scientifically structured and directed. As an illustration of mental disharmony this interview revealing the extreme pathology of Lacanism will be most instructive."

With his customary anticipatory grin Chief Skinner signaled for the seats of the neurobiology cell to be reclined. The tape recorder was activated.

Each student knew that the plasmic constitution of his seat permitted a full monitoring of his neurological responses, and thus a near perfect correlation with his Beta-wave progress indicators. Although an apprehension correction factor compensated for this knowledge, each student also knew that this correction factor was reduced as the student progressed in his training. Regimentation reduces apprehension-everyone knew this. Today the correction factors would

be minimal. Miss Freud's voice was coming through in translation.

"Dr. Lacan, you have implied that concerning what you have to say about language and the unconscious we cannot agree nor disagree, for to do so would be, in the first case, to take the part for the whole, and, in the second case, to take the whole when only the part is given. But surely, Dr. Lacan, you understand that we of the International Psychoanalytic Association must take a position on your theories?"

"Miss Freud, your insistence upon taking a position is a form of defensiveness. Thus I choose to answer your objection by supposing that it has passed over to the level of the signified. <sup>1</sup> You should take a position when it is offered, but our subject is language which extends only a signifying chain upon which we may ride but never sit."

"Never, Dr. Lacan? Without question you are mistaken! Our moments of communication, albeit few and far between, are the result of the stability of concepts and the meanings of words. If this were not the case, we could hardly have any success in the interpretation of dream symbolism. You, Dr. Lacan, are the defensive one. It is clear that you do not want to be understood!"

"Alas, Miss Freud, are you not aware that what you say sets the whole system into motion? There are no seats on this train. We sign the letter, but it always continues to move on to another. Perhaps you and your colleagues should try to insist that Lacan means 'x' or 'y' or 'q,' but not 't' and 'r.' But that would certainly fail to be decisive since 'q,' for example, is a difficult and controversial area of research. So let us say, for the moment, that you settle on 'x' or 'r.'"

"Then you admit that you represent only a verbal dispute?"

"Miss Freud, let us say that, in fact, I mean 'x' since I have already said, upon occasion, that we must accept the notion of an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier. <sup>2</sup> Yet it is possible that 'we' are sliding the wrong way."

"Enough!"

"No, Miss Freud, we are just underway."

"Underway with what? Empty words instead of scientific premises."

"If you like we can consider the formula S/s."

"What in the world does this formula stand for?"

"A great deal since the formula, insofar as it is only a pure function of the signifier, can only reveal the structure of a signifier in the transfer." 3

"Dr. Lacan, I honestly haven't the slightest idea of what you're talking about."

"Very good, Miss Freud, for the transfer is indeed without reason, or meaning."

Chief Skinner busied himself with examining the computer's correlations of plasmic translations with Beta-wave progress indicators. Deviations were quite pronounced, and experimentally significant. Suspected maladaptives all fell into the minus 0.80 to minus 1.00 range. The readings were beginning to confirm his initial conspiracy theory. Skinner knew from experience that dealing with subversives was quite different from simply treating those students whose training sometimes failed to preclude an occasional wrong turn now and then. Yet Skinner was puzzled. If the Institute had been infiltrated by subversives, why had they elected to permit themselves to be detected? The simple-minded possibility that these subversives had simply handed themselves over to him for readjustment began its work on Skinner's optical nerve. Skinner began to feel elated-at long last... perhaps... behavior modification and control will once again become a Cause! Before his eyes Skinner could see the significance which he demanded of the world begin to take on concrete form. His jaws jerked violently, but he was too immersed in his fantasy-ridden thoughts to notice the red light of his neuro-stability set flashing its overload signal.

"Dr. Lacan, it would appear that you are in the habit of putting one word for another. Clearly this is a case of displacement."

"Quite the contrary, Miss Freud, it seems you have inadvertently hit upon the formula for the metaphor — 'One word for another.' 4 If we rewrite the formula for signifier

over signified as 'f (S)  $\frac{1}{S}$ ' and turn our attention towards metaphorical structure, we can then derive the formula

'f ( $\frac{S}{S}$ ) S~S (+) s.' Thus we can see that in the metaphor

what is not said still crosses the bar of signification. If this were not the case, any particular signifier could directly refer to a particular signified thing without the mediation of the total signifying system. The point of instruction for psy-

choanalysis, however, must be made reflexively: without the total signifying system, that is the unconscious, reference to a symptom or syndrome is merely nominal, or ideal. Real reference, on the other hand, is intersubjective insofar as metaphoric substitution demands a reading of the subject's history as it is constituted by the Word addressed to the Other." 5

