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Nixon's 'full-speech': Imaginary and symbolic registers of communication

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ABSTRACT: Communicative interchanges play a foundational role in establishing the social. This being said, communicative behaviour can also lead to stalemates and conflict in which demands of recognition outweigh the prospect of hearing or saying anything beyond what is thought to be known. This paper foregrounds a dimension of communication often neglected by approaches prioritizing mass communications and new media technologies, namely the *psychical* and *inter-subjective* aspects of communicative exchange. More directly, this paper introduces and develops a Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of two interlinked registers of communicative behaviour. The first of these is the imaginary: the domain of one-to-one inter-subjectivity and behaviour that serves the ego and functions to consolidate the images subjects use to substantiate themselves. The second - far more disturbing and unpredictable - is the symbolic. It links the subject to a *trans-subjective* order of truth, it provides them with a set of socio-symbolic co-ordinates, and it ties them into a variety of roles and social contracts. In an elaboration of these two registers, illustrated by brief reference to Nixon's admission of guilt in his interviews with David Frost, I pay particular attention to both the potentially transformative symbolic aspect of communicative behaviours and the ever-present prospect that such relations will ossify into imaginary impasses of mis-knowing (*méconnaissance)* and aggressive rivalry.

Approaching Lacan

Two caveats are necessary at the outset of any attempt to introduce Lacanian concepts and link them to existing theoretical ideas in a given field of conceptualization. The first is to make an admission of inadequacy: to reduce the complexity of Lacanian thought in favour of clarity and introduction, notes Thom (1981), always runs the risk easy or misleading assimilations. In opting for an expository approach that attempts to connect ideas in Lacan's work in the early 1950's to existing concepts in communication theory, I take just such a risk. Secondly, while I make every effort to portray said Lacanian concepts accurately, to introduce them with the conceptual qualifications that they are due, my reading is not of a 'purist' or dogmatic Lacanian sort. Put differently, my attempt here is to *make use of* Lacan, to *apply* his ideas in support of other complementary understandings of communication, rather than merely to repeat him. I write in opposition thus to a trend of Lacan scholarship that avoids dialogue with other theoretical approaches and that amounts all too often to an obscurantist self-referential language-game, a type of 'Lacanianism for Lacanians'.

One further clarification is important, particularly in view of Miller's (2000) call for a periodization of Lacan's work and the (seemingly unending) plethora of concepts (Bowie, 1991) that flow from Lacan's teaching. Rather than overloading the complexity of the theoretical issues at hand by transposing concepts from multiple different periods of Lacan's teaching, I have opted to focus on a particular period of his work, namely that of the early 1950's (benchmarked perhaps by his seminal essay 'Function and Field'), in which the notion of the symbolic and the problematic of communication are both prioritized.
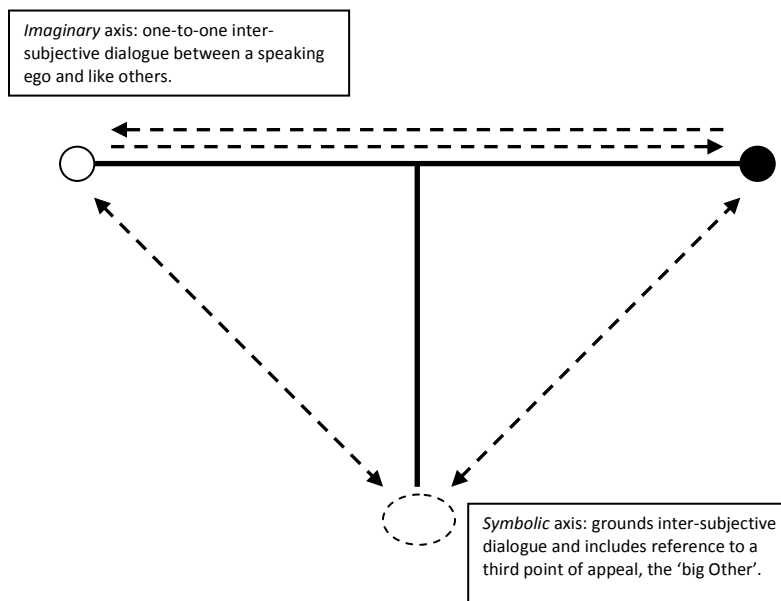
The triadic structure of dialogue

Where to begin then, with a Lacanian theorization of communication? With an elementary assertion, namely that any dialogue, any form of inter-subjectivity, needs to be grounded in something other than the standpoints of its two participants (Lacan, 1988b). This is evident in the case of two people from very different backgrounds who meet for the first time and are able to understand one another simply because they speak the same language. Communication, as such, always entails *a third point of reference*. This idea seems affirmed if we extend our example to consider the case of misunderstanding. For reasons of accent, dialect, different conventions of gesture and so on, we would be right to expect misunderstandings in the interchange between persons who speak the same language but come from different countries. That they might overcome these difficulties, identifying the problematic words or meanings in question, only affirms what Dolar (1991) refers to as 'the third'.

Constant recourse to some extra-subjective point of reference is necessary for communicative interaction to function. This third-point typically functions implicitly, discretely, such that it *feels* as if there really are only two perspectives involved in any dialogical interchange. Then again, when meaning breaks down, the importance of this

third-point becomes far more overt. Such an external authority – say the role of an expert - provides a means of resolving deadlocks, a point of arbitration, an extra-subjective position of adjudication (Lacan, 1988b; 1993). We might diagrammatize this factor of communicative interchange (see Figure 1) – the fact that something stands apart from and anchors the dyadic interchange of one-to-one inter-subjectivity - in the form of a vertical superimposed upon the horizontal axis of inter-subjective dialogue. The vertical represents the *symbolic axis* of human behavioural exchange; it necessarily includes reference to an external third-point, and it is to be contrasted to the *imaginary* axis of one-to-one dialogues that emerge between any one person (or ego) and their like others (or alter egos). The Lacanian name for this third-point - which functions as an amassed collection of social conventions and laws, as the embodiment of the authority of the 'rules of the game' - is the 'Other' (capital 'O' so as to distinguish it from like others (alter egos)) (Fink, 1997; Žižek, 1989, 1992a).

This third-point thus supplies a standard of intelligibility, and, in addition, a *principle of appeal* which holds out the prospect of symbolic mediation. If inter-subjectivity were merely a matter of two conversing subjectivities trying to make sense of one another in the absence of such a symbolic Other, then conflicts would be intractable. Two opposed perspectives, each unable to make recourse to anything other than the terms of their own frame of reference, would surely result in the all-or-nothing struggle for recognition (Borch-Jacobsen, 1991; Lacan, 1993, 2006a). We are here in what psychoanalysis understands as the imaginary register, a domain as much characterized by the ego's self-love as by the limitless potential for rivalry and aggressive conflict. This is a characteristic of the imaginary axis of subject-to-subject interactions: each participant is locked into the concerns and perspective of their own ego (Leader, 2000; Soler, 1996).

Imaginary axis: one-to-one inter-subjective dialogue between a speaking ego and like others.

Symbolic axis: grounds inter-subjective dialogue and includes reference to a third point of appeal, the 'big Other'.

Figure 1: Symbolic and imaginary axes of communicative activity

The third as point of appeal

The competitive nature of team sports provides an exemplary case of the domain of imaginary inter-subjectivity. Both sides want what the other side does: to win, and, moreover, for the other to lose. This provides a nice sketch of the narcissistic ego-logic of the imaginary register: despite the likeness, the equivalence between players there is ultimately no real concession that the opponent is as deserving of recognition as one's self.

