

INTERVENTION OF DESIRE: HOW LANGUAGE MANIFESTS REPRESSION

DEBMALYA BISWAS

Abstract: Desire and its repression leaves indelible marks in the cognitive schema of sexualized subjects. This is manifested through language, when individuals articulate using a streamlined mental faculty that reflects the societal stranglehold on desire. From Freud, Kristeva, Lacan to Deleuze and Guattari, the paper explores post-structuralist ideas and frameworks that portray the interplay and interlude between power and desire, as well as how language is intertwined through it all.

Keywords: Desire, Language, Psychoanalysis, Repression.

Introduction: Psychoanalysis transpired as an offshoot to the emergence of various approaches to understand the world in terms of language. Introduced by Freud, the central concern revolved around the impact of the subconscious on social behavior. The analysis is based entirely on linguistic output. Freud's scrutiny of disturbed minds was based on individual use of language. The Language Therapy for neurosis and hysteria focused on a very specific understanding of human subjectivity. The process involved ascertaining psychological blocks in the subconscious by talking to patients. Most of these blocks stemmed from the family and from an individual's sexuality. Every individual underwent some form of familial experience that affects and leads to the creation of mental blocks. There is the classical idealist conception of subjectivity as an ideal neutral subject with an ideal consciousness. Freud incorporates a break. Subjectivity is transformed in the early stages of life of a child and the unconscious crops up. What the subject harbors in the unconscious is the repressed sexual desire at the familial level.

A child desires attachment to the mother's body and there is the appearance of the father to nullify that possibility, resulting in a repression of that infantile urge. Desire is depicted as vile and impure. So, it is always ignored as part of existence. Desire is also philosophically suppressed. The initiation is the mother's physicality and that is shunned by the father's authority since it is owned by him. There is an interplay of desire and power. Desire takes consciousness in one direction and what is repressed in desire seeps into the unconscious. The mark of sexual repression buried in the unconscious, is manifested in the distorted behavior. The primary mark is because of the Castration Complex, arising from the fear of being castrated by the father.

Freud also dissected the human mind into the id, the ego and the superego. The ego is the prominent top while the id and the superego constitute the unconscious. The ego is what is visibly conspicuous and smaller in magnitude than the id and the superego. Within the unconscious, there is an incessant onslaught of the id on the superego. This

conflictual dimension is somewhat representative of repression and the constant resistance to overcome it. The superego is moulded by the prevalent normative paradigms. The state-oriented educational apparatuses, cultural and religious discourses shape what the superego perceives as good, bad, moral, immoral, ethical and unethical. The superego also instils a sense of opposition which is actually a veiled fear of consequence. The id is the most interesting aspect. It is where the desires and the emotions precipitate. It is always in a state of turmoil and activity. The primitive instincts of survival and procreation fuel the id's aggressive and sexual drives. The id constantly wants to surface but the societally conditioned superego represses its outburst. So the binary of the repressor and the repressed finds a parallel in the conjunction of the id and the superego. Desire, its repression and its manifestation in the unconscious become critical issues while mulling over psychoanalytic approaches to linguistic behavior. However, it is vital to note that Freud did not actually employ the term 'desire'. Desire does not have the same connotation as 'Wunsch', the German correspondent of 'wish'. Freud's use of 'wunsch' is related to his method of interpreting an individual's dreams. He considered an individual's dreams to be an obfuscated state of explicit and implicit content. The explicit is the actuality that the individual can recollect while the implicit is the dormant unconscious housing repressed sexuality and aggressive retaliation. In his theory of dreams, 'wish' could be extracted and differentiated from other very similar notions. In this regard, Freud's definition relates to the experience of satisfaction, after which the mnemonic image of a certain perceptive experience "remains associated [...] with the memory-trace of the excitation produced by the need. As a result of the link that has thus been established, next time this need arises a psychological impulse will at once emerge which will seek to re-cathex the mnemonic image of the perception and to re-evolve the perception itself, that is to say, to re-establish the situation of the original satisfaction. An impulse of this kind is what we call a wish; the reappearance of the perception is the fulfilment of the wish" (Freud, S. *The*

Interpretation of Dreams. 1900: G.W., II-III,571; S.E., V, 565-66.).