"Lacan, it would appear that you have fallen victim to the seductions of a full-blown countertransference. As an analyst you should certainly know that the symbolic significance of a patient's syndrome is only located in his individual history. Psychoanalytic anamnesis aims at pointing out these specific, individual historical events only insofar as they are symptomatically manifested, and acted-out, by the patient in transference. At the point of sufficient ego strength and mastery analytic pointing-out enables the patient to work through his conflicts and, thus, to reestablish his contact with reality. Your comments concerning intersubjectivity arise out of the confusion which fails to distinguish between the formal nature of the psychoanalytic interview and the function of the analyst within the transference situation. Our argument with you is precisely over the question of transference and countertransference. The consensus of considered opinion in our organization is that you, and your colleagues, are unqualified to conduct didactic analyses, or to engage in the formation of analysts at any level of their development."

His jaws were still out of control when the telex screen caught Skinner's attention. Tolman's appearance was unexpected, and very unsettling in the context of the possibilities suggested by this conspiracy. Tolman appeared his usual self-confident and eager self. Skinner's fantasy receded as Tolman began in his smooth, calculated manner...

"I hope that I haven't interrupted an enjoyable fantasy, Skinner, but a very zealous member of the board has informed me of the student situation at your Institute. The conspiracy theory which he advanced would have been disturbing had I not talked the matter over with our chief programmer before contacting you. As you know Ray Hull is our analogue expert. He has an impressive record considering that he received his Superior Technician degree from your Institute just two years ago. At any rate, Hull says the maladaptation problem is nothing new. It seems that while he was attending the Institute, and while working on some new,

experimental analogs, he discovered that some of his own neurobiological response translations had a minus correlation with his Beta-wave progress indicators. The point being, however, that these maladaptive characteristics could not be detected using the standard topological mapping vectors. I can't go into details now, Skinner, but I will say that on the basis of Hull's subsequent work on maladaptation, this conspiracy theory of yours is all wet. The central committee has, accordingly, asked me to request your presence at my office tonight at 2000 to discuss Hull's findings, and to formulate a long-term plan of action. See you tonight Peter."

"God damn it," blurted Skinner at the blank telex screen, the lousy technicians won't leave anything open for speculation, and good, ole fashioned intrigue. Not even a little controllable conspiracy is possible any longer. Skinner was depressed, but the warning signal light of his stability set had stopped flashing. Resigned to the inevitable, Skinner switched on his monitor of the neurobiology cell.

"Yes, Miss Freud, as our discussion itself makes clear, our point of opposition is taken with respect to the question of the formation of the analyst. The dialectical interpretation of analysis requires the recognition of mediations outside of the analytic situation proper, and thus the concomitant recognition of, and compliance with, the integrative characteristics of that discourse which brings us face to face with the social and political features evidenced. The picture which you trace of the relationship between analyst and patient, on the other hand, is evidence of, but still unrecognized, certain social and political metaphors. What you have thus gained by this unconscious substitution is the manageable load of under-determination and arbitrary nomination. In short, you argue for the position of authority in the classroom as well as in the office. Yet this position is subsidized by information and sustained by an unequal distribution of terms."

"Lacan, your obscurity finally advances a certain clarity. I now see that your position is not grounded in a misunderstanding of psychoanalysis, but rather in a genuine and complete lack of understanding in general."

"Miss Freud, I believe that it would be in the best interests of psychoanalysis for you to consider these embalmed forms by which you, as an individual, are captivated, and by which you, as a subject, are spoken. I should hesitate to say that you are spoken as a subject in the name-of-the-father

were it not for the fact that being spoken, rather than being a speaking subject, articulates the Great Debt, but it issues no advance in repayment. <sup>6</sup> You have insisted, in other words, that the whole be taken as the part which speaks through you. There is, however, no way for me to mirror the image spoken insofar as that image projects not true being, but only a secret desire imprisoned in your non-dialectical chatter. You and your associates have, à la Faust, identified with this image, this icon which represents the ideal reality rather than necessities to come, or tasks to be undertaken. Your seductive level of discourse mirrors the institutions which today serve as the paradigm for all psychoanalytical interpretation. All of this you mirror with only a coy glance at the simple recognition that seduction displaces the real object of desire in the fanning of the fires of egotology. We must remember that the seduction of the patient is today carried out with the same carrot towards which his malaise disposes him. Seduction avoids the recognition of the need, as it is communicated to us through the symbolizing function of the Word, <sup>7</sup> for the transformation of the subject. Thus, with all due respect to our institutions of seduction, it would be worthwhile finding out what places in social space our culture has assigned to these subjects in need of transformation. This is necessary, I believe, especially as regards their assignment to social duties relating to language since it is not unreasonable to assume that here there is at work one of the factors which consign these subjects to the effects of the breakdown produced by the symbolic discordances characterizing the complex structures of our civilization. <sup>8</sup> So, in the masked face of the seductive pull of moderne society and our prosthetic God <sup>9</sup> incarnate, we simply note, in passing through, that we are unhappy, and in our unguarded moments we still scream for transformation rather than for the humdrum of public and private affirmation."