Now although things sometimes get out of hand in such contests, these imaginary interchanges are virtually always put on hold by the appearance of the referee. The aggressive confrontation with an opponent is often thus bypassed; calls for verification from the Other takes precedence. Protestations of unfairness, appeals for a decision, ("Penalty!", "Off-side!"), are instead addressed to the figure who oversees the game. What is worth stressing here is that this Other – who embodies the rules of the game – cannot be assimilated into the 'horizontal' level of the one-to-one interactions of the competing players. The Other necessarily remains above the level of dyadic inter-subjectivity (Lacan, 1988a; Salecl, 1998). There would be no way grounding the rules, the function of arbitration and judgement, the point of symbolic registration ("Goal!", "No goal!"), if this were not the case.

One might argue of course that protestations to a symbolic referee always occur *at the level of the ego*. It is at this point that this example potentially breaks down. We must remain wary of the idea that the Other could be embodied by a single subject for any length of time, that it necessarily becomes apparent as another human-being. We need thus distinguish the Other as a *symbolic function* and the *temporary imaginary guise* within which it appears to be momentarily located. The symbolic or 'Other' element in question, although perhaps momentarily instantiated in the figure of a referee, may perhaps be better understood as embodied in the rules, the history, or indeed, the 'grammar' of the game in question (Sharpe, 2004; Stavrakakis, 1999). Never static, never isolated to a single point or perspective, never whole or complete ('fully knowable'), the Other emerges rather in a state of constant re-negotiation, indeed, as a question or effect of authority posed by signifiers rather than subjects (Pavón Cuéllar, 2010).

In terms of the symbolic axis of communication then, we are concerned with something more than merely *taking another's perspective*, which, after all, would hardly remove us from the dyadic imaginary level of inter-subjectivity (Soler, 1996). So, what is often taken as an ideal of communicative efficacy – the attempt to 'see something from the other's point of view' – is not necessarily a goal of effective communicative change. Our diagrammatic representation makes this evident: when it comes to the symbolic axis, we are looking to a function of social mediation that is *not itself a psychological element*, *not itself a type of subjectivity*. There is no easy stepping outside of ego-subjectivity, no simple assumption of 'how the other sees it' that succeeds in bracketing my ego (Lacan, 1988a). This paradox is worth emphasizing: the attempt to take the

other's point of view occurs *via one's own ego*, so the very gesture of 'opening up to the other' really only reaffirms my ego (i.e. the logic here is that of *how* I *think they see it*).

Before leaving the above example we should draw attention to a type of 'truth-of-consensus' that is in operation here. As every follower of sports knows, what 'counts' according to a referee's decision does not necessarily reflect the actual state of affairs. The Other is sometimes in error; seemingly authoritative yet nonetheless inconsistent, Lacan's later work (2007) will increasingly emphasize that the Other is, like the psychoanalytic subject who never fully knows one's self, *barred*, incomplete. Back to the sporting event: it is often not what 'actually occurred' that is registered; it is what was declared by the referee that stands as the historical record. There is a type of consensual agreement at work here; even if we disagree with the referee's decision and realize that it is often erroneous, we do not dispute the rules of the game, the referee's mandate to implement them. As Borch-Jacobsen (1991) emphasizes, it is this symbolic factor, the framework of convention, of consensual rules and regulating principles, that certainly for Lacan in the 1950's, holds out the possibility that there might be some alleviation, some mediation of the imaginary state of 'egos at war' which would otherwise know no prospect of resolution.

A less than obvious Other

When I do something stupid (spill a cup of coffee, etc.), why the need to express myself in *socially-codified* terms? How come even my most 'brute', immediate 'non-mediated' responses take on an immanently *symbolic* form ("Oh God!", "Oops!")? There is an obvious resonance here with Wittgenstein's famous maxim, 'there is no such thing as a private language'. We might take this idea one step further though, by asking the following: Why is it that even in my most private moments I nonetheless utilize 'public language' (or signs, or gestures), I remain still caught up in the process of making meaning – at least potentially – for some Other (Žižek, 1992b)?

A related line of questioning: who are the epitaphs on tombstones addressed to? The most obvious answer is that they are addressed to the loved ones of the departed person, their immediate community. Then again, it would seem that such epitaphs are also addressed to an audience that is beyond the amassed subjectivity of the 'here and now'. Something else is present in the Other, an element of the historical beyond; the Other is always characterized by prospect of a future exceeding our own situation. We are able to propose then, following Lacan (1993) that the messages we send are never directed only to an obviously designated recipient. Their itinerary always involves the prospect of an Other addressee removed from the level of all collected others, who thus exceeds what is designated by the psychological notion of a 'generalized other'. This is a constant refrain in Lacan: each instance of speech presupposes a listener, a recipient, an interlocutor or, perhaps more directly, a 'frame of listening'. "To speak is first of all to speak to others" he says in 1955 (1993, p. 36). To which he later adds: "[T]here is no speech without a response…even if it meets only with silence" (2006b, p. 216). Even an internal monologue presupposes a field of reception.

Emphasizing the importance of this role of the Other adds a degree of complexity to how we may have understood the determining role of *the receiver* of given communication. The message I send is always in part a function of *whom it is sent to* (Sharpe, 2004). This recipient plays a determining role in its success; they make something of it, recognize something in it, and through it, they make something of me. This sets up a kind of anxious reverberation, not only the anticipation of *how I am might be understood*, but also in the terms of the feedback effect of *what I might have meant* now that I am aware of how the other has apprehended my words (Fink, 1995; Lacan, 2006b). This gives us a better grasp of the *return*-effect of a signal; a better appreciation of how one's message is only half (if even that) of what is effectively communicated; a sense also of how one can never be certain of how one is understood.

This facet of the Other, the factor of 'how I am heard', always entails the potential of over-interpretation. We approach here the traditional emphasis in Freudian psychoanalysis on the ambiguity of meaning and intention, slips of the tongue, and so on. The breadth of how I might be interpreted always exceeds the more delimited field of what I (consciously) intend to say, whether by virtue of the tonal variations of my voice, the 'materiality' of how I speak (patterns of pronunciation, enunciation, etc.), or the related bodily gestures present in the moment of expression (Van Haute, 2002; Verhaeghe, 2001). To make such a claim is not, importantly, to imply that some "zero point" for transparent communication exists, or to intimate that there could ideally be some perfect, efficacious communicative utterance that is direct, unmediated by ambiguity and mishearing. The incommensurability between statement and enunciation, that is, between the content of a given communication and the performative conditions of its utterance is irreducible in Lacanian thought (Chiesa, 2007; Lacan, 1988b, 2006b). It is this constitutive split which dictates that the subject is barred, never fully transparent unto themselves. The fact of this gap or irreconcilability – an instance of the Lacanian 'real' – cannot be overcome, it qualifies all communication and it ensures that a minimal entropy characterizes each instance of speaking.

We have then a stronger thesis than the idea that ambiguity and misunderstanding are unfortunate yet inevitable by-products of any communicative attempt. It is at this point that we can most dramatically distinguish between Habermasian (1984) ideals of communicative action which aim for a progressive refinement of speech (and discourse) efficacy as a means of surmounting instrumental strategic actions, and Lacanian notions of communication. From a Lacanian standpoint, and contrary to a Habermasian position, it is not the case that there is a prospective ideal norm of successful communication beset by the nuisance of an omnipresent horizon of potential misunderstandings, infelicities and untruths. Rather, what we might take to be 'successful communication' is never itself certain, secure, but is rather something of an accident, the unlikely outcome of a potentially huge range of signals, over-readings, ambiguous significations, infelicities, uncertainties and potential deceptions that are present in each communicative situation. That we may have progressively learnt to screen-out the seemingly redundant or inadvertent components of everyday communication – bracketing the multiple interpretative trajectories in any utterance that the psychoanalyst seeks to exploit – does not detract from the idea that

pure uncomplicated communication remains an impossibility. This sheds some light on the Lacanian assertion that our communicative attempts are always qualified by types of failure, by an over-arching impossibility; after all, it is this very impossibility of us ever fully, transparently 'saying it all', understanding one another, that, as Verhaeghe (2001) insists, keeps us talking.