Laplanche and Pontalis offer further comments on this observation. First they clarify Freud’s intention to not contaminate need with desire. Need is a derivative of “a state of internal tension” and “achieves satisfaction (*Befriedigung*) through the specific action* which procures the adequate object (e.g. food)” (1973: 482). Wish, on the contrary, is “indissolubly bound to ‘memory-traces’, and [...] fulfilled (*Erfüllung*) through the hallucinatory reproduction of the perceptions which have become the signs of this satisfaction” (1973: 482).

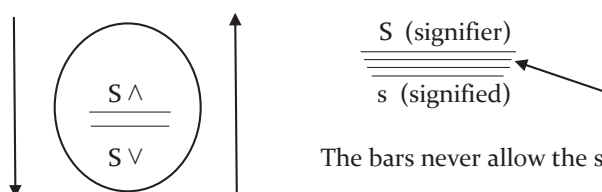
Laplanche and Pontalis opine that “the Freudian conception of desire refers above all to unconscious wishes, bound to indestructible infantile signs” (1973: 482). They also point out the breadth of the spectrum in which Freud manipulated with ‘wish’. Freud ruptured the confined premises of the notion to subsume “the wish to sleep, of preconscious wishes, and he even goes so far, on occasion, as to express the outcome of the conflict as a compromise between ‘two opposing wishes, arising each from a different psychical system (Freud, S. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. 1900: G.W., II-III,575; S.E., V, 569.)” (1973: 482)

Freud also pioneered the introduction of hypnosis as a psychoanalytic tool. It focused on the idea that under the influence of suggestion, an individual’s outputs can provide the jigsaw pieces to unravel the picture of the unconscious. Freud further brought in another method to replace hypnosis during the 1890s. It pivoted around the notion of psychic determinism and came to be known as ‘free association’. The procedure explored “neurotic antecedents” (Jones) in subjects based on the idea that psychic processes are not subordinated to free choice. The linguistic output generated, when an individual under introspection is subjected to some ambiguous stimulus, has an unconscious trace. This trace can be inspected through free association. Critical to free association is spontaneity of thoughts and voluntary abandoning of the intellectual filter. Freud believed that the unconscious is so saturated with trauma and repression, that it is inaccessible voluntarily. So, he

investigated spontaneous linguistic output from his patients to determine the impact of the unconscious on conscious behavior.

Freud believed that even if human beings are born with an independent mind, it is deflected by the familial context. The deflected subjectivity or decentred subjectivity sprung from the intervention of what Freud described as ‘wunsch’ and later on established as ‘desire’ by Lacan. According to Freud, the ideal consciousness gets affected by desire and its repression. Ideal state of consciousness is ruptured by desire and the effect of desire always prevails. A great deal of what people do or know is influenced by the repression of desire. Every individual has a repressed state of conscious desire. Ideal well-formedness does not exist and there are different categories of deviance in subjectivity and ability. By the time, a child becomes a personality, things intervene. Philosophers are mostly concerned with how people gain knowledge and the affective filter of desire is glaringly overlooked. Desire is what pushes consciousness to deviate. A child is born with his or her consciousness spreading in all directions symbolically tantamount to the formation of an omelet on a frying pan. The jubilant assumption of the ego is expressed as “That’s me!” when confronted with one’s reflection. It is fragile and initiates the formation of one’s ego. But the linguistic repertoire that we use in accordance with streamlined rules to describe our being, is not ours. It is formed by somebody and undergoes socio-cultural repression by the state. The subjectivity is never with itself. One only feels one’s ego while describing oneself. With the very production of “I am X”, an immediate division has taken place. Reality is fixed in terms of sexual desire. There is no escaping it.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, the disruption is treated as psychopathological but the treatment is linguistic. The connected string of ideas in the mind and the interfering blocks are mapped. There is a semiotic element and a linguistic element and it is not solely on depth analysis. The deflection in language is imposed by the unconscious bearing the mark of repression. The mark is the initial signifier.



