All behavior is communication.

Bateson

Unlike the experience of psychoanalysis in the United States, Freud came very late to France, and he was more or less refuted by Sartre in Being and Nothingness before he had even properly 'arrived'. Curiously enough, however, it was during the very heyday of existentialism and existential psychoanalysis in the fifties and early sixties, that an unknown French analyst of Sartre's generation had begun a radical re-reading of the Freudian texts. His work was to have such influence by the seventies as to entir-
ely rescue Freud from the positivistic medical orientation of the Paris psychoanalytical society, and to re-integrate the work of Freud into what the French still call les sciences de l'homme.

The man in question was Jacques Lacan, Director of the Ecole freudienne de Paris - a hermetic and obscure stylist, a mesmerizing lecturer, an uncompromising and intransigent thinker intensely preoccupied with and jealous of his own writings and prerogatives - who was outlawed from the International Association when he and his colleagues broke away from the Paris society in 1953, mainly because of internal rivalries. There are undoubtedly a greater number of scurrilous and probably slanderous anecdotes circulating about Lacan in the incestuous intellectual climate of P
aris than about any other influential thinker. But if Lacan's work means anything at all, we must separate Lacan's well-
known personal idiosyncrasies from the unique contribution he has made to our understanding of Freud.

Although Lacan began his original work in the late thirties, under the influence of Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerean existentialism, it was not until the sixties that he began to be really listened to in France, and his writings have only recently begun to reach England and the United States. Attacking French 'intellectualism' and the cult of the 'expert', British 'empiricism' and 'biologizing', and American 'adaptation' and 'behaviorism' in a series of blistering polemics, his work alone has made it impossible for any self-respecting French thinker to continue to ignore the texts of Freud. The integration of that text into the culture of the Cartesian cogito has already had startling and fertile results. It remains to be seen how much of Lacan will filter across to the United States - where the very enthusiasm of the original American acceptance of Freud has tended to reduce his ideas to triviality and his theories to the status of games people play.

We now discover, for instance, that we have another return to the Breuer-Freud theory of therapeutic catharsis - once popular as the psychodrama - in a new form of 'repressive desublimation': "primal-scream" therapy. But the heroes of the late-night talk-shows come and go with monotonous regularity, and, when all is said and done, we are always left with the great works of genius to ponder over: Hegel, Marx, Freud, Dostoevsky, Rousseau, Balzac, to mention only some of our more recent antecedents. And what we discover is that we must learn to read before we speak, that we must learn to read them from a critical social perspective, as free of ethnocentric, socioeconomic, and cultural prejudice as possible.

In a word, we have to learn to read from a non-academic perspective, from the perspective of a life-experience in which these authors and their personal quests form part of our individual and collective quest. I would much rather read the Interpretation of Dreams as a novel, for
instance, or the celebrated case of the ‘psychotic’ Doctor Schreber as philosophy, or the Brothers Karamazov as a metapsychological study, than the other way around. Lacan has helped to make this kind of reading possible.

Much of what Lacan sought to accomplish with his students in the fifties is of little interest now, because it was an attack on the therapeutic technique of a most untalented group of objectifying, culture-bound French psychoanalysts. But his attack on the ‘ego psychology’ of practitioners like Hartmann, Kris, and Lbwenstein, or the ‘behaviorism’ of Massermann, still holds good (Lacan, 1956a; Wilden, 1965a: 1-87). And those who so vehemently opposed him in France now find that they cannot reject his critical analyses of the Freudian texts and still call themselves Freudians. But if Lacan has inspired a French school of analysis which claims to be anti-institutional, anti-psychoanalytic, and profoundly critical both of the ‘adjustment’ of the individual and of those Marcuse called the neo-Freudian revisionists, he has probably done no more for analytical practice than what has been accomplished by therapists like Laing, Esterson, and Cooper, in the United Kingdom, or by people like Ruesch, Bateson, Haley, Weakland, and Jackson in the United States.

