Reflexivity and fantasy: surprising encounters from interpretation to interruption

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AUTHOR:

Dr. Claudia Lapping

CONTACT

UCL Institute of Education

20 Bedford Way

London WC1H OAL

e-mail: c.lapping@ucl.ac.uk

BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT:

Claudia Lapping is Senior Lecturer at the UCL Institute of Education. One of her main research interests is the relation between theory and empirical methodology. She teaches a range of courses on the Institute of Education MPhil/PhD programme.

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Abstract:. This paper sets out two psychoanalytically informed conceptions of fantasy as a resource for reflexivity in research. First: fantasy as a defensive structure that distorts our perception of reality, and the use of the researcher's affective responses as an interpretive tool. Second: fantasy as a signifying structure that constitutes the subject's engagement in reality, foregrounding unconscious symbolic associations. These approaches are traced in the construction and analysis of interview data, exploring: i) a trajectory that interprets fantasy as a defense against difficult emotions, ii) the construction of free associations, iii) symbolic material that disrupts the interpretation of fantasy as defense.

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1   This paper emerges from my research and inspiring discussions with Jason Glynos. Although I wrote it, it was, very obviously, co-authored.

Introduction: fragmenting reflexivity

There are many ways we might begin to tease out diverse approaches to reflexivity, the different aspects of subjectivity that they explore, and contrasting understandings of the implications these might have for academic research. Kuehner, Ploder and Langer (this volume, p. 2) distinguish, for example, conceptions of researcher subjectivity as authorial or textual performance, and contrasting orientations to truth or knowledge. I have traced similar distinctions arguing, for example, that while a Lacanian approach foregrounds the importance of recognizing knowledge as built on a foundation of ignorance (c.f. Nobus and Quinn, 2005, p. 209), it is possible to read a realist ideal of truth into Bourdieu's account of the relation between reflexivity and scientific knowledge (Lapping, 2011, p. 11-12). However, holding different approaches apart in this way can itself promote unreflexive dichotomizations that prioritize individuated aspects of a more complex research practice. The epistemological distinction I foreground in separating Bourdieu from Lacan, for example, though not wholly unjustified, obliterates some pertinent aspects of method. Bourdieu, at certain points, characterizes reflexivity as 'a particularly effective means of increasing the chances of attaining truth by increasing the cross-controls and providing the principles of a technical critique, which makes it possible to keep closer watch over the factors capable of biasing research' (2004, p. 89). Taken out of context, this can be interpreted as a form of naïve realism. However, he goes on to warn against the pursuit of 'absolute knowledge' and to foreground the impossibility of extracting epistemology from its social relations: 'the epistemological obstacles' he says, 'are first and foremost social obstacles' (ibid, p. 89). In a similar way, rather than emphasizing the distinction between psychoanalytic and sociological practice, we might notice the way Bourdieu's account of the interview as 'spiritual exercise' requiring a 'forgetfulness of self' (1999, p. 614) resonates with Freud's account of the 'evenly hovering attentiveness' that is necessary for psychoanalysis. I'm not arguing that there are no helpful distinctions to be drawn, but rather that these distinctions themselves are only provisional, and often tempt us to fix a text or an author as a unified instance of something (c.f. Saville Young, 2014).

Despite these cautions, I think that it is helpful to sketch out some positions in the field in which this paper might be situated, and through this to indicate some of the diverse aspects of subjectivity that might be foregrounded in order to unravel the interpretive processes of research. Sociological frameworks, for example, can help us to notice the effects of more structural aspects of classed, gendered, ethnic or cultural positioning within the research relationship (c.f. Bourdieu, 2004, 1999). Psychoanalysis, it has been suggested (e.g. Frosh and Baraitser, 2008), provides a set of unique conceptual tools for exploring the unconscious aspects of methodological processes; and the different schools of psychoanalytic thought will direct us to notice distinct elements of our practice as clues to the unconscious. Elsewhere I've mapped contrasting epistemological and methodological trajectories associated with Kleinian, relational (c.f. Benjamin, 2004) and Lacanian schools of psychoanalysis, with a particular focus on the status of affect and language in contrasting conceptions of countertransference and (mis)recognition (Lapping, 2011, 2013a, 2013b). I've attempted to develop a certain interpretive openness, while also acknowledging my strong attachment, epistemologically and politically, to more Lacanian approaches. In this paper I am developing this discussion. I begin by briefly setting out two approaches that have been used within the social sciences to work reflexively with psychoanalytically informed conceptions of fantasy: one foregrounds the use of the researcher's affective responses; the other attempts to interrupt the imaginary linguistic fixities that emerge in the process of interpretation. In the final sections of the paper, I will explore how these contrasting conceptions of fantasy play out in the construction of a research interview, drawing on some instances from a project experimenting with these ideas.