Symbolic registration

The fact of such an Other interlocutor provides a means of understanding declarative statements, the function of speech-acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1970), whose performative impact always exceeds the literal meaning of the words spoken. Likewise, when public oaths are made, when someone states a fact 'for the record', or makes a verbal contract before a series of witnesses ("I swear to tell the truth and nothing but the truth…"), we have more than the inter-subjectivity of speech, but a type of registration, a making of history. The implication of this idea is that communicative behaviour, particularly in its performative, declarative and institutional capacities, is constantly involved in types of symbolic registration (Žižek, 2005, 2006b).

A nice series of examples of *not* informing the symbolic Other are supplied by Pinker (2007). In each case the key protagonist is involved in a risky gambit, and the use of deliberate ambiguity enables them to "save face", so as to potentially preserve an existing set of social roles. In one example, a driver who is pulled over by a police-officer for an infraction hands over his driver's license along with a fifty dollar bill, suggesting that "…maybe the best thing would be to take care of this here" (Pinker, 2007, p. 374). The benefits of such a strategy are immediately obvious: rather than the danger entailed by a more explicit offer of a bribe – which of course is illegal – his ambiguity provides an alternative explanation should the offer be rebuked. It thus suspends, to a degree, the full implications of this act: the symbolic Other has not as such been properly informed of what has gone on. Pinker's own comments touch on this quality of the interaction:

> Somehow the implicated nature of the bribe allowed both sides to pretend
> that they could deny that they had transacted a bribe, as if they thought a
> hidden tape recorder might be running and they could be indicted by a
> prosecutor in court (2007, p. 400).

The fact of being able to offer something in a tacit manner here, of momentarily bypassing the explicit symbolic registration of the event, is absolutely crucial. Stated in a more direct way, the bribe would have changed things. The definition of the situation, the status of the act would have been different; in the case of an *explicit* bribe, the act in question becomes a crime. This is the benefit of not informing the Other: things can go on as they were, the participants can preserve the social roles they had, as if nothing had happened, prior to the encounter in question.

This recourse to the Other makes it apparent that what is going on in these examples cannot be reduced to the mere interplay of inter-subjectivity. After all, neither of the participants in these scenarios is really deceived by what is going on – the real target of deception is the extra-subjective Other. Importantly however, to highlight such

(typically farcical) attempts to sidestep the Other is by no means to suggest that they *succeed*. One might even contend that, strictly speaking, it is impossible to *not* inform the Other. Indeed, I have insisted above on the omnipresence of the Other, suggesting, furthermore, that to speak within even a minimal frame of intelligibility necessarily entails such a 'third point'. One might even argue that the elaborate decoy of attempting to avoid symbolic registration itself instantiates an Other (an 'Other to be deceived'). The point to emphasize here – an idea that Žižek (1992b, 2005, 2006) makes time and time again - is that communicative exchanges should be analysed via an awareness of the role of the Other (even an 'Other to be deceived'), with an appreciation of the multiple redundant declarative acts and gestures that are continuously reinstated so as to re-substantiate laws and institutions.

Empty speech and bullshit

As crucial as speech is, it often leads us nowhere. This poses a question: how are we to understand those types of everyday communicative interaction in which a great deal is spoken by the participants, but effectively nothing is heard, nothing new is learnt? We might link this to the sense one sometimes has of two people talking *but of each effectively talking only to and of themselves.*

      This type of interpersonal communication is well depicted in an episode of the US TV show *The Sopranos.* The lead character, Tony, is forced to take a hiatus from his therapist, and struggles to find a suitable listener to take her place. It quickly becomes apparent that her replacement, an old friend of Tony's, is not up to the task: although initially he listens, he uses the pauses in Tony's speech to insert stories and complaints of his own – in other words, he listens and responds with his ego. Their resulting conversation is like a comedic parody of a dialogue: their respective narratives hardly connect; they speak over one another, paying little if any attention to what the other is saying. We have the situation, thus, where two speakers, seemingly involved in a dialogue, are actually involved in two self-enclosed monologues, each using the other as the mute audience to a story they are telling themselves about themselves.

      In such exchanges each participant is locked into a narcissistic closed-circuit of ego-speech in which the only thing that matters is *how this communicative content affects them*. Such an ego-centred or 'imaginary' dimension of communication is not merely an anomaly, an irritating aspect of everyday speech that blocks true dialogue. This 'empty speech' should be viewed rather as a constant tendency within communicative exchange (Julien, 1994), an impasse that is *inherent to inter-subjective dialogue itself*. To this we should add the qualification that this imaginary dimension is not only a problem; it also absolutely necessary, it is a precondition for dialogue to occur at all (Pavón Cuéllar, 2010; Wilden, 1972). Empty speech affords a means of connecting with others, it calls out for the recognition that they can provide, it contains the prospects of a type of imaginary mediation – that one might be understood, loved - but it is, in itself, insufficient for transformation, for symbolic forms of truth (Soler, 1996).

There is an interesting resemblance between the notion of 'empty speech' and Frankfurt's (2005) conceptualization of bullshit. Frankfurt's philosophical analysis asserts that bullshit is neither simply careless, unplanned talk – the bullshit of advertisers and politicians is, for example, often carefully crafted, strategically designed – nor merely a case of lying. An effective lie, after all, maintains some proximity to what is true, not only in the sense that successful lies are often interwoven within a series of truths, but in the more fundamental sense that the liar presumably needs to know what is true in order to design their deception. Says Frankfurt: "The liar is inescapably concerned with truth-values…he must design his falsehood under the guidance of truth" (2005, pp. 51-52). For Frankfurt this is not the case in the 'empty talk' of bullshit, which is produced without any concern for the truth. It is this detachment from the frame of the truthful – which even lies must remain strategically connected to – that particularly vexes Frankfurt. Hence his argument that bullshit is more the enemy of truth than are lies. With bullshit it is more a case of *fakery* than outright falsity, more an instance of *bluffing* than of intended dishonesty, which means that the bullshitter need not necessarily get things wrong, or even that what they say is factually untrue. Essentially anything goes - truths and falsities alike – in the narrative that the bullshit artist spins, so long as it serves their interests.

What Frankfurt (2005) misses is the factor of ego-benefit, the ego-gratification that comes from speech of this sort. In short, his analysis would be sharpened by adding the observation that this is essentially *ego-led speech*. With this hypothesis we are better placed to account for the omnipresence of this type of talk, and indeed, for its over-riding purpose, namely its *ego-substantiating function* (Van Haute, 2002). Hence the Lacanian (1988b, 2006b) idea that a subject *speaks him- or herself into being*, into believing he or she is a substantial entity: this is the notion of empty speech as a way of shoring-up, lending consistency to, an ego; talking here is a project of imaginary *self-making*.

Communicating to sustain images

Having evoked a sense of empty speech and its rudimentary objectives, it helps to turn to a consideration of the *form* of this type of speech. Although speech – and communicative behaviour more generally - holds out the potential of truth, it brings with it also the trappings of illusion; it enables us to believe what we invoke. This is the imaginary aspect of language which functions to thus supply an illusory object-status to what is in fact insubstantial (Glynos, 2000). One is reminded here of the seductive charms of rhetoric (Bauer & Glaveanu, 2011): the greater your powers of expression, the more I *feel* that I know *exactly what you're talking about*.

An appreciation of the representational illusion that language is capable of is evident in the notion of reification, the idea that the functioning of discourse gives practical object-status to postulates ('personality', 'intelligence', 'femininity') that have no independent, material existence beyond the explanatory frameworks of meaning that call them into being (Gergen, 1985; Parker, 1992). One of the objectives of clinical

psychoanalysis in bringing to the fore the symbolic aspect of spoken interchange is that it may help momentarily dissipate the illusory, figurative properties of language. It is in this respect that Lacan (2006b) presents us with an opposition between two different forms of truth. On the one hand there is what is true within the confines of a given discourse (within the horizon of a particular mode of knowing, a type of intelligibility). On the other there is the truth made apparent by the pact established by the speech-situation itself: the designated roles conferred by a particular interaction, for example, or a consensus established as ratified by a form of symbolic registration (as in the case of a referee's decision).

