

Introduction

Translating *Jouissance*

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To translate the spirit is so enormous and phantasmal an intent that it may well be innocuous; to translate the letter, a requirement so extravagant that there is no risk of its ever being attempted.¹

—Jorge Luis Borges

Beginning in the 1950s the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) waged a battle against Lacan's teachings and analytic technique that resulted in his removal from the sanctioned list of teaching analysts. At a 1963 conference in London, Lacan sought to make his case one last time. It is the year of Seminar X on *angst* (anxiety) when he presents the outlines of what he later called "his only invention": object *a*, a nonphenomenological, nonspecular "object" that points to the subject's cause of desire. Speaking in English, Lacan struggles to translate the word *reste*, the crucial remainder for reading object *a* in relation to desire. He asks his audience for help with the translation and the response is silence. The decision had been made.² The next day, Lacan interrupts his planned seminar on the names-of-the-Father after one class and announces he will not continue it in the future. Lacan thus leaves a hole in the trajectory of his teaching. His "excommunication," as he called the decision made by the IPA, becomes the introduction to Seminar XI: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. The scene of the London conference marks the impossibility

of translation, or translation as impossibility. It is the confrontation with a void: what cannot be said and therefore remains a secret, although not without leaving a rest. Object *a* points to what is lost in the sphere of signification, but also to what founds the desiring subject. Perhaps for this reason that same year Lacan establishes the *École Freudienne de Paris*.³

More than a decade later, during his 1975 Seminar RSI, a trip to London again confirms the difficult relations between English and psychoanalysis:

It is completely true that not even the English, no, I would not say English psychoanalysts since I only know one who is English, and he is probably Scottish! *Lalangue*, I think it is the English *lalangue* that is the obstacle. This is not very promising, because the English language is on its way to becoming universal; I want to say it is marking the way. I can't say that people don't get angry when they translate me. Those who read me, from time to time, must be aware of the difficulties, to translate me into English *lalangue*. In any case, one must recognize things as they are: I am not, I am not the first to note English *lalangue's* resistance to the unconscious.⁴ (S XXII, February 11, 1975)

These are certainly ominous words to introduce the English translation of Néstor Braunstein's *Jouissance: A Lacanian Concept*. Perhaps with Lacan's pronouncement in mind, Braunstein also issues a warning in chapter 1 regarding the translation of *jouissance*: "Never enjoyment!"⁵ Innovative rest, impossible sense, effects of signification: a translation exposes the disparities and gaps across and between languages in a never-ending movement of mis-naming and missing the mark: the unconscious at work. It is an interpretation and transference of sense that, as in psychoanalysis, is not exempt of desire and *jouissance*. Like the analytic act, a translation confronts the impossible, as Lacan shows in 1963, a hole that language cannot represent and can only be said between the lines. Lack is structural, loss is inevitable: for the *parlêtre*,⁶ the destiny of the analyst (expelled as object *a* at the end of analysis) and, as Lacan muses regarding (the) English, even for the survival of psychoanalysis.

Néstor Braunstein is an Argentine-born psychoanalyst, doctor, psychiatrist, professor, and scholar who works and teaches in Latin America (Mexico) and Europe. He is a leading figure in the field of psychoanalysis

with a long list of publications that also include studies in philosophy, literature, and art. He is the first to have published a comprehensive study of *jouissance*, originally appearing in Spanish in 1990 as *Goce*. This edition was followed by a French translation in 1994, with a revised and expanded French version in 2005. A new revised Spanish translation was published in 2006, which is the edition on which we base the present volume. A Portuguese translation came soon after (2007).⁷ Although more than twenty years have passed since the original publication, Braunstein presents a concept that in some sectors of contemporary psychoanalysis has become a sort of transcendental signifier. Its discursive presence in other disciplines, such as philosophy, political theory, art history, gender studies, and literary studies is also noteworthy. Yet while most studies of *jouissance* in English frame it within broader political and cultural discussions, Braunstein's book focuses on Freudian and Lacanian theory and the psychoanalytic clinic, making it an indispensable reference point in any serious consideration of this concept.⁸

Whether inscribed within the context of capitalist or neoliberal logic and its imperative to “enjoy,” as a critique of all forms of hetero-normativity, a liberating force in a positive reading of biopolitics, the point of inflection in the ethics of psychoanalysis, or articulated in the knot of the sinthome, *jouissance* is either the diagnosis, response, or solution for a wide range of contemporary discontents. Why does *jouissance* occupy such a central place in contemporary psychoanalytic discourse? What is *jouissance* the name for?