The bars never allow the signifier to reach the signified.

The bar is representative of the mark of repression in the unconscious. The full grasp of the signifier rarely happens. The bar is also definitive of the intervention that creates the deflection. Linguistic output is always

divergent from the actual individual demand which lies repressed. For Freud, the repressed consists of sexual desire and pleasure. It is also a feature of modernity that pleasure is tabooed and repressed.

Anything non-denotative has to be repressed. This is commensurate of the closures in the field of modern knowledge where everything has to be comprehended as denotation and pleasure is renounced by science.

With regard to his propositions, Freud formulated two language models. The first model, that Kristeva labels as a “heterogeneous model of language”, is rooted in “the inadequacy between the sexual and the verbal.” According to Kristeva, “Freud does not believe that sexual desire can be grasped by language: not only is it difficult for desire to enter language, and to be interpreted, but intelligence and language on the one hand, and sexual desire, on the other, are even asymptotic. This asymptote is probably attributable to neurosis but, going back in time, perhaps also to our initial immaturity - language comes *après coup*, afterwards. Thus, there is a gap between our body and the possibility to speak.” The inadequacy between body and language, sexual desire and intelligence, is corroborated by Freud into an “absent (or inadequate) translation between the unconscious representation and words.” Kristeva calls it “heterogeneous” because of the gap bifurcating the representation of words and the representation of things. This model is not endorsed by the followers of Lacan.

The second Freudian model, termed “optimist” by Kristeva, is close to Lacan’s structural model that came later. Freud developed it while grounding his psychoanalytic cure on free associations. In the 1890s Freud believed in the potential of “associative recounting” to translate a traumatic block or a repressed state through linguistic output. He would diagnose and determine a cure on the basis of the narrative, thereby creating another model centering around language.

Kristeva delineates that “this second model is characterized by two particularities: on the one hand, language is constituted by preconscious intermediary terms which allow the unconscious to be dominated by the conscious. Thus, language is intermediary and intermediate. For Freud, language remains in the sphere of the preconscious. Nevertheless, language possesses the power to go beyond consciousness because it is situated between consciousness and the

unconscious. [.....] Furthermore, in order for consciousness to be dominated by the unconscious, the model of the unconscious itself will be ever more influenced by linguistic consciousness. So, Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, develops a definition of language constructed, in fact, from certain notions he gleans from theories with which he is familiar, ranging from certain assimilations of the unconscious to grammar, to certain reminiscences regarding writing - for example, he compares language to hieroglyphics.”

In the same context, Freud resorts to the studies of Karl Abel in his essay *The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words*. Freud’s fascination with primitive words ensued from his attempts to institute a logic designed for the conscious. The logic of the unconscious particularly rejects the “no” and is oblivious of contradiction. As Kristeva feels, “Freud does not consider this logic to be a simple theoretical construction of the analyst, or something simply tied to the analytic experience, or to a neurotic or psychotic pathology, but rather a part of the human luggage as such. Thus, Freud attempts to base himself on linguistic works-sometimes erroneous ones, as were Karl Abel’s-which permit him to say: “what I tell you today is realized in the cure, but this is part of man’s heredity, and can be rediscovered in the past”. In short, Freud seeks to rationalize his discovery and to extend the reach of what might be thought, not just to pathology, but to the whole of human experience. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he seeks to understand the logic of the unconscious by assimilating it to a primitive language. Lacan’s contribution - particularly his statement that “the unconscious is structured like a language” - is a careful and faithful reading of this second Freud, whose essential objective he makes explicit.”