The image-making capacity of empty speech leads us away from difficult truths and introduces a set of systemic distortions into the subject's communications (Lander, 2006), distortions of what an ego *would like to hear and believe*. Hence the links so frequently found in psychoanalytic texts between subjective truth and that which disturbs, discomforts, causes pain. Authentic speech, intimates Lacan (1988a, 1981) provokes anxiety, certainly so inasmuch as it is directed at a non-subjectifiable Other, an Other who can never be second-guessed, and who is always in part unrecognizable, impossible to anticipate. We should not sidestep the factor of anxiety incurred by the Other (so emphasized by Lacan (1962-1963) in Seminar X), the fact of the persecutory element of the symbolic which, via this Other, constantly scrutinizes and terrorizes the subject. Of course – and this links our current discussion to the topic of the unconscious in Lacan – the anxious dimension of communication resides not simply in the Other. What we might call a 'hypothesis game' exists between the subject and the Other. The Other, put differently, is the target of the subject's ongoing existential attempts to affirm the meaning of their own socio-symbolic position and to guess what this Other wants of them (Chiesa, 2007; Lacan, 1981). This incessant questioning and answering process – an asymmetrical process between a divided subject and a barred Other – makes up the unconscious of the subject (Lacan, 1981; Verhaeghe, 2001). One should not fail to follow through on the ramifications of this state of affairs, of the evident lack in the Other which the subject becomes oriented towards. The repeated refrain 'What do you (the Other) want of me?' can never be finally answered (Hook, 2008). Any momentary fixity earned in this way is impermanent; the resultant uncertainty de-stabilizes given subject-positions. Lacan's early work, that is to say, is susceptible to claims of a 'valorization of the symbolic' (Borch-Jacobsen, 1991; Julien, 1994). Against such a tendency, we need remain aware of the perils of an idealization of the symbolic which exaggerates its constructive capacities (Parker, 2010). To do this risks drifting towards a normative account unaware of how the symbolic itself leads to various deadlocks, impasses (forms of the Lacanian 'real') which are never simply surmounted.

Back though to the topic of empty speech: there is an abiding suspicion in psychoanalysis that what furnishes the ego with a comforting image of the world, or gratifies its inherent narcissism, necessarily involves a swerve away from reality (Freud, 1917). We have thus an important psychoanalytic maxim when it comes to analyzing inter-subjective communication: talk is continually conditioned by the tendency (on the part of both speakers) to affirm the ego, to protect and insulate it against what it finds unpalatable, and to mobilize defences against hearing anything too disruptive. These

defences involve an epistemological dimension, namely the systematic distortions whereby the ego hears on the basis of what is already 'known' by, pertinent to, or reflective of its own interests. This is the imaginary function of *immediate comprehension* (Leader, 2000), which entails an insistence on attributing ego-centred meanings as a means of understanding. We might then overlay Piaget's longstanding concepts of assimilation and accommodation - which distinguish between the cognitive operations of fitting of new experiences into existing schemas and the construction of altogether new structures of understanding (Furth, 1987; Piaget, 1975) - with a properly psychoanalytic dimension: *imaginary* assimilation and *symbolic* accommodation.

This underlines once again the challenges behind communicating at all: in sending a message the subject is typically more concerned with affirming an ideal image of its ego, with winning the gratifications of the recognition of others, than with what is being communicated *per se* (Lacan, 2006b, 2006c). Frankfurt's (2005) example of a 4th of July orator who goes on in bombastic fashion about the greatness of America, its illustrious and heroic history, is instructive in this respect. What this speaker really cares about is *what people think of him*, as a patriot, someone who reflects deeply on the origin of his country. The listener's disposition is likewise conditioned – the case, one might say, of 'having an ego for ears' – by how what is being said might serve to affirm their ego, what they know, what they might be able to tell about themselves.

The L-Schema

We may now turn our attention to the L-Schema (Lacan, 1988b, 2006b, 2006d) which extends the basic diagram of communication offered above. We can treat the schema as a diagram of communicative behaviour where Subject (S) and ego (o) - two facets of the individual contained on the left-hand side - are conversing with another ego (o') (on the top right). The L-Schema, says Lacan, "represents the interruption of full speech between the subject and the Other and its detour through the two egos, o and o', and their imaginary relations" (1993, p. 14).

As established above, any ego to other interaction brings into play another principle of Otherness, the 'big Other' (bottom right). We are thus able to account for the four corners of the Schema. Importantly however, the schema is used both as a means of mapping the communication between two subjects (two egos) and as a depiction of the four nodal points of *a single subject's subjectivity.* Such a participant is "drawn to the four corners of the schema", says Lacan, from 'S', his or her "ineffable and stupid existence", to o', the position of their objects (alter egos or 'little others'), on to o, the place of their ego, his/her form "as reflected in the form of [their]…objects", to, finally, O, the Other, "the locus from which the question of [their] existence may arise for [them]" (Lacan, 2006d, p. 459). Given the psychoanalytic emphasis on the split nature of the subject and upon the fleeting quality of unconscious events which suddenly emerge and then disappear, it is not surprising then that the individual is viewed here as *a set of relations* rather than as a single, unified entity. This affirms something reiterated above, namely that there is always a split between what an ego *means to say* (an individual's conscious communicative intention), the *act* of speaking

(the fact of the enunciation itself) and *how they are heard* (the place of the Other) (Lander, 2006). This is helpful in connecting our discussion above, largely focussed on speech, to a far broader realm of communications; each communicative instance can – theoretically at least – be split into the analytical categories of communicative intent, enunciative act, and its interpretations.
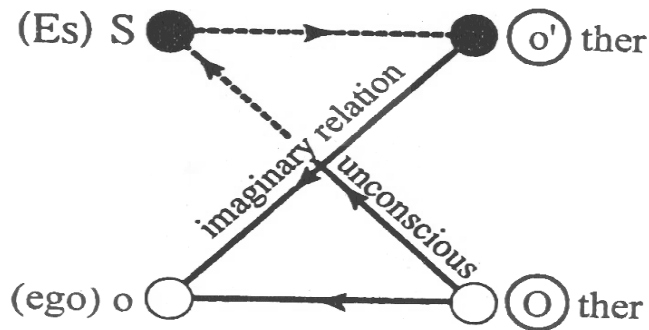
Figure 2: The L-Schema (Lacan, 1988b, 2006b, 2006d)

One question often comes to the fore in considerations of the L-Schema: if we assume that the ego is the seat of identifications, the functional basis of the rational individual, then why does it appear only in the third position of the schema (at the bottom left)? In this respect it helps to trace the communicative event as a movement *across the positions* of the schema. There is an initial moment of speaking (at S) which connects the subject to an other, an *alter ego* which supplies the images and desires that will provide the basis of the subject's ego (the ongoing process of identifications that give it its "identity"). Such an "identity" maintains always an alienating destiny (Lacan, 1993). With the ego it is never the case of an original or integral 'me' but instead an amalgamation of images and reflections that have been taken on so as to lend a degree of bodily and psychological coherence.

It is by virtue of this outside-in nature of the ego's constitution that, for Lacan (1988), a form of alienation proves an inescapable condition of human subjectivity. There is thus a structural basis to the psychical and epistemological trend to misrecognition. This is what underlies the *méconnaissance* of distorted forms of knowing that are always routed via others, and that are delimited by the ego's habit of understanding on the basis of what is already 'known' by, or reflective of, given ego-interests (Lacan, 2006a, 2006c). This provides an answer to the question as to why the alter ego (o') comes first: because, simply put, as the originating source of the subject's identifications, *it does come first.* We have then the conditions for a constitutive form of aggressiveness with an other who is always more authentic at being me, oddly, than I am. Such a narcissistic rivalry is part and parcel of any primary identification, a foundational element of human subjectivity (Chiesa, 2007; Lacan 1988a, 1988b).

