**JACQUES LACAN**

**“The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,**

**or Reason since Freud” (1957)**

The unconscious is shaped like a language:

1. Language “exists prior to each subject’s entry into it”
2. Subject already circumscribed by laws of language-culture (“proper name”)
3. Language affects all subsequent thought, so nothing, no theorizing or being, exists outside language

**S**

1. The main algorithm of language is

**s**

(Signifier over signified)

* + Signification sustained only differentially, “by reference to another signification” (signifying chain)
	+ Because of the s sliding unstably and arbitrarily under the S, “the signifier enters the signified”
	+ Signification exists in the chain of elements, but not in any one of them
	+ Signification is not only linear/traceable, but vertical in every point recalling “all attested contexts…’vertically’ linked to that point”

🡪the signifying chain can mean something altogether different from what we intent; we can never speak “the truth”

Metaphor (a word for a word) and metonymy (a part for the whole) as the two functions deriving from signifying chain

Similarities with the unconscious:

1. “the dream is a rebus”=>its images must be taken as signifiers, irrelevant to their true signification (ex. hieroglyphics)
2. Dream-mechanisms similar to linguistic mechanisms:
3. Transposition = sliding signified
4. Condensation = metaphor
5. Displacement = metonymy
6. Means of representation =also writing-like
7. Symptoms as metaphors (past trauma substituted by current symptom)
8. Metonymy is our desire for something else (unsatisfactory Other) = our desire for **our** true self (unconscious Other)

🡪”the recognition of desire is tied to the desire for recognition”

Thus if our linguistic selves are inherently incomplete:

🡪we can never really “Know Ourselves” (who *is* that?)

🡪Ego and Id can never become integrated

🡪we exist and desire because of/for **lack**, never fulfillment