Reflexivity in research: interpretation or interruption of fantasy

Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (1989, 2001) situate their use of psychoanalysis within a broader post-structural approach to research, arguing that this combination can produce a richer understanding of classed and gendered subjects than either approach on its own. They draw on psychoanalysis to argue that research narratives are constructed and interpreted in a web of anxiety and fantasy, and use concepts of projection, denial and countertransference to unpick fantasies that emerged in their research into young women

and their families. Frequently, according to their research narrative, the starting point for this interpretive process was an emotional response, an affective experience of discomfort or envy, for example, which prompted discussion within the research team and further examination of the data. Through this process, for example, a discomfort in relation to a middle class family's consistent story of one sibling's educational 'failure' prompted them to look for evidence of her grades, which reveal the 'failure' as a fantasmatic element in the family narrative. That is: the designation acts to fix particular understandings of individuals and relations within the family. The analysis goes on to situate this fantasy within wider social and discursive norms regulating expectations of success within middle class professional families (2001, pp. 95-8). In other instances, they follow up incongruities in the data to suggest the way the researchers interactions were guided by their own fragile fantasies, or threats to these fantasies (e.g. p. 102-3).

The use of 'fantasy' in Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody's account is relatively loose, and my summary elides their shifting use of 'fantasy' and 'fiction'. Conceptually, they foreground the role of fantasy as a defense against anxiety and note the way it challenges notions of truth or reality in research. Methodologically, they draw on a range of linguistic and affective moments to trace the effects of fantasy in the research process. Although they specify attention to words, images and metaphors as an explicit stage in their analysis (p. 96), much of their discussion focuses on the use of the researchers' emotions and on their exploration of clues that indicate the denial or avoidance of difficult feelings. The researchers also draw on their own class, gender and familial positioning to explore, question or confirm their interpretations. As they note, these processes always carry a risk of projection from the researcher onto the research subject. They suggest that this risk was mitigated by the fact that each of the researchers was in psychoanalytic psychotherapy throughout the period of the research, which acted both as a support and as training for this kind of work. Miller, Hoggett and Mayo (2008) extend this point, foregrounding the potential dangers of troubling the fantasies that defend us from unconscious anxiety. Discussing the ethics of sharing interpretations with research participants, they note: 'judgments are required about the respondent's defensive

organization' and suggest 'Having psychotherapists in the team or as mentors to the research can help make such judgments' (p. 15).

While these ethical cautions are helpful, and from the perspective of method they might constitute productive suggestions for research practice, from the perspective of the epistemological dichotomy in understandings of reflexivity in psychoanalytically informed research, they simply raise a further set of ethical concerns. The problem of interpretation, of claiming to know on behalf of another or of claiming to know oneself, hovers throughout these methodological debates. Saville Young and Frosh summarise the critique of a reliance on expert discourse: 'From a Lacanian perspective, using psychoanalysis to understand defence mechanisms or psychic processes in discursive work is an elusive and illusory goal for we are always subjected to language and therefore can never occupy a position that offers a final pronouncement on it.' (2009, p. 3). The aim of an analysis, they suggest, should be to open out possible meanings of a narrative, rather than to fix an interpretation from a position of supposed expertise: to interrupt rather than to interpret.

In her contribution to a recent collection of work in the emerging field of Lacanian discourse analysis (Parker and Pavon Cuellar, 2014), Lisa Saville Young (2014) offers a re-reading of her own written analysis of a research interview, to suggest what this interruption to interpretation might look like. She first traces three discourses she deployed in the writing: a set of signifiers of gender and masculinity, a set of signifiers of affect, and finally the expert discourse of psychoanalysis. She then notes points that might be understood as slips or interruptions, which reveal/undermine the textual production of coherence and authority. She scrutinizes, for example, the shift from tentative language in the initial sections, to the certainty of the final claims, which are couched in the discourse of psychoanalysis. She thus reveals how her initial text acted to close down meanings at the level of the signifier, and in doing so seeks to open them out once again. This Lacanian scratching at the never-ending openness of the signifier aims to unsettle subjectivity at the point of its necessary formation within the discourse of the Other (Saville Young, ibid, p. 281-2; Lacan, 1960, p. 338). Saville Young uses the word

'surprise' (p. 288) to describe her experience of this transformation in her fixed and fantasmatic relation to her 'own' words; this resonates with other accounts that draw an association between 'surprise' and the subject's encounter with their 'own' unconscious formations (see also Glynos, 2002, p. 35; Parker and Pavon-Cuellar, 2014).

