

*Jacques
the Sophist*



LACAN,
LOGOS, AND
PSYCHOANALYSIS

Barbara Cassin

TRANSLATED BY MICHAEL SYROTINSKI

JACQUES THE SOPHIST

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BARBARA CASSIN

*Translated and with notes
by Michael Syrotinski*

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York 2020

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This book was first published in French as *Jacques le Sophiste: Lacan, logos et psychanalyse*, by Barbara Cassin © EPEL, 2012. Published by arrangement with Agence littéraire Astier-Pécher. All rights reserved.

Cet ouvrage a bénéficié du soutien des Programmes d'aide à la publication de l'Institut Français.

This work, published as part of a program of aid for publication, received support from the Institut Français.

Ouvrage publié avec le concours du Ministère français chargé de la Culture—Centre National du Livre.

This work has been published with the assistance of the French Ministry of Culture—National Center for the Book.

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Visit us online at www.fordhampress.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available online at <https://catalog.loc.gov>.

Printed in the United States of America

2 2 2 1 2 0 5 4 3 2 1

First edition

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I don't know how to approach, why not say it, the truth—
No more than woman. I have said that the one and
the other are the same thing, at least to man.

—Jacques Lacan, *Encore*

Thirty-six buttocks make eighteen asses.

—Jeanne Bréchon, a.k.a. Tomère

PROLOGUE

“How Kind of You to Recognize Me”

—Hello, is this Lacan?

—Certainly not.

Do you remember what Lacan said about *agalma* in the “Proposition of the 9 October 1967”?

“As in all these particular cases that make up the miracle of the Greeks, this one presents us with only a closed Pandora’s box. Open, it is psychoanalysis, which Alcibiades had no need of.”¹

As a prologue of sorts, I would like to present a closed Pandora’s box, ancient Greece as it finds its way to the philologist philosophers, those limping centaurs à la Nietzsche. This Greece, or rather its texts, and above all its pre-Socratic texts, including the texts of the sophists, finds its way to us in fragments via what is called “doxography,” and it will be up to the reader to open it, even if locks are missing even more than keys.

This question of the relationship between the transmission of antiquity, via its schools and texts, and the transmission of psychoanalysis was once asked of me by a now departed Argentinian friend, Ezequiel de Olaso, who was very close to Borges. I answered him first of all with an anecdote—all doxography, as we will see, works by anecdote. I narrated the circumstances by which Lacan—it must have been around 1975—asked me to talk to him about doxography.

Gloria calls me one Sunday morning in the country. Out of breath, I dismount from my horse and run to the telephone (at the time we had more than twenty horses in our gamekeeper's house and were responsible for working them professionally). Gloria, the secretary in general of the chief medical officer in general—a kind of universal analogous to that of the apples Chirac would eat, in the epigraph to Alain de Libera's *La querelle des universaux*: "I like apples in general."² As it happened, my uncle was also a chief medical officer and was, moreover, an intern at the same time and with Lacan (the exasperated kitchen staff, it is said—*phésin*—had given Lacan a well-cooked placenta in sauce to eat).

"Stay on the line, please. The doctor would like to speak with you."

"Hello," said the doctor, and I replied, "Hi! How are you?"

"How kind of you to recognize me. Jacques Lacan."

It is Jacques Lacan, whom I have never met, and not Jacques Caroli. Just to give a sense of the "misfit" of the start of my relationship to Lacan and of how doxography and psychoanalysis first brushed against one another.

I supposed that some analysand had spoken to him about me on a couch (worse than a pillow) and of the effect produced when I gave night lessons to those analysts supposed to know, who wanted to learn, truly mad with the desire to know, philo-sophers as well as sopho-philes, lovers of knowledge and connoisseurs of love. At the time we were reading not only Plato's *Phaedrus* but everything before Plato that even Lacan, like Freud, did not have to hand; starting with Hesiod's *Theogony*, following which any Oedipus acquired a rawer force, as it deals with everything from incest to emasculation of a son by the father, with Gaia the Earth sheltering her children in her entrails so that Ouranos the Sky would not devour them, and Cronus their son castrating his father, whose sperm mixed with the sea made Aphrodite, before his son Zeus then castrated him.

So it was around the time Lacan was tying and untying his Borromean knots on his desk, a very particular time, late in his life, when he was not thinking about starting a school, which he had done long ago, but rather what to do with his school, which he never stopped doing until its dissolution and beyond.

I would go along to the rue de Lille, regularly, punctually, in the morning more or less every two weeks for quite a few months (if I have forgotten dates and times, I do remember the clothes I bought to go and meet him).

One morning, sitting at his desk with his back to me, and fiddling with his knots, he says to me: "Go see Gloria."

My eyes staring at his back, I reply: "You're going to pay me, aren't you?"

He turns around, unreadable, his opaque or sore eyes behind the lenses of his glasses, and he says: “You are Stéphanie Gilot, aren’t you?”

I go to see Gloria, and no one pays anyone a thing.

Did I in fact say or did I only think loudly enough that it could not not be heard: Things have come full circle, it is over because it ends as it began, mistakenly identifying someone. How nice of you to recognize me, Jacques Lacan/You are Stéphanie Gilot, aren’t you? A good-humored double misprision, which puts me in my place from the start and leaves me the opportunity and responsibility to bring it to a close. It lightens everything. The outbound mistake opened up the unforeseeable possibility of meeting him and being propelled into the position of immediately dismissed master, after a year of mounting anxiety, as one section of my head continuously sharpened and turned toward him what I was able to say with my not-yet thirty-year-old philology-philosophy, all the more tightly wound because of its fragility; the return mistake produced the splat of an ending with all the panache of *kairos*. It was true, then, that he did not listen, that he waited to hear, that he heard nothing of the texts I had chosen or of my demonstrations and hypotheses. Or worse.³ What a strange maniac I must have been in the Greek original.

In writing this today, I do in fact think:

1. That it was not without determining my relationship to psychoanalysis. No need to go see an analyst, the delightful everyday misprisions are pretty effective.⁴
2. That it was not without determining my relationship to Hellenic studies. The exposition of doctrines and findings (*trouvailles*), of knowledge, is—too bad for *peers*⁵ and detractors—first and foremost a discourse.

Lacan was curious to learn, then, from the first great transmissions how, through his school, he could get himself and psychoanalysis out [*faire passer*]. I hardly need to point out that “*faire passer*” in French also means to abort—to abort a child. As if the series of theoretical and practical mechanisms he had put in place, all of his *mêkbanai* (machinations, machines, and *machins*, or contraptions), the *Écrits*, the seminars, the mathemes, the school, the “pass,” the *cartels*, the *cardos*, were still not enough.⁶ He was looking for a Pandora’s box like doxography. Allow me to recall the conclusion to the Congress on Transmission in June 1979.

My proposition, the one which begins the process of what is known as *la passe* (passing on), whereby I trust in something one might call

transmission, if such a transmission of psychoanalysis were possible. I have now come round to thinking that psychoanalysis is not transmissible. It is quite wearisome that every psychoanalyst is forced—and it is right that he or she is forced—to reinvent psychoanalysis.

So this was the moment at which Lacan needed someone to talk to him about doxography.

What follows is *grosso modo* what I told him and which, no doubt justifiably, put him to sleep. This is why you can, if you prefer, go directly to Chapter 2.

Doxography and Psychoanalysis,
or Relegating Truth to the Lowly
Status It Deserves

This analytic thing will not be mathematical

—JACQUES LACAN, *Encore*

Writing Opinion Down

The first thing to give Lacan pause for thought was the word *doxography*. The word, I dare not say the signifier, but the word in any case.

Doxography. It is easy to see how it is formed. *Graphy* is inscribing or putting down in writing; doxography is a matter of going from the oral to the written, from one modality of transmission to another, from one modality of memory to another. Going, more precisely, from enthusiasm to a kind of scratching.

“Enthusiasm” is oral for the Greeks, it is the way in which a god “puts him or herself in,” into us, or transmits himself or herself. One of Plato’s dialogues, the *Ion*, is wholly intended to show how the oral is a chain of presences: “Sing, O Goddess, Achilles’ anger,” from the muse to the poet, from the poet to the rhapsode, and from the rhapsode to the listener. This is also true of thought: we can, with a quotation, render this perceptible in the poem of origin, the *Poem* of Parmenides. At the start of the poem, “The goddess . . . welcomed me warmly, took my hand in her right hand, began

to speak and said to me: ‘young man, etc.’”¹ This is the guarantee of the spoken word and of oral transmission.

The model for written transmission is not the *Ion* but *Phaedrus*, which was then retransmitted by Derrida, for whom writing is thereafter left to its own devices. One quotation, this time from Lacan, to give an idea of the new status of enthusiasm when we pass on to this scratching that is graphy. It is from the introduction to the Rome discourse in the *Écrits*: “Including a whiff of enthusiasm in a written text utterly ensures that it will become dated, in the regrettable sense of the term.”²

This can be juxtaposed to the letter as the *caput mortuum* of the signifier; “The essence [of “The Purloined Letter”] is that the letter was able to have its effects on the inside—on the tale’s actors, including the narrator—just as much as on the outside—*without anyone ever having to worry about what it meant. This is the usual fate of everything that is written.*”³

I have italicized, so as to emphasize in the same gesture that with doxo-graphy, as we will see, no one has in fact been concerned with what it meant.

So that explains *graphy*. *Doxa* now, since doxography is the graphy of *doxai*, “the writing down of opinions.” With *doxa* we are dealing with a good old Greek term, *kalos kagathos* like a Homeric hero, and these fine old Greek terms are characterized by their ambivalence. Freud, as read by Benveniste, was right about the opposite meanings of primitive words: It is not a question of contradictions or of contrary meanings but of genuine ambivalence. We will have to resemanticize or actualize “semblance” [*semblant*] for the word not to pull to one side alone.

The first meaning of *doxa* is expectation, or what one expects. “*Dokei mei*” means “It seems to me,” and the first usages in Homer, or in Pindar, are para-doxical usages, in the strict sense of the term, where it is a matter of what appears *apo doxês*, “against all expectation.” *Doxa* belongs to the family *dekomai/dekbomai*, which means “to receive,” “to welcome,” and *doxazô* means “to imagine,” “to think”—whence the Latin *docere*, “to admit,” “to teach.” In what sense, then, is *doxa* an ambivalent term? To characterize it quickly, we can turn to the German, which is, I believe, most faithful to its full range of meaning, even if it is not enough to summarize these. The ambivalence varies depending on whether it is *Schein* or *Erscheinung*, and each of these two terms is to be understood both *a parte rei* (objectively) and *a parte subjecti* (subjectively). The objective aspect of *Schein* constitutes its “deceptive appearance” or “pretense”; its subjective aspect is the idea of “conjecture,” “hallucination,” “error”—“opinion” as something unreliable. *Erscheinung*, considered in its relation to an object,

suggests a “beautiful appearance,” the force or plenitude of “manifestation,” and when this object is a person, we celebrate his or her “good reputation,” “glory,” and even “splendor” (*doxa* is the term used in the translation of the Bible to refer to the glory of God). Assuming that we are able to think *Erscheinung* “subjectively,” it would then be a question of a “true opinion,” of a “received opinion,” in other words, the opinion of those of whom one has a good opinion, the opinion of respectable people (*doxa* belongs to the same family as the Latin *decet*, “it is right and fitting,” which give us the French word *décent* [decent]). This is the full sense of the term, and the Greeks would play constantly on this breadth of meaning. A fragment from Heraclitus, fragment 28, with its differing interpretations, brings out best this resplendent value of things and people: “Dokeontôn ho dokimôtatos gignôskei phulassein” (the best known person decides which things are recognized, and he holds on to these [Bollack]/the person who is beautiful in appearance understands and conserves the things that are deceptive [Dumont]).⁴

So the meaning of *doxa* has to be negotiated each time relative to the meaning of *alêtheia*, or opinion versus truth, ever since Parmenides and the last lines of the fragment I have just mentioned, where the Goddess opposes “the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true persuasion” to the “untroubled heart of the truth that persuades well”—but then immediately reframes in more positive terms the *dokounta*, or appearances/apparitions, and the way in which “in their appearing [*dokimôs*],” they should “completely traverse all things” (I am paraphrasing the untranslatable lines 29–32 of fragment I).⁵

It is not wrong to say that all Greek philosophy negotiates between these two concepts and modulates the different meanings of *doxa*. One of the most striking effects of sophistry is thus to make *doxa* and *alêtheia* indissociable, in opposition to Parmenides. One of the extant transmitted fragments of *Gorgias* goes something like: “Being is invisible [*aphanes*] if it does not appear [*dokein*], and appearance is weak [*asthenes*] if it does not attain Being.”⁶

It is basically this whole negotiation between *alêtheia* and *doxa* that culminates in Nietzsche’s sentence in *The Twilight of the Idols*, “How the True World Finally Became a Fable—The History of an Error”: “The true world is gone: which world is left? The illusory one, perhaps? . . . But no! *We got rid of the illusory world along with the true one!*”⁷

Against the backdrop of the history of Western philosophy, as we say, moving ineluctably from the reversal of Platonism to the establishment of phenomenology, it is understandable that the word *doxography* might have sounded weighty to Lacan’s ears and worthy of interest.

Too Much/Not Enough Meaning

After the word, the thing: What is doxography?

Doxography is how a good deal of Greek philosophy reached us, practically all pre-Socratic philosophy, and a lot of Epicurean and Stoic philosophy, for example. In its primary sense, it is everything that was not transmitted directly but from bits of compiled or embedded works, such that we cannot thereafter call them completely lost. One can well imagine how Lacan, interested in Heidegger and trying to understand what was going on in a philosophy that proposes an origin, must have stopped short at the very thing through which we know this alleged origin.

A lot of philosophy and all pre-Socratic philosophy. Doxography is thus something of the utmost importance, and yet it is also something radically unreliable. In doxography it is impossible, for reasons that are both contingent and structural, to separate out fact and fiction. In other words, nothing without doxography, but nothing with it, where nothing means: not something one could hold on to. With doxography we are plunged right into a Nietzschean modernity, since it is clear that there are no facts but only interpretations and interpretations of interpretations. Nietzsche was moreover exactly contemporaneous with the moment when in German philology the object of study called doxography was first constituted, and he himself was one of the greatest commentators of Diogenes Laërtius, the doxographer par excellence.

With doxography, the question of transmission is formulated as a question of hermeneutics, of meaning rather than of truth, and meaning oscillates endlessly between not enough and too much. To explain this more clearly, I will use two bits of texts that are not doxographic texts but that apply perfectly to doxography. The first is from Flaubert, in *Bouvard and Pécuchet*:

They copy out at random everything [the papers] they find—tobacco cornets, old newspapers, posters, book with torn pages, etc.—(pieces that are both genuine and pastiches in every idiot-genre).

They then feel the need to classify, [they] make antithetical tables, and [draw] parallels, such as “kings’ crimes and people’s crimes”—benefits of religion, crimes of religion—The beauty of history, etc. But sometimes they are embarrassed at putting something in its proper place (and they have) moments of conscience.—Come now! No thinking! Let us simply copy! The frame [of the page] has to be filled in—equality of all, good and evil—of good [farce] and of evil [sublime]—of

Good and Evil—the insignificant and the sublime [characteristic]
Exaltation of statistics—there are only Facts—phenomena.

Final and eternal joy . . . ends with the sight of the two gentlemen leaning over their desks and copying.⁸

There we have doxography in one sense. It is up to you to find the meaning. In any case, assuming there is a meaning, it is not the doxographer who possesses it—“Come now! No thinking! Let us simply copy!”—and thank goodness, since the less copyists know, the less they correct.

But here is doxography in another sense, paralyzed by too much meaning, to judge from Charles Nodier’s biographies and exaggerated eponymies:

I hate those unnatural fictions in which the name of the main character tells you in advance the subject and the point of the story, with no consideration for the illusion which constitutes its charm.

And what interest do you expect me to show in the death of a Hippolytus, in the misfortunes of Oedipus, and in the battles fought by Diomedes, when I am forewarned that the first will die as a victim of his horses’ fury, that the swollen feet of the second will have been pierced and bound at a young age by a bloody belt, and that the third is nominally predestined to triumph over the gods themselves?

. . . I have no objection to Nicias since it appears that it is because of his name that he took over command of the war in Sicily.

But . . . what judicious critic would be credulous enough to adopt the individuality of a concise, almost enigmatic writer, whose art is to hide many ideas within few words, and who would be named Tacitus?

. . . The inventions of studious lazybones who wisely abandon the boredom of their jobs by composing Latin classical verse for ignorant future readers.⁹

So what exactly is this paradoxical object called doxography made up of? Doxography is basically a shambles, which is its first and perhaps best definition. It is nothing but bits and pieces, fragments, quotations, parts of works enclosed within a larger, foreign whole: *placita*, or selected extracts. Doxographic material is infinitely varied and includes dictionaries—such as the *Souda*, a dictionary that for a long time was mistakenly attributed to a man named Suidas—and other lexicons, rhetorical manuals, or stylistic treatises. They are all rich in examples, ranging from summaries and extended or critical commentaries, like those by Simplicius, which are interlaced with quotations and comparison, to biographies, those lives full of witticisms, anecdotes, and paraphrastic compilations. The common

denominator of this whole shambles is that foreign bodies are inserted as examples into a whole with a particular orientation, the direction or meaning of which is not self-evident.

The founding fathers of doxography are without a doubt Plato and Aristotle. It is clear that for Plato and Aristotle, what they say about the authors of the past is appropriated to other ends and related to their own philosophies. For example, in the *Sophist*, Plato is talking about the Ionian and Sicilian Muses and constructs the first doxography according to the model: “One says that . . . , the other says that . . . , but where we are, the Eleatic school descended from Xenophanes . . . says that. . . .”¹⁰ He uses these disparities to show that Being, although we know all about it, is the most aporetic of genres.