There is no easy means of transcending this deadlock. The imaginary content of the ego is always already derived from the other, which means that any attempt to

assert the status of my existence or my desire *as primary* necessitates the elimination of this other. Of course to eradicate the other means that one loses the basis of one's own identifications, and along with it, the possibility of the recognition that this other provides. The impasse is writ large – and here the Hegelian underpinnings of Lacanian theory are writ large: if I am to make any claims regards the uniqueness, the authenticity of my desire, the other must be done away with, as the enemy of my self-realization. Then again, this other is of desperate importance, for without them my ego has no existence.

The trans-subjective order of truth

We may at this point risk a hypothesis in respect of communicative behaviour: more important than the message being conveyed in most communications is the *implicit request made for ego recognition*. Such an imperative, on the side of message-senders and receivers alike, routinely supersedes the possibility of any real communicative gains or change. This imaginary deadlock is not however completely unsurpassable: the type of 'third-party appeal' discussed above enables the establishment of forms of convention and agreement (Borch-Jacobsen, 1991), providing thus the basis for properly *trans-subjective* order of truth. We might take the example here of legal conflicts, or, more particularly, the apparent intractability of divorce battles. Things get hopelessly muddled in such a rivalry of competing egos; there are two conflicting versions of events, each of which is anchored into its own self-interested subjective reality. The only thing that can be ascertained with any certainty here is the principle of the relevant law. The idea here is that *the structure of communication itself* involves such a reference-point, that it establishes an order of truth (Wilden, 1972), and provides thus the basis for a genuine and potentially transformative social contract.

Back then to the L-Schema: having discussed the other-ego (o' – o) relation, we may now turn our attention to the diagonal that bisects this axis, that is, to the Other–subject (O – S) relation. As opposed to the empty speech of the imaginary axis, this relation holds out the possibility for communicative change. The S is the (barred) speaking subject, who, by communicating within a given socio-symbolic context and by necessarily utilizing the codes, signifiers and language(s) supplied by the Other, constantly produces more in their communicative attempts than what they had meant (Lacan, 2006b). We should as such be wary of treating the subject as the first or most important term in this four-part structure. After all, the communicative interchange is always already conditioned by the factor of the Other, by the fact of the symbolic system which I draw upon to express myself, and in terms of which I am heard. The starting point of the schema would thus be – counter-intuitively, as always – at the bottom right, in the fourth position of the diagram, the only position, incidentally, that emits signals in two directions. (It is the source of the ego's constant attempt to understand its symbolic location, its social role(s) (the O - o trajectory), and the necessary precondition for any attempt to express one's self in symbolic terms (the direction of O to S)).

The arrow from the bottom-right to the top-left thus gives us the unconscious vector of the diagram. This diagonal implies that the conditions of the symbolic *speaking the subject* is a condition of speaking at all. This vector also, incidentally, implies that the unconscious must be understood via the symbolic order, via the fact of the trans-subjective factor of the Other (Dor, 1998; Lacan 2006b, 2006d), a fact which entails a far stronger societal dimension than is typically accorded the notion of the unconscious. There is of course considerable resistance to this field of unintended messages and meanings enabled by the Other. What the L-Schema illustrates is that this Other-subject line of transmission is continually disrupted, denied or bypassed by the production of ego meanings. This current, crucial to the production of subjective truth and change, is constantly detoured, re-channelled by the cross-axis (o' – o) of other–ego exchanges (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986). The dotted diagonal line connecting the middle of the diagram to the top-left corner indicates as much: the truth-potential of Other meanings produced on this axis are continually deflected. The possibility of any ego-disruptive or symbolic speech is continually re-routed and assimilated into the ego's characteristic function of misrecognition.

Nixon's full speech

We now tackle the task of characterizing 'full speech'. Ron Howard's (2008) film *Frost/Nixon* dramatizes a series of interviews carried out in 1977 between the British journalist David Frost and the former US President. The film stages the encounters between the two men as a desperate affair of two egos in crisis, indeed, as a bout - Nixon's aide even likens the interviews to a boxing-match – as a 'struggle to the death'. The stakes of such a symbolic demise are real: Frost's career is in free-fall; he risks enormous debt and professional humiliation in his attempt to record these interviews with a man who is aggressively intent on using the exchanges as a means of restoring his image, potentially returning to politics.

What accounts for much of film's dramatic tension is that, prior to the final interview, Frost seems completely outclassed. Nixon has at his disposal all the rhetorical devices of the smooth-talking politician; he is in his element in front of the TV cameras. When the filming begins, the beleaguered Frost, by contrast, becomes a virtual irrelevance: his interrogative skills are swept aside and he is reduced to a stage-prop that allows Nixon (very nearly) to vindicate himself. We have thus an exemplary instance of empty speech: the 'little other' of Frost amounts to no more that a patsy, a means to Nixon's grandiose self-narrativization.

How then does this type of speech tip over into something different? Given his vitriolic assertions of innocence, his declared intent to 'set the record straight', why does Nixon go on to admit error, and culpability in the Watergate scandal? Why the apparent apology for 'letting the American people down' – which, until that point was inconceivable for the recalcitrant Nixon – and the declaration, a perfect instance of the *act* of saying something effectively making it so, that "My political life is over"? Or, framed more generally: What were the underlying conditions to this dialogue that made it possible for a previously repudiated truth to be spoken, and spoken in such a way that

changed not only the life-circumstances and role of the speaker, but the socio-political circumstances of the milieu itself?

Of course, we need be aware that the film's representation of these events is saturated with quasi-psychoanalytic notions of Nixon being trapped up by the truth, of somehow needing to confess. In this respect it pays to refer to the published transcripts of the actual interviews (Frost & Zelnick, 2007) rather than to treat the film – essentially after all, the director's fantasy – as a direct text. Reference to the transcripts proves fruitful in this respect. Nixon's admissions come at a very particular moment in his discussion with Frost over Watergate. After repeated assertions of his innocence ("…you're wanting me to say that I…participated in an illegal cover-up? No." (Frost & Zelnick, 2007, p. 244)), Nixon considers the emotive question 'How do I feel about the American people?', and then changes tack to recall an earlier event:

> *I didn't expect this question…but I can tell you this….I think I said it all in one of those moments when you're not thinking… I had a lot of difficult meetings those last days before I resigned and the most difficult one, and the only one where I broke into tears [was when]…I met with all my key supporters just a half-hour before going on television…at the very end, after saying, 'Well, thank you for all your support during these tough years'… I just, well…I sort of cracked-up; started to cry; pushed my chair back and then I blurted it out, I said, 'I'm sorry, I just hope I haven't let you down'.*
> *Well, when I said, 'I just hope I haven't let you down', that said it all. I had. I let down my friends. I let down the country. I let down our system of government and the dreams of all those young people…*
> *Yep, I…I, I let the American people down, and I have to carry that burden with me for the rest of my life. My political life is over. I will never yet, and never again, have an opportunity to serve in any official position… And so I can only say that, in answer to your question, that while technically I did not commit a crime, an impeachable offence – these are legalisms. As far as the handling of this matter is concerned, it was botched up, I made so many bad judgments* (Nixon, cited in Frost & Zelnick, 2007, pp. 246-47).

Five aspects of full speech

Before turning to consider the above example, it is important to make few qualifications. The above material, particularly viewed alongside the amassed Frost-Nixon interviews, represents a rich data-set for a sustained project of discourse analysis. That is not my objective here. Such an undertaking, like a developed historical contextualization of the interviews, would valuably inform my discussion. My aim here is not analytical; I draw on the material far more tentatively, as a hypothetical means of illustrating the Lacanian concepts at hand.