In traditional conceptions of fantasy, what is repressed is a truth about reality; in Lacanian conceptions, what is repressed is the illusory nature of the relation between language/signifier and reality/signified (Evans, 1996, p. 111; Lacan, 1998, p. 53; Lapping, 2011, p. 111-2). For Walkerdine et al, fantasy appears to emerge as a defensive structure that distorts our perception of reality in order to keep anxiety at bay. Affective experience, they suggest, provides clues that may help to interpret and correct this fantasmatic distortion of reality. From a Lacanian perspective, this account does not pay enough attention to the way fantasy configures the relations between signifiers to mediate affectivity. The Lacanian distinction between the necessarily fantasmatic engagement of the subject in *reality* and the inaccessibility of the *Real* is conceptually important. Subjectivity only appears within the signifying structures of language (reality); the Real, in contrast, is the site of overwhelming anxiety, unmediated affect and the disappearance of legible subjectivity (see for example Pavon-Cuellar, 2014; Lacan, 1960). The fantasmatic structuring of symbolic relations between signifiers is what reconstitutes the unsymbolisable affectivity of the Real as desire, and channels its articulation in language. This structuring of symbolic relations between signifiers permits the indeterminate formation of the subject and its engagement in everyday reality. The signifier and its symbolic relations are thus necessarily the focus for engaging or shifting, as opposed to correcting, fantasmatic fixations.

In this paper, then, I want to explore the possible uses of the signifier as a focus for reflexivity in research. I am interested in the role the signifier might play in the encounter between a researcher and a research participant; and in the risks and inevitabilities of intervening in the specific fantasmatic signifying patterns that constitute these subjectivities within a wider symbolic network of signifying systems. I want to begin by offering an example from psychoanalysis, as a starting point for thinking about the

materiality of the signifier, and what it might mean to intervene at the level of the signifier within qualitative research.

Intervening at the level of the signifier

It is not easy to focus on the materiality of a word: its sound, the shape of its letters on the page, its relation to other words. This materiality is what needs to be grasped to think about word as signifier, or signifier *as* signifier: to begin to separate a word from its apparent meanings. I want to suggest the methodological significance of recognizing the materiality of the signifier *as* signifier; and the way this aspect of our use of language so easily slips out of our grasp. As a first illustration of what this might mean, I am beginning with a story told by a patient about her psychoanalysis with Lacan. She describes a moment when Lacan responded to the materiality, to the *sound* of a word in her speech:

> One day, in a session, I was telling Lacan about a dream I had. And I told him, I wake up every morning at 5 o'clock, and I added "It's at 5 o'clock that the Gestapo came to get the Jews in their houses". At that moment Lacan jumped up from his chair, came towards me, and gave me an extremely gentle caress on my cheek. I understood it as 'geste a peau', the gesture…[Gerard Miller: he had transformed the 'Gestapo' into 'geste a peau']. A very tender gesture, it has to be said – an extraordinarily tender gesture. And that surprise, it didn't diminish the pain, but it made it something else. (Suzanne Hommel, describing her analysis with Lacan, from Gérard Miller's film 'Rendez-vous chez Lacan'. Clip posted on Youtube as 'A Story from Lacan's Practice': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VA-SXCGwLvY)[2]

This account of a moment in Suzanne Hommel's psychoanalysis with Lacan, related in an interview with Gerard Miller, provides an illustration of what it might mean to intervene at the level of the signifier. Hommel's story suggests the way the materiality of

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2   I am grateful to Lisa Farley for sharing this clip on Facebook.

the signifier – its sound, the way it is voiced or enacted, and its relation to other signifiers – might constitute a channel for affect, or desire. The signifier 'Gestapo', its phonetic resemblance to 'geste a peau' (gesture on skin), Lacan's enactment of this unvoiced resemblance in his touch on Hommel's cheek, and the shift in Hommel's pain, turning it into 'something else': This associative chain illustrates what we mean when we talk about the openness of signifiers and their relation to the fixing or shifting of our experience of affect, or desire. When we notice this openness, we can also begin to understand that the fixed meanings we attach to signifiers can always be understood, at one level, as fantasy. Lacan's intervention at the level of the signifier, we might say, shifted a fixed and painful fantasmatic relation between a signifier and an affect, and Hommel's 'surprise', as I suggested earlier, can be associated with the interruption of an unconscious symbolic relation (Glynos, 2002, p. 35; Parker and Pavon-Cuellar, 2014). The account draws our attention to the possibility for change associated with this interruption, but also to the delicacy of this mode of intervention.