Moreover, psychoanalysis is a socioeconomic privilege restricted to people with the money and the leisure to indulge themselves. The question of the ‘cure’ is in any case entirely debatable, and we well know that psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy in general have always been vehicles of the values of the status quo (with the extraordinary exception of Wilhelm Reich, whose theories unfortunately never matched the high level of his social commitment). And since most of us can learn to live with our hang-ups, whereas it is highly unlikely we can ever learn to live with the alienating effects of our one-dimensional, technological society, why bother with psychoanalysis at all? No one seeking a truly critical perspective would attempt to build a theory of man-and-womankind primarily on human psychology in any case, because the ‘scientific discourse’ of psychology is designed to deny or to omit the collective socioeconomic content in which psychological factors come to play their part.

I shall try to show later that the axiomatic closure of most psychoanalysis from that context in all its plenitude - and, I believe, in its primacy - generates purely logical problems in the theory, problems that it is not logically equipped to overcome.

Thus, what appears in Bateson's logico-mathematical theory of the 'double bind' (Chapter V) as an oscillation, necessarily appears in psychoanalysis under one form or another of a theory of repetition. Lacan, for instance, has appealed to Kierkegaard (Repetition, 1843) to buttress his interpretation of Freud, and yet if one looks closely at Kierkegaard’s writings, especially his Either/Or, also published in 1843, one discovers that the whole theory depends upon Kierkegaard’s inability to transcend, either logically or existentially, the paradoxical injunctions (double binds) he receives from his familial and social environment. Consequently he is condemned to oscillate interminably between an ‘either’ and an ‘or’.

What appears in Bateson’s theory as a necessary response to injunctions emanating from relationships of power and domination in the social order, usually appears in psychoanalysis, and specifically in Lacan, as the ‘compulsion to repeat’.

In this way, either the responsibility is thrown back onto the individual (via the ‘instincts’ or some other metaphor for these biomechanistic constructs), or else, as in Lacan, it is subtly transformed into a form of the ‘natural order of things’, via the paradoxes that language creates in the human condition.

1 Thus a recent book by Gilles Deleuze, with the tantalizing title Différence et répétition (1968), turns out to be founded on Kierkegaard’s theory. Deleuze’s position is invalidated by even the most rudimentary knowledge of ‘cybernetics’ oscillation in self-regulating open systems like the cell.
Unlike the double-bind theory, both views assume a homogeneity in society which simply isn't there, and both serve as rationalizations of dominations.

By refusing to deal with the relationship between power, knowledge, and oppression, they fail to see the difference, in society, between what Marcuse termed 'repression' and 'surplus-repression'. For all of Marcuse's lack of understanding of the 'clinical' Freud - and in spite of his reliance on the bioenergetic theory of the instincts - the distinction is important. Few American theorists, for example, would seriously consider the travail of the American minorities in their struggle for elementary socioeconomic rights, simply in the terms of a 'compulsion to repeat' a revolt against the father (or the mother).

I find it impossible to talk about either Freud or Lacan without using the contributions Bateson and Marcuse - in different and even mutually opposing ways - have made to our understanding of human relationships.

We have on the one hand to deal with the reputation of psychoanalysis and psychology as rationalizations of the values of our culture (the oppression of women, in particular), and, on the other, to show how they may contribute to a devalorization of those values. Bateson's analysis of power relations through the double bind is, I believe, essential to social and psychological theory\(^2\), (4) and I do not know how to explain Lacan's theory of the Imaginary without it. In any case, Freud does describe the relation between ego and ego ideal in terms similar to a double bind (in The Ego and the Id, Standard Edition, XIX, 34): "You ought to be like this (like your father), but you may not be like this (like your father)."

In the contemporary world of contestation, there would be no answer to the way psychoanalysis is regularly - and necessarily - put in question, if the Freud we are talking about is the hydraulic, instinctual, electromagnetic, and entropic determinist we all thought we knew. There is an answer, however, if we discover the communicational and linguistic perspective behind Freud's explicit or implicit acceptance of the mechanistic tenets of nineteenth-century physical and economic science.

After all, psychoanalysis is indeed the 'talking cure', as Lacan has never failed to insist, and pages upon pages of Freud's writings are concerned above all with language. Far more interesting than the entity-bound theory of ego, id, and superego, for instance, is Freud's view of the unconscious and the dream as scenes (Darstellungen) of distortions (Entstellungen) and (re) presentations (Vorstellungen).