Lacan inversed Saussure’s picture by advocating a chain of signifiers, which hardly ever reaches the signified. There is the perpetual re-appearance of the mark of repression whenever an individual uses language for expression of thoughts. Always the gap between what a person is in body and mind and what the person articulates. It is indeed exceedingly rare for a signifier to talk about the signified and there is an inescapable loop that our expressions enter into.

(Chain) Signifier → Signifier → Signifier → Signifier → → →
 // Signified \ (Signified never reached)

Lacan revived Freudian psychoanalysis of language. Most importantly he brought in the notion of desire. Lacan differentiated desire from need and demand. As Laplanche and Pontalis argue: “Need is directed towards a specific object and is satisfied by it. Demands are formulated and addressed to others;

where they are still aimed at an object, this is not essential to them, since the articulated demand is essentially a demand for love. Desire appears in the rift which separates need and demand; it cannot be reduced to need since, by definition, it is not a relation to a real object independent of the subject

but a relation to phantasy; nor can it be reduced to demand, in that it seeks to impose itself without taking the language or the unconscious of the other into account, and insists upon absolute recognition from him."

For Lacan, "the unconscious is structured like a language" and this language is about the Other. There is no self as such and always a persistent effect of the Other. An individual's "desire is for the desire of the Other", according to Lacan. He located desire to be deep-seated in the unconscious and unfolding with an individual's flowering into a "gendered and sexualized subject". But remarkably for Lacan, desire is tangled in the social conventions and paradigms, in the symbolic reality that gets hardwired after an individual's admittance into language. Desire stems not from relation to locus, but a lack and agonizing unreachability to it. The locus is not towards which desire strives but the trigger for the lack. So it appears as a societal construct being always effervescent in a dialectical relationship. Although Lacan pays little heed to material sexuality, he does not deny the indelible mark of infantile repression in the unconscious. It is like a wound when the object of desire is apparently accessible but taken away forcibly by the patriarchal authoritative presence. This mark keeps on resurfacing without a conscious agent.

Replacing Freud's id, ego and superego, Lacan brought in the real, the imaginary and the symbolic. The ego is false and an imaginary bodily assumption. The beginning of the ego takes place with the glorious assumption of subjectivity, when a child as a ball of raw instincts, mirrors a reflection and projects the reflection onto oneself. Ego develops as an imaginary reality. There is a two-stage cleavage:

- i) Taking the 'I' in the language and applying to oneself, thereby creating a gap between the pronoun 'I' and its projection onto me.
- ii) The gap between ego and the real 'me'.

An individual desires "both the love [...] of the Other (a desire to be desired by the Other) and to possess the Other (a desire for the Other)." Muddled in this web of desires, is also the desire to be the Other, to certify that the Other is not contrastive but a mere self-reflection and hence identical. So ultimately it would boil down to self-desire. For this reason, Lacan believes that "whereas the zero form of sexuality for animals is copulation, the zero form of sexuality for humans is masturbation" (Felluga, Dino. "Modules on Lacan: On Desire." *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. 2015) The simple sexual act is so much twisted and perplexed by individual 'phantasies' (idealized bodily manifestations of the self and the desired Other) that it is finally narcissistic.

In the Oedipus Complex, the unavoidability of loving one's mother by the son makes the maternal figure the desired Other but it also comes with the fear of

castration. This primal desire is forbidden and extinguished as the child is repressed by "the symbolic authority of the father embodied in the phallus". The phallus appears as the ultimate signifier. Lacan goes in line with Freud, stating that it is the "turgidity" of the phallus that makes it "the image of the vital as it is transmitted in generation", and it is "the most salient of what can be grasped in sexual intercourse as real" (Lacan, J. 2002. "The signification of the phallus", in J. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*. transl. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, p. 277). Apparently heterosexual intercourse is considered to be the bodily ground of the signifier that would render that sexual relation as impossible. Lacan's use of the term is a conceptualization of the ultimate signifier and not essentially equated to the biological appendage. Psychoanalytic approaches deliberate at the fuzzy juncture between the two connotations. At one moment, the phallus is the "point extremity" that predisposes it to the fantasy of it falling off", and at the next it is a "real organ" invested by way of "the signifier's imaginary function of prohibiting objects" (Lacan, J. 2002. "The subversion of the subject", in J. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*. transl. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, p. 307) (Parker, Ian. 2006. The Phallus is a Signifier. The Symptom Online Journal). In the Oedipus complex, the phallus is a shifting signifier that forms an imaginary triangle. The mother seeks the phallic insertion and the infantile mind desires to identify with the phallic signifier, but it never happens because of the paternal phallic intervention. So the signifier revolves around real, imaginary and symbolic.

