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TO INTRODUCE PIERRE FÉDIDA

M. Stone-Richards and Ming Tiampo

To say that Pierre Fédida is a member of the *Association psychanalytique de France* (APF), which includes Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, Jean Laplanche, and Didier Anzieu, and that his work is closely related to that of André Green (*Société psychanalytique de Paris*), is scarcely to begin to situate him. Fédida's distinctiveness in part resides in the fact that he is the heir to a tradition of philosophical and psychopathological thought that is strictly phenomenological and psychoanalytic, yet which has long recognized the critique of the institutionalization of psychoanalysis. His work also demonstrates an extraordinary openness to and fertile dialogue with English language *clinical* psychoanalysis (for example, the work of Harold Searles, D.W. Winnicott and Frances Tustin). In other words, his is a psychoanalysis perpetually interrogating *experience* in which the usual oppositions between the psychoanalytic and the phenomenological do not make sense. His project is as much concerned with the mutual critique of phenomenology and psychoanalysis as it is with the furtherance of critical experience. It would be useful, though, to identify briefly certain key themes which dominate a large *oeuvre*.

Though Fédida is not a Lacanian, it can fairly be said that after Lacan no French psychoanalyst can ignore the question of the specificity of psychoanalysis, in other words, what constitutes the analytic situation. This is Fédida's first theme: the understanding of the

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framework [*cadres*] of the analytic situation. His attempt to conceptualize the analytic framework is motivated by the fact that Freud did not develop a metapsychology of communication. This constitutes a second theme, which issues into a more general *théorie des lieux*. In common with post-Lacanianians such as Green and Laplanche, Fédida does not put the primary degree of stress upon language in its semiotic dimension; rather he places the stress upon *metaphor* and *regression*. The emphasis on these notions articulates a third theme: viz., the entry into the analytic situation. Analysis begins, can only begin, with the experience of the *negative*, that is, resistance, which brings regression in its train. From this event, it becomes possible for analyst and analysand to become metaphors for each other, and with this experience of the negative that sets regression in motion (both topical and temporal regression) there follows a distinct experience of time. This may be discerned as a fourth theme: the distinct experience of time in relation to memory as permanently available to the instant — the problem of place [*lieu*] — which Fédida terms the *passé anachronique*.¹ Within the context of a conception of clinical practice (“au coeur [du] paradoxe quotidien,” as he says of Searles), Fédida describes the theoretical synthesis of these concerns as a *fundamental* (and *not* general) psychopathology; indeed he terms his approach a *tragic* psychopathology — which may be better rendered as a psychopathology of the tragic of the everyday.

In *The Movement of the Informe*, Fédida returns to a problem posed by Georges Bataille regarding the inability or perhaps refusal of psychoanalytic inquiry to go beyond the function of language as an instrument of communication. In so doing, Fédida indicates the possibility of going further on a voyage which takes the reader through some familiar and less familiar terrain: from Freud's Wolf Man to the relatively unknown work with autistic children of the English psychoanalytical therapist Frances Tustin. The issues Fédida addresses point straight to the heart of debates about the nature of expression in psychoanalysis, art history, philosophy and literary criticism: the resurgence of the physical in language; the repression of animality in the academic and especially psychoanalytic usage of language; the relationship between writing and speech; and the question of animality versus abjection.

In a style as erotic and physical as that which he advocates and defends, Fédida investigates the “mute zones” which evade the positivity of language when it is used as a medium of communication. Through Bataille’s work, an investigation of his famous *Dictionnaire* as well as his writings on the Lascaux caves and Manet’s *Olympia*, Fédida considers the function and the *work* of the *informe*, where, as Derrida and many others have shown, Bataille poses the notion of a *négativité sans emploi* against the Hegelian work or labor of the concept without for all that being able to escape from the shared terrain that is the experience of consciousness. That the concept of *work* must encompass the movement and inflections of negativity is something widely accepted within the French psychoanalytic community.² In his examination of the function of the *Dictionnaire*, Fédida makes it quite clear that Bataille never intended to effect a debasement of everything in culture to some state of formlessness and meaninglessness. Bataille’s *Dictionnaire* defines “not the meaning but the job of words” which takes as use, the “opposite of things.” Rather, it is through this work, between a transvaluation of values and a *négativité sans emploi*, that the “mathematical redingote” or rigid semanticization of language can first be destroyed; this work is necessary to bring to bear that which lies beyond the discursive. As such, Fédida sees Bataille as searching for the marvelous — the word enchanted, the *vocable*.