More in keeping with contemporary concern for systems and structures than the later Freud's 'ego psychology', is his early model of primary and secondary processes. More significant than his determinism is his theory of the 'overdetermination' of the symptom or the dream, which is a concept akin to redundancy in information theory and to equifinality in gestaltism and biology.

If we have to reject the mechanistic tenets of the pleasure principle, we can still discover the semiotic model of levels of communication in the early work of Freud. More useful than the 'second' theory of symbolism (derived from Stekel), which equates icons or images (analogues) with sexual symbols (Jones, Ferenczi, et al.), is the 'first' or 'dialectical' theory, dependent on the condensation and displacement of signs (Zeichen).

\(^2\) See, for example, his subtle and remarkable analysis of alcoholic 'repetition' in "The Cybernetics of 'Self" (1971a). Bateson locates the 'repetition' - an oscillation between mutually exclusive logical propositions - not 'in' the alcoholic, but in his relations with the social order. What Bateson calls "alcoholic pride in performance" is a version of Marcuse's "performance principle" (cf. Chapter III).
The dream must be translated from image to text before it can be interpreted (by the dreamer), and repression is, as Freud put it in 1896, "a failure of translation". Moreover, no current theory of memory is essentially different from Freud's original metaphor of the 'grooving' of pathways by the memory traces in the brain.

I shall return to a more specific description of Freud's semiotic and linguistic orientation in a moment. The point is that, without the work of Lacan, I doubt whether we would have discovered this Freud at all - although Karl Pribram's analysis of the neuropsychological Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895) goes a long way in the direction of re-reading Freud at least in the terms of information theory and feedback (Pribram,1962).

The problem with Lacan is that at first glance his writings are almost impossible to understand. His Ecrits (1966) - and only Lacan could have the hubris to entitle his work simply Writings - read more like a 'schizophrenic discourse' - or like poetry, or nonsense, depending on your prejudice and your tendencies towards positive or negative transference - than anything else. (5)

Lacan's hermeticism cannot be excused on any grounds - any more than his attitude to the reader, which might be expressed as: 'like it or lump it'. But although Lacan's personal destruction of French syntax makes him arduous enough even for the French reader, there is at least a fairly homogeneous intellectual tradition in Paris which makes Lacan less alien there than in Britain or in the United States. The phenomenological, existentialist, and Hegelian-Marxist tradition in France makes it less necessary there to explain what you mean when you mention Hegel, or Husserl, or Heidegger, or Kojève, or Sartre. And most people will recognize an idea anyway, even when you don't mention the source, or when you quote or paraphrase without references, for this kind of 'plagiarism' is generally acceptable in France. (6)

Significantly enough, though, Lacan could not have accomplished his analysis of Freud without the influence of the American-Russian-Swiss school of linguistics represented by Roman Jakobson, who has long exemplified the influence of Russian Formalism and of Saussure's structural linguistics in the United States. But even that influence came to Lacan indirectly. The most important single influence on Lacan has been the French structuralanthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who met and worked with Jakobson while at the New School for Social Research in New York, in 1942-45.

Lévi-Strauss tends to be rather vehemently disliked by American and British anthropologists beholden to the analytical and so-called empiricist tradition, which says a lot for him. He has been the originator of a new methodology and accompanying epistemology in the human sciences in France, which is usually called 'structuralism'. (By now, however, the term simply designates a fad, in the same way that existentialism came to do.)