Aristotle is the second father of doxography, or the father of that which Plato is said to have been the genitor. He restructures all the opinions of his predecessors and begins his works with a systematic aporetic presentation in which he explores, little by little, one by one as in the opening to his *Physics*, all of the divergences and difficulties (Is there one or are there several principles? Are they thought as immobile or in motion?). He uses them as a foil to present his own ideas of what is right and proper and to support the Aristotelian demonstration of plurality in motion.

Plato and Aristotle in this way embed the opinions of others within their own works. Analogously, but on an entirely different scale, the end of the doxographic movement sees the reign of one philosophical work that inserts, through a kind of internal necessity, the largest number of these bits and pieces: that of Sextus Empiricus, the skeptic. For a skeptic has to take everything as grist to the mill to demonstrate *isostheneia*, that is, the equal force of opinions—this is no more important than that, no more in this way than in any other way, *ouden mallon*—in order to conclude in the suspension of judgment, and a certain philosophical truth about doxography is indeed embraced within skepticism.

A shambles, then, but in one way only, since doxography is also an entirely separate genre. In fact, there are people who call themselves, and are called, doxographers. One does not call Plato a doxographer, any more than Aristotle or Sextus Empiricus, even if there are elements of doxography in their works. There are, however, a certain number of authors who are traditionally referred to as doxographers—I am suspicious, and you will immediately understand why.

Doxographers are those who wanted, in principle, to produce a work of doxography, and that is all, not to philosophize in their own name but to collect, organize, and transmit information about philosophy. The problem

then, obviously, is how to distinguish between doxography as a source, as a catalog, as objective information, and doxography as a kind of work, as a means of informing information, as deformation. How can we understand the interest that lies behind the classification and selection, and how can we detect the organizing principle of a doxographic work?

The founder of doxography as a genre is said—one says, *phêsin*, is the doxographic verb par excellence—to be Theophrastus, who succeeded Aristotle as the head of the Lyceum, which is why it is generally assumed that the (de)formation of information is Aristotelian in nature. But this sentence is all the more doxographical in that the work of Theophrastus, which is supposed to constitute the first work of doxography, the *Phusikôn doxai*, or *Physical Opinions* (or opinions of the “naturalists” or of “philosophies of nature”), was lost. How paradigmatic a loss is that! Why? Because doxography, as an entirely separate genre, is above all a philological artifact.

Origin as Montage

Doxography, insofar as we might consider it an erudite trend, can in fact be summed up in the name of one author, Hermann Diels, and in one book, the *Doxographi Graeci*, published in Berlin in 1879 (Figure 1).

Yes, it is Greek. But it matters little for now whether one reads it or not, since the interest of this page is its structure: two parallel columns and a name above each column, Plutarch and Stobaeus.

Doxography is visibly constituted as a juxtaposition of several texts, from which one tries to draw out the resemblances. One quick remark: I said “Plutarch,” but it goes on, since it is not in fact Plutarch but a “Pseudo-Plutarch”; we do not know who this is or when he was writing.¹¹ As for the other column, it was indeed Stobaeus (who lived in the fourth century AD), but this time it is the title of the chapter of the *Eglogae physicae* that is in brackets: “<Peri arkhôn>” (On the principles), since it was added to match the title we have of the author we do not have (“Peri arkhôn ti eisin,” On the principles, as they are).

The two columns are joined at the top of each page by a brace, above which is the mention of a title and a name: *Aetii Placita*. The brace is there to signify that the resemblances between Plutarch and Stobaeus allow us to reconstitute, in theory if not in fact, a source text by Aetius, which they would both have read and plagiarized, two centuries apart. The point of convergence between Plutarch and Stobaeus, or what remains of Aetius, only appears to all intents and purposes as the space between two parallel

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AETHI PLAC. I 3 1

PLUTARCHI EPIT. I 3

STOBAEI ECL. I 10 12

σις. ἀμαρτάνει οὖν ὁ Θαλῆς στοιχεῖον
καὶ ἀρχὴν λέγων τὸ ὕδωρ.

γ. Περὶ ἀρχῶν τί εἰσιν.

E XIV 14 1

5 Θαλῆς ὁ Μιλήσιος ἀρχὴν τῶν ὄν-
των ἀπεφήνατο τὸ ὕδωρ. [δοκεῖ δὲ ὁ
ἀνὴρ οὗτος ἄρξαι τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ
ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἡ Ἰωνικὴ αἵρεσις προσηγο-
ρευθῆναι· ἐγένοντο γὰρ πλείεσται διαδοχαί
10 φιλοσοφίας. φιλοσοφῆσας δὲ ἐν Αἰ-
γύπτῳ ἦλθεν εἰς Μίλητον πρεσβύτερος.]
ἐξ ὕδατος γὰρ φησι πάντα εἶναι καὶ
εἰς ὕδωρ πάντα ἀναλύεσθαι. στοχάζε-
ται δὲ ἐκ τούτου πρῶτον, ὅτι πάντων
15 τῶν ζώων ἡ γονὴ ἀρχὴ ἐστὶν ὑγρὰ
οὐσα· οὕτως εἰκὸς καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐξ
ὕδατος τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔχειν. δεύτερον, ὅτι
πάντα τὰ φυτὰ ὑγρῶν τρέφεται καὶ
καρποφορεῖ, ἀμοιροῦντα δὲ ξηραίνεται.
20 τρίτον, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ πῦρ τὸ τοῦ ἡλίου
καὶ τῶν ἀστρῶν ταῖς τῶν ὑδάτων ἀνα-
θυμιάσεται τρέφεται καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ κόσμος.

1 ὁ (A)C: om. B || 2 τὸ αὐτὸ Budaeus
probante Xylandro et Wyttenbachio cf. Prol.
p. 57. 180 || 3 περὶ ἀρχῶν AB: περὶ τῶν ἀρ-
χῶν C et Psell. de omnif. d. c. 60 || τί εἰσιν
om. C || 5 Μιλήσιος εἰς τῶν ἐπτά σοφῶν E cf.
Prol. p. 8 || 6 εἶναι ante τὸ inserit E cf. Iust.
|| Plutarchi emblemata δοκεῖ — πρεσβύτερος notavi
Prol. p. 61 || 10 φιλοσοφίας om. E: τῆς addit
ante φιλοσοφίας C || 11 πρεσβύτερος ante ἡλ-
θεν E || 12 ἐξ ὕδατος γὰρ Iustin. cf. [Plut.]
Strom. 1: ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ E: δεξ ἐξ ὕδατος (A)BC
— de fonte Aethi cf. Prol. p. 179. 220 || 14 ἐκ
om. B || πρῶτου E || 15 τῶν ζώων (A)C: om.
B: τῶν om. E || 16 οὐσα ABC Iustin:
οὐσα E [ενθεῖ] || 17 ὅτι om. E || 18 τε καὶ
E || 20 τρίτον δὲ ὅτι E || τὸ τοῦ ἡλίου EB: τὸ
om. AC || 21 καὶ τῶν E: καὶ τὸ τῶν (A)BC

TESTIMONIA PLUTARCHI

3 1 [Iustin.] coh. ad gent. 3 Θαλῆς
μὲν γὰρ ὁ Μιλήσιος ὁ πρῶτος τῆς φυσικῆς
φιλοσοφίας ἄρξας ἀρχὴν εἶναι τῶν ὄντων
ἀπάντων τὸ ὕδωρ ἀπεφήνατο. ἐξ ὕδατος γὰρ
φησι τὰ πάντα εἶναι καὶ εἰς ὕδωρ τὰ πάντα

(Περὶ ἀρχῶν.)

5 Θαλῆς ὁ Μιλήσιος ἀρχὴν τῶν ὄν-
των ἀπεφήνατο τὸ ὕδωρ, ἐξ ὕδατος
γὰρ φησι πάντα εἶναι καὶ εἰς ὕδωρ
πάντα ἀναλύεσθαι.

στοχάζεται δὲ πρῶτον ἐκ τούτου,
ὅτι πάντων τῶν ζώων ἡ γονὴ ἀρχὴ
ἐστὶν ὑγρὰ οὐσα. οὕτως εἰκὸς καὶ
τὰ πάντα ἐξ ὑγροῦ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔχειν.
δεύτερον, (ὅτι) πάντα φυτὰ ὑγρῶν τρέ-
10 φεται καὶ καρποφορεῖ, ἀμοιροῦντα δὲ
ξηραίνεται. τρίτον, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ
πῦρ τὸ τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ τῶν ἀστρῶν
ταῖς τῶν ὑδάτων ἀναθυμιάσεται τρέ-
φεται καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ κόσμος.

1 titulum excepsi ex pleniore c. 10 περὶ
ἀρχῶν καὶ στοιχείων καὶ τοῦ παντός.

6 δὲ πρῶτον Iacobs: δ' ἀεὶ [corruptum
olim ex δὲ ᾱ] A

8 οὐσα A casu consentiens in p̄endo cum
Eusebii codd.

10 ὅτι om. A [ut Euseb.]: add. Heeren
14 ὑδάτων C: θυμιαμάτων F

columns, and a name outside the text, since no one in fact knows who Aetius was. We have lost his text, and what is more, we only find one subsequent mention of his name, by Theodoret.¹² Aetius is unknown, little more than a hypothesis put forward by Diels. But can you hear what Aetius means? “Aetius,” from *aitia*, the “cause”! It is impossible not to hear Charles Nodier sniggering away. No one believes in a writer who is called Tacitus and who says nothing. Would *you* believe in a writer called Aetius who is the cause of several texts and the main source of our pre-Socratics? As for the text itself of these *Placita*, no one has it, and only a series of operations that might be carried out by a surgeon, a detective, and a moralist enable us to talk about it: Diels imagines its form after having put together the dislocated and poorly fitting parts so as to reduce them to an orderly schema, after having factored in the laziness of the copyists, and after having thwarted the ultimately monotonous frauds and ruses of the compilers.

But the problem of sources is desperately unstoppable, and Diels continues upstream. These *Placita*, which are dated from the first century AD, are merely the vestiges of a text that is even more lost once we take into account new concordances: the *Vetusta Placita*, written in the first century BC, during the time of Posidonius and the Middle Stoa, about which all we can really say is that they happened. It still remains for him to locate the source of the *Vetusta Placita*, which involves, by Diels’s own admission, being something of a water dowser and a sorcerer—a kind of “sourcery.”¹³ So the philologist manages to go back to Theophrastus, the one he so charmingly calls “first lips,” and the text that is the origin of doxography as a genre, these *Physical Opinions*, which, inspired by his divine master and unable to continue thinking, Theophrastus supposedly stored away for the benefit of future generations. An original text that is obviously lost, and modeled by Diels, using the method he learned from his teacher Usener in spite of the diversity of titles transmitted, into an ultimately unique work.¹⁴

Theophrastus is indeed the first doxographical writer, but he is still not the end of Diels’s trajectory, since doxography is not the end of doxography for Diels. The *Doxographi Graeci* of 1879 are the means or the tools for a collection that is even closer to the origin, the *Fragments of the Presocratics*, published by Diels in 1905. This is still today our pre-Socratic bible, and later critical reflections, beginning with that of Kranz, are only carried out in its margins. The two reconstructions fit together very precisely: From the page in Figure 1, for example, which is a page comparing passages concerning the opinions of Thales, over and above the reconstitution of the Theophrastean sentence and philosophical system, we can extract what Thales must have said, what he really said. The *Fragments of*

the Presocratics will then store these reconstitutions in the chapter “Thales,” where we can find the A fragments, referring to testimonies, and B fragments, what Thales literally said: the exact verified quotations of the great pre-Socratic himself.

This for us is the architecture of pre-Socratic philosophy and is even the model for how we construct our knowledge of all the lost works, that is to say, the works that have been found.

We have to understand that doxography works from one loss to another. It is important to lose everything that differs in order to establish an identity, even if it shrinks away to nothing. This is how the “sourcery” works, this sorcery of the diviner of sources, by constructing a divinatory chain: Plutarch/Stobaeus: < Aetius: “*Vetusta Placita*: ‘Theophrastus.’” > All we have are Plutarch and Stobaeus, who borrowed from Aetius, who borrowed from the *Vetusta Placita*, which were possibly inspired by Theophrastus, and Theophrastus quoted from Thales. It is as if every appearance of a new link in the chain immediately signaled the loss of the previous one.

We also have to understand, and this is obviously connected, that the ideal for Diels, the ideal of the doxography that he constructed, was the copyist: The model is always one of exact repetition. For Diels the philologist, doxography is a repetition of information, the value of which is measured, exactly as is the case with a manuscript, according to how close it is to the origin and how neutral or self-effacing the intermediaries are.

Borges was right when he said that the modern form of the fantastic is erudition.

Literal Exactness

The end of ends is thus the extraction of quotations. Yet the worst part of it is that the quotation cannot be attributed. What, then, do we do about quotation marks? Quotation marks, or guillemets in French, do not exist in Greek, certainly because they had no printer called Guillaume (whose name is eponymous with guillemets) to insert them, but more radically, because of ancient customs concerning quotation. A quotation is legally an appropriation, and the quoted sentence—if we can still call it that—can be modified, cut, and sutured however one likes as long as its syntax, and even its meaning, match the context that imposes its Leonine law. All Greek literature is palimpsestic, every text is a text of texts, starting with the originary text advocated by Heidegger, Parmenides’s *Poem*, which, when describing the sphere of Being, borrows the same words Homer uses in the *Odyssey* to describe Ulysses tied to his mast as he sails past the

Sirens along the shore.¹⁵ “The hand and its index finger must be somewhere. Often a single particle is a hidden indication of a quotation. But of course one must first have put oneself in the same sphere as the person discoursing.”¹⁶ Schleiermacher emphasizes the extent to which a quotation is a matter not of positivist philology but of art history.

Diels chooses to place quotation marks nominatim, that is, wherever the name appears.¹⁷ If we think about it, however, the only local certainty in the texts is the other way around: Wherever the name appears, quotation marks have no place. Nominatim: When we read “Theophrastus says that . . . ,” “as it seems to Theophrastus” in the *Doxographi Graeci* or “Thales asserts that” in the *Fragments of the Presocratics*, we know that these words are said by neither Theophrastus nor Thales, unless they could write like Cesar from time to time. In short, it is Diels who decides. The difference in his two works between the more compact characters and the looser characters has implications for its history as well as the entire history of philosophy. The more compact characters are the errors, the speculative and belated interpretations, which are so many commentaries on the quotations. The sudden appearances of looser characters, however, are the equivalent of quotation marks and set apart the quotations. The Diels of the *Doxographi* freely admits this: Every admirable passage (“quanta est rerum gravitas, ordinis concinnitas, indicia sagacitas”) straightaway has a strong whiff of Theophrastus about it (“nec fieri potest quin illico Theophrasti quasi quondam saporem sentias”).¹⁸ So the only criterion of origin is excellence, the only criterion of excellence is the judgment of Diels, and the judgment of Diels is who knows? It is many things in sum.

Doxography is thus the philological object that corresponds to the ideal of an integral transmission by pure repetition. The ideal doxographer is indistinguishable from the ideal copyist, who himself is never anything more than a perfect printer, whose only machine is an adequate hand. In return, the philosopher only needs to be a simple reader and not even short-sighted or ruminant, as Nietzsche called for. A change of hand produces a copy, and a doxographic borrowing produces a quotation, but in the actual transmission the letter is faulty, and the quotation is inexact, even invalid. Doxography as Diels constructs it is an illusion, a fiction. Such is the price to pay for wanting to appropriate the origin, Theophrastus or Thales, those first lips.

In Diels's defense, it has to be recognized that it is doxography itself that leads to this type of misapprehension. It is indeed true that it presents itself as a collection, a treasure trove where everything is consigned and preserved for posterity. This can be seen particularly in the greatest

doxographic monument preserved that is Diogenes Laërtius. To make things clear, we might say that doxography has two main types: the one reconstructed by Diels that refers to Theophrastus, and is primarily concerned with the sayings, theses and systems, and the “opinions” that provide most of the material for the B fragments; and the biographical tendency, which deals first and foremost with “lives” and provides most of the more authorized material for the A fragments or testimonies (while of course also filtering out opinions), and of which Diogenes Laërtius is the most brilliant example.

Just as we learn from Diels what a quotation is, or rather what it is not, we learn from Diogenes Laërtius what a fact is, a doxographic fact: Like a quotation, it is a meaningful fiction and very precisely the reification of a meaning.

Diogenes Laërtius is often reproached for not thinking, for dwelling on anecdotes and witty sayings. The French editor and translator of Diogenes Laërtius, Robert Genaille—his translation was fortunately replaced about ten years ago by a new edition—thus allowed himself to present the work as follows:

[The work of Diogenes Laërtius presents] a major and consistent flaw. For each biography there is not an equal proportion between the study of the life, the study of the ideas, and the noting down of witty sayings. . . . Space is given predominantly to anecdotes, and they make up, along with witty sayings, the main part of the biography of the Seven Sages, and we cannot criticize him for this, since everything we know about them is from legends. But they also play an important role in the study of the Cyrenaics, the Cynics and the Sceptics, all philosophers whose ideas might be of greater interest to us.¹⁹

Alongside which Lacan writes: “Anecdote, here as elsewhere, dissimulates structure.”²⁰ We clearly need to understand Diogenes Laërtius in the manner of Lacan!