A second caveat is more theoretical in nature, and it concerns the importance of maintaining some distance from the assumption that truth simply emerges here in the form of an encapsulating statement (Parker, 2005). If, as Lacan (2007) emphasizes in his

later seminars, subjective truth, the truth of desire, *can only ever be half-said*, then moments like the one pinpointed above are events, openings up onto profitable and transformative sayings without themselves representing 'the whole truth'. We should not forget that for Lacan (2006b, 2007) desire cannot be formulated in propositional form, that it emerges as such instead in the form of formal distortions, contradictions (Eidelsztein, 2009; Leader, 2003), as instances of the 'real' of what cannot be said. Important here also is the distinction between a Lacanian moment of disruption in which the speaker encounters an incoherence and precipice in his/her own meaning, and a more Habermasian notion of recognition. Clearly my focus here is on the former, and we need be wary of assimilating the former into the later. In the former case, given Lacan's emphasis on the 'real' on the ultimate inexpressibility of truth and of the divided's subject's desire, no transparent realization of truth through language can ever be expected. In Habermas (1984), by contrast, there is a commitment to deliberative forms of truth and their recognition which may emerge precisely within the context of an 'ideal-speech situation'.

Turning back then to the Frost-Nixon interchange. From a Lacanian perspective the answer to why Nixon made such unexpected admissions has little to do with the structure of a inter-personal two-way dialogue. We should thus bracket a series of banal psychological speculations (such as Nixon's need to 'come clean', or the interpersonal skills of the interviewer) viewing this outcome rather in terms of how the imaginary dimension of empty speech slipped momentarily into the symbolic register of full speech. Now although there are good reasons to question such an assessment – to query whether Nixon's comments really qualified as full speech, as paradigmatically different from empty speech – many of the characterizing features of full speech can be illustrated by means of this example.

We have, firstly, the factors of error, surprise, the unanticipated (i.e. what Nixon *had not meant to say*), each of which represents a route to a difficult, previously unacceptable disclosure. Put differently, we have a speech-moment - as in the case of the typical Freudian slip - in which the subject speaks *beyond him- or herself* (beyond their ego), and ends up saying more than they had meant to (i.e. Nixon's "*I said it all in one of those moments when you're not thinking*"). In such cases there is something *Other* in one's speech (Fink, 1995), something which seems not to have been said by one's self, or adequately integrated into the field of one's own conscious (ego) identity.

Secondly, there is the disruption of ego-to-ego speech which occurs when it becomes apparent that it is the *Other* rather than the 'little other' that one is speaking to. That the Other provokes anxiety, upsetting the operations of ego-speech, is an important consideration here. When Frost comes fleetingly to occupy the position of this Other - the role of the 'confessional interlocutor' of History, of the expectant American People – *this itself* seems a precondition of Nixon's unexpected admissions. Frost himself, as 'little other' could not precipitate such a destabilization. Furthermore, the confessional nature of Nixon's speech could not effectively have been achieved 'intra-personally' by Nixon - the structure of confessional communication necessitates an Other. Confessing cannot function hence without this element of symbolic registration, without alerting an Other as to what has been done.

Thirdly, we have the performative dimension of Nixon's comments, the fact of their illocutionary force as speech-acts, the consideration, in other words, of the 'what is done' by virtue of what he says. Full speech has the capacity of being able to bring about change in the speaker and the situation (Lacan, 1968). This is clear enough in Nixon's declaration that his political career is over, a statement, that makes what it says to be so. It is apparent also in Nixon's acknowledgement of wrong-doing, an acknowledgement which confirms the events in question – and his own complicity therein – thus committing these facts to the official historical record. We have thus an elementary case, to quote Forrester's succinct (1990) definition, of full speech as "speech which transforms the speaker in the very act of speaking" (p. 144).

Fourthly, a different relation to truth has been established. It is not only that something about the structure of the (inter-subjective) situation has been changed by virtue of what Nixon has said. Something *about himself* and his own relation to his past has also changed, been brought into a different relation to truth. So, whereas in empty speech there is a gap between the ego content of what is enunciated and the position of enunciation (what is said does not chime with the truth of the subject), in full speech the subject articulates their position of enunciation (their speaking-position of desire) despite its discordance with the ego (Pavón Cuéllar, 2010). This links to another characteristic of full speech: rather than the imaginary self-making of empty speech that operates to assure and comfort us, full speech resembles a 'coming undone' of this ego typically accompanied by anxiety and resistance. Truth here takes the form of that which disturbs, destabilizes (Lacan, 1988a, 2006b).

A fifth consideration includes the role of full speech as a type of founding speech. The fact that full speech entails the making of an elementary pact (of speaker and interlocutor), that it implies a contract, the acknowledgement of certain reciprocal obligations (Zafiropoulos, 2010), is crucial. In this respect one should draw attention to the precise conditions immediately preceding Nixon's confession. Surrounded by his most loyal supporters, and about to confront the big Other, Nixon reaches breaking-point at the moment that he is forced to confront not merely his own compromised symbolic position, but the fact of a failed pact, an abused bond. What is effective and powerful in full speech has much to do with this establishment of a *new order of relationship between myself and my other/Other interlocutors*, a relationship that is 'ratified', confirmed by the very conditions of speaking themselves (Lacan, 1968).

Speech devoid of content

Lacan (2006b) shares with Austin (1962) at least two vital commitments in his approach to verbal communication. The first of these is a resolutely non-psychological stance which does away with any reference to the intentionality of inner states. Lacan (1968, 2006b) concurs, secondly, with the pragmatic imperative of breaking our fixation with the *constative* dimension of language, that is, with the assumption that the functioning of speech is best evaluated with assessments of truth and falsity (Forrester, 1990). In other words, speech should not be viewed as a chiefly descriptive means whose primary task is to name or represent, and whose efficacy can thus be based on its degree of

factual accuracy. Although such properties are vital to language as a communicative modality, they do not best pin-point its ability to facilitate and convey communicative meaning (Franks & Green, 2011). As argued above, this fecundity of imaginary meaning-making harbours illusions; it functions to create effects of certainty, stability and ego-coherence, to reify both its speaker and their objects (Glynos, 2000).

Empty speech, we could say, has an alienating, inauthentic destination, even if composed of factually true fragments. Full speech, by contrast, may be made up of less than convincing elements despite that its end-point is one of revelation (Pavón Cuéllar, 2010). The implication is that the truth-potential of full speech should have little to do with the *empirical* truth-value of its contents. The paradox of this situation is that empty speech is often exceedingly full of non-substantive ego-supporting contents (full of bullshit, we might say) - it is heavy on content but light on substance. So, while empty speech is typically loaded with insubstantial materials, symbolic full speech is often stripped of content, purified of imaginary trappings. This is an idea which resonates with Jakobson's (1960) concept of phatic communication, with the idea of essentially meaningless exchanges that function simply to maintain a social bond, to keep communicative channels open and effective. Lacan draws on Mallarmé in this respect, who, he says

> compares the common use of language to the exchange of a coin whose obverse and reverse no longer bear any but eroded faces, and which people pass from hand to hand "in silence". This metaphor suffices to remind us that speech, even when almost worn out, retains its value as a *tessera* [a ticket, a password]. Even if it communicates nothing, discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the obvious, it affirms that speech constitutes truth; even if it is intended to deceive, the discourse speculates on faith in testimony (Lacan, 2006b, p. 209).

The contract of communication

It is important that we grasp the truth-potential of full speech. What Lacan has in mind is not simply a truth of verification; it is a truth which relies upon neither the correspondences of form nor of content (Borch-Jacobsen, 1991). In the example of a worn coin passed between people what matters is neither the detail of its content nor how it is handed over. What is important is that this (essentially meaningless) object is exchanged so as to maintain the contract of communication itself. *The social patterns corroborated and strengthened by communicative behaviour here outweigh the semiotic importance of the content of the message itself.* The *tessera* that Lacan refers to is a 'dumb element'; the fact of its exchange however confirms a contract, a bond, a pact (one has paid the price of admission; one knows the password). Full speech is thus true not by virtue of its content or its form, but *by means of the symbolic contract that is set in place* between subjects (Žižek, 2006).