Before moving on to explore these processes in a research interview, I also want to note the processes of closure in my own account. In my use of Hommel's story, I have traced a relation between Lacan's intervention in her account of the Gestapo coming to get the Jews and his epistemology of language and desire; but these are contingent aspects of an inevitably fragmented methodology, and shouldn't be understood as a unified whole (see also Lapping 2015). The same instance of practice might be explained through alternative conceptual frameworks.

Experimenting with the signifier in the research relationship

In these final sections I want to examine an instance from a recent interview based project, developed with Jason Glynos, that set out to explore the structure of fantasy by experimenting with a Lacanian notion of intervention at the level of the signifier. In order to do this we experimented with a range of techniques for producing and exploring free associative material with our interview participants. Bollas (1999) has described the contrasting modes of listening to or receiving a patient's speech in different schools of psychoanalysis. He contrasts Freud's technique, which uses the analyst's silence to allow

the gradual emergence of material, with Kleinian technique, which recommends frequent intervention to interpret projections (p. 188). Pure free association is impossible to achieve, so these approaches are not exclusionary or incompatible, they simply provoke or facilitate different trajectories in the associations (ibid, p. 63). Since our specific objective was to develop ways of exploring fantasy, from a Lacanian perspective, within empirical social research, our focus in planning our approach to the interviews was explicitly on the use of signifiers, and on ways in which we might draw our participants attention to other meanings and ambiguities in their speech (see Fink, 1997, p. 15). We also attempted to avoid responding to the material except at the level of language, or signifier. The Lacanian stance, unlike the way of listening Bollas attributes to Freud, supports interruption of the analysand's speech. Fink advises: '*The analyst must not be afraid to stress the material he or she considers important.* Not necessarily to the exclusion of all else, of course, since the analyst cannot know what lies behind each element; but by stressing the unconscious, the analyst manifests "the analyst's desire" to hear about *this.*' (1997, p.16, italics in original). We interpreted this injunction in a variety of ways in planning and carrying out the interviews, with the aim of opening up meanings to facilitate free association.

Our participants were four teaching assistants, working at different schools, but all in the final year of a part time BA in Education Studies. The topic we were exploring was pay and remuneration, and we were interested in the fantasies that sustain engagement in often poorly remunerated professional practice. We planned a series of group and individual interviews. In the first group interview we invited participants to say anything that came to mind in relation to 'pay and remuneration'. We then interviewed each participant individually, using words and phrases from the prior group interview to prompt further associations. In the second group interview we experimented with a range of prompts for further free associative writing and speaking; and similarly in the final individual interviews we explored a range of approaches to elicit additional professional and biographical material. The final interviews also included a question which invited participants to reflect on the experience of participating in the project. At the beginning of the first group interview, and again in each subsequent interview, we explained the

idea of free association, that our approach meant that they should not expect 'normal' conversational responses, and that they might find this uncomfortable.

Listening and interrupting: signifying relations in an interview

Below I'm going to set out some possible lines of interpretation/disruption in relation to a selection of moments from my first individual interview with Mary, one of our participants. I want to explore the interaction between i) an initial trajectory that interprets fantasy, within the interview, as a defense against difficult emotions, ii) my own interventions within the interview, and iii) a question it is possible to posit at the level of the signifier that might disrupt the initial interpretation of fantasy as defense.

At the beginning of her first individual interview, asked to say whatever came to her mind about the first group interview, Mary produced a fluent chain of associations. She began by referring to a discussion about bonuses in the group interview, but moved on to talk at length about the status and pay of cleaners. She referred to a news item from several years previously about a university that paid their cleaners less than the minimum wage, and described an image that had accompanied the article: 'There was a picture of her, this lady sitting on the bus at four o'clock in the morning, I think that's what it was, four or four thirty, coming into work for five pounds or less' (05:18)[3]. She moved on to talk about pay and conditions in her own cleaning job, which she did alongside her role as a teaching assistant. She expressed puzzlement over the perception and status of the work: 'I don't know why cleaners in particular attract that low wage, because it's not an easy job' (07:00); 'I still don't understand why cleaners are seen as […] lower class' (07:35). She also described positive aspects of the physical process of cleaning: 'It's a very therapeutic job actually after you've been working with the children […] it allows your mind to get away from the stress of, not the stress, I don't want to use the word stress…' (06:52).