Let us take the life of Thales as an example. Thales is the one whose citations Diels provided us with on the page reproduced earlier. Now his life, by Diogenes Laërtius. There is not the slightest touch of anecdote, which we have to take as a kind of dream narrative, that is not a meaningful fiction. It appears that Thales is no less than the speaking subject of “water.” “He supposed that the principle of everything was water.”²¹ In view of this, homage is paid to Thales for everything that is to be found in water, for example, a trivet that was pulled out of the nets of Milesian fishermen and passed from hand to hand until it reached its only possible

addressee. Everyone knows the story of Thales who goes outside to look at the stars and falls into a hole, the famous “well” in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, while the Thracian servant woman, fists on hips, looks down from above in fits of laughter upon the philosopher who is incapable of knowing where to put his feet. What is less well-known is how he takes his revenge: His revenge is the invention of capitalism. Thanks to his knowledge of astronomy he predicts that the weather will be very dry and the olive crop will be abundant. So in the off-season he monopolizes all of the olives presses and then rents them out when the time comes for whatever price he wants. So he invents both monopoly and chrematistics and proves, says Aristotle, “that it is easy for philosophers to become rich when they want to, but that is not the object of their zeal.”²² He made his money from meteorology and hygrometry.

And do people know how Thales died? He died of weakness watching gymnastics because he was too hot and thirsty. From this I conclude that Thales is the doxographic ripple on the surface of the water. We could either say that it is a pure proper name or that it becomes a common noun, as “Homer” already was, having lost the virtue of being identified—or identifying a single person—with certainty. It is at once normal and remarkable that all of the doxographies, all of the lives that Diogenes Laërtius made up, should end with a list of homonyms. Just imagine Élisabeth Roudinesco’s life of Lacan ending with a list of homonyms; if it did, it would have been just as good as a doxographic *bios*.

This is what an anecdote is, then. The same is true of every reproach made by our good old preface-writer: lacking a critical mind, not looking for where the truth lies, being content with unscrupulously juxtaposing heterogeneous and contradictory traditions—So-and-so says that Xenophanes is the son of So-and-so, but according to So-and-so he is the son of So-and-so, born before Parmenides, after Parmenides, et cetera. For each time it all involves an interpretation of filiation, for example, a certain doctrinal relationship to Eleatism. The fact of the date of birth is not a fact but what is left over from a complex operation: the reification of a meaning. This should not be treated chronologically, historically, or positivistically but understood as a fiction, an interpretation, even an interpretation of an interpretation, and to be interpreted as such. So the different versions of the same life and the same doctrine, with the same text, as well as from one text to another, are only avatars inherent to a certain loss or weakening of information, or alternatively lapses of attention, to the extent that avatars and lapses of attention are taken for what they are—namely, symptoms. And there is no doubt that every single line in all of doxography could be read through this lens.

To conclude on doxography and open onto Lacan, the most accurate definition of doxography seems to me that of a process of generalized quotation. The doxographic verb par excellence, as I have already mentioned, is *phêsin*, “he says,” “it is said that,” “So-and-so says that . . .,” or “one says.” Now the root of the verb *phanai* is **bha-*, which refers, as Benveniste says, “specifically to the spoken word independently of the person uttering it, and not according to what it means, but insofar as it exists.”²³ *Phanai*, unlike *legein*, for example, which means “to mean,” erases the speaking subject and any signifying intention, to leave behind nothing but the “repetition of a formula.” It is the verb that allows the spoken word to be written, by effacing at the very least a double utterance, that of the person composing the doxography and that of the person doxographed—or of the chain of doxographers—behind the literal identity of what is said. What is said is recovered in writing through that “orphaned writing” described by Phaedrus; orphaned in the sense that it comes out of an evanescent filiation, with no surety or guarantor other than itself.

It is a generalized quotation in the sense that any subject, actual or not, is only there as a kind of virtual absence: that is, insofar as everything is there that needs to be written, since the subject is not there. A quotation, he says, *phêsin*, comes as an ersatz of its formalization, the substitute for a formal writing.

But truth is no longer upheld in that case by anyone. Original meaning is no longer to be found in the letter, nor is it to be found anywhere else. This is why a quotation has to be transmitted literally: It has no value in itself, but nothing will ever give it value. The two characteristics of doxography—a claim to literal exactness and an infinite manipulation of meaning—are thus assured of being simultaneously foundational. This is the truth of doxography. It resonates appropriately with the transmission of Lacanian psychoanalysis: Quotation in its very impossibility keeps appearing in place of the *matheme*. Not because in Lacan’s world we are always dealing with parrots, but because the other of quotation, that is the *matheme*, is even more impossible and is, however much Lacan declares his desire, even less desirable. “If psychoanalysis were to succeed, it would be snuffed out, by virtue of becoming a forgotten symptom.”²⁴

Transmission—Fiction/Matheme

Let us open the Pandora’s box a crack. What aspects of the School founded and dissolved by Lacan can a knowledge of doxography emphasize? I will group the lines of argument into two series, which come together under

the heading already understood as being of capital importance: that of fiction. To be written once and for all with an *x*: *fixion*, as Lacan writes it in “L’Étourdit.” These two series are, on the one hand, the status of teaching and, on the other, the status of the fact and of truth.

Let us begin with teaching and ask what, from the point of view of doxography, a School is, as in the École Freudienne de Paris. And to assist us, let us take as a counterpoint the description of Schools provided by Diogenes Laërtius in his introduction.

École Freudienne de Paris; “Freudienne,” so the teacher has a teacher; “de Paris,” the place is opposed to other places. Or rather, Paris is “the” place. For Lacan, it is a question of making public the difference between the French tradition and Anglophone obedience, a difference made explicit in the preamble published after the Founding Act.²⁵ In the same way, Diogenes Laërtius also makes a distinction from the outset between two traditions according to their place: the Ionic tradition and the Italic tradition. Now these traditions only assume existence or meaning in relation to their teachers. So let us turn to the teacher. I will quote an unusually violent passage from *Encore*: “Marx and Lenin, Freud and Lacan, are not coupled in being. It is via the letter they found in the Other that, as beings of knowledge, they proceed two by two, in a supposed Other.”²⁶ Diogenes Laërtius now: “Philosophy, the pursuit of wisdom, has had a twofold origin [*arkhai*]; it started with Anaximander on the one hand, with Pythagoras on the other. The former was a pupil of Thales, Pythagoras was taught by Pherecydes.”²⁷ Note that he talks about Anaximander and Pythagoras but that each of them had a teacher. Diogenes continues: “The one school was called Ionian, because Thales, a Milesian and therefore an Ionian, instructed Anaximander; the other school was called Italian from Pythagoras, who worked for the most part in Italy.” Note for what comes later (“École lacanienne”?) that the Italic tradition is named after the pupil (Pythagoras and his place, Italy) and not after the teacher (Pherecydes).

What the identity of these *topoi* underlines is that the origin of a school is at the same time a fiction of origin. As Lacan said in the “Proposition of 9 October 1967,” in relation to the article by Octave Mannoni and original analysis: “The true original can only be the second one, through constituting the repetition that makes the first into an act, for it is that that introduces therein the deferred action (*après-coup*) appropriate to logical time.”²⁸

A second question would be: What does one transmit in a school, what is passed on? We have to go back to the quotation here to reflect on this oscillation between literal quotation and *matheme*.

As far as literal quotation goes, Milner in *L'Oeuvre Claire* proposes the term *logion*, which refers to a transmissible proposition indicated by its simplest possible syntax and by its recurrence, for example: “The unconscious is structured like a language.”²⁹ That is something of Lacan, maybe even is Lacan. Similarly for Thales, it is “Everything is water.” For Parmenides, “All is One.” And for Protagoras, “Man is the measure of all things.” Literal quotation is thus part of learning to speak well, insofar as it is passed on—to posterity.

Logion is relayed by the matheme: It is what Milner calls the second Lacanian classicism. As we read in *Encore*: “Mathematical formalization is our goal, our ideal. Why? Because it alone is matheme, in other words, it alone is capable of being integrally transmitted.”³⁰ I quote a sentence from “L'Étourdit” in which precisely the term *fixion* appears: “The non-teachable I made into a matheme so as to ensure it is a fixation of true opinion, fixation written with an x not without a certain equivocation.”³¹ It would not be impertinent to name such an integrally “fix(ionn)ed” nonteachable doxa. Milner will quite rightly conclude that the institutional turbulence of the *École Freudienne* is not a result of what happened in the classroom but of Lacanian knowledge itself and that to dissolve the school was at a certain point to dissolve the matheme—“my obstinacy on the path of mathemes.”³² Dissolution had nothing to do with the anecdotal. In the idiom of doxography, there is no such thing as an anecdote. Or rather: Every anecdote is meaningful. Or even: There is nothing but anecdote.

The third question having to do with education: What is a teacher?

In all doxography there is clearly an oscillation between an actual presence—for example, Socrates who is recalled in his enduring singularity—and a proper noun, a simple position interchangeable with others. According to Milner, this describes the opposition between antiquity and modernity with respect to teaching as mastery [*maîtrise*]: “The word master or teacher [*maître*] has remained from the ancient world to modern times, but at the cost of a homonymy. A teacher in the ancient world was a teacher insofar as this was an unsubstitutable term. . . . A teacher in the modern world is only a teacher to the extent that it is someone who occupies a position in which that person can be infinitely substituted by someone else.”³³ What I think doxography shows instead is that the teacher in antiquity is also, or always already, characterized by this oscillation between a presence made up of anecdotal, meaningful, and magical singularities and functional positionality, which could be substituted from one sect to another. These are, I believe, two aspects of Lacan: the Lacan of the Seminar, his presence as a teacher to his disciples, his spoken word, his wisdom,

or wisdom/madness beyond knowledge, and then Lacan as a substitutable teacher, the subject presumed (to know), in his “position” as a teacher (“Salomon, . . . the master of feeling [*le senti-maître*], someone of my own ilk”³⁴); substitutable-unsubstitutable even, in two more intimate modalities—the Lacan of the Seminar, the best Gorgias of his time, with Deleuze, Foucault, then Derrida in close rivalry, and the psychoanalyst Lacan, uniquely different with each transference but ready to fall away like one “object *a*” among others.³⁵

Finally, one last question related to teaching: What does it mean to be the member of a school? In the *École Freudienne*, just as in doxography, we find an oscillation or even negotiation between a sect and the Diadochi.³⁶ A sect is what Lacan calls the Bourbaki effect: “The fact that the name School was chosen rather than the name Society or Institute is explained . . . by a non-trivial element of the doctrine.”³⁷ The Bourbaki effect as a function of collective intellectual anonymity.³⁸ By contrast, the Diadochi present, with Alexander the Great’s lieutenants, a succession of proper names and narcissisms opening out on to problems of toxic succession, in the lethal sense of term. Whence the eminently doxographic play between the esoteric and the exoteric explored by Milner, between the spoken, the written, and the transcribed. Here again what is new and modern, just as in art, is very precisely a kind of growing awareness, a means of returning to and re-presenting with words, which would come to describe an ancient, enduring structure, as a way of allowing it to be exploited.

The other line of investigation, connected to the status of the fact and the status of truth, is so immense that it could both highlight certain points and provide a way in.

Doxography reveals the *di-mension* of the fact, in its two complementarily Lacanoid aspects: On the one hand, the fact is a *factum*, a fabrication, a fiction; on the other, this fiction is discursive, it is an effect of the signifier, and it is itself signifying, effective, and effect-producing.

What gives the “doxalytic”³⁹ conjunction such a cutting edge is its relation to repetition: in this instance, the use of quotation marks in any dimension [*dit-mension*]. An example here would be “The Purloined Letter,” which emphasizes the triple subjective filter of narration: the narration by Daupin’s friend of the story through which the Prefect of Police informs Dupin of the account given to him by the Queen.⁴⁰ We are right back with Diels, and his *Doxographi Graeci*! “The Purloined Letter” as a pure signifier, a repetition automatism: “Truth here reveals its fictional ordering.”⁴¹ And “the redoubled parenthesis,” Lacan insists, “is fundamental. I will call the latter ‘quotes’ [*guillemets*].”⁴² “This is why,” he adds, “the

question of the psychoanalytical experience begins here.”⁴³ And this is how doxography is at work in “The Purloined Letter.”

Encore makes this more explicit in relation to the Gospels, which tell “the ‘storyette’ or little tale of Christ,” the story of a man who has called himself the Son of Man:

They write in such a way that there is not a single fact that cannot be challenged therein—God knows that people naturally run straight at the *muleta*. These texts are nonetheless what go right to the heart of truth, the truth as such, up to and including the fact that I enunciate, that one can only say it halfway. . . . I enunciated that truth as the “di-mension,” the “mension” of what is said (*la mention du dit*). . . . In order to relegate the truth to the lowly status it deserves [*minoriser la vérité comme elle le mérite*], one must have entered into analytic discourse.⁴⁴

The Pandora’s box has been opened, so do we find what we expected to find in it?

How to transmit? The answer from a doxographer who is an admirer of Lacan, or from a Lacanian who is an admirer of doxography, is : through fixation. This is the doxographico-linguistic moment of Lacanian transmission that cannot be scraped clean [*le moment indécrottablement doxographico-langagier*]. The normal fate of mathemes, which we have no idea what they mean, is that they need language in order to be transmitted: “Nevertheless, they are not transmitted without the help of language, and that’s what makes the whole thing shaky [*la boîterie de l’affaire*].”⁴⁵ Why should mathematical formalization, the only kind that can be transmitted integrally, (still [*encore*]) be our goal, our ideal, when in order to be transmitted and to keep going it needs “the language I use”? The “objection” (“they are not transmitted without the help of language”) is in any case an invitation to turn to the use of language itself.

So let us relegate truth to the lowly status it deserves.

The Presence of the Sophist in Our Time

I have the feeling that language can only move forward by going round and round, twisting and turning on itself, and I could not say I am not, here and now, giving you an example of this. Taking up the gauntlet of language. . . . You must not think I am doing this light-heartedly. I would prefer if it were less tortuous.

—JACQUES LACAN, “La Troisième”

Muthos/Logos: The Pre-Socratics and the “Long Aristotelian Detour”

Freud accustomed *psychoanalysis*, a Greek word par excellence, to a certain Greece: the Greece of *muthos*, both myth and story, fiction-fiction, the Greece of Greek Tragedies—*Oedipus*, *Electra*, *Antigone*—and of their interpretations, starting with Aristotle’s *Poetics* and his catharsis. Through his own readings, his references to high German culture from the turn of the century, he finds there what he needs when he needs it, such as Eros and Thanatos, or Empedocles’s Love and Hate. All of this he knows well and makes use of. But, once again, his world is the world of *muthos*, where phylogenesis and the Kabbala go hand in hand, rather than the world of *logos*: He avoids, in a rather high-handed way, the works of Plato and Aristotle just as he avoids the works of philosophers more generally. If he knows all about cynicism, sophistry, stoicism, Epicureanism, skepticism, it is because he is well-read and is familiar with the canon. In other words, he has read the classic works, in some detail, a long time ago, but he never directly engages with philosophy. Lacan offers a double-edged diagnosis of

Freud's relation to the classics and to philosophy in the *Écrits*: "The fact is that psychoanalysis, because it progresses essentially by non-knowledge, is tied within the history of science to a state prior to the Aristotelian definition of analysis, which is known as dialectics. Freud's work bears witness to this in its references to Plato and even to the pre-Socratics."¹ Plato and the pre-Socratics, but on the side of *muthos*, or pre-Aristotelian dialectics, and not on the side of *logos*, or Aristotle.

This is a major difference vis-à-vis Lacan, who is interested in and actively engages with philosophy as *logos*, both its longer and more immediate history. Lacan is of his philosophical time and helps to define it as structural, logical, language-focused, discursive, and inspired by linguistics. Not that Lacan avoids any reference to Greek culture more broadly or does not comment on *Antigone* or Plato's *Symposium* other than as an analyst might during an analysis. But in each case it is *logos*, as it becomes more fully theorized in psychoanalysis, which is foregrounded.

Aristotle, or "the long Aristotelian detour," is a turning point: Freud goes back, as Lacan says elsewhere, "to those philosophers who came before Socrates, who in his eyes were alone able to bear witness to what he found."² Lacan does not "go back" to anyone, he takes Aristotle as his grain store, and it all becomes grist to his mill, including those who came before Socrates. But his pre-Socratics are not quite the same as Freud's.

Lacan and the pre-Socratics? On the one hand, Lacan hears and understands Freud's pre-Socratics even more "pre-Socratically" than Freud does, with a Heideggerian ear; Heidegger thus leads Lacan not to the *muthos* but to the *logos* of the pre-Socratics, which grapples with the "unveiling" of truth as *alêtheia*, and the dawn of ontological difference. On the other hand—and in my view this is part of his forceful attempt to open philosophy's eyes—Lacan understands certain pre-Socratics quite differently to the way Heidegger does. Fragment 93 of Heraclitus, for example, which was made Heideggerian famous through his translations and reinterpretations, illustrates perfectly the way in which Lacan shakes things up—Apollo "makes something signifying" [*fait du signifiant*].³ Lacan simultaneously brings others into play, particularly Democritus, whom Heidegger never really figured out and who is, in my opinion, the Lacanian pre-Socratic par excellence. Both Heraclitus and Democritus are what I would call "otherwise pre-Socratic"—that is, they are pre-Socratics who cannot be reduced to a Heideggerian interpretation. As such, they are philosophers Lacan can use to Lacanian ends, as paradigms of the signifier.

So I will be interested here in the *logos*. The *logos* of the Greeks, of which *muthos* philosophically becomes a subset, "is able to do anything": "The

most immoderate presumption of being able to do anything, as rhetors and stylists, runs through all antiquity in a way that is incomprehensible to us," writes Nietzsche, in "The History of Greek Eloquence."⁴ "Sophistry" is the name given to this claim. I contend that the sophists, used rather indirectly by Lacan,⁵ who is a prisoner of the Platonic heritage even when contesting it, are the pre-Socratic masters when it comes to the intelligibility of the non-Heideggerian pre-Socratics. The kind of discursiveness they set in motion allows us to clarify (let us not say to understand) Lacan's own, or certain distinctive features of it. At the same time, it clarifies both the meaning of the long Aristotelian detour and way in which Lacan attends to it.