Structuralism, in the sense of a non-empiricist, non-atomist, non-positivist methodology of the laws of relation, is complemented elsewhere by advances in general systems theory, in non-mechanistic cybernetics, in communication theory, and in ecological studies. Both the new structural and the new systemic-cybernetic approach seem in fact to bespeak a veritable epistemological revolution in the life and social sciences, about which we shall be hearing a lot more in the next decade (if we survive it, that is). (Boe: written 1972)

Lévi-Strauss sought to use the work of structural phonologists on the 'binary opposition' of phonemes as a model for the analysis of myth and of the exchange relationships of so-called 'primitive' societies - whose supposed 'primitivism' he proceeded to put in question. Noting that a relatively small number of 'oppositions' between 'distinctive features' (grave/acute, voiced/voiceless, etc.) are sufficient to form the acoustic infrastructure of any known language, Lévi-Strauss attempted to discover analogous sets of oppositions in kinship systems and in myth. His most recent work has concentrated on myth as music. With all that
is dubious in his approach, Lévi-Strauss has nevertheless introduced a type of signification into the study of myth - previously concerned almost exclusively with content rather than with form - where none existed before. As with the work of Lacan - or that of Freud - the main problem of Lévi-Straussian structuralism lies not in the methodology, but in its application, that is to say, in the universal claims made on its behalf.

I shall take up the more detailed critique of 'structuralism' in later chapters. For the moment it will suffice to give a brief and purely illustrative example of Lévi-Strauss's use of the concept of 'binary opposition' in the study of myth (Lévi-Strauss, 1958: Ch. 11).

For him, the myth is a diachronic representation (succession through time) of a set of synchronic (timeless) 'oppositions'. He believes that the discovery of these synchronic oppositions is a statement about the "fundamental structure of the human mind". In later chapters, I shall analyze and criticize the term 'opposition' - which conceals the categories of 'difference', 'distinction', 'opposition', 'contradiction', and 'paradox'.

I shall also criticize the concept of 'binary' relations - which conceals a whole set of misunderstandings about analog and digital communication in general, and specifically about 'not', 'negation', 'exclusion', 'zero', and 'minus-one', as well as about the relation between 'A' and 'non-A'.

I shall also try to demonstrate the misconception involved in Lévi-Strauss's confusion between 'mind', 'brain', and 'individual'. This is closely allied to Piaget's conception of the organism as the "paradigm structure", and with the failure, in most current work in the life and social sciences, to understand the logico-mathematical and existential problem of boundaries and levels in open systems of communication and exchange (systems involving or simulating life or 'mind', living and social systems).

Lévi-Strauss's method of reading myths is entirely novel, simple to understand, aesthetically satisfying, and all-encompassing. He suggests that we look at the myth the way we would look at an orchestra score in which the notes and bars to be played in simultaneous harmony by different instruments have become mixed up into the cacophony of a linear succession. Thus, if we represent this succession by the numbers 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 1, 4, 5, 7, we can re-establish the original score by putting all like numbers together in vertical columns:

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
1 & 2 & 4 & 7 \\
2 & 3 & 4 & 6 \\
1 & 4 & 5 & 7 \\
\end{array}
\]

This matrix is exactly what one might construct in the phonological analysis of a sentence, where a linear sequence of words can be shown to be constructed on a succession of binary oppositions between distinctive acoustic features.

Unfortunately for what Lévi-Strauss views as the keystone of his method, the analogy he draws between structural phonology and myth is false, whereas his methodology is extremely fertile. This problem points to the central difficulty involved in using the work of both Lévi-Strauss and Lacan. One has to show that the supposed sources of their new contributions to social science are not what they think they are; one has to demonstrate where and how their views serve a repressive ideological function; and one has to show the inadequacy both of many of the axioms of the method and of many of the applications claimed for it.

Without developing a detailed critique at this point, it can be said at once that it is an error to treat a context-free system of oppositions between the acoustic characteristics of 'bits' of information (distinctive features) as if it were isomorphic with myth, which is a system with a context.
Myth is necessarily contextual because it manipulates information in order to organize and control some aspect of a social system, and it cannot therefore be considered as isolated from that totality.

Unlike Lévi-Strauss's 'mythemes' (the "gross constitutive elements" of myth, by analogy with 'phoneme'), phonemes are bits of meaningless and non-significant information. Phonemes and phonemic oppositions are the tools of analysis and articulation (whose basic characteristic is difference) in a system in which both signification and meaning are outside the phonemic structure. 'Mythemes' and oppositions' between mythemes, on the contrary, involve both signification and meaning: they have 'content'.