The rise in neuroscience, mental health systems, behavioral therapies, and pharmacological solutions question the efficacy of the *langagière*⁹ practice of psychoanalysis and the dimension of speech as event. Lacan noted: “The symptom is first of all the silence in the supposed speaking subject” (S XI, 11). If psychoanalytic practice lends an ear to that silence so it may speak, contemporary approaches to the discontent in culture often exclude the symptom and, therefore, the singularity of the subject of the unconscious (the case by case) in favor of generalized solutions able to produce satisfied, fulfilled subjects in accordance to societal ideals.

In *Why Psychoanalysis?* E. Roudinesco defends psychoanalysis from contemporary claims “seeking to reduce thought to a neuron or to equate desire with a chemical secretion,” due to the rise of medicalization and neuroscience.¹⁰ The relation between scientific knowledge and psychoanalysis, which privileges *savoir* (unknown knowledge) deciphered by forms of the unconscious, is what for Roudinesco provokes the “great quarrel”

that emerges with the Freudian discovery: “It is neither hereditary, nor cerebral, nor automatic, nor neural, nor cognitive, nor metaphysical, nor symbolic and so on. But then what is its nature, and why is it the point at issue for bitter polemics?”¹¹

The quest for total rationalization negates the notion of the split subject of the unconscious in its relation to knowledge; its unfolding evades apprehension. Freud articulates the divisions within the psychic apparatus as the ego, superego, and Id. Lacan speaks of a subject of the enunciation and the subject of the statement and later conceives the subject in relation to three registers (symbolic, imaginary, and real). The subject of the unconscious is a *parlêtre* and language inscribes lack in being (*manque à être*), making the axis of existence inaccessible to the subject. The subject is expropriated from his intimacy. That is why Lacan speaks of “extimacy,” of an outside that is inside. As subjects of the unconscious, we are exposed to a cipher of destiny that is not knowable in a general, positive, or anticipated manner. Unconscious *savoir* is always *après-coup*, after the fact, not immediately knowable. Language is not simply a tool at one’s disposal, but rather precedes the *parlêtre* while being exterior to it. The subject is thus constitutively split, signaling an impossible unity with the Thing (Freudian *Das Ding*, the lost [incestuous] object of desire, the Mother), which “suffers” from the fact that language manifests itself in the world. As Braunstein notes, there is an incompatibility between *jouissance* and the Law: “the Law of language . . . orders to desire and renounce *jouissance*” (chapter 2).

Throughout the book Braunstein contends that *jouissance* and language are co-terminus. This affirmation outlines the parameters of the book’s trajectory:

I am tempted to begin with a gnomic formula: *Im Anfang war der Genuss* (In the beginning was *jouissance*), which is clearly different from the beginning of the Gospel of St. John: *Im Anfang war das Wort* (In the beginning was the word), but it would be a false opposition. One cannot say which came first, whether *jouissance* or the word. They both delimit and overlap in a way that the experience of psychoanalysis shows to be inextricable. (chapter 1)

The epistemological suppositions are thus laid out from “the beginning,” starting with the book’s title: *jouissance* is a Lacanian con-

cept. Although not explicitly developed in the book, the concept is not considered here in the restricted, classical sense of an apprehension that delimits and captures meaning. Instead, it is read topologically as a “limit concept,” which Braunstein demonstrates in chapter 3 in relation to the three *jouissance*(s), “localized” on the borders of the Mobius strip that signal their “littoral union and disunion.”¹²

Topology allows thinking the unconscious sayings of analysis in the relations instantiated by a cut, making a re-positioning both for the subject and the analyst possible. The cut (interpretation, scansion) intervenes in the temporality of analytic discourse, producing synchronic effects on the signifiers in diachronic unconscious repetition. As Lacan notes in “Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire” (1960), the cut makes it so the analysts’ pursuit not be in vain, “it verifies the structure of the subject as a discontinuity in the real” (E, 6, my translation). The object *a*, the phantasm, castration, and the phallus can also be written topologically on the edge of those borders where language inscribes the effects of *jouissance* on the body. For this reason, throughout the book Braunstein discusses the torus, the Mobius strip, the Borromean knot, as well as graphs and Eulerian circles.