The Presence of the Sophist in Our Time

At the end of "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," Freud talks about the "the love of truth"—a classic definition of philosophy—as the very foundation of the analytic relation, since this relation "precludes any kind of sham or deceit." He then goes on to recommend, in the following paragraph, that both he and his readers pause for a moment in order to "assure the analyst that he has our sincere sympathy."⁶ Being an analyst is the third "impossible" profession, alongside teaching and governing: in short, the three professions of philosopher-kings. A note in *Moses and Monotheism* confirms this difficulty or mistrust: "It has not been possible to demonstrate in other connections that the human intellect has a particularly fine flair for the truth or that the human mind shows any special inclination for recognizing the truth."⁷

"The psychoanalyst," Lacan points out for his part, "is a sign of the presence of the sophist in our time, but with a different status."⁸ *Jacques the Sophist* is an extended commentary on this sentence. We will have to see exactly what Lacan means by the term *sophist* as well as by the term *psychoanalyst* (and what kind of "psychoanalyst" he is), what is distinctive about our time, and what it is about each status that is different. Let us just say provisionally that the respective discourses of sophistry and Lacanian psychoanalysis share a rebellious relationship to meaning, which operates performatively, at the level of the signifier, and distances itself from the truth of philosophy. Our time is the time of the subject of the unconscious bound to the sexual relationship that does not exist, by contrast with the Greek political animal, but both are first and foremost speaking beings. As for the differences in status that follow from this, they can perhaps be expressed in terms of discourse as a social link that has to be negotiated

between medicine and politics, between *jouissance* and mastery. In any case, we will throughout the book be talking about discourse.

A philosopher/sophist? “We all know that ‘for philosophers, the question has always been a lot more nuanced and full of pathos. . . . They want to save the truth.’”⁹ We should be sensitive to nuance here: Freud feels moved out of sympathy for the philosopher that he is (not) and that it is “impossible” (for him) to be. Lacan reads, in the embrace of Plato and the sophist in the *Sophist*, “the palpitation that is current, and present in the history of the psychoanalyst himself.”¹⁰ Freud, the midwife, ironizes, and Jacques the Sophist philosophistizes.¹¹

I say “Jacques the Sophist” to echo *Jacques the Fatalist*, of course: “Were we to forget the relationship that exists between analysis and what is called fate, the sort of thing that is akin to a figure—in the sense in which in French we speak of a ‘figure of fate’ or a rhetorical ‘figure of speech’—we would simply forget the origins of psychoanalysis. For psychoanalysis could not have made the slightest step forward without this relationship.”¹² Jacques the Psychoanalyst is thus a fatalist, with rhetoric at stake, which also brings into play the relationship between sophistry and philosophy.

But he is first and foremost Jacques the Sophist in his direct presence, leading a crowd of followers, a court, a dance troupe of the young and not so young, exulting in the *epideixis*, the performances of his seminars, improvised or not, whom I got to know in the rue d’Ulm in the overfull, droning Dussane lecture theater, that would suddenly fall absolutely silent.¹³ The fashionable, the madly in love, the “*hainamorations*.”¹⁴ The drone of his voice, projected then held back, audible inaudible like Delphine Seyrig’s,¹⁵ was how Socrates must have described it at the beginning of *Protagoras* or, better still, Philostratus in the *Lives of Sophists*.¹⁶

Lacan philosophistizes by teaching psychoanalysis; he is a Gorgias, who sees himself as a Socrates, in the pre-Aristotelian dialectics of the double dialogue, because he sees Socrates as an analyst—Socrates is a “perfect hysteric, a kind of prefiguration of the analyst. Had he asked for money for that . . . he would have been a Freudian analyst before Freud. I mean, he was a genius!”¹⁷ He was an analyst, aside from the payment—which is not nothing, as we shall see with the *logos-pharmakon*. His didactics linked *epideixis* to chasing after wealthy young men. Since we are talking about the most obvious external signs, we might add two oft-noted specific differences, from Plato to Hegel: Socrates is an Athenian/Gorgias is a foreigner, Socrates dies because of what he says/Gorgias is alive because of what he says. Lacan, then, at times on the side of Socrates, at times on the side of Gorgias: two sides of the same sheet of paper. And here we come back to

the question I asked in the Prologue about the relationship between Lacan's discourse as the master of his own school and the speech or silence of Lacan the analyst. The "logical" relationship between the two, between the performance of the seminars or for *Télévision* (Lacan referred to his appearance as "clowning around" [*faire le clown*]) and the vectorized double dialogue of the analytic couple, is that the master/analyst is presumed to know. This presumption that is at the core of semblance, and semblance at the core of discourse, tips everything over to the side of Gorgias, of whom Socrates is the unpresuming, unpresumed other or wrong side [*l'envers*].

From Freud to Lacan, we have moved decisively from the love of truth to the discourse of truth ("I, the Truth, am speaking"), a *half*-said truth but at least one that is *said*, "fixioned" [*fixionné*] by the speech that produces it as a side effect.

In this same seminar of May 12, 1965, after having talked about the "presence of the sophist," Lacan interjects with two pseudopods: one against "logico-positivism," which looks for "the *meaning of meaning*" as a way of "protecting itself from the surprises of the signifying chain," the other in order to point to one of the major differences between our world and the Greek world—"It suddenly hit me, and I said to myself: 'but there is no Greek word for sex.'"¹⁸ The difference in "status" between the sophist and the psychoanalyst, and the nature of the impact of "our time," is to be sought here: "We understand the reason why these sophists operated with so much force and also without knowing why. The degree of force is based on something that analysis teaches us: the fact is that at the root of every dyad there is the sexual dyad. The masculine and the feminine." It is thus very precisely the relationship between meaning and sexuality that is open to question, and the correct way to envisage it is the signifier's capacity to surprise.

We will come back to this, but allow me to continue in a concentric-deductive manner, by making circular ripples in the water. I will go from one logos effect to another, starting from the outer edge, unlike Lacan, so as to move toward the point of impact: first how one treats (in or with it); then how one signifies (in or with it); finally how one enjoys (in or with it, hee haw)¹⁹—without sparing you a few scenic digressions in this guided tour of a Greece few people know.

Of What Is Sophistry the Name, So to Speak?

Lacan then, unlike Freud, tackles sophists and sophistry head-on when talking about psychoanalysts. But he no doubt uses these terms, as we all do,

without being completely sure of what they mean, Platonicoid parrots that we are. For it is from Plato, and from Plato's *Sophist*, and not even from *Gorgias*, or *Protagoras*, or *Theaetetus*, which he almost never quotes as far as I know, that Lacan acquires his firsthand, which is in fact secondhand, knowledge. "I knocked myself out during these pseudo-holidays reading the *Sophist*. I must be too much of a sophist for it to interest me. I must have some block there. I can't appreciate it. There is something missing for us to be able to appreciate it, we are missing the knowledge of what a sophist was at that time, we are missing the substance of the thing."²⁰ So it seems indispensable to me at this point, to help understand the *presence* of the sophist in our time, to bring back to life certain texts of the sophists themselves (I will limit myself to *Gorgias*, a little of the *Treatise on Non-being* and a little of the *Encomium of Helen*, which I probably should have suggested to Lacan he read).

It seems to me no less indispensable to throw into the mix someone other than Plato—namely, Aristotle. Plato is Lacan's official alter ego, with his transference, *eidōs*, and mathemes—Plato, according to Lacan, was a Lacanian.²¹ But Aristotle was most definitely not. However interesting his logical inventions might be, and however much affection Lacan had for him (*Encore* could be read as a long and very diverse homage to him), Aristotle is, as we shall see, a structural adversary. It is as if Freud, who flirts with a love of the truth but stops in order to empathize with the analyst, is Aristotelian, and Lacan, who tolerates the discourse of truth and constantly accepts the one supposed to know, is Platonic, more Platonic than Freud. But since he is a Plato/Lacan according to Aristotle, according to Nietzsche, and not reducible to Badiou, he presents himself as decidedly sophistic.

Since nowadays we are Aristotelian, having suckled on the decision of meaning with our mother's milk, "sophistry" needs to be defined. Let us start with the definition given by Lalande's *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, which is still the bible for French apprentice philosophers. Its honesty is worth a detour.

Sophistry (noun).

- A. The set of doctrines, or more specifically the shared intellectual attitude of the main Greek Sophists (Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, etc.).
- B. (Common noun). A philosophy of verbal reasoning, with no solid or serious basis in truth.²²

Meaning A and meaning B. Sophistry is split between two definitions. The singularity of sophistry is that, as a historical fact, it is a structural effect: “Sophistry” is a philosophical concept whose model is no doubt provided by those who called themselves and who were called sophists but that is used to refer in philosophy to one of the possible modalities of nonphilosophy. Definition B is as magisterial as it is mysterious in timelessly describing the common noun *sophistry* as “a philosophy of *verbal reasoning*, with no solid or serious basis in truth.” Follow my black book gaze!

The two are welded together platonically by fusing sophistry as a historical reality to the antiphilosophical artifact produced by philosophy. The sophist is philosophy’s negative alter ego, its bad other. They have always resembled one another, ever since the Stranger in the *Sophist*, “just as the wolf resembles the dog, and the wildest resembles the tamest.”²³ But we cannot tell from the text itself who is the wolf and who is the dog—it is the sophistic-platonic point of irony to show how upside-down identity is ruined as soon as it is assigned. If we measure sophistry using the yardstick of being, truth, and the good, we have to condemn it as pseudo-philosophy, as a philosophy of appearances and as the appearance of philosophy, or “any kind of sham or deceit,” as Freud will say. Conversely—and this is of course an outgrowth of the *Sophist*, disrupting its strict organization—the artifact in its turn produces philosophy.

*A Sophistico-analytic Listening to the History of Philosophy:
Performance and Homonymy*

What is particular about the sophist (and Socrates is sophistic in this respect) is that he listens: “His ears are his eyes”²⁴ (“He will seem to you like someone who has no eyes at all,” Plato says in the *Sophist*). He is forever taking the other at his word, indeed taking him quite literally, and thus forcing the philosopher to listen carefully to what he says.

Philosophy is the daughter of surprise, and according to the opening sentence of the *Metaphysics*, “all men naturally want to know.” And yet, “those who ask themselves whether or not they must honor the gods and love their parents only need to be corrected once, and those who ask themselves whether snow is white only need to look.”²⁵ The sophist exaggerates; since nothing else is acquired than what the other says, he always, like Protagoras or Antiphon, asks one too many questions, he always draws one too many consequences. This insolence or lack of respect literally takes

philosophy outside of itself, forces the love of wisdom to transgress the limits it assigns itself and to make a certain number of gestures—leaving its well-trodden path—that are not of the same order as the rest of what it does. Sophistry in fact works as a way of delimiting philosophy. Drawing all of the conclusions, including those that blind you, and taking literally are one and the same gesture: It is “the purloined letter,” as all of Lacan would bear witness, and indeed all psychoanalysis, but I am getting ahead of myself. We could describe Freudian psychoanalysis as a delimiting operation, as a subjective revolution of thinking about oneself [*amour-propre*] akin to that of Copernicus or Darwin, to whom Freud compared himself, and Lacanian psychoanalysis as well, as a type of discourse that one could align with antiphilosophy.

Allow me what is only apparently a digression. I am convinced that the entire history of doctrinal philosophy stands to gain from being listened to, interpreted with this same uncompromisingly obstinate ear, a philology in the strict sense of the term and not unrelated to a kind of drifting attention. “Taking things literally” is not only a formal method; I believe that by taking things literally in this way, we are plunged into what Lacan calls the “prompter’s box” [*trou du souffleur*].²⁶ The vague insistent and insolent ear, if it a sophist’s, allows us to listen backward and the wrong way around, and thus precisely in the right way, and in the right direction. What I have elsewhere called the “sophistic history of philosophy” is perhaps as much a history recounted from the side of the whore (as Benjamin put it)²⁷ as it is a history recounted from the side of the psychoanalyst. This is particularly true of Greek philosophy that is, in its essence and its commitment, entirely palimpsestic, shot through with invisible quotations and homonymous resemantized terms. The word *dialectic* is a clear example: It instantly travels from being a gentle Socratic dialogue, which dismantles and destroys more than any other, to the supreme contemplation of the idea of Good (of what violent irony is the [in]articulation of the two in Plato himself the trace), to the more strictly “peirastic” meaning of the Aristotelian organon, where dialectics is used to distinguish between correct reasoning and all other forms of reasoning (here again, what irony and what violence in the [in]articulation of the two with Plato!), not to mention the Stoic or Neoplatonic meanings, all of which Hegel will use to performatively feed his own system, via phenomenology. We then become aware that the “unconscious” of philosophy or of thought is not to be confused with the unthought of ontological difference. Heidegger has a very fine sense of hearing when he listens to and understands different reinterpretations of keywords-concepts, and his tracing of semantic historical trajectories, in

his *Nietzsche* for example, is dazzling in its brilliance. But what is constantly lacking is the performative di-mension, since each case of enunciation is tightly bound up within Language or within what is Said and commanded from afar by Being.

The paradigm of this kind of listening that is attentive to both performance and homonymy is for me the way in which Gorgias understands the *Poem* by Parmenides in his *Treatise on Non-being* and returns it to sender. This is enough to deflate Being, making Heidegger a latter-day symptom of a sublime inability to hear. So there are two points of anchorage, both quite down to earth: identifying the performance (let him say . . .) and pointing out the equivocations. In his *Treatise*, Gorgias reproduces for nonbeing the set of semantic and syntactic knots that were used to make Being in the *Poem*, but he shows how, and by which intermediate operations, language in action, what I would call a language act par excellence, enables the passage from the famous inaugural *Esti (esti)*, third-person singular of the verb in the present tense, to the subject *Being (to eon)*, the nominal participle secreted by the verb, which then becomes the subject of ontology.²⁸ *Esti* could be translated equally well by “is” or by “it is,” “that is,” “it” or “that” exists, “it is possible” and “it is the case that,” “it is true that.” Exploring all of these equivocal meanings is precisely part of the required operations. This is why, even when it is monolingual (one of the characteristics of the Greeks, according to Momigliano, is that they are “proudly monolingual”), such a history takes us deep into the thicket of what a language is, into “all the equivocations” that make up a language, among others. I am already deliberately alluding to “L’Étourdit” here because this sophistic listening to the history of philosophy is necessarily a listening to philosophies and the languages in which they are expressed, that is, taking us deep into the *lalangue* of each language.²⁹ It is Gorgias’s hearing that makes manifest Being as an effect of saying, and ontology, the Greek saying of Being, is what makes Being a signifier. But Gorgias does not talk about signifiers. There is little point in knowing who, Lacan or Gorgias, was first to hear and understand ontology, since there will always be a sophist who has read Lacan and a Lacanian who is well versed in sophistry. Whatever the case may be, “Ontology is what highlighted in language the use of the copula, isolating it as a signifier. To dwell on the verb ‘to be’—a verb that is not even, in the complete field of the diversity of languages, employed in a way we could qualify as universal—to produce it as such is a highly risky enterprise.”³⁰

We might add that the sequences of history listened to in this way, muted as they may be, are absolutely savage and nowhere more clearly

than in the emasculating successions to Hesiod's *Theogony*. One example will suffice: The Stranger in the *Sophist* proposes a "remake" of Gorgias's *Treatise on Non-being*, all to Plato's advantage since he both kills father Parmenides again, who is already dead, and assumes all the glory himself. In so doing, he defuses the radical critique of ontology as a discourse that produces Being, for the benefit of a new discourse of ontology, that of Plato himself obviously, in which nonbeing can take its place as "other," that is, as one of the species of Being: Moving along, there is nothing to see, foreclosure is only to ontology's advantage. Plato, thanks to the Stranger, is even more of a sophist than Gorgias.

In "The Furrows in the Alethosphere,"³¹ Lacan is not averse to being situated in relation to Gorgias: "I recall that the first [reference] was to Gorgias, of whom I am supposed to be conducting some sort of repetition. Why not? But what was inappropriate is that in the mouth of the person who evoked this character whose effectiveness we, in our days, cannot evaluate very well it was about someone from the history of thought. This is the distancing that seems disturbing to me." So we have to rethink the "history of thought" sophistically in order to place Lacan within this history, perhaps within the idea, as Lacan himself says, that thought is not a category but an affect, a pathos of logos.

Logology: Speaking for the Pleasure of Speaking/Speaking to No Avail

"Generally speaking," writes Lacan, "language proves to be a field much richer in resources than if it were merely the field in which philosophical discourse has inscribed itself over the course of time."³² For once, it is a matter of "[giving] something back to metaphysics" instead of taking something out of its "manger."³³ What is this something more? We could begin with Benveniste's astonishment at the singularity of psychoanalysis, which Lacan welcomes as a good diagnosis: "Just what is this 'language' which acts as much as it expresses something?"³⁴ The origin of this astonishment is in the article Freud published in 1910, "On the Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words": The awareness of the act of language and of language as an act ("The utterance *is* the act,"³⁵ which is how Benveniste defines the performative) is thus linked from the very beginning to motivated homonymy, in other words, the two points of anchorage of sophistic-analytic discursiveness.