Full speech has absolutely nothing to do with sincerity, with the subjective authenticity of the speaker. Bluntly put: what seals a deal is not my inner psychological

state, but my signature. My word here is indeed my bond, but as *the mark of a contract*, not as an index of psychological meaning (Forrester, 1990). Representational efficacy is not then what installs such a pact. Be it the case of signature, thumbprint or oath – the minimal signifier can be essentially meaningless – it is *the mark* of the promise that counts to confirm a contractual relation, to alter a given symbolic constellation.

We cannot then view empty speech merely as pointless and inauthentic as compared to full speech as the authentic position of enunciation (Žižek, 2005); to do so would reduce full speech to an expressive modality. Unexpectedly then, empty speech may be a necessary precondition for the event of full speech, certainly so if it provides the means whereby speech becomes increasingly unmoored from the objectives of truth and sense (Julien, 1994). This would accord with the psychoanalytic conviction that the (relatively) undefended 'nonsense' of free-association is a necessary route of access to subjective truth. Just as the truth-potential of full speech is always at risk from the disruption of empty speech, so it is that in the midst of the babbling of empty speech a moment of full speech may erupt, a pulse from the Other might break through (the o' – o axis of the L-Schema) (Dor, 1990).

Symbol-as-pact

Grasping the behavioural dimensions of full speech requires that we add a key qualification to what is meant by 'the symbolic'. We are not concerned here simply with symbolizations, with representation in its semiotic dimension, but with relations of convention as they install laws, customs and bonds (Lacan, 2006c; Zafiropoulos, 2010). It helps here to approach the symbolic via the structural anthropology of Levi-Strauss (1974), as a system of exchanges. The symbolic thus denotes the effective operation of collective customs and institutions which work not by reference to the intrinsic meaning of symbols, but on the basis of how they locate subjects, by generating the symbolic co-ordinates that enable such subjects to take up positions in social reality (Lacan, 2006c, 2006d; Muller & Richardson, 1982). The exchange of symbols cements certain pacts. As the recipient of a gift from the mafia knows very well: what matters in accepting such a gift has little to do with its intrinsic qualities, and everything to do with the links and obligations thus established between the parties concerned.

For Lacan (1968, 2006c, 2006b) then the platform established by virtue of a spoken exchange installs a code of sorts, 'rules to play by' as we might put it, a series of consensual parameters that characterize the implicit contract of communication itself. The first extra-linguistic facet of this agreement concerns the fact that *there can be communication*, that a communicative attempt is possible, and that, presumably, some understanding can in principle be achieved (Lacan, 1988a). The second facet concerns the fact that speech does indeed represent a viable route to truth, despite that this route possibly involves the contradiction of what has been accepted. Thirdly, despite the fact that deception is a constant possibility of all human speech engagements, a given communicative exchange nonetheless entails an aspect of 'good faith' (*bona fide*), apparent in both the elementary trust one exhibits towards what one is told (there is always the potential that something genuine, authentic is being said), and in the implicit

pledge one makes in speaking (that I have committed this act of saying something to you) (Lacan, 1993).

These then are the *meta-communicated components* of any speech situation (Nöth, 1995), components that are not dependent on the content of what is said, upon the frame of mind, or the psychological conditions under which the speaking occurs. They nonetheless install a rudimentary social bond, a phatic 'kinship of communication' that ties both participants into their shared socio-symbolic world (Jakobson, 1960). *Communicative behaviour is thus involved in the constant renewal, the re-instantiation of the social contract itself.* What this means in turn is that empty gestures (asking "Can I get you anything?" when the expected answer is no) are important communicative acts. The same holds for rhetorical questions which ask after what *they know not to be the case* ("Are you OK?" when someone clearly is not). Despite being redundant at the level of literal content, such questions, like empty gestures, nonetheless add something to the communicative exchange (Fox, 2004). They move a social bond along, they strengthen an interpersonal tie; more than just fostering a relation, they secure and reiterate certain roles (Fiske, 2002).

The case of politeness is of interest here inasmuch as it tells us something about the meta-communicated context of what is being communicated (Franks & Green, 2011). So, what is polite about the roundabout way of asking someone to do something, say the request "Would you mind passing me that book?"? Taken at a purely literal level, this is a request as to whether the recipient objects to being asked something. What makes the request polite is its indirectness, the very fact that *it does not work at the level of literal meaning*. By couching the request in these terms I make apparent the fact of *my relation to the content,* i.e. that I respect their prerogative to turn down my appeal, and so on. Indirectness, in other words, itself communicates something. It signals to the hearer, as Pinker (2007) stresses, that an effort has been made, that their feelings, their situation has been taken into account.

Founding speech

The above discussion sheds light on an aspect of full speech that we have yet to properly introduce, the fact that it affirms and registers interlocking dialogical speaking-positions. Full speech instantiates reciprocal *roles* and *subject-categories* supported by the contract of communication itself (Forrester, 1990; Julien, 1994, Lacan, 1988a). This is minimally present even in the basically collaborative nature of a conversational speech-exchange: if a question is posed by my interlocutor, then what I say in return is framed as a response; if a demand is made, then my answer will be situated either as a concession to, or refusal of this demand, and so on. This mutual role-designation function will be important in distinguishing full speech from something with which it is frequently conflated, namely, the theory of speech-acts.

The best way of grasping what Lacan (2006b) has in mind here with what he calls 'founding speech', is to return to a notion introduced above, the idea that each instance of speech involves an interlocutor. We need now take a second step: this interlocutor will in many instances be named, their position relative to me declared – you are my

sister, you are my boss, my child. Such a definitional declaration, this allocation of role, does not of course end there. It is not merely a descriptive task, it implies a position for the speaking subject also, the role of the sister's brother, the boss's worker, the child's parent, and so on (Muller & Richardson, 1982). To define the position, the role of the other is also thus to locate one's self in an act of symbolic-positioning that ties one into the socio-historical network of roles (Zafiropoulos, 2010). One such proposition implies another, a chain of roles is thus continually affirmed in the practice of speaking (Lacan, 1968; Wilden, 1972). This for Lacan is the highest function of speech, a modality of spoken language which defines symbolic subjectivity:

> In as much as speech commits its author by investing the person to whom it
> is addressed with a new reality, as for example, when by a 'You are my wife',
> a subject marks himself with the seal of wedlock (2006b, p. 246).

What is indicated here is the opening of a symbolic 'relation domain', an addressing of one's interlocutor that invests them and thereby one's self not only with a general role, but with a more finely configured set of symbolic co-ordinates. We have thus an exemplary instance of 'receiving one's own message back from the other in an inverted form' – Lacan's (1988a) paradoxical definition of communication - which operates as a mode of self-interpellation, an answer to the ongoing unconscious question of how one fits into the social network. We should not under-estimate the force or complexity of founding speech (Žižek, 2005) – or indeed its historical dimension - especially given that this function of symbolic-positioning is refreshed each time one enters into role-designating forms of dialogue:

> Founding speech, which envelops the subject, is everything that has
> constituted him, his parents, his neighbours, the whole structure of the
> community, and not only constituted him as a symbol, but constituted him
> in his being (Lacan, 1988a, p. 20).

Founding speech is thus a specific variant of full speech, a naming of the other that transforms *both involved parties* in the act of saying. It is an invocation, following Forrester (1990) "in which the *I* and the *you* are simultaneously modulated" (p. 159). Forrester adds a vital observation here: although such utterances are speech act's in Austin's sense "they go beyond those acts he studied most closely, in *necessarily* implicating both subject and the other" (p. 153). Now, to avoid the obvious over-sight, Austin (1962) does of course discuss the effect of speech-acts on others: 'perlocutionary force' is the term he uses to designate the effects – behavioural impacts, resulting actions and so on - that speech-acts have on those to whom they are uttered. Nonetheless, Austin does not discuss in any detail the binding effects of this form of speech in relation to the generation and maintenance of roles. The notion of founding speech takes into account this *pairing effect*, aware that it is not simply the declarative role of speech acts that is crucial in the location of subjectivity, but *the inter-dependence of the speech-acts of two participants*. What counts thus is not merely the 'I do' of the marriage vow, but the fact that the first 'I do' "receives its ratification as a solemn pledge from the other 'I do'" (Forrester, 1990, p. 159); after all "you need two people, both saying 'I do' [to one another] for the marriage to come off" (p. 158).