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3   Time references are included to indicate one aspect of the relation between different cited extracts.

Within this account, we might say, the signifier 'cleaner' organizes a dispersed set of significations. My sense was that alongside a political discourse of pay and exploitation I was getting a slightly confused combination of negative images, of both cleaning and working with children, that were either associated with others (e.g. the lady on the bus) or retracted (e.g. 'I don't want to use the words stress') and set alongside more positive images of Mary's work (e.g. 'it's a very therapeutic job actually'). I was also, normatively, curious and a little surprised by Mary's apparent puzzlement about the status of cleaning. She continued on the same topic, and produced a memory that I found striking:

> I remember a few months after starting this job thirteen years ago, going to the goodbye for a cleaner who'd been working at the school for twelve years. But she had been cleaning for thirty years. And she could hardly breathe. She was sitting there and she could hardly breathe. She was all red in the face, I think she was about, I don't know how old she was, probably coming up for seventy. But she was all red and flushed, and she had breathing problems from all the cleaning she'd been doing. And then she was given this plant, which probably cost about five or ten pounds. I know that's just, she'd been working at other places, she'd only been there twelve years. And I thought, please God do not let me end up like that where I'm just so worn out I can hardly breathe from cleaning. (11:33)

I repeated her final phrase back to her, and she reiterated: 'Don't let me end up working like that so that I'll end up sitting you know with a flushed face and hardly able to breathe because I've killed myself cleaning' (12:20). This image seemed to confirm my initial sense that there were negative and frightening associations to cleaning and work that Mary was trying to keep at a distance; and further elements that emerged as the interview progressed, such as her claim that 'every job I've ever done, I've loved it' (32:27), seemed consistent with this. However, because of the ease with which the negative images surfaced, alongside more mundane comments recognizing the everyday difficulties associated with both cleaning and working with children, this would appear to be a relatively loose or transient fantasy. Perhaps we might say that the dispersed

constellation of meanings in fixed symbolic relation to the signifier 'cleaner' held Mary's subjectivity in suspension between the diverse fantasies of exploitation, mortality and love in relation to work and employment.

I now want to turn to a section of the same interview where I made several interventions trying to elicit associations to 'nun', a word introduced in Mary's response to a prompt, the word 'caring', taken from the group interview: 'You care about those children or I would say it's like a sort of vocation, like wanting to be a nun really' (27:20). In the following section of the interview I made eight interventions to facilitate or follow up associations to this: 1) 'A nun?' (27:21); 2) 'And you made a comparison with a nun' (28:37); 3) 'But what comes into your mind around a nun?' (28:43); 4) 'As a Catholic what do nuns mean for you?' (29:02); 5) 'Did you say 'giving their lives away' or 'throwing their'?' (29:51); 6) 'So there's the vocation that you associate with nuns, but also something quite negative' (30:12); 7) 'So when you say that your work is a bit like being a nun' (30:37); and finally, when Mary commented that nuns 'give up their life for the work that they do' (30:46), 8) 'Are you giving up your life?'[4] (31:35).

In her responses to these prompts, Mary initially gave several definitions of 'vocation', focusing on ideas/feelings of passion and satisfaction. In relation to 'nuns' she was more ambivalent or skeptical: 'to me it means giving up their lives, but according to them it's fantastic' (29:05). She also referred to an article she had read about a community of nuns: 'Well their timetable is get up at four thirty and have breakfast so no, I'm sorry, nuns don't paint a good picture for me' (29:45). In response to my sixth question, about the ambivalence of her associations, she became quite reflective, first agreeing, slightly uncertainly, but then invoking her memory of nuns she had met 'I've not met any

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4 I listened back to this potentially quite challenging intervention, and it seemed to me to be voiced with care – steadily or gently. However, a conceptual framework that foregrounds the relation between language and desire also foregrounds the potential sensitivity of this kind of intervention. There isn't space to fully explore these issues in this paper, but as Miller, Hoggett and Mayo (2008) suggest, they need consideration.

unhappy ones' (30:34). Eventually, after talking about when she had first wanted to be a teacher, she referred back to my interventions and commented: 'It's not sitting comfortably with you is it, me saying vocation? That's the impression, that it's not sitting comfortably' (33:35). I responded: 'What do you think? Why might it not sit comfortably' and she suggested maybe she should have said 'passion' rather than 'vocation' (34:48).