Not only does language "express," that is to say, "speaks about," says what I see, says what is—phenomenology, ontology. Not only does it "speak to" and in so doing persuades, even heals—this is rhetoric and

pharmaceuticals, perhaps the first extraterritorial action in relation to analysis, as we will see. But it also simply “acts,” as a performance, and not first as description or information or as an address; it is capable of producing a world-effect, what I am calling, following Novalis, “logology.”³⁶

“There is really something very foolish about speaking and writing; proper conversation is merely a word game. One can only marvel at the ridiculous mistake that people make when they think that they speak for the sake of things. The particular quality of language, the fact that it is concerned only with itself, is known to no one. Language is such a marvelous and fruitful secret—*because when someone speaks merely for the sake of speaking*, he utters the most splendid, original truths. But if he wants to speak about something definite, capricious language makes him say the most ridiculous and confused stuff. This is also the cause of the hatred that so many serious people feel toward language. They notice its mischief, but not the fact that the chattering they scorn is the infinitely serious aspect of language.”³⁷

This text, identified as fragment 1941 of the “Logological Fragments,” is my jumping-off point. Firstly, because it deals with wordplay, witticisms, chatter, in other words, with the difference between the seriousness of philosophers and the seriousness of language, as sophistry and psychoanalysis urge us to think about it. Logology names the moment when discourse is thought of primarily in relation to itself and, in more Lacanian terms, language in relation to *lalangue*. It seems to me it can refer to both sophistic and psychoanalytic or, at any rate, Lacanoid discursiveness. Sophists, according to Aristotle, whom we will read more closely, “talk for the sake of talking,” [*logou kharin legousin*], talk for no reason, to shoot the breeze, but also only in order to speak “for the pleasure of speaking.” Lacan defines psychoanalysis in the same way Aristotle defines sophistry, with a revealing inversion of centuries of Aristotelianism, of Christian reserve with respect to the Dionysian, of the modernity of efficiency and community, but also of the way desire works, of the *jouissance* of loss and the structure of transference: “Psychoanalysis, namely the objectivation of the fact that the speaking being still spends time speaking to no avail [*en pure perte*].”³⁸ “Speaking for the pleasure of speaking”/“Speaking to no avail” is one first way to define the change of times and the different status.

Sophistry, Psychoanalysis, and Antiphilosophy

Lacan, like sophistry, articulates this reflection on language as action in two distinct phases: a critical phase in relation to philosophy and a declarative phase, where several key formulae that become logia are clarified.

In the two texts that seem to me the most explicit in this regard—*Encore* (1972–1973) and the paper given at the second Rome Congress (January 11, 1974)—he critiques Parmenides and, more precisely, the two theses that form the foundation of ontology and that lend philosophical discourse its physiognomy for centuries to come. The first is that “being is and non-being is not”: “It is precisely because he was a poet that Parmenides says what he has to say to us in the least stupid of manners. Otherwise, the idea that being is and nonbeing is not, I don’t know what that means to you, but personally I find that stupid. And you mustn’t believe that it amuses me to say so.”³⁹ The second thesis is identity, or the coimplication of what is and what is thought: “*Je pense donc je suis*. All the same, it’s better than what Parmenides says. The obscurity of the conjunction of *noein* [thinking] and of *einai* [being], it doesn’t work out, poor Plato,”⁴⁰ says Lacan, referring to the way in which the Stranger interprets Parmenides in the *Sophist*. And as he says about Aristotle: “The problem with the kind of science I qualify as traditional, because it comes to us from Aristotle’s thought, is that it implies that what is thought of [*le pensé*] is in the image of thought, in other words, that being thinks.”⁴¹ Ontology, ancient and modern, both on the side of substance as well as on the side of the subject, thus appears simply as an in-principle petition: “The discourse of being presumes that being is, and that is what holds it.”⁴² This is precisely, minus the denial of amusement at stating it, the operation we find in the *Treatise on Non-being*, in which Gorgias shows that ontology only holds its position, and only takes center stage, if it forgets not being but that it is itself a discourse.

When confronted by ontology, the sophistic thesis and the Lacanian thesis are one and the same: Being is an effect of saying, “a fact of what is said” [*un fait de dit*].⁴³ It is on this point, in this position, that Lacan cannot be said not to be a sophist—even if, as we have already sensed, it is always also with regret that Lacan states he is not a Parmenidean, Platonic, Aristotelian, Heideggerian philosopher. In order to clarify Lacan’s logological position, we need do nothing more than place quotations by Lacan and the sophists side by side. Being is a fact of what is said: This means quite simply that “there’s no such thing as a prediscursive reality. Every reality is founded and defined by a discourse.”⁴⁴ We have to invert the direction of meaning [*le sens du sens*], which goes not from being to saying but from saying to being, or, as Gorgias reported by Sextus puts it in the *Treatise on Non-being*: “It is not discourse that commemorates the outside, but the outside that comes to reveal discourse.”⁴⁵ This sentence explains the emblematic statement of sophistic discursiveness and its principle of identity: “Whoever says, says what they say.” “It is not discourse that

commemorates the outside”: Discourse cannot represent the real, and it should not have to do so, it does not stand in for, or make reference to, a thing or an idea external or foreign to itself. In short, we are not in the Parmenideo-Aristotelian regime of communicability, which goes from cobelonging and simultaneous coming into being [*éclosion*] to adequation. “But it is the outside that comes to reveal discourse”: If a relationship of meaning exists, it has to be inverted. Discourse creates being, and this is why its meaning can only be grasped after the fact, in view of the world it has produced. We can understand that one of these world-effects might be the rhetorical effect on the behavior of the listener, but this is only one of its possible effects. If we come back again to the idea of seduction, it is with an extra ontological twist, which makes all the difference, and can serve as a definition of logology: “It is not the addressee who is seduced by the addressor. The addressor, the referent, and the sense are no less subject than the addressee to the seduction exerted.”⁴⁶ Sophistic discourse is not only a performance in the epideictic sense of the term, it is in every way a performative in the Austinian sense of the term.⁴⁷ It is demiurgic, it makes the world, it brings it into being, including (we will come back to this in order to clarify further the notion of its “other status”) as polis and politics. Since the outside, like Parmenides’s Being as understood by Gorgias, can only be grasped or structured, indeed only exists in the very process of its discursive creation, so the outside necessarily provides some indication in return about the saying that constructed it. The outside becomes what “reveals” discourse, in the sense that what comes to pass performs discourse, fulfils the prediction it constitutes. What comes to pass, whatever comes to pass; since whatever comes to pass, some thing or its opposite, oracles and dreams will always be right. This is not a question of fate or destiny, it is simply a question of logos: The son kills his father whether he kills him or not, which is what Freud taught us through the story of Oedipus. This is also why sophists are not soothsayers, if we imagine a soothsayer as someone deducing from certain signs knowledge of what is already written; but they are soothsayers, if we understand that soothsayers, or therapists, work with the forces of saying in order to induce a new state or a new perception of the world, readable with retrospective lucidity. And once again we come back to fact as fixion, relegating truth to the lowly status it deserves: There are only interpretations and interpretations of interpretations.

The subsisting and substantial object disappears, to be replaced by an effect, and the effectiveness of this effect: The object *a* is “the object about which precisely there is no idea”—“it’s this that justifies my reservations . . .

regarding the pre-socratism of Plato.” Likewise, “the symbolic, the imaginary and the real is the statement of what is effectively operating in your speech when you situate yourself in the analyst’s discourse, when you become the analyst. These terms do not really emerge except for and through this discourse.”⁴⁸ This “reality,” the “outside,” in a word “Being,” far from being anterior, always conforms after the fact to the discourse that has brought about its prediction, and it owes its existence, like Being in Parmenides, or like the Helen of Gorgias or Euripides, this fetishized concretization of breath, only from having been discoursed.

A series of negative propositions follows, which accuse traditional scientific discourses of naivety. For example, “cosmology”: “Isn’t there something in analytic discourse that can introduce us to the following: that every subsistence or persistence of the world as such must be abandoned?”⁴⁹; “physics”: “In what sense does this new science concern the real?”⁵⁰ and, in the same Aristotelian bag, “behaviorism”; and, finally, the “history” we can extrapolate from the “history of Christianity,” in which “there is not a single fact that cannot be challenged” and in which the whole truth is “determination, the ‘mension’ of what is said.”⁵¹ The series of negations culminates in the formulation: “There is no language of being,” and Lacan can finally defuse the fundamental ontological proposition by pointing out that it is always an enunciated sign, which as we know is a characteristic of the doxographic procedure: “Being is, as they say, and nonbeing is not.” We might conclude by saying this is the power of logology itself: “I distinguish myself from the language of being. This implies that there may be verbal fiction (*fiction de mot*)—I mean, fiction on the basis of the word.”⁵²

If Being is a fact of what is said, *un fait de dit*, we ought to take precautions as far as meaning is concerned. The most elementary precaution is “distinguishing the dimension of the signifier.” “Distinguishing the dimension of the signifier only takes on importance when it is posited that what you hear, in the auditory sense of the term, bears no relation whatsoever to what it signifies.”⁵³ And in the same way that logology proceeds not from being to saying but from saying to being, we do not go from the signified to the signifier but the other way around: “The signified is not what you hear. What you hear is the signifier. The signified is the effect of the signifier.”⁵⁴ Verbal fiction signals a rupture with philosophy (“How can I get the philosophical use of my words out of your heads—meaning the obscene use?”⁵⁵) and therefore the new situation in discourse (in sounds and the homonymic writing of homonymy) and in thought (“in the platysma of the forehead [*dans les peauciers du front*],” like a hedgehog). Psychoanalysis, dependent on the autonomy of a discourse defined as sound, makes the

signifier swish and hum—the reason why Lacan lacanizes, just as Gorgias, as his contemporaries would say with no less love-hate, gorgianizes.⁵⁶ Everything is rushing forward here, or rather everything holds together, which we will pick up thread by thread.

I conclude provisionally from this that psychoanalysis and sophistry occupy the same position with respect to philosophy. Alain Badiou names this position “antiphilosophy,” but he contests the equivalence between the sophist’s antiphilosophy and that of Lacan, at any rate in one of his first great texts on “Lacan and Plato.”⁵⁷ I would like to focus on this text briefly.

“It is a question of knowing, once and for all,” Badiou asks, “whether Lacan’s antiphilosophy is in our eyes necessarily sophistical.”⁵⁸ For me, everything comes into play (the philosophical move is made) just before, when Badiou defines sophistry as being organized around the statement “there is no truth”: “The eternal adversary of the philosopher is called a sophist: he can be recognized by the fact that although he resembles a philosopher in every respect, armed with the same rhetoric, and drawing on the same references, he nevertheless organizes what he says around the statement ‘there is no truth.’” I would disagree that this is sophistry’s statement of principle. A sophist knows that a destroyer is first and foremost a battleship. It is philosophers, from Sextus Empiricus to Heidegger, who have characterized sophists as inconsequential skeptics who assert, against skepticism, the impossible “skeptical truth” that there is no truth. The sophist’s position is not in relation to truth but with respect to discourse: Being, and truth if one holds to it, is an effect of saying. The sophist organizes what he says around the notion of “the one who says says a saying [*celui qui dit dit un dire*],” not affirmative but negative in itself, tautological except that it is expressed in syntactical and grammatical form, very much like the subtractive gesture of the *den* that marks the invention of the signifier.⁵⁹ For as with the *den*, what this key sentence is about is of a temporal order, the inscription of time into the logos to come, in the dis-course chain.

From this, Lacan’s three core theses on truth are important for a philosopher and indicate his own point of view, but they do not mark any fundamental difference from sophistry. Let us recall them as Badiou formulates them: 1. “There is such a thing as truth, the thesis whereby Lacan dismisses the axiom of sophistry.” 2. “A truth is always in part a remainder of what is said about it, since it can . . . only be half-said. Thus Lacan, whatever the importance accorded language, dismisses any equivalence between thought and the resources of language as such.” 3. “There are no criteria for truth. Since truth is less a judgement than an operation.” From

my point of view there is no counterindication here with respect to sophistry or what I am fictioning as such. Let us suppose there is such a thing as truth, or as more truthful for, and that one can produce enough truth for. Truth is a word that a sophist just as a psychoanalyst uses, and what remains half-said of this truth touches upon the real of *lalangue*, whatever it may be, caught in some prompter's box. What is more, this is the best thing that could happen to a *matheme*, which is in the same boat.

So it is not a matter of getting on board, of allowing oneself to be taken on board: "There is nothing stopping us calling 'Being' whatever it is that truth signals its excess over the resources of saying, or Being as Being, which Lacan consistently distinguishes from the real." And even less of coming on board at the right port: "How can one not recognize, in this Being which surprises, what I am calling the event, which is the origin of every truth about singular Being, or about Being in situation?"⁶⁰

I would like to attempt a common definition that reorganizes the elements suggested by Alain Badiou and that would fit the antiphilosophy of Lacan-and-sophistry: more than truth, meaning (its multiple negations and deprivations, non-sense and ab-sense), and more than meaning, discourse, that is, the effects of discourse. Truth, meaning, effect, there is always a fitting quotation:

"It is not because the meaning of their interpretation has had effects that analysts are in the true, since even if it were correct, its effects are incalculable. It bears witness to no knowledge, since if we consider it according to its classic definition, knowledge guarantees some possible predictability.

What they have to know is that there is a kind of knowledge that does not calculate, but which is nonetheless working in the service of *jouissance*."⁶¹

I will summarize things: The two points of convergence between sophistry and Lacanian psychoanalysis as far as discursive technique goes are performance and homonymy. On the one hand: "that one says," an insistence on language as an act, and its consequence as a world-effect. On the other: the force of the signifier, linked to equivocation, ambiguity, and homonymy. These are knotted one to the other like inseparable dit-mensions. The two of them together reveal new and unfamiliar dit-mensions and "play old Harry" with the two fetishes that Austin refers to at the end of his essay: the truth/falsehood fetish and the value/fact fetish.⁶² In the case of performance as in that of homonymy, it is Aristotle who initiates this repression, the long Aristotelian detour.

Logos-Pharmakon

What is clear here is that Freud is not messing about [*ne déconne pas*].

—JACQUES LACAN, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Seminar XVII [1970]

Speaking/Paying: A Little House on the Agora

The first effect of a discourse relating to itself, that is, disconnected from reference, is to be a drug that treats/poisons. Logos is a kind of *pharmakon*.

The external resemblance between sophistry and psychoanalysis is only too striking. What is most scandalous, from the perspective of both philosophy and public opinion, is that sophists or psychoanalysts sell their discursive know-how, and always at too high a price. They sell what should not be sold, like the “whores” to whom Xenophon’s Socrates compares them and, since it is, it becomes something quite different: no longer wisdom and truth but skill and opportunism, *tekhnê* in short. In the language of Aristophanes, they are “a race of wicked Thrive-by-Tongues” (*panourgon egglôtogastêrôn genos*).¹

Money is used for two quite distinct but connected things. On the one hand, it is used to prove that the sophistic/analytic logos has a use. If someone is paying, it is because it is worth something. It is easy to understand how payment and effectiveness are mutually guaranteed—“There is in

short a *black-out*² concerning what people got from the sophists' oracle. It was no doubt quite effective, since we know that they were paid handsomely, like psychoanalysts."³ We come back to all the stories of the *misthos* (fees) Protagoras, for example, charged, no matter what happened.⁴ We pay a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, because we need them, just as we sometimes pay for sexual pleasure.

On the other hand, money guarantees at the same time that we are not dealing with truth, which is priceless in all senses of the term. By Platonico-Kantian principle we do not pay for truth, nor virtue, nor love, which are all too precious for that. Money is a symptom of the fact that we are dealing with none of these—"I ask you to refuse what I am offering you because it is not that." When a philosopher is paid to deliver a lecture, it is as a lecturer and not as a philosopher that he receives money.

Money is thus really the symptom of an analogous discursive practice, which is not philosophical, and we could observe a series of strategies that consign sophists and psychoanalysts to the role of object *a*, both "fly shit" and "subject presumed to know." This is the mark of their difference from Socrates, since an object *a* cannot drink hemlock. One of the main virtues of money is to prove the disjunction between the logos of psychoanalysis and sophistry and the philosophical logos, even if it rattles Lacan. There is nothing quite like money for neutralizing the truth, for better and for worse. And on the side of wisdom, for neutralizing transference and emancipating when the day comes: "And is it not the responsibility their transference entails that we neutralize by equating it with the signifier that most thoroughly annihilates every signification, namely money?"⁵

So the first little house will have been opened on the agora by Antiphon the sophist, whom Jean-Paul Dumont, in his very first translation into French of the sophists, already referred to as "the inventor of psychoanalysis":⁶

Antiphon composed, as well as poetry, an art of making sufferers feel better (*décbagrin*) [*tekhnhê alupias*] like the various therapies in use among doctors for their patients. He set up a little house [*oikêma tî*] near the agora in Corinth, and on the gate wrote [*proegraphen*] that he could treat those were suffering [*tous lupomenous*, those in distress, or afflicted] with nothing but words [*dia logôn therapeuein*] and that, once he was aware of the causes [*punthanomenos tas aitias*], he would comfort the weary by giving them advice through the spoken word [*paremutheito tous kammontas*].⁷

Lucien calls him the “hypocrite of dreams”:

In the centre of the square is a spring which they call Drowsimere, and close to it are two temples, that of Falsehood [*Apatê*] and that of Truth. There too is their holy of holies and their oracle, which Antiphon, the interpreter [*bupokritês*] of dreams, presided over as prophet, having had this office from Sleep.⁸

So let us call this type of discursive practice *logos-pharmakon*, and let us understand that *pharmakon* is not linked to truth but to interpretation.