As Roland Barthes explains in *Le Plaisir du texte*, the *vocable* is writing which exceeds the purely communicative function of words, and which encompasses the life and *expressivity* of speech, of the voice, and of silence. In its capacity for movement — physical movement and the materiality of language as well as psychic, sexual and linguistic movement — the *vocable* allows the body to assert itself in language. A violent contact between the signifier and signified, it is in this manner that language avoids the repression of pure signification. In another context, developing his theory of temporality in the analytic situation, Fédida has observed: “That is why rather than signification (implying objectivating discursive intentionalities) it would be preferable to speak of *signifying*. As if *signifying* supposed *forms* in process of enunciation in place of signs in the operation of

signification."³ There is, though, this qualification, as Fédida agrees in a dialogue with Michèle Montrelay and Pierre Solié, namely, that "The unconscious 'signifier' is not the linguistic signifier; the former is distinguished from the latter by the fact that it also places in circulation [*met en jeu*] the body of the other."⁴ For Fédida, with the body comes "the metaphorico-transferential dimension of language [*langue*], the dimension misprisoned by linguists because they do not know what is understood by silence."⁵ Within the framework of an analytic situation that engenders a metaphoric relation between analyst and analysand, silence threatens the viability of the analytic contract not only by throwing the analyst back onto his or her self, but by threatening an upsurge of animality which, through projective identification, links analyst with analysand in the blind point of the unanalysed (and perhaps inanalysable) transfer. Hence the import of distortion. The internal connection between experience, form and culture is, for Fédida, the *enjeu* of Bataille. Bringing up the examples of *abattoir*, architecture and mouth from Bataille's *Dictionnaire*, Fédida shows how the *Dictionnaire* works — not at all arbitrarily, but with a precision that not only loosens the attachment of word to meaning, but which metamorphoses the sedimented cultural forms that are thereby exposed toward animality.⁶

Animality, animation, and animism — the three terms are introduced through Freud's Wolf Man with a playfulness and associative chain all of its own. What Fédida reveals in turning to this case is the *significance* of distortion and destruction, and the rich variety of possibilities which result in resemblance;⁷ how the tearing of the image [*Zerrbild*] is the *work* of the dream, and how the associative chain relies not upon language as mechanism of meaning, but rather upon language in its materiality: the visual qualities of language (the roman numeral "V" and its similarity to the spreading legs of a woman) as also the aural qualities of language (the resonance between *S.P.* in French and *Wespe* in German). It is this *movement* of language, the "interior experience" of word-values that Fédida points to as Bataille's *informe*. Indeed, it is important to recall that the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis (free association) announces and

necessitates a movement from the unconscious (image, form) to the preconscious and conscious (word) states, and thus cannot be thought apart from the movement of language. Critically, Fédida writes, “the *informe* is, in Bataille, not an absence or a loss of form, but the *setting in motion* effected by the language of that which passes itself off at first, as a form.” Thus Fédida sets himself against interpretations of Bataille such as those of Rosalind Krauss and Julia Kristeva in terms which continue to view the *informe* as a “knowledge-word.” That is to say, he sets himself apart from any interpretation which continues to attach a value to the *informe* — in Krauss’ case, the base, and in Kristeva, the abject. For Fédida, neither of these interpretations takes Bataille’s critique of language far enough — that Bataille did not simply desire a destruction of the Apollonian in order to free the Dionysian in language, but the dismantling of the entire system of opposition which, in so doing, would allow meaning to coexist with and be enriched by animality. In opposition to the manichean ways by which Krauss and Kristeva enact relationships between psychoanalysis and Bataille’s *informe*, Fédida gestures toward a new possibility in the work of Frances Tustin which, through the study of autistic children, suggests a *figurability* of the body that is neither optical nor semantic, but tactile.