In my repeated interventions in response to Mary's initial introduction of 'nun' I was trying to facilitate freer associations, to get beyond her initial, normative linear definitions. I was also struck by the image evoked in the phrase 'giving up their lives', which resonated, for me, with connotations of mortality in the earlier image of the cleaner retiring with breathing problems. Some of my interventions, then, seem to relate to an initial interpretation I had formulated about the function of these images as a fantasmatic defense against a fear or anxiety associated with work and mortality[5]. It is possible that these interventions are too directive, in that I was listening for confirmatory meanings, rather than listening to the material at the level of the signifier.   I also think I remember wondering if Mary might reflect openly, in the interview, on some of her fears associated with mortality, and it is possible that if the project had continued this is a trajectory that might have emerged in later interviews[6]. In relation to the project aim of exploring fantasmatic structures that support engagement in paid employment, it would have been interesting to see whether it might be possible to trace this kind of shift in symbolic associations. My interventions were, of course, partially formulated by these research objectives, which constitute a significant aspect of the signifying structure of the interview. The question of who or what is speaking, or rather, an understanding that the

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5   See also Miller, Hoggett and Mayo: 'We suggest that a separation of data analysis and production is untenable. Researchers cannot but 'think into the encounter' and this necessarily assumes the form of interpretations' (2008, p. 121).

6   There was one further group and one further individual interview. Analysis of Mary's second interview is only in very preliminary stages.

signifying system speaks through us, is helpful to bear in mind: which discourse or which network of fantasies constitutes the subject in a moment of enunciation?

In relation to the initial aim, within the interview, of interrupting Mary's more linear or normative narrative to facilitate freer associations, it is relevant that my interventions produced additional material, including signifiers that might indicate alternative unconscious structures at play. There is, for example, an interesting repetition of the signifier 'four thirty', first in the image of the cleaner on the bus, and later in Mary's account of the nuns' daily timetable. Why this repetition? What unconscious symbolic relations might 'four thirty' articulate within the signifying structures of Mary's subjectivity? This is an impossible question to answer; however, simply raising it might act to mitigate or interrupt the other interpretive trajectories that have emerged in my account. The obviousness of an interpretation of the function of fantasy as a defense against painful affect might be disrupted by a slightly stricter focus on the signifier.

Conclusion: listening to the materiality of the signifier

Suzanne Hommel's account shows us what it might look like to truly have one's attention at the level of the signifier, and to respond to the materiality of 'Gestapo' as signifier. The English translation says 'Lacan jumped up'. The French further emphasizes the speed and precision of his response 'Lacan s'eleve comme un fleche' (got up like an arrow) [need to check this!]. It is as if his very being is attuned to respond to the signifier *as* signifier. This way of listening, fully attuned to the material aspect of the signifier, is not a necessity or perhaps a possibility, for those of us who are not Lacan. My sense is that we have our own idiosyncratic sensibilities that will orient our responses in relation to particular aspects of an interaction. But at the same time, these are not fixed, so that drawing attention to the productivities of a focus on the signifier, in its full and open material relation to other signifiers, might also productively open up interpretive and reflexive practice in qualitative research.

Finally, I want to note again the surprise that accompanies an encounter with unconscious fixations in our signifying systems. My surprise at Mary's apparent puzzlement at the

way cleaners are paid and perceived has alerted me to both the fixity and the ongoing layering of fantasy in relation to this signifier. One layer relates to my own, or perhaps our shared assumptions about the self evidence of the differential status attributed to different kinds of work. Another layer relates to our initial, intrusive or obscene (c.f. Walsh, 2014) request that our participants tell us what came to their minds in relation to 'pay and remuneration'; and to the way this request set a potentially painful limit on the signifying possibilities for participant subjectivities within the research. The surprising encounter with Mary's associations, in the interview, disturbed or momentarily interrupted this signifying formation, loosening the secure moorings of my subjectivity. Alongside the signifier, then, we might draw on this sense of surprise as a resource for reflexivity and change.

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