It is worth taking a detour through the dictionary here. Derrida has accustomed us to thinking of *pharmakon* as both remedy and poison.⁹ Its equivalents, according to the *Greek-English Lexicon*, are: “A. 1. Drug, good or harmful; 2. Remedy, medicine; 3. Magic potion, philtre; 4. Poison; 5. Lye for washing/ B. 1. in general, Remedy, treatment; 2. Means of making something; / C. Dye, paint, colour/ D. *Chemical agent used in tanning*.”¹⁰ *Logos as pharmakon*: “Discourse as remedy,” “language as drug,” “account as poison,” “definition as magic charm,” “word as colouring agent,” “term as tannin,” and “reason as lye,” we should allow ourselves a moment of fun in interpreting all possible combinations.

“I hereby found,” declared Lacan on June 21, 1964, “the Ecole Française de Psychanalyse.”¹¹ “We constitute three sections,” he went on, and he entitled them respectively: 1. “*Section for Pure Psychoanalysis*,” nothing more than training in psychoanalysis, 2. “*Section for Applied Psychoanalysis*, which means therapeutics and clinical medicine,” and 3. “*Section for Taking Inventory of the Freudian Field*.” The first makes the link between the epideictic performance of the seminars and the demands on him as an analyst (“seeking out rich young patients,” as Plato said of the sophists). The second concerns *pharmakon*: It is worth stating at least, even if rather unceremoniously, that therapeutics is not off limits. The “original distinction of psychoanalysis,” whether or not it acts as a “lightning rod” that is still relevant “today,” “lay in giving access to the notion of a cure in its domain, to wit: restoring to symptoms their meaning, according a place to the desire they mask, rectifying in an exemplary mode the apprehension of a privileged relation.”¹² The condition is a Freudian innovation—that one should acknowledge the subject of the unconscious (symptom, desire, transference)—but the effect—that one should reach those who speak through what they say, above and beyond what they say, and that the spoken word has a therapeutic effect, in a complex speaking-listening—is as old as man, or as old as the relationship of man to *logos*.

“The astonishing thing” is that “there be a response” to the demand for a cure “and that throughout time medicine, using words, has hit the bull’s eye.”¹³

In antiquity the pharmakon of the talking cure¹⁴ is precisely the articulation of rhetoric and magic. Freud knows this and from the outset places the patient-doctor interaction under the heading of influence:

Nothing takes place in a psycho-analytic treatment but an interchange of words between the patient and the analyst. *The patient talks*, tells of his past experiences and present impressions, complains, confesses to his wishes and his emotional impulses. *The doctor listens*, tries to direct the patient’s processes of thought, gives him explanations and observes the reactions of understanding or rejection which he in this way provokes in him. . . . Words were originally magic and to this day words have retained much of *their ancient magical power*. By words *one person* can make another blissfully happy or drive him to despair, by words *the teacher* conveys his knowledge to his pupils, by words *the orator* carries his audience with him and determines their judgements and decisions. Words provoke affects and are in general the means of a *mutual influence among men*.¹⁵

Gorgias describes the same phenomena under the generic heading of “poetry,” the art of the maker:

I both deem and define *poetry* as speech with meter. Fearful shuddering and tearful pity and grievous longing come upon its hearers, and at the actions and physical sufferings of others in good fortunes and in evil fortunes, *through the agency of words, the soul is wont to experience a suffering of its own*. Sacred incantations *sung with words are bearers of pleasure and banishers of pain, for, merging with opinion in the soul, the power of the incantation is wont to beguile it and persuade it and alter it by witchcraft*. There have been discovered two arts of witchcraft and magic: one consists of errors of soul and the other of deceptions of opinion. All who have and do persuade people of things do so by molding a false argument.¹⁶

The interest of the sequence pharmakon-magic-rhetoric presented in the *Encomium of Helen* is that it is vectorized by the power to create affects on the other, to care for and persuade, and to produce new objects such as Helen (world-effect) and, at the same time or thereby, to take and give pleasure (poetry). In this respect the pharmakon goes beyond rhetoric, at least as philosophy ordinarily thinks of it.

I would like for a moment to follow the thread of the logos-pharmakon in the ways it is connected in Greek in order to see how it knots the soul to the body and how it knots this combination of soul-body to the body politic, to the city as organism or organization, which will inevitably be instructive in terms of the change of times, and Lacan's reticences or absences.

(A) *Woman's Voice*

The key text of the analogical medicine of the soul and of the body, or the psychosomatics of the spoken word, is to be found in Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen*. This text is a kind of matrix of all subsequent reworkings, in particular Plato's. But the word *pharmakon* is already linked by Homer himself to Helen with her white arms, love-hated¹⁷ among all women, the source of desire par excellence. Without this magnificent scene that runs beneath all of the palimpsests, one would be not be able to understand fully either Gorgias or, perhaps, *Encore*, and this is why I will begin here.

In the *Odyssey*, the war is over, Troy is destroyed, thousands of warriors from every part of Greece are dead, Helen is back in Sparta with her husband. Menelaus has not killed her, he has not taken revenge, it is a bourgeois happy marriage. Like a good housemistress, she is giving orders to the servants and planning dinner. Several unexpected guests arrive, among them Telemachus, who has set off in search of his father, since Ulysses is the sole surviving Greek king who still does not know about the date of his return. It also happens to be the wedding day of one of the children of Menelaus and Helen, Telemachus is sobbing, and his tears will spoil the dinner. Then Helen has an idea: She goes to get a *pharmakon* she has brought back from Egypt, so that all those who drink it are cured of their sadness and can watch their father and brothers be assassinated in front of them without crying. It is said that this *pharmakon nepenthes takholon*, "which dissipates pain and anger," allows one to give in to the pleasure of discourse (*mutuois terpesthe*: "to enjoy stories"). What we have, then, is a first *pharmakon*, whose effect is to make possible discursive pleasure.

Helen pours the *pharmakon*, everyone present drinks it, starts talking, and takes pleasure. Here is the scene:

Helen, meanwhile, the child of Zeus, had had an idea. Into the bowl in which their wine was mixed, she slipped a drug [*pharmakon*] that had the power of robbing grief and anger of their sting and banishing all painful memories. No one that swallowed this, dissolved in wine,

could shed a single tear that day, even for the death of his mother and father, or if they put his brother or his own son to the sword and he were there to see it done. It was one of many drugs [*pharmaka mêtio-enta estbla*] which had been given to the daughter of Zeus by an Egyptian woman, Polydamna, the wife of Thon. The fertile soil of Egypt is very rich in herbs [*pleista . . . pharmaka*], many of which are beneficial in solution [*polla men estbla*], though many are poisonous [*polla de lugra*]. And in medical knowledge Egyptians are supreme among men.

...

When Helen had dropped the drug into the wine and seen that their cups were filled, she turned to the company once more and said: . . . Then let us sit at dinner in this hall and enjoy listening to each other's stories [*muthois terpesthe*]. I have just the one for the occasion [*eoikota katalexô*].¹⁸

She then recounts how she recognized Ulysses when he entered Troy disguised as a beggar and that she did not denounce him, even secretly taking pleasure when she heard he killed a number of Trojans, all the while regretting that she had left her daughter and husband—there would be much to say about this scene of repeated deceit and duplicity. Then Menelaus speaks: “My dear, your tale was well and truly told.” And he adds to her tale by telling of Ulysses’s great feats: “What he did inside the Wooden Horse is another example of the man’s steadfastness and iron resolution. We sat inside it with the pick of the Argive army, waiting to bring havoc and slaughter on the Trojans.” The wooden horse in which the Greek warriors were hiding was brought into the city, it is inside Troy where Helen has lived for the last ten years, and where she has married successively Paris and, when Paris was killed, his brother Deiphobus. I quote, with comments on Bérard’s French translation:

“You came up,” said Menelaus to Helen, “prompted, I can only suppose, by some god who wished to give victory to Troy [for prince Deiphobus came with you, as beautiful as a God].¹⁹ Three times you circled round our hollow lair, feeling the outside with your hands, and you called out the name of all the Argive captains in turn, [altering your voice to mimic each man’s wife].²⁰ Diomedes and I, who were sitting right in the middle with the good Ulysses, heard you calling and were both tempted to jump up and come out or give an instant answer from within. But Ulysses held us back and checked our impetuosity.”

We can see how complex the situation is here: Helen, whatever she claimed just prior to this, is betraying the Greek soldiers, among them

Ulysses and Menelaus, her husband she has been reunited with that day. And he is the one telling the story. She knew very well that they were in the wooden horse, she wanted them to betray themselves. And in order to do this, she made them crazy with desire—as Menelaus recounts—by imitating for each of them in turn the voice of the woman they had not seen for ten years. So she calls each one by his name, she says “Ajax” in the voice of Ajax’s wife, “Ulysses” in Penelope’s voice, and “Menelaus” in her own voice, as Helen. Obviously, “the imitation of voices is impossible, and completely absurd” accordingly to the scholiast Bérard. Bérard then asks: “As for verse 279, it is utterly incomprehensible: how could Helen imitate the voices of each of the Achaean queens, and for what reason?”²¹ And Jaccottet, who had however read Freud and Lacan, adds the following nuance: “This verse, which several critics have found suspect, could simply be understood to mean that Helen is speaking Greek, and not Trojan.”²²

What I take from this, delighted by so many denials, is that the Egyptian pharmakon opens the way to understanding voice as pharmakon, remedy-poison par excellence. The object of desire is the Don Juanesque voice calling every man by his name, one by one: “The voice is—if I may say so—freed up, free to be something other than substance.”²³ From this I deduce that Helen is the equivalent of all women, that she is Woman/a woman. This is the Homeric text, the first layer of all palimpsests. It knots together woman and discursive drug—and even Woman/a woman, voice and signifier. It is a good beginning for a Lacanian end.

The Theory of Logos-Pharmakon

There is nothing surprising about the fact that it is in *Encomium of Helen* that Gorgias should first express his theory of logos-pharmakon. His speech is the first pharmaceutical performance: He treats the Athenians who made the mistake of blaming Helen and produces as he talks a new, eternally praiseworthy Helen. This is why he serves as an emblem for logology.

Let us come back for a moment to the meanings of the word *performance* as I am using it here. It is the best translation of the Greek *epideixis*, which I suggest could be used to refer to Lacan’s seminars. *Epideixis* is the very term Plato uses to refer to the extended speeches of a Prodicus, Hippias, or Gorgias, as opposed to the dialogue by question and answer that Socrates prefers.²⁴ Something like a “talk,” a “presentation,” or a “performance,” indeed, since the orator throws himself so fully into it (“The Thessalonians try to gorgianize [*gorgianiser*], they would have criticised if Critias had gone to them to perform an *epideixis beautou sophias*, a demonstration

of his wisdom.”).²⁵ The word is formed from *deixis*, the act of showing by pointing an index finger, but it is differentiated from the usual philosophical term, *apodeixis* or “demonstration.” *Apodeixis* is the art of showing “from” what is shown, by using it as a basis, or of “de-monstrating”: one acts as if the phenomenon becomes an object of science, of “logic,” and one adheres to it. *Epideixis* is the art of showing “in front of” and of showing “in addition to,” according to the two main senses of the verbal prefix. Showing “in front of,” publicly, before everyone’s eyes (an epideixis can also be the deployment of an army, in Thucydides for example, or a crowd demonstrating), but also showing “in addition to,” showing “more” of what is to be shown on the occasion of this public demonstration: By displaying an object, one uses the fact that one is showing it as an example or a paradigm, one “overdoes” it—“to make an elephant out of a fly,” as Lucian says, who is given to such paradoxical praise. And one thereby also shows oneself to be “more than,” as a talented orator or as a performer. So in the broad sense of the term it is a kind of “performance,” whether improvised or not, written or spoken, but always adapted to a ceremony, or to the speaker, or to the public; and in the narrow sense, codified more precisely by Aristotle’s rhetoric, it is a kind of “praise” or “blame” that expresses beauty or shame and whose aim is to give pleasure—epideictic eloquence, as distinct from the eloquence of advice-giving or that of a trial. These two senses of performance and praise, in sophistry, are closely connected and amplify one another: The most memorable epideixis of Gorgias (the “one man show”²⁶ that made him famous in Athens) is an epideixis, *Encomium of Helen*, in which “praising the praiseworthy and blaming the blameworthy,” he nonetheless succeeded in proving the innocence of the unfaithful woman whom everyone had been accusing since Homer. The supplement that *epideixis* adds to *deixis* ends up, then, turning the phenomenon into its opposite, making another one appear out of it, like a rabbit out of a hat: The phenomenon becomes the effect of the omnipotence of logos.

This is why all praise is also and above all a praise of logos, a proof of the merits of logology:

Speech is a powerful lord (*dunastês megas*), which by means of the smallest and most invisible body [*au moyen du plus petit et du plus inapparent des corps*], effects the divinest works: it can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity.²⁷

This definition of *logos*, or rather the way in which it works, is quite new. We can only grasp it well *a parte post*, by contrasting it to the opposite definition, the one we have inherited along with Aristotle as the normal regime:

the epideictic logos of Gorgias is a pharmakon, the apodeictic logos of Aristotle is an organon.

As a pharmakon, or remedy/poison, logos is characterized, for better or for worse, by its effect:

The effect of speech [*logos*] upon the condition of the soul is comparable to [*logos* again] the power of drugs over the nature of bodies. For just as different drugs dispel different secretions from the body, and some bring an end to disease and others to life, so also in the case of speeches, some distress, others delight, some cause fear, others make the hearer bold, and some drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion.²⁸

As organon, however, language is the instrument or organ proper to man, which he uses to deploy or to demonstrate the thing from the thing itself: It culminates not in epideictic rhetoric but in phenomeno-logy and in apodeictic logic. On the one hand, power and effect, on the other, deployment or adequacy.

The founding analogy (logos again, in the mathematical sense of “proportion”) is thus the one Gorgias presents in *Encomium of Helen*. It is abbreviated in the following shorthand metaphor: Logos is the pharmakon of the soul. We can write it as:

$$\frac{\text{the power of logos}}{\text{the condition of the soul}} = \frac{\text{the effect of the drugs administered}}{\text{the nature of bodies}}$$

When the *logos-organon* is dominant, words are substitutive stimuli that are used instead of things, according to convention and as appropriate (“since it is not possible to bring things themselves when we speak, but instead of things we must use their names as symbols”).²⁹ With logos-pharmakon, on the other hand, words are not substitutive stimuli but the only stimuli and have an effect on the soul in the same way that remedies are effective on bodies. It is words, and not the things beneath the words, that transform our condition: Words by themselves are capable of reorganizing souls.

The emphasis placed on the materiality of the word obviously changes from one speech to the next, and this materiality as sound or as signifier is already effective by itself. Gorgias “gorgianizes,” says Philostratus, he invents and disseminates the figures of the lexis, of what is pronounced, the repetitions reprises reversals correspondences antitheses symmetries homeoteleutons, the different impacts of the pharmakon one pours into

the soul through the ears³⁰—a language spoken out loud, a kind of language that closely resembles Gongorism or Lacanism. This sonorous motif belongs to a rhetoric that has stood the test of time and that philosophy has not been able to subjugate. The incantation and the melody of pharmakon are resistant to figures and tropes, we will find this anti-Aristotelian rhetoric as escape from signification on the horizon of meaning, and we will find it as an ab-Aristotelian jouissance. Words, the noise they make, sounds and signifiers, this is precisely what we will need to inter-dict. We will come back to the way in which Lacan re-energizes the signifier, that is as time, discursivity, commonplaces, or the topoi of Aristotelian rhetoric, in this case the ordinary tropes of metonymy and metaphor constructed so as to spatialize time but that he manages quite easily to retemporalize.³¹

Pharmacy, Politics, and Semblance

The Greeks, before the Moderns, were constantly trying to work out the relationship between the scene of the body itself of the individual organism and the scene of the other organization that is the body politic. How is the logos-pharmakon a pharmakon on this much larger scale?

The sophists were, as Hegel says very simply, the “masters of Greece.” Masters of paideia (education and culture, all of the sciences and human sciences) and masters of politics (founders and legislators, orators present in every area of life, in courts, on councils, at great epideictic events). Their “pharmacy” is clearly not confined to its effects on a person. Praise itself stands out as a moment of political invention, which is used to move from the communion of the values of a community (including the communion of the shared values of language, via the meanings of words and metaphors, as Nietzsche emphasizes) to the creation of new objects and values that shift the consensus.

The two first paragraphs of *Encomium of Helen* testify to this shift and begin to produce it. I will not go into a detailed analysis but simply sketch it out by quoting these paragraphs:

- (1) What is becoming to a city is manpower, to a body beauty, to a soul wisdom, to a speech truth, and the opposites of these are unbecoming. Man and woman and speech and deed and city and object should be honored with praise if praiseworthy and incur blame if unworthy, for it is an equal error and mistake to blame the praiseworthy and to praise the blameworthy.

(2) It is the duty of one and the same man both to speak the needful rightly and to refute . . . those who rebuke Helen, a woman about whom the testimony of inspired poets has become univocal and unanimous as had the ill omen of her name, which has become a reminder of misfortunes. For my part, by introducing some reasoning into my speech, I wish to free the accused of blame and, having reproved her detractors as prevaricators and proved the truth, to free her from their ignorance.³²

So this is how the liturgy (*kosmos, kallos, sophia, arête, alêtheia*) opens out, via the way in which a “self” gives *logismon* to logos (“come and go from one to the other through my speech”³³), on to a happening³⁴ that performs another world, with a new Helen, another history of Greece, and a new relationship to discourse.

It is this very political power that Plato and Aristotle, each in their own way, will rebel against. Plato does it very directly by following through Gorgias’s pharmaceutical analogy so as to dismiss it more completely as illusory: Any logos that has become detached, grafted on to itself and not the truth, is merely a semblance. The analogy becomes mimetic, like *eidos* (idea) and *eidolon* (phantom, flattery, semblance).