Lévi-Strauss is treating myth as if it were a language representable by a context-free grammar, or treating mythemes as 'information' in the technical sense of the quantitative and closed systems of information transmission studied by Shannon and Weaver.

Information science concerns the statistical study of stochastic processes and Markov chains (Chapter IX) - and Chomsky has demonstrated that no known language can be properly generated out of a grammar modeled on such processes. It has further been shown that language is a system of a higher logical type than that which can be generated by context-free algorithms (grammars).

Although Lévi-Strauss speaks of the mytheme as of a 'higher' type than any similar element in language, the model of the binary phonemic opposition remains what he regards as the scientific basis of his method. Thus the mytheme becomes the equivalent of a tool of articulation (a distinctive feature) employed by a system of signification and meaning of another logical type (language).

When we seek to discover what this other system is in Lévi-Strauss, we find the category of "mythic thought". But mythic thought is already defined on the basis of the mythemes themselves. It is a system of articulation of oppositions by "a machine for the suppression of time" (the myth). What is missing from this circle is the real and material context in which the myth arises and to which it refers.

However, Lévi-Strauss will insist that his methodology, unlike pure formalism, is indeed 'contextual' (Lévi-Strauss, 1960a). He consistently refers to kinship categories, to the zoological and botanical context of the myth, and to the characteristics of material entities ('raw', 'cooked', 'rotten', and so on). In actual fact, however, all the 'material entities' and material relations' he employs come to the analysis already defined, tautologically, as categories of mythic thought.

Consequently, the 'context' Lévi-Strauss evokes is invariably the context of 'ideas' or 'mind', which, like Kant, he conceives of as being antecedent to social organization, both epistemologically and ontologically. Within this idealist framework, he then makes a quick-step into the material categories of physics and chemistry, which he regularly evokes as the ultimate ground of his ideal categories.

But in between the context of ideas and the context of atoms and molecules (or even that of the genetic code) there is a single, but enormous, level of organization which is missing: the socioeconomic context of human reality.

And this level of organization contains a parameter which cannot be found in physics, in biology, in information science, in language, in ideas, or in myths viewed as synchronic systems of oppositions: the punctuation of the system by the power of some of its parts to exploit the other parts (including 'nature' itself).
All ideas, electrons, and 'bits' of information are indeed equal, none of them are more equal than the others, and no group of them exploits the others. And whereas in systems not involving social exploitation, myths can properly be regarded as performing a 'pure' or 'neutral' organizing function, in all other systems myths become the property of a class, caste, or sex. ‘A myth which is the property of a class’ is in effect a definition of ideology. The myth then ceases to serve the neutral function of organization pure and simple; it serves as the rationalization of a given form of social organization.

The structural study of myth is, as Lévi-Strauss has often said, another variant of the myths it analyzes. Like them, it is a system of binary oppositions. But it is not a machinery for the suppression of time, however, it is a machinery for the suppression of history. And since 'structuralism' is indeed the property of a class, then we may correctly identify it as a system of ideological rationalization - which is not the same, however, as saying that it has no value.

Lévi-Strauss’s mistaken analogy between a context-free system and a context-bound system - and all the subsequent edifice erected on it by the structuralists - is derived from a confusion between language and communication.

On the one hand, such a confusion is only possible in theories punctuated so as to exclude the objective social category of exploitation. On the other, it depends upon a single real isomorphy, which is then used to reduce different levels of organization to each other: the fact that language, kinship systems, the structural study of myth, and the science of phonology are digital (discontinuous) communications about analog (continuous) relations.

A single characteristic of digital communication - that it is a system of communication involving boundaries and gaps - is reified by the structuralist argument so that it can be indiscriminately applied, as an implicit ontological category, at every level of complexity at which 'boundaries and gaps' occur.

Such digital forms do necessarily occur, as the instrument of communication, at every level of biological and social complexity. Consequently, the reductionist argument of the structuralists is greatly facilitated. Moreover, the fact that binary opposition is also a significant category in classical physics (e.g., electro-magnetism) allows structuralists to make the further epistemological error of confusing matter-energy with information.

11 The excluded term in the system of reductions involved in structuralism is the real context in which the „system of elements involving boundaries and gaps“ is used.