The spirit of this way of understanding a Lacanian concept seems to be confirmed by Braunstein in a recent conference titled “Jouissology” (2017). He recounts that at the presentation of the second edition of *Jouissance: A Lacanian Concept* in Mexico in 2006 someone in the audience asked the author how he would define *jouissance*. Braunstein realized at that point that the book did not contain such a definition (from *de-finere*: to delimit), although its more than three hundred pages were dedicated to this concept.¹³

With Freud and Lacan, Braunstein reads the concept of *jouissance* vis a vis other key figures in the field of psychoanalysis (J. Allouch, J-A. Miller, C. Soler) and philosophy (M. Foucault, J. Derrida). Literary texts (Proust, Kafka, Bataille, Fitzgerald) and queer theory are also mobilized to further explore the implications of these interpretations. The reader will find spirited engagement not devoid of polemic, meant to re-enliven unexamined truisms, sedimented (mis)readings, and ideological distortions. There is also a purposefully creative stance or “style,” given that Braunstein approaches Lacan as an open text (following Lacan’s edict to “do as I do, but do not imitate me”), always with the intention of clarifying certain points in the theory or in response to criticisms from other disciplines, such as philosophy or gender studies.

Although too many to discuss at length here, the reader encounters conceptualizations, terms, and neologisms not present in either Freud's or Lacan's own texts. Such is the case of object @, written with the "at" sign, that for Braunstein avoids the ambiguities of *a* in the Lacanian algebra (chapter 1) and "jouissology," contrasted to Bataille's erotology in order to "specify" *jouissance*—here the three *jouissance(s)*, much like Lacan does with object *a* (chapter 3). The author also supplements the forms of *jouissance* established in Lacan's Borromean knot in Seminar XX (phallic *jouissance* JΦ, *jouissance of the Other* JA) with *jouissance of being*: bodily, linked to the Thing, prior to castration and phallic signification, which he differentiates from the *jouissance* of the Other (sex): also linked to the body, ineffable although emerging from castration; feminine *jouissance* (explained in chapter 3 in part to respond to critics deeming psychoanalysis "phallogocentric"). Braunstein's explanation of the differences between *jouissance* of the Other and feminine *jouissance* is especially important, clarifying and contrasting a *jouissance* linked to the order of the Law and the phallus to feminine *jouissance* that, although ineffable, should not be confused with the Thing and impossible signification. This distinction serves to dispel criticisms made by certain proponents within gender studies that comment on Lacanian texts and often make gender and sexuation synonymous.

Lacanian psychoanalysis is fraught with misunderstandings, some due to a decontextualization of Lacan's teaching, in which certain parts are read independently from other seminars or prior developments. These are then repeated in a common-sensical manner in commentaries or scholarly works. Such is the case of "do not give up on desire" that, although never said by Lacan, has been raised to the status of an aphorism. Braunstein provides a lengthy review of what Lacan *did* say about desire in chapter 8. Another example comes from Seminar VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. In session XVI, titled "The Death Drive," the editor J-A. Miller subtitles one of the sections "*Jouissance*, the satisfaction of a drive," where the grammatical construction affirms that drive satisfaction is possible, as well as making the drives and *jouissance* homologous.

Braunstein takes a two-step approach in his critique of this syntagm. In chapter 2, he notes that to posit the satisfaction of the drives is contrary to Freud's formulations, as evidenced even in the early "Drives and their Vicissitudes" (1915): only necessity can be satisfied, but the drives are a constant force that cannot bring the process to a conclusion. This is especially evident after Freud develops the second topic and the

publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), where he develops the death drive more clearly. Freud outlines a system that cannot be closed off completely, but rather is continually open due to the constant force of repetition (the compulsion to repeat, dreams of traumatic neuroses, and the playful *fort-da* are summoned as evidence). It is a movement that opens to close, leaving a gap that re-launches the movement anew each and every time.

As for Lacan, the only drive that could be totally satisfied is the death drive, in the return to an inanimate pure *jouissance* (the Thing). But repression makes it so this satisfaction is only possible at the price of its death, resulting in a historicizing memorable movement that seeks to re-find the lost object by always missing the mark.¹⁴ Lacan notes the drive's trajectory implies non-reciprocity and torsion in the return (S XI). Total *jouissance* is impossible because there is always a deviation from the source. The result is the gap or lack that inscribes the subject of the unconscious in the signifying chain through the invoking call of the Other.