Plato’s *Gorgias* begins with a pharmaceutical narrative: “I often accompanied my brother . . .,” “For a long time, I got up early . . .” Gorgias, then, often accompanied his brother or other doctors to a patient who refused to be treated: “He did not wish to drink the *pharmakon*, but I persuaded him to.” “I maintain too that if a physician and a rhetorician went together in any city you please, supposing they had to argue out the question before a general assembly, or any other meeting which of the two was to be elected, orator or physician, the latter would be totally eclipsed, and the able speaker elected if he chose.”³⁵ Socrates constructs a counteranalogy, a palimpsest of the *Encomium of Helen*, but in which logos is no longer *pharmakon* but a ghost of *pharmakon*, an *eidolon* like the Helen of Euripides on the ramparts of Troy. “However, not to be tedious, I will state the thing like the geometers, for this time you might perhaps follow me: as the art of dressing is to gymnastics, so is cooking to medicine; or rather thus, as dressing is to gymnastics, so is sophistry to legislation, and as cookery to medicine, so is rhetoric to justice.”³⁶ We could write it out (Figure 2).

Socrates proves that he is a genuinely scientific Hippocratic doctor by dividing the analogy: on the one hand, a healthy regime (gymnastics/laws) that has a structuring function, on the other, a remedy (medicine/justice)

SOUL		BODY	
REGIME			
<i>eidôlon</i>	<u>sophistry</u>	<u>dressing</u>	<i>eidôlon</i>
	————— = —————		
<i>eidos</i>	legislation	gymnastics	<i>eidos</i>
REMEDY			
<i>eidolon</i>	<u>rhetoric</u>	<u>cooking</u>	<i>eidolon</i>
	————— = —————		
<i>eidos</i>	justice	medicine	<i>eidos</i>

Figure 2. Socrates’s pharmaceutical counteranalogy in Plato’s *Gorgias*.

that has a reparative function. It is rhetoric that is suddenly in the position of pharmakon instead of sophistry—this substitution, moreover, is one of the manipulations of the dialogue (*Gorgias, or On Rhetoric*) in order to render sophistry invisible under philosophy’s yoke via the invention of rhetoric. This is part of a long history. But for my immediate concern, what strikes me as characteristically Platonic is the division into *eidos* and *eidolon*. *Eidos*, as form (legislation, gymnastics, justice, medicine), strives for good because it knows what it is doing. *Eidolon*, for its part, is *alogon pragma*, a “thing without logos,” “practice without reason”³⁷ (a magnificent and trivial use of the great plural univocality of Greek when it applies to logos itself—note that rhetoric does not speak). *Eidola*—sophistry, dressing, rhetoric, cooking—belong to the empirical realm, to routine (the word *tribê*, “frottage,” has a deliberately obscene connotation), with flattery, with semblance. To cut short the political pretensions of logos-pharmakon, rhetoric is presented as cooking, not medicine. And a sophist is merely a semblance of a philosopher-king, if truth be told.

The Lacanian intelligence of semblance and the half-saying of truth inverts the analogy and turns Plato inside out, like the fingers of a glove. But the question is difficult to close off: Is the philosopher-king who accords himself the authority of knowing the truth a better political healer than a logological sophist? O my brothers, as Nietzsche might say. . .³⁸ Everyone

is busy trying to complete the analogy, but not psychoanalysis. Lacan—without going into his polemic with Freud—did not want to find a way out of this suspense (pronounced both in English as well as in French).³⁹ This is where the change of times produces a change of status. It is most remarkable, but also very normal since the maneuver involves transference and homonymy, that we all see something of ourselves in Lacan, that is, we fictionalize⁴⁰ our Lacan in order to get back from him what we authorize ourselves to ask of him (and I am certainly no exception here). One rather blatant example of this, and so perhaps in poor taste, is the interview entitled “Choose Your Lacan” that Elisabeth Roudinesco and Alain Badiou gave to *Philosophie Magazine* in September 2011. In it I read that “One must never give in when it comes to one’s desire [*Il ne faut jamais céder sur son désir*]”⁴¹ is for E. Roudinesco the core truth of Lacanian ethics, which A. Badiou reformulates as “giving in when it comes to communism means giving in when it comes to all forms of political desire.”⁴² An “enlightened conservative”—such will be the (feminized, masculinized, neutralized) position of maximum ambiguity.

At the Far End of the Palimpsest: Psychoanalysis on a National Scale?

As the contemporaneous end of logos-pharmakon,⁴³ I would like to discuss the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a sort of political epiphany. I will take it as a modern point of comparison to teach us how to understand what healing means for Lacan, which will be appropriately relegated, like the truth, to a more lowly status.

The commission is the key element of the process created by South Africa as a way of avoiding a potential bloodbath at the end of the apartheid regime. It has to contribute to producing a new nation, the rainbow people,⁴⁴ something the world had not seen before. And it is, and is nothing but, a mechanism of the spoken word, explicitly linked to logos-pharmakon and to discursive performance. Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela thus talk about a “new Athens.” “Athens” because politics in South Africa is now about discourse; “new” because the aim is now to create the “rainbow people” after the deadly sin of apartheid, for which the Greek idea of “barbarism,” where one is constantly tripping between nature and culture, is insufficient as a concept. But “new” as well because the mechanism explicitly introduces, it is often said and repeated, a “psychoanalysis on a national scale.”

In order to promote what Tutu calls “the miracle of the negotiated solution,” one must appeal to the soft drug of discourse rather than the hard

drug of punitive justice normally administered by Nuremburg and by other international tribunals. It therefore comes as no surprise to hear Desmond Tutu, Anglican archbishop of Cape Town and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, talk like Gorgias:

It is a commonplace to treat language as mere words, not deeds, therefore language is taken to play a minimal role against violence. The Commission wishes to take a different view here. Language, discourse and rhetoric, *does* things: it constructs social categories, it gives orders, it persuades us, it justifies, explains, gives reasons, excuses. It constructs reality. It moves certain people against other people.⁴⁵

It is not difficult to make the connection between the logos-pharmakon of Gorgias and the watchwords of the commission: “Revealing is Healing” on the cover page of the dossiers it teaches us about, “Healing our Land” on the banners at the public sessions. Therapy takes place in the slightly obsessive metaphors of apartheid as a sickness of the social body, with syndromes, symptoms, words, antiseptics, medicine. To speak, to say, to “tell the story, tell your story, full disclosure”⁴⁶ are what keep time in the enterprise of healing that is both individual and collective (“personal and national healing,” “healing through truth telling,” *TRC Report*, vol. 5, § 5). Since we are dealing with a sickness of the soul—it is, after all, how one often nowadays conceives of sin (apartheid was finally, very late on, condemned as a deadly sin) and even of illness since Socrates, for whom no one is willfully evil—and since it is healed through talking, it is explicitly about psychoanalysis at the level of the nation that moreover, as a good patient, assumes its cost. The commission, therefore, in good conscience, is inscribed within a tradition of discursive therapy that goes from sophistry to psychoanalysis via catharsis.

In so doing, it effectively relegates the truth to the lowly status it deserves: It does not want the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, whether it be historical, judicial, or individual, but it is sufficient to produce “enough truth” to build the rainbow people, and the truth is nothing other than “the essential ingredient of the social antiseptic” (*TRC Report*, vol. 5, § 12.). This truth is defined essentially as a truth about the past: Enough needs to be known in order to share a common past (so that no one can say: “I did not know”) and so as not to build something new upon the toxicity of a repression that generates symptoms and continued violence. One has to admit that the truth does not pre-exist the process: Apartheid itself is not an original truth but a resultant truth, produced and set by what comes after.

At the same time, the effectiveness of the mechanism of the spoken word is produced by a ruse—namely, the mechanism of amnesty itself—in which it is not simple, but not impossible, to hear the relation to the mechanism of the analytic cure: All that is said will not be punished, but only what is said will not be punished. The injunction is one of full disclosure, “tell all,” for what is told, and only that, can be amnestied. Amnesty is defined as “the truth in exchange for freedom,” so the truth is relegated a second time: It is not important in itself, but it is simply a currency that can be exchanged. It is not all but only insofar as it is all told. *Amnesty* is thus detached from its Greek double, *amnesia*.⁴⁷ In return, the individual anamnesis that is to be added to the collective is assimilated into the story: “The narrative function is in itself reparative. It is . . . as if there is a last word. Stories push the event to the margins” (*TRC Report*, vol. 5, § 219).

This mechanism is very clever in that it only compels applicants, those whom the unbearable apartheid obliges to break out of their silence and repression, but also in that it invites each and every person to be an applicant. It is not a matter of prosecuting the guilty, as in a punitive system of justice, but of listening to the petitioners. The commission is a third party between oneself and the others, or between oneself and oneself as another, whose presumed knowledge is at the same time fed by everything it learns, hearing after hearing: One presumes that what one tells the commission simply adds to the knowledge it already has and that would lead you to be condemned if you did not tell it. All the commission does is to hear, and neither judges nor forgives, but it recommends amnesty. For the only possible verdict, if one has told it “all,” will be amnesty. . .

Is this to talk about psychoanalysis in too crude terms? Here, storytelling⁴⁸ and amnesty stand in for anamnesis and healing. Unless this “psychoanalysis on a national scale,” with its cathartic pharmakon that is no less Anglo-Saxon than it is Greek, makes it clear that psychoanalysis, Lacanian at least, does not really work this way and that this strange endgame shows how difficult it is for psychoanalysis simply to be allied to both politics and medicine.

An “Extra Benefit”: Are We Still (Encore) in Psychoanalysis?

Healing an individual or a country, then. In the tradition of the anti-*furor sanandi*, healing, says Freud says Lacan, catharsis or not, is an “extra benefit” of the analytic cure.⁴⁹ It is even, to borrow Serge Cottet’s expression, a “side” [*latéral*] benefit⁵⁰—after all, health is by no means guaranteed, whether as it is defined or in the security it brings, and there is always the

risk of something worse than the symptom. Therapeutic criteria vanish “at the very moment one is bringing to bear a theoretical point of reference,” making healing, like truth, an extraterritorial question. “Mental health,” with our DSM-IV manual to hand, is more than ever for us all, for our children and our hospitals, a major risk. Whether or not we make mental health the central question and the ultimate goal of political action is perhaps at the heart of the objective wrangling between psychoanalysis and politics. Politics today is constantly making a show of its relation to prevention and treatment, whether we call it care⁵¹ or not, in order to maximize social performance, of which individual well-being is a guarantee. In politics one also has to diagnose what is wrong and to want it to get better. Wherein lies the difference? It has to do with the place of discourse. We can say without fear of being mistaken that we just need to watch the documentary *Sainte-Anne Psychiatric Hospital*⁵² to grasp the horror of the absence of pharmakon-speech. Neuroleptics, electric shock treatment, confinement beds, never listening, generate behaviors of prison-warder nurses and terrorized/terrorizing doctors, with indignant or dazed patients wandering around in open pajamas. Science excludes the spoken word—speaking for the sake of speaking, speaking to no avail, in short, the logos-pharmakon—with all the appearances of legitimacy, including the democratoid one of the same thing for everyone. No other pharmakon here than that of the pharmaceutical industry.

When Lacan, in talking of the other side of psychoanalysis, finally allows himself for once (it is right after May 1968) to ask “the question of the place of psychoanalysis in the political,” he starts (and indeed ends) by stipulating that “the intrusion into the political can only be made by recognizing that the only discourse there is, and not just analytic discourse, is the discourse of *jouissance*, at least when one is hoping for the labor of truth from it.”⁵³ “Jouissance” is here really feminine *jouissance*, since it is “clearly not by chance that the word ‘truth’ provokes a curious shiver” in them: In this case, “they” are women analysts, “animated by the revolutionary properties of psychoanalysis.”⁵⁴ So analysis gets politicized as far as women on the side of women, as if they are having a laugh, and on the condition that they are philosophers (or, rather, assistant philosophers, with the whole distance between love and quivering)—woman-philosopher-politician, as far from Greece as is possible—since what makes her quiver is the hope of the labor of truth. . . . The love of truth of the Freudian analyst-king, which becomes that of the analyst-queen who manipulates the word *truth* outside of the salubrity of propositional logic, consequently finds itself analyzed

without detour. “What is the love of truth?”: “The love of truth is the love of this weakness whose veil we have lifted, it’s the love of what truth hides, which is called castration”⁵⁵—“what truth is, namely, powerlessness,” in other words, “truth, the sister of jouissance,” the title of the fourth session that follows this one. We will come back to this in the final chapter.

We will need to continue to question in psychoanalytical terms, conscious of red flags and potential traps, the relationship between micro and macro, individual and city, subject and state or republic, and to question once again the ethics “of” psychoanalysis, at the same time as the articulation between ethics and politics.

It is not impossible that Protagoras could help (*n’aide*, with the expletive *ne* in French)⁵⁶ to understand why or how Lacan ventures so little into politics or talks so little about it. The sophist, unlike the analyst (unlike a analyst),⁵⁷ is from the outset within politics without hoping for the slightest labor of truth from discursive jouissance: The labor of truth does not make the sophist quiver with pleasure. The only thing he hopes for from this jouissance is the political, the labor of the political, directly. I would readily say, against the Platonicist adherences stipulated with such irony by Lacan, and using Protagoras and Arendt⁵⁸ somewhat crudely, that to talk of truth—no less the truth of the matheme than the truth of castration—is to step outside of the political domain altogether. Protagoras (it is true that he speaks via Socrates, who defends and justifies him!) is absolutely clear: “Not that anyone ever made another think truly, who previously thought falsely”⁵⁹—“For no one can think what is not, or think anything different from that which he feels.” But “the one state requires to be changed into the other” and “the worse into the better.” Protagoras deals a different hand: In place of the opposition true/false he substitutes a comparative “better.” And he defines this “better” more precisely as a “better for” an individual or a city, thereby proposing what I would call an assigned [*dédié*] comparative, assigned on a case by case basis, in short: clinical. He who knows how to bring about a transformation of states is a wise man: “The sophist accomplishes by words [*logois*] the change which the physician works by the aid of drugs [*pharmakois*],” and Protagoras, the wisest of all, has every right to be paid the most. Whence we see, starting from a consistent relativism, the link between discourse, care, competence, and money, all the ingredients of the pharmakon; and since the city is a continuous creation of discourse (“the most loquacious world of all,” according to Jacob Burckhardt, whom Arendt often cited), the link between discourse, pragmatics, jouissance, and politics. These interconnections I

have sketched out are as hard to think as they are to avoid. Indeed, one of the most effective ways of extricating oneself from them is no doubt not to speak of them. This would be congruent with Lacan's diagnosis of metaphysics: "For my 'friend' Heidegger mentioned earlier out of the respect I have for him, I would ask that he stop for a moment, an entirely gratuitous wish I express since I know very well he could not do it, stop, I say, at this idea that metaphysics has never been anything, and could only keep going by busying itself with plugging the hole of politics. This is how it works [*C'est son ressort*]." ⁶⁰ But such silence, assuming it could be a good method of pragmatic negation for an analyst, can then lead to almost as much chatter as a rectorial address. ⁶¹

Pharmakon and Social Link

The common position of Gorgias-Lacan in relation to philosophy and ontology is in their common conception of language and, more precisely, of discourse as a link [*lien*]: "The word reference, in this case, can only be situated on the basis of what discourse constitutes by way of a link. The signifier as such refers to nothing if not to a discourse, in other words, a mode of functioning or a utilization of language qua link." ⁶² We should not let go of the political. The logos-pharmakon is also, and perhaps above all, a pharmakon to the extent that it constitutes a social link: in Greece, as creator-facilitator of the polis; in South Africa, of the rainbow people.

This is the very definition Lacan gives of discourse, which he repeats again and again in *Encore*:

In the final analysis, there's nothing but that, the social link. I designate it with the term "discourse" because there's no other way to designate it once we realize that the social link is instated only by anchoring itself in the way in which language is situated over and etched into what the place is crawling with, namely, speaking beings. ⁶³

A discourse determines "a form of social link" ⁶⁴ and the four discourses together are "the social link." The singularity of the discourse of the analyst is to "aim at meaning" [*viser au sens*]: not to aim for the truth like philosophical discourse, but not to aim for meaning either. I understand *viser au sens* not as *viser le sens* [to aim for meaning]: one can aim at meaning just as one aims at the head or the heart, or as one "loves at you" [*aime à vous*]. ⁶⁵ "What analytic discourse brings out is precisely the idea that

meaning is based on semblance [*ce sens est du semblant*]: “word” [*mot*] is “not a word” [*motus*], “Meaning is the direction toward which it fails [*échoue*].”⁶⁶

The change in times is there: Discourse as *jouissance* can constitute the political, or it can “lose its foundations” [*s’effonder*], to borrow the term coined by Deleuze,⁶⁷ in the hole [*trou*] of the sexual relationship that is not: not in political reality but in the real of the unconscious. The difference in times (and status) is perhaps very similar, in Lacanian terms, to the difference between reality and the real. But the point of convergence that holds them together is the primacy of the signifier, which makes the holes go around such that they all relate to one another, the hole in the real, the prompter’s box [*trou du souffleur*], the hole in the political, and so on.⁶⁸

At this point in my argument, what will help us get our bearing is the way in which Lacan, in his “Variations on the Standard Treatment,” a title he maintained in 1966 was “abject,” moves straight from cure to ambiguity, “the unbearable ambiguity that is proposed to psychoanalysis.”⁶⁹ “It is,” he goes on, putting it to work—since does it refer to ambiguity or psychoanalysis, which are both grammatically authorized?—“within everyone’s reach. It is revealed in the question of what it means to speak, and one encounters it simply by welcoming [*accueillir*] a discourse.” On the side of discourse, meaning (to say) [*vouloir dire*] “tells us clearly enough that it does not say it.” On the side of the listener, meaning (to say) is divided again: There is what the speaker “means to say to him,” the meaning he addresses to him, and what the discourse “tells him about the condition of the speaker,” what the discourse tells him “about *who* says it.” Meaning is a product, a result, but the subject who speaks is also a product, a result.