A psychoanalytic analysis of speech would prioritize this question: how are types of contract activated in verbal exchanges? Furthermore, if each communicative engagement instantiates a relationship of sorts bounded by certain conventional roles and implicit rules, then what is the particular dialectic of positions, the reciprocal role-positions cemented by virtue of this symbolic pact?

Historical reflexivity

By way of drawing this section to a close and emphasizing one final aspect of full speech, I would like to refer to a passage in which Lacan reflects on what might have been learnt from pre-psychoanalytic attempts to affect a cure via hypnosis. A question before doing so: what is meant by the criterion whereby full speech "is defined by its identity with that which it speaks about" (Lacan, 2006c, p. 319)? How are we to understand full speech as speech within which "the subject can articulate their position of enunciation" (Žižek, 2005, p.193)? This is our challenge in what follows: to understand the *enacted reflexivity* that in full speech the subject demonstrates towards their own subjective truth.

In the hypnotic state "verbalization is dissociated from conscious realization", previous events, are forced into words, "into the *epos* [the tale, the song, the narrative] by which [the hypnotised subject] relates…the origins of her person" (Lacan, 2006b, p. 212). The question of symbolic co-ordinates, origins, history is crucial here, as is the fact of the juxtaposition of an earlier mode of speaking - the vernacular of an "archaic, even foreign tongue" (p. 212) - against the present discourse of the subject's contemporaries. Such a spoken representation of the past brings with it not only a degree of distance from what is being spoken of, but a performative dimension also, given that this is "speech…performed…on a stage" before an audience (p. 212). As in the epic dramas of antiquity, which rendered the myths of the state in such a way that "a nation…learn[ed] to read the symbols of [its] destiny", (p. 212), so here too a new relationship to history is made possible. There is, it would seem, an opening up of contingency, not only the return of historical events, but their relativization, a reshuffling of historical elements that neither takes them for granted nor assumes the sequence and meaning of an apparently fixed destiny. The interrogation of the present by means of history, the factor of "conjectures about the past" with the ability to make "promises about the future oscillate" (p. 213) is key here. This "assumption by the subject of his history, insofar as it constituted by speech addressed to another" (p. 213), is the basis of psychoanalytic method once it has dispensed with hypnosis. This alerts us to the dimension of historical reflexivity, crucial to the effect

> of full speech [which] is to reorder past contingencies, by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the…[limited] freedom through which the subject makes them present (Lacan, 2006b, p. 213).

The bond resulting from a full speech speech-act is not only a tie of reciprocal roles to my interlocutor, or a tie to the Other grounding the structure of speaking. It is a bond also to my own declarative position and the history it entails. This returns us to the

question of how full speech goes beyond the speech-act, to which Žižek (2006) responds by evoking the 'twofold movement' of the symbolic. In other words, it is not just a question of how a form of speech performs an act, but of how this act itself *is reintegrated by the subject.* There is a subjective after-effect to the speech-act, the prospect whereby a subjective 'truth change' can be effected by virtue of it having been uttered. This is not just an issue of what I *do* by means of saying something, but of what is *done to me by my saying* – I can after all be surprised by virtue of what is thus done, by what I have committed myself to – of what subjective 'truth change' has been effected.

Differently put: the perlocutionary effect of a speech act contains a reflexive impact, so much so that what I enact in saying provides the basis for a different order of subjective truth. Let us imagine that I am attending the trial of a man who is just about to be found guilty of a crime that I in fact committed. If, at the right moment, I stand up, declare my guilt and provide telling evidence, such a declaration not only effects a change in proceedings, and a re-ordering of symbolic positions (the accused now assumes a different role, the official record of the crime will now be re-written). It effects also my own subjective position: by saying what I have said I perform an acknowledgement of what I have done, a declarative instance from which a series of subsequent acts and psychological dispositions may well follow (I give myself up; an attitude of acceptance emerges; I express a readiness to accept the consequences of my actions, etc.). This conclusion once again impresses upon us the importance of the *declarative aspect* of communicative behaviour above and beyond the semiotic consideration of the contents of communication (Forrester, 1990; Žižek, 2006) certainly so when it comes to understanding how certain symbolic registrations provide the platform upon which later psychological articulations might unfold.

Here then is the twofold movement of the symbolic which entails the possibility of subjective communicative change:

> One does something, one counts oneself as (declares oneself) the one who did it, and on the base of this declaration, one does something new – the proper moment of subjective transformation occurs at the [initial] moment of the declaration, not at the moment of [what one goes on to do]. This reflexive moment of declaration means that every utterance not only transmits some content, but simultaneously, *conveys the way the subject relates to this content* (Žižek, 2006, p. 16).

Without the enacted reflexivity that, in full speech, the speaker demonstrates towards their own position of enunciation, there would be no psychoanalytic cure. The performative dimension of speech rebounds on the speaker and their receiver alike: the fact of what is done by being said installs a relation, a relation in the sense of both how I am linked into my socio-symbolic network, and, in the terms of how I myself have assumed my own subjective truth. This is a vital consideration in how the impact of full speech might be said to exceed what is theorized by way of speech-acts: full speech implements an extra reflexive turn by means of which the performative act is *subjectivized*. I can change myself, in short, by virtue of how what I say does to me, effects a different relation to the symbolic.

Conclusion

If it is the case, as Evans (1996) suggests, that theories of communication based on modern linguistics typically prioritize *conscious intentionality* and *dyadic* models of exchange, then, as I hope to have shown, a Lacanian orientation certainly has something new to offer.

It is easy enough to anticipate a series of critical remarks that may be directed against the above psychoanalytic approach to communicative behaviour. A first predictable charge, that psychoanalysis is either too arcane in its theory, or not scientific enough, can be dealt with by pointing to its value as a *conjectural* theory that is helpful in the making of hypotheses and predictions in respect of various communicative failures and successes. Important here is to emphasize how concepts like the Other, the imaginary, full/empty speech, unintended expressivity both link to other theoretical frameworks (Austin, 1962; Frankfurt, 2005; Goffman, 1959; Jakobson, 1960; Lévi-Strauss, 1974; Pinker, 2007) and in fact prove to be useful, *practicable* analytical concepts.

A second and more pertinent criticism is that the model of communicative behaviour and change advanced here is specific to the realm of clinical psychoanalysis and is not as such properly generalizable beyond this domain. True as this is when it comes to issues of applied clinical *practice*, it seems less of a problem when it comes to the attempt to theorize reoccurring deadlocks within communication, in anticipating how many ego-to-ego ('empty') communicative attempts run aground. In fact, it is in the direction of just such a diagnostic framework for the analysis of communicative behaviour that this paper hopes to make its most important contribution.

Let me end with a series of questions that reiterate the distinctive areas of analytical scrutiny within communicative behaviour that a psychoanalytic vocabulary draws particular attention to. How, for a start, does locating the dimension of symbolic registration - of emphasizing a less than obvious (Other) addressee - shed a different light on everyday communicative behaviours? Secondly, does an awareness of the demand for recognition within ego-to-ego interchanges help sensitize us to certain recurring impasses within communication? Furthermore, in what ways does it profit our analysis to be aware of the constant contract-making dimension of symbolic exchanges, to highlight the importance of founding speech, to make apparent how everyday interchanges entail types of reciprocal role designation? Moreover, do the multiple dimensions of full speech attune us to possibilities of communicative change, to how certain declarations effect not only a given symbolic constellation, but the speaking subject's relation to themselves?

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