The subject's inscription in language requires a renunciation of *jouissance*, while producing a rest (object *a*) that makes *jouissance* ek-sist. Therefore, while there is no total satisfaction of the drive and *jouissance* is an interdiction for the *parlêtre*, it can be said "between the lines" (*interdit*), at the margins or borders around which the object *a* turns, the void of the Thing. What accounts for the misreading in the subtitle of Seminar VII—what is gained in formulating *jouissance* as the satisfaction of a drive? To what conception of the body, the subject, and ethics does this reading respond? Or, if we consider the resistances to psychoanalysis mentioned above, what social imperatives does this reading presuppose?

The clinic informs the theoretical discussions in this book, and Braunstein devotes three chapters to a rich, detailed reading of neurosis, perversion, and psychosis in their relation to speech and *jouissance*. The author studies the triad as being either before, after, and instead of speech in each of the three "structures." Psychoanalysts today question whether the notion of "clinical structure" remains a viable and pertinent one for the clinic. The debate responds to three main concerns regarding "clinical structure": (1) its terminology harks back to a medical (psychiatric) conception of psychoanalysis which considers the cure in terms of pathologies; (2) the notion belonged to a "structuralist" Lacan and was later abandoned in favor of topology and nodal logic; and (3) it defies the very premise of psychoanalysis as a practice of the singular "case by case" in favor of a classificatory system.¹⁵

In a recent conference¹⁶ Braunstein weighs in on these discussions by noting his preference for the expression “subject position” or the relation between subject and analyst under transference, instead of a theory of “clinical structures,” which is not found in Lacan’s own seminars or written texts.¹⁷ Although Braunstein notes in this same conference that he made use of “clinical structures” until some five years ago, in 2006 (the publication of the second edition of *Jouissance*) Braunstein had already posed these same concerns when he questions the “misnamed clinical structures” (chapter 2) and when discussing *jouissance* in psychosis, which he shows to be markedly different to how *jouissance* is filtered by speech in *parlêtres*: “not necessarily neurotic, psychotic or perverse (is that possible?)” (chapter 7). Posed as a question in 2006, Braunstein clarifies in his recent conference that the rejection of a psychopathological taxonomy goes hand in hand with the incompatibility between psychoanalysis and medicine, the political maneuver to make psychoanalysis compatible with university discourse and a moralizing normativity.

Jouissance: A Lacanian Concept closes by foregrounding the ethical dimension of psychoanalysis and the position of the analyst. Neither a therapeutic strategy for assuring well-being, a technique for procuring limitless *jouissance*, nor the promise of absolute knowledge:

In psychoanalysis it is not a question of the laws, but the Law, which prohibits *jouissance* (of the Thing) in the real, displaces it to the field of the *semblant*, and orders it be reached through other discursive means. *Jouissance* thus becomes a *semblant* and occupies the place of agent in a new analytic discourse: inverse, an inversion, the reverse of the master’s discourse. The Law orders desire while making the (absolute) object of desire, the Thing, unreachable. Led to desire in vain, circling the object @ as cause of desire, and only under the appearances of the *semblant* of an impossible *jouissance*, the Law elevates *jouissance* to the place of the Thing. This is how men and women inscribe themselves as historical beings by making themselves a name (the meaning of the “proper” name, the signifier given at birth) and record their path toward *jouissance*, by passing through desire. (chapter 8)

R.S.I: as Lacan notes in Seminar XXII, *jouissance* is imbricated in the knot of the three registers (real, symbolic, imaginary) for every *parlêtre*. It

cannot be considered autonomously, pretending to forego the symbolic and foreclosing castration. Lacan reiterates this idea in *Talking to Brick Walls*:

What differentiates the discourse of capitalism is *Verwerfung*, the fact of rejecting, outside all the fields of the symbolic. This brings with it the consequence I have already said it has. What does it reject? Well, castration. Any order, any discourse that aligns itself with capitalism, sweeps to one side what we simply call, my fine friends, the things of love. Do you see that? It's no small thing!¹⁸

Castration is not submission to the law of the Father, but a pathway toward becoming a desiring subject: "Castration means that jouissance must be refused so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder (*l'échelle renversée*) of the Law of desire" (E, 827). In Lacan's presentation at St. Anne in 1972, "the things of love" refer to a-love (*a-mur*), a love of object *a*, which surrounds the void of the Thing and is the cause of desire. The capitalist discourse is here shown to be the opposite of the analyst's discourse that Lacan had presented in Seminar XVII: *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. While the former is another form of the discourse of the master, in the latter the analyst takes the place of object *a* and by so doing reverses the position of domination previously occupied by the master. In the analyst's discourse, the subject has access to the cause of desire as unconscious *savoir*. This is the ethical position of psychoanalysis.