Skinner simply could not comprehend Lacan's last remarks, but they somehow reinforced his bitterness for the technicians. He switched off the tape recorder, convinced that Lacan, despite his incomprehensibility, deserved the last word.

Walking towards the lecturn Skinner decided to disregard one of the specific guidelines proposed by IEA (Institute for Educational Analysis): he was going to open the seminar for questions. Skinner knew that this radical move could always be justified, if necessary, as innovative experi-

mentation in a potentially dangerous situation. But, most importantly, Skinner had simply decided that the conspiracy was not going to be dismissed by any of the formalistic rationalizations of the technicians. Assuming his position behind the lecturn, Skinner was determined to draw out the conspirators.

"Today you have heard only a small part of the interview led by Dr. Anna Freud. But, for our immediate purposes, it constitutes the most essential part. Respecting the difficulty of Lacan's remarks, I have decided to simply address myself to your questions. Although this is a most unusual procedure here at the Institute, all of you have my personal assurance that your questions will not be used, or recorded, in any way such as to modify your Beta-wave progress indicators. With this assurance in mind, who has the first question?"

The neurobiology cell was filled with dead silence. The student-cadets were astonished by Chief Skinner's invitation to question the tape material. Everyone remained motionless.

At the end of these minutes of silence, Skinner was more perplexed than ever. Certainly, Skinner thought, the student conspirators knew that had already been detected and identified. Why did they not now take the advantage Skinner had given them?

"Well it appears that the message of the interview still remains in code form. A day of assimilation and adaptation seems in order before we will be able to discuss this message. We will therefore recess until 0800 tomorrow."

Returning to his quarters on the 20th level of the Institute, Skinner resolved that, regardless of what Hull's analogical analysis of the student maladaptation indicated, he would continue in his attempts to evoke student responses to the interview. Behavior control had, after all, gotten its legs as a political instrument, and if he continued to have anything to do with its future, it would continue as such despite all the numerous formalistic attempts to reduce it to the principles of universal nature. Skinner knew that there was nothing normative about BC.

Tolman's office occupied one-half of the 64th floor of the TRIM (Training Relations and Instructions Mission) Building. Within five years Tolman had moved from the undistinguished position of psychological consultant to the sacrosanct G4 level of Opcon (Operations Control). Following the Tri-Powers (U.S.A., U.S.S.R., and China) Coalition



in early 1973 Tolman's progressive work on differential energy thresholds of reflex-arc fields during psychic frustration was soon recognized as pivotal for the success of mass behavior control in extant tactical zones. Thus Tolman emerged as a very important agent in the sophistication of PPW (Political-Psychological Warfare) programs. The pacification of all existing tactical zones of the Third World was accomplished in late 1975 vis-à-vis the successful application of behavior control principles. At least this is how the history books now describe how the age of ideology was finally brought to an end. In early 1976, following the entrenchment of the unified theory of science, BC was constituted as the prescriptive techno-science of man. Extending the results of his early experimental work, Tolman's development of refined anxiety-eliminating mechanisms in late 1981 placed him once again as pivotal figure in the global strategy of reorganizing mass society in accordance with the normative principles of BC.

A few minutes before 2000 Skinner entered TRIM on the 4th access level (such overtures of a class society always amused Skinner). Skinner was well acquainted with the Tolman's legend. He had no reason to doubt that tonight Tolman's and Hull's performance would be nothing but another stars debut. Obviously the alleged conspiracy would have to be debunked if BC were to remain standing as the normative science of man.

Interestingly enough, thought Skinner, if there actually was a student conspiracy underway, it would mean that pacification had been incomplete. And if this was the case, then Tolman's anxiety-eliminating mechanisms would certainly come under review by the Central Committee. Yes, Skinner knew that the stakes were high tonight. Skinner had decided, however, that he was going to circumvent both Tolman and Hull by demonstrating that pacification had fallen short of total immobilization. If he could accomplish this, he knew that the Central Committee would demand a return to PPW. Walking into Tolman's office Skinner smiled as he speculated on the fact that the limits of science had no life unless they rubbed knees with politics.