Since information without context is noise, this exclusion provides a neat closure to the theory, an imperviousness to information generated at the levels of context and organisation of a different logical type from the logical typing on the theory itself. The uneasy feeling of simplistic reduction one often has in reading Lévy-Strauss has its real source in the actual logical „flatness“of the theory. As much as it refers to levels, structuralism includes no theory of levels of communication. Consequently, it is impervious to the paradoxes it generates: all such paradoxes - which ought to require an evolution and an enlargement of the theory - are manipulated, by means of a flattening of logical types, into „oppositions“.

As a new metaphor of the discourse of science in our culture, structuralism confuses meaning - which concerns survival - with signification - the instrument of meaning. In spite of the important contributions it has made - principally by changing the kind of questions to be asked - structuralism fails in the life and social sciences in exactly the same way and for exactly the same reasons that both structural linguistics and information science
fail in those areas. They are all anti-semantic in that they substitute the supposed characteristics of theoretically neutral instrument of analysis (the bit) for the use to which it is put, as an instrument of communication, at a given level in a given goal-seeking system, where no information is ever neutral.

**Meaning - the goal - becomes bounded not by the structure of the context in which it occurs, but by the structure of „science“. As a result the methodology implicitly becomes an ontology.**

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**Footnotes:**

(1) A version of this chapter has appeared in *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*.

(2) Thus a recent book by Gilles Deleuze, with the tantalizing title *Différence et répétition* (1968), turns out to be founded on Kierkegaard's theory. Deleuze's position is invalidated by even the most rudimentary knowledge of 'cybernetics' oscillation in self-regulating open systems like the cell.

(3) See, for example, O. Mannoni's 1950 work, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, refuted with remarkable restraint by Frantz Fanon (1952). Mannoni speaks of the "civilizing influence" of the French subjugation of Madagascar, and of the "dependency complex" of the Malagasy people (see Chapter XVI I).

(4) See, for example, his subtle and remarkable analysis of alcoholic 'repetition' in "The Cybernetics of 'Self" (1971a). Bateson locates the 'repetition' - an oscillation between mutually exclusive logical propositions - not 'in' the alcoholic, but in his relations with the social order. What Bateson calls "alcoholic pride in performance" is a version of Marcuse's "performance principle" (cf. Chapter III).

(5) Harley Shands, in a review of the text, *The Language of the Self* (1968a) in *Semiotica*, 4 (1971), projects his justifiable annoyance at the hermeticism of Lacan onto me, constructing an image of me as the "disciple" of Lacan, "chosen" by the master to introduce his work to the English-speaking world. To set the record straight, I have to point out that I have never been such a disciple, and that I chose to put the book together simply because I thought Lacan's work interesting and important. With only the published texts of Lacan to go by, some of the problems of interpretation necessarily remained unresolved.

(6) One of the first tasks in understanding Lacan is to track down the sources of his text and to provide it with a context. Since 1968, I have continued to come across new signposts. For example, in his theory of psychosis, which speaks of the "coming unanchored" of the Symbolic order (governed by language), Lacan describes language as being anchored to Symbolic meaning by points de capiton ("buttons" like those on the surface of a mattress). Like many of Lacan's images, this is probably more mysterious than it is worth. But in the context of Lacan's predisposition to invent complicated and ill-explained graphic diagrams and equally incomplete 'transformational' formulae, this image is illuminated somewhat by the 'buttons' in W. Ross Ashby's kinematic graphs, in his *Theory of Transducers* (1956).

The Lacanian school unfortunately chooses to operate like a Masonic Lodge. Important texts, including resumes of Lacan's seminars by third parties, are deliberately withheld from publication, and circulated only among certain initiates. The 'sibling rivalry' this creates among his followers would be ludicrous if it were not so pernicious. The Ecole freudienne has been riven by excommunication after excommunication - which has even gone so far as to include the 'old Soviet Encyclopedia trick' of excising names from articles being republished. Moreover, the withholding of texts from publication might well lead the uncharitable to suspect that Lacan is seeking for himself a posthumous reputation a la Husserl or a la Freud.