It is Tustin’s autistic sensation shapes which fascinate Fédida, offering, as they do, a tactile model for the psychic constitution of form at the very margins of language acquisition — *informe* forms.⁸ Probing the liminal zone of silence inhabited by the autistic child, Fédida explores the modes of expression and symbolization that emerge when the symbolic register is absent or not fully functional, when the body is unmoored from its semiotic and semantic anchorages by its relation to silence. What he finds there is a certain kind of animality which, he insists, should not be ignored in analysis, and he points to these “dumb zones” as significant sites (marked by trauma) which are essential in the pursuit of the cure.

Fédida moves toward a language which allows for the significance of silence, which yearns to be enriched by the enchanted vocable. Language which is put in motion by its materiality, which

does not give “a redingote to that which is a mathematical redingote.” Language, that is, as that which *exceeds* the communicative, and gives full force to the violence, wonder, eroticism and physicality of the expressive.

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- 1 A particularly useful introduction to Fédida’s theory of temporality is his intervention following Jean Laplanche, “Traduction et temporalité,” *La Révolution copernicienne inachevée* (Paris: Aubier, 1992), 342–7.
 - 2 André Green’s *Le Travail du négatif* (1993) is an excellent summation of this position.
 - 3 Pierre Fédida, “Passé anachronique et présent réminiscent: epos et puissance mémoriale du langage,” *L’Écrit du temps*, 10 (Fall 1985): 26.
 - 4 Michèle Montrelay in *La Psychanalyse aujourd’hui*, ed., Michel Cazenave (Pierre Fédida, Michèle Montrelay, Pierre Solié) (Paris: Imago, 1983), 24. This conversation between Fédida (neo-Freudian), Montrelay (Lacanian) and Solié (Jungian) was first broadcast on France-Culture, 14 March, 1981.
 - 5 Pierre Fédida, *ibid.*, 50.
 - 6 Phenomenology, and especially phenomenological psychopathology since the 1920s and 1930s, has had much to say about animality, hence Roger Caillois’ use of Eugène Minkowski as noted by Fédida. Cf. the phenomenological journal *Alter*, no. 3 (1995) for a thorough review of the phenomenology of animality.
 - 7 The recent book by Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (Paris: Macula, 1995) along with the exhibition catalogue by Didi-Huberman and Didier Semin, *L’Empreinte* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1997) are amongst the most beautiful examples of the impact of Fédida’s thinking on the *informe* and the *passé anachronique*.
 - 8 In *The Protective Shell in Children and Adults*, Tustin writes that the autistic child, suffering from the trauma of bodily separateness, develops an intense anxiety of “not-being.” In order to protect itself, the child creates “objects” — autistic sensation objects and autistic sensation shapes — which provide the illusion of being encapsulated by a shell. This shell, which paradoxically the child experiences as a two-dimensional object with its own body, shuts out awareness of other bodies and objects, thereby protecting it from experiencing the anxiety of body separateness, but also preventing it from developing affective relationships with persons and objects. Significantly, these autistic sensation objects and sensation shapes are generated respectively by a sense of touch, or through tactile *activities* such as stroking, brushing, rubbing, smearing, and even drawing and painting. Of the autistic sensation shapes, Tustin writes that:

[T]hey are not classified shapes associated with specific objects, nor are they experienced in terms of spatial relationships, as objective shapes are. They are experienced in terms of tactile sense impressions on the subject’s body surfaces (“To be or not to be,” in *The Protective Shell in Children and Adults* [London: Karnac Books, 1990], 41).