Hull was already there, busy setting up a barrage of charts and idiot diagrams. Tolman got up from his desk-chair, "Peter, I think you and Ray have already exchanged greetings."

"Yes, Mr. Hull was a very good student of mine at the Institute."

"Good evening, Dr. Skinner. I think that you will be pleased with the results of my study following my presentation tonight."

"Quite likely, Mr. Hull. . . I never doubted your abilities. Of course, everything is a matter of good training."

Tolman cut in quickly, "I think we had better take our seats. The Committee will be here any minute now."

Tolman was still scrutinizing Skinner's expression when the first Committee member entered the room. Seconds later the full Committee of fifteen had taken their positions around the huge oval table in Tolman's office. Skinner found himself seated opposite Dora Kirolov, the top economic cyberneticist of the Tri-Power Coalition. But it was Franz Diebold, Kirolov's associate and head of the Division of Psycho-cybernetic Computer Analogs, who first spoke.

"Skinner, you are familiar with our work on cybernetic analogs derived from human biological mechanisms and their application to neuro-control centers vis-à-vis medical transplantation of linear-impulse speech devices. What you don't know, however, is that we achieved the goal specified in our latest program, viz., the elimination of all tension in the quasi-human organism-within the temporal parameters imposed by its organic structure. Between stimulus and response, in other words, we have managed to reduce the organic variable to a minimum. Correlations are, therefore, near perfect, and response deviation has been reduced to a mere temporal lag factor pertaining to tension reduction. Stimuli overloading is now possible beyond our wildest dreams. Our newest speech organ designs now allow vocal responses in machine-electronic analogs at a rate commensurate with current storage capacities. Reactive inhibition has thus been virtually eliminated. We can now say that, in general, the cybernated human organism's relation to the environment is almost perfectly symbiotic. So behavioral oscillation has become a purely mechanical problem. . . ah, Tolman and Hull will present the details on this. What we are going to demonstrate, Peter, is that your wild conspiracy theory is, in fact, only a case of behavior oscillation. More specifically, we have come to the conclusion that your conspiracy notion simply mirrors student maladaptive responses to stimuli which presently fall outside of their assimilation capacities. These students are highly trained cadets and they thus exhibit incompatible reaction potentials in situations like the ones you have been placing them in. Their maladaptive responses are nothing but responses following upon conditions of

heightened tension. As you well know, Peter, this kind of response used to be associated with 'thinking.' But when thought and efficiency were finally identified as synonymous, the full importance of a value-free science became clear, and the exhibition of tension became a sign of non-mutual reinforcement. Your work in 1948 was, of course, decisive for a scientific formulation of verbal behavior. It was and is to your credit that you pointed out then that there is no need for such explanatory fictions as the id, ego, and superego to account for maladaptation, fear, depression, anxiety, and the like. What we find interesting in this context, Peter, is your identification with the group of cadets who are now exhibiting the signs of non-mutual reinforcement. Which brings us to the point of this meeting ... Peter, we think that you think that you are a revolutionary. It is a most interesting situation, but rest assured ... we are certain that you can be corrected."

## REFERENCES

1. Jacques Lacan, *L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud, Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), p. 504. English translation "The insistence of the letter in the unconscious" by Jan Miel in *Structuralism*, ed. Jacques Ehrmann (New York: Anchor Books, 1970), p. 113.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 502-03; translation, p. 111.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 501; translation, p. 109.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 507; translation, p. 115. In the event that the reader should find access to the meaning-intention of this little piece entitled "Language and Transcendence", consider what Lacan says here about metaphor: "The creative spark of the metaphor does not spring from the conjunction of two images, that is of two signifiers equally actualized. It springs from two signifiers one of which has taken the place of the other in the signifying chain, the hidden signifier *le signifiant occulté* then remaining present through its (metonymic) relation to the rest of the chain."
5. Jacques Lacan, "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis," trans. Anthony Wilden, in *The Language of the Self*, commentator Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1968), p. 19.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
9. See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1962), p. 38-39.

## **REVISTA DE CIÊNCIA POLÍTICA**

Publicação trimestral do Instituto de Direito Público e Ciência  
Política da Fundação Getúlio Vargas

Diretor: Themístocles Brandão Cavalcanti

Serviço de Publicação — Praia do Botafogo, 188 — Caixa Postal,  
21 120 — ZC-05 — Rio de Janeiro 20000 Guanabara — Brasil

## **SOCIOLOGIA**

Rivista di scienze sociali — Publicada pelo Instituto Luigi Sturzo  
Redator Responsável: Ignazio Ughi

Assinatura anual: 7 000 libras

Direção, redação e administração:  
00186 Roma — Via delle Coppelle, 35 — Itália