In the Elektra complex, of the infantile daughter desiring the father, there is a reversal of this picture and a feeling of inadequacy of not possessing the phallic appendage, a stage termed by Freud as penis envy. The desire for the father initiates over the vacuous possibility of having a heterosexual relationship with the mother due to the fleeting away of the unattainable phallic signifier.

Deleuze and Guattari in 'Anti-Oedipus' supply the final piece in the puzzle by deconstraining repression of desire from the familial context and encompassing the political and economic command. By bringing in the dimension of power, Deleuze expands the scope of Lacanian propositions. All language erupts with demand and in this want, there is an underlying desire. Language is not simply about use in a flat, mundane manner. Whenever there is use of language, there is some inevitable play of power and some order of discourse. This power seeks obedience and when order is applied, the linguistic content becomes a command. This is where Schizoanalysis comes in and the enforced division (schizo) is treated as reality. Deleuze and Guattari look at the main

reality as not just familial but politico-economic. There is the imposition of political and economic command from one end and there is individual demand on the individual end. To extricate obedience, the socio-political order bogs down demand. Things have to be understood in a certain way and there is a thrust to accept the unreal.

As Michel Foucault aptly highlights in the Preface, *Anti-Oedipus* can "best be read as an "art", in the sense that is conveyed by the term "erotic art", for example. Informed by the seemingly abstract notions of multiplicities, flows, arrangements, and connections, the analysis of the relationship of desire to reality and to the capitalist "machine" yields answers to concrete questions. Questions that are less concerned with *why* this or that than with *how* to proceed. How does one introduce desire into thought, into discourse, into action? How can and must desire deploy its forces within the political domain and grow more intense in the process of overturning the established order?" (1977: Preface, xi) Deleuze and Guattari grasp all desire being social in the wider political and economic context. "The best guide to social desire is schizophrenic id rather than neurotic ego" (Bogue, R. 1989). In schizo-analysis, there is an emphasis on anatomical organs and social networks. As Bogue comments, it is "not a "celebration" of schizophrenia, but use of it to explore contemporary society". An individual can be construed as a "heterogeneous aggregate of parts

functioning in social and natural machines" (Bogue, 1989). For Deleuze and Guattari, language is not merely informative or communicative. It is subjugative in the perspective of all language being command. Just as anatomical systems operate on a chain of biomechanical dependence under central co-ordination, in social structures too what is required from the hearer or listener in a linguistic exchange, is not belief but obedience. The intersubjective domain of language use is deconstructed as disposing understanding but imposing order.

Unlike others who treated desire as a lack or a trigger for a lack, Deleuze and Guattari stressed on a productive and positive treatment of it. The schizo-model for desiring-production is brought in to inspect modern systems of production. As Seem looks at it, Deleuze and Guattari deal with "rather than view the creations and productions of desire—all of desiring-production—from the point of view of the norm and the normal, they force their analysis into the sphere of extremes. From paranoia to schizophrenia, from fascism to revolution, from breakdowns to breakthroughs, what is investigated is the process of life flows as they oscillate from one extreme to the other, on a scale of intensity that goes from o ("I never asked to be born...leave me in peace"), the body without organs, to the nth power ("I am all that exists, all the names in history"), the schizophrenic process of desire" (1977: Introduction, xvii).

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Debmalya Biswas, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Research Scholar
Centre for Linguistics, Jawaharlal Nehru University