The belatedness (*après-coup*) of meaning and the belatedness of the subject, their fixation, are remarkably pre-empted under this heading of ambiguity. It is a matter or “speaking to” [*parler à*] of what constitutes rhetoric as opposed to the “speaking about” [*parler de*] that constitutes philosophy: what Lacan calls the “listener’s discretionary power,” which the analyst only ever “raises to a second power.” The analyst, by imposing the double rule of a “continuous” or “nonstop” discourse (in such a way that silence speaks) and an “unrestrained” and “shameless” discourse, multiplies by two the very characteristic of discourse as such—namely, ambiguity. It then becomes “an ambiguity that is direct [*sans ambages*]”⁷⁰ linked to the position of interpreter—which is reflected in a “secret summons” and that the speaker “cannot dismiss even by remaining silent.” The only limit, which

is rarely commented upon, is the syntax that, Lacan says as a good Saussurean, articulates the spoken word [*parole*] of the subject in discourse within the language [*langue*] he uses.

What I wish to underline emphatically here is how the problematic of the logos-pharmakon opens out in psychoanalysis onto the problematic of ambiguity, linked to the spoken word, to discourse, and to language. We are back to the habitual gigantomachy in philosophy according to which homonymy, first incarnated by sophistic discursiveness, is the root of all evil.

Sense and Nonsense, or Lacan's Anti-Aristotelianism

Don't think there is no enigma for me in this phonematic
identity of the *noms du père* [names of the father]
and the *non-dupes errent*—and that is what it is all about.

—JACQUES LACAN, “Les non-dupes errant,” November 13, 1973

An enigma is most likely that, an utterance.

—JACQUES LACAN, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*

Aristotle against the Sophists, Freud and Lacan

If the two worlds, Lacanian and sophistic, are comparable, it is precisely because both the sophists and Lacan have the same other: the “normal” philosophical regime of discourse, defined by the equivalence between “saying” and “meaning something,” namely, “something that has one and the same meaning for oneself and for others.” Aristotle elaborates this series as a means of defending against sophistry; this normative decision is clear for Lacan.¹ It is thus at least plausible that an anti-Aristotelian regime and a post-Aristotelian regime such as Lacanian psychoanalysis could communicate through their non-Aristotelianism, even if the different kinds of “non-” (*a parte ante* and *a parte post*, deprivation, negation, escape²) have yet to be clarified.

The interest in returning to antiquity is that it enables us to explore in some detail the hold that normal discourse has on us. That is to say (1) the way in which we conform to it, insofar as we are all, whether we like it and know it or not, ordinary Aristotelians; and (2) the way in which we transgress it, insofar as the Aristotelian regime is a universal regime, constructed

to prohibit or interdict any other regime. I would like in passing to draw attention to this linguistic peculiarity, which even the best dictionaries do not comment upon: When one says (*dit*) something in a way that could be termed “inter,” or between, the same Habermassian “inter” as “interrogation” or “inter-disciplinary,” rather than communicating or building bridges, one in fact excludes, and *interdicts*. . .

At stake here is an analysis of what I have called the “decision of meaning.” What is, belatedly, a kind of abnormality for the sophists? I put a comma in the title of this section: “. . . Sophists, Freud and Lacan.” The comma is quite deliberate; I believe that Freud and Lacan are, when read in the light of Aristotle and in terms of this decision of meaning, also sophists, and perhaps first and foremost sophists, with the proviso that Lacan is more so (otherwise more) than Freud.

In the primal scene a decision is made regarding both what it means to speak and what it means to be a man, an animal endowed with logos. As if to underline the purpose of my comma, “parlêtre” is the Lacanian translation of this Aristotelian definition of man. Lacan, who invents the expression around 1974, proposes in “Joyce, le symptôme” [Joyce the symptom] that it should replace the “ICS of Freud (the Unconscious or Id [*ça*]: move along so I can sit there.”³ With “parlêtre,” Lacan rereads [*relit*] (and reconnects [*relie*]) Aristotle and Freud via Gorgias and engages with logology as a critique of ontology and the unconscious, Freud’s finding:

It is a vicious circle to say that we are speaking beings. We are “*parl-êtres*,” a word that it is advantageous to substitute for the unconscious, equivocating on the one hand about our chit-chat [*parlote*], and on the other about the fact *that it is from language* that we get this madness that there is such a thing as being.⁴

The primal scene unfolds in the book Gamma of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, at the moment when he is demonstrating the principle of all principles, namely, the principle of noncontradiction, “the most stable of all the principles without exception.”⁵ Lacan is clear where he stands on this, and it becomes a focal point for his diagnosis:

Read Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, and I hope that, like me, you will sense that it is *incredibly stupid* [*vachement con*]. . . . Three or four centuries after Aristotle, people began to express the most serious doubts about this text, because people still knew how to read. . . . I must say that Michelet⁶ does not hold that opinion, and neither do I, because how should I put it, stupidity [*la connerie*]⁷ acts as a proof of authenticity.

What prevails is the *authenticity of stupidity*. . . . This is what stupidity is, it is what “one” gets into when one asks questions at a certain level which is precisely determined by the fact of language, when one approaches its essential function which is to fill everything that is left gaping [*tout ce que laisse de béant*] by the fact that there can be no sexual relationship. . . . It is thrilling to see someone so sharp, so knowledgeable, so alert, so lucid, starting to flounder in this way, because why? Because he is questioning the principle. *Naturally, he has not the slightest idea that the principle is that [c'est ça]: there is no sexual relationship*. He doesn't have a clue, but we see that it is uniquely at this level that he asks all the questions.⁸

Stupidity to be mistaken about the principle. It is thrilling and authentic because it engages with the essential function of language, to fill in the gaps or holes. It is only the hole that is worth anything (pause for laughter),⁹ and all holes are worth the same: Metaphysics, even and especially when transcended by Heidegger, is the stopgap [*le bouche-trou*] of politics (Heidegger's stupidity was to make this visible), the principle of noncontradiction is the stopgap of language, and all these holes take us back to the hole of the prompter's box [*trou du souffleur*], that of the unconscious structured as a language but a language with a hold on the Real, whose first principle is that there is no such thing as a sexual relationship. This is what I will be circling around in the following two chapters, in an attempt to identify perhaps another kind of stupidity.

Let me recall the inaugural statement of the principle of noncontradiction: “Impossible that the same simultaneously belongs and does not belong to the same, and according to the same.” Believing that this is the first principle is thus what Lacan calls Aristotle's stupidity. In reading Aristotle, we will see clearly the procedure of his demonstration, which is to say refutation, and what it shows the principle of the principle.

His procedure, first of all. One cannot demonstrate the principle directly. One does not demonstrate directly the principle of all principles, such is the *aporia* of the ultimate founding act, as has been pointed out from Aristotle (*anagkê stênai*) to Heidegger or Karl-Otto Apel.¹⁰ One can only appeal to [*faire la pétition de*] this principle. But since those who have been poorly educated persist in asking for a demonstration, Aristotle offers them a demonstration by refutation, which challenges them themselves insofar as they speak, and whatever they say, thus insofar as they are men. Here is this refutation, in which I emphasize the passages that appear self-evident, but that force the issue, and touch on the foundations of the principle:

But even in this case it is possible to show by refutation that this view is impossible (that the same belongs to the same and according to the same—BC), if only our opponent *will say something* [*an monon ti legêi*]. But if he says nothing [*an de mêthen*], it is ridiculous to look for a reason [*discours*] against *one who has no reason* [*ton mêthenos ekhonta logon*], on the very point *on which he is without reason* [*mêthena ekhei logon*]; for such a man is really *like a plant* [*homoios phutôi*]. . . .

The starting point of all cases of this kind is not for someone to state that something either is or is not, for this might perhaps be thought to be begging the question [*la pétition du principe*], but that *he shall state something significant both for himself and for someone else* [*sêmeinein ge ti kai autôi kai allôi*]; for this he must do if he is to say anything [*eiper legoi ti*]. For if he does not, no discussion will be possible [*ouk an eiê logos*] for such a person either with himself or with another. But if anyone will grant this, demonstration will be possible; for there will already be something definite [*ti hôrismenon*]. But this will not have the effect of demonstrating but of upholding, for he who destroys reason [*le discours*] upholds reason.

However, if . . . one were to say that a term signifies an infinite number of things, evidently *reasoning would be impossible* [*ouk an eiê logos*]; for *not to signify one thing is to signify nothing* [*to gar mê ben sêmeinein outben sêmeinein estin*]. And if words signify nothing, there will be no discourse with another or even with ourselves. For it is impossible to understand anything unless one understands one thing; but if this does happen, a term may be assigned to this thing. Let it be assumed, then, as we said at the beginning, that a term signifies something, and that it signifies one thing.¹¹

Aristotle demonstrates the undemonstrable principle of noncontradiction by means of a series of equivalences, taken as proofs. To speak is to say something, to say something is to signify something, to signify something is to signify something that has one meaning, and one meaning alone, the same for oneself and for others. This is what I call the “decision of meaning.” To mean something [*vouloir dire quelque chose*], *legein ti, sêmeinein ti, sêmeinein hen*, such is the decision of meaning that Aristotle demands of every man, if he wishes to be a man, that it to say, an animal endowed with logos. The principle of noncontradiction is founded upon the univocality of meaning and nowhere else. What is impossible is not that one substance could be the subject of contradictory predicates but that one word could simultaneously have and not have the same meaning. Meaning is the first entity encountered and that can be encountered, which does not tolerate

contradiction. It is not the unconscious but the world itself that is structured like a language, or to put it another way: An individual being [*étant*] is made as meaning is made. The prohibition [*interdiction*] of homonymy is to language what the prohibition of incest is to society.

It is only when we imagine that Aristotle means something that we worry about what he is encompassing. What is he catching in his net, in his network? What is he drawing out of it? What is he handling? What is he dealing with? What is he struggling with? What is he maintaining? What is he working on? What is he pursuing?¹²

Lacan reflects the Aristotelian demand by applying it to Aristotle himself as a hermeneutic object: Aristotle “means something” [*veut dire quelque chose*]. Lacan has the advantage over Aristotle of making manifest the fact that meaning takes on meaning only via an operation and a mechanism [*dispositif*], in relation to an adversary, as a kind of manipulation and an aim [*objectif*]¹³—what it means to speak. More precisely: With no exception made for the universal, with no other who says no, and on condition one takes the other at his word, no demonstration is possible. It requires a “you said it.” Only a refutation can assert that the adversary himself, in denying the principle, has always already presupposed it. This is an irrefutable procedure of demonstration, which happens to us a lot more than the other way around, not unrelated to the intuitionist logic that we know is used in the “pedagogy” of the psychotics that we are too, particularly when it comes to principles. Because to escape it, it is necessary (but doubtless sufficient) not to say what we are saying and not to be ourselves. Obviously, forcing us to see it complicates things a little. When all is said and done, with Aristotle just as in the mechanism of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and just as in the mechanism of psychoanalysis, it is always about getting the other to speak, even if through their very silence. Then, hearing that he is speaking, one gets him to hear and understand what he is saying. It is on this reflexive moment of the mechanism that Lacan is hyper-Aristotelian, but if he is, it is because Aristotle, using the notoriously sophistical method of refutation, is in this respect truly a sophist. Aristotle has the animal endowed with logos hear and understand that his logos is normal-normalized-normative, Lacan has the *parlêtre* hear and understand that he can escape from this norm. The norm is thus circumscribed twice. On the one hand, it needs the exception to confirm the rule: It is only founded by its outside. On the other, it appears as a remarkable subset of a much vaster set, like a well-adapted dominant species, on par with Euclidian geometry

in relation to Riemannian geometry, or ontology in relation to logology. In fact, the parlêtre is excess to the animal endowed with logos.¹³

“The Logos That Is in the Sounds of the Voice and in the Words”

Parlêtres as such are excluded from humanity by Aristotle's demonstration. Among the adversaries of the principle of noncontradiction are those who are irredeemable, who will never speak like Aristotle, who will thus never “speak.” They do not correspond to his definition of man—*homois phutôî*, they are “plants” that speak.

Their characteristic is to “speak for the sake of speaking,” *legein logou kbarin*.¹⁴ I propose now to hear this doubling as a shift in the meaning of logos: The logos that is proper to man, the one that Latin translates ingeniously as *ratio et oratio*, and that the Aristotelian organon systematizes, only concerns the “logos that is in the sounds of the voice and in the words.”¹⁵ They cannot be refuted since they do not hold (on) to [*ne (s'en) tiennent pas*]¹⁶ the meaning of words, thus to univocal meaning, but only to the sounds and the words themselves: In order to “cure” them (*iasis*) of this attention, they would have to be forced to no longer hear the signifier but only the meaning, the one-meaning, the univocal logos, the one that belongs not to the pharmakon but exclusively to the organon. In short, they remain within an autotelic logos, and because of them the decision of meaning appears as an extrinsic norm, linked to a partial conception-valorization of the humanity of man. There is a way to conceive of logos, there is logos, which is—and only is—in the sounds of the voice and in the words, and such a logos is not made a norm by the Aristotelian demand of meaning. If this logos has no meaning or sense in the Aristotelian sense, it is because it does not have only one meaning, nor the same meaning for all, even if what one vocalizes and what one hears never stops presenting itself as logos: It is a logos that lets the unthinkable leak out and that ought to be ineffable, “at the same time” as a contradiction. “Indeed, they believe (it is possible, normal, legitimate) that they contradict themselves whenever they speak.”¹⁷ Plant-men are part of “nature” after all, in that they can say all they say because their discourse is self-authorizing, or, as Gorgias put it more simply in the *Treatise on Non-being*, because “the one who speaks speaks.”¹⁸

Aristotle goes no further in isolating this logos that is in the sounds of the voice and in the words of the meaning it has. He does not distinguish as such the dimension of the signifier, even if the arbitrary nature of the

sign as sound and as letter is not only compatible with but also consubstantial with his conception of the *logos*: The language man is endowed with “by nature,” *phusei*, is “conventional,” *nomôi*, and not *phusei*—there is no contradiction here but rather the proof that man’s nature is his culture. There is a *de facto* plurality of languages and alphabets, and this explains why one does not understand a foreign tongue: But this arbitrary nature of the sound and the letter, which we can rightly compare to our arbitrary nature of the sign, only ever exemplifies each time the constitutive univocality of the possibility of meaning, which is the transcendental condition for the sign to be more than just a “sign of something” (*sêmainei*), as in the Delphic oracle, and for it to “effectively mean something” (*sêmainei ti*), and for it to “speak” in the sense of “belonging to *logos*.” The difference between signifiers, a symptom of the arbitrary nature of the sign, is in effect redeemed by the identity of the signified (“man” and “*anthropos*” are both man, the essence of the thing gives the meaning of the word) and by the shared nature of referents (the world is the world for all men). Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* explains it as follows: What is in writing is the symbol of what is in the voice, and this differs between tongues, but letters as well as sounds are symbols of “affections of the soul” (*pathêmata*, affects, ideas, representations, mental states), which are identical for everyone, because they are themselves the signs of “things” (*pragmata*), which are, precisely, identical.¹⁹ This is full meaning of the familiar physical/anthropological/ethical/ontological foundation and from which communication flows effortlessly.

So the differences between tongues and the arbitrary nature of the sign cease being a matter of concern when we start out from things and not words²⁰—this is the key sentence in Plato’s *Cratylus*, which Aristotle conforms to in drawing out its consequences or, rather, in expanding its premises into a theory of language. However, if we presume that words constitute the starting point, or the parking area, then we change worlds. We can distinguish the dimension of the signifier, and logology is the operation of this inversion that takes us from the word to the thing and from the signifier to the signified. Let us repeat with Lacan so as to put the dots on our sophistic i’s: “Distinguishing the dimension of the signifier only takes on importance when it is posited that what you hear, in the auditory sense of the term, bears no relation whatsoever to what it signifies” and “the signified is the effect of the signifier.”²¹ The symptom of the illness of the sophistic-analytic *logos*, in an Aristotelian frame of reference, is the free play of signifiers against the univocality of meaning.

Aristotle can do nothing about it other than to deny and expel it (calling it a plague, a plant logos). Not only is it there in his refutation both from not having to be there, or having to be not there, and from being unable to not be there in order for the refutation to work, moreover, it comes back in through the window. Indeed, it would be fitting here to add the failure of the *Sophistical Refutations* to the case file.

In this text, which all analysts should read,²² Aristotle shows how never to let oneself be taken in by sophisms: It is necessary, and sufficient, to set out homonymies and amphibologies (or syntactical homonymies) by distinguishing from each other the meanings of all words and all turns of phrase and by refusing to consider them simultaneously (the famous *hama* of the principle of noncontradiction). The solution for refuting someone who uses a homonymous logos, whether it is the equivocal meaning of a word (“apprendre”²³) or the amphibology of a construction (“me souhaïter la capture ennemie”²⁴) is then that: “At the beginning, therefore, one ought to reply to an ambiguous term or expression in the following manner: ‘in one sense it is so and in another it is not so.’”²⁵ It is necessary, and sufficient, to identify where the homonymy is and to affirm the other meaning: to show everyone that several meanings lie underneath one and the same lexis (word or expression, alone or in the context of an argument). A philosopher is first and foremost a tireless critic, semanticist, and grammarian.

Or rather it is *almost* always sufficient, for there is one case where the remedy is powerless. It is when it is a question of the signifier on its own, the pure signifier, the one hidden in the rhythms and accents of the voice—“composition, separation and prosody,” as Aristotle puts it, since it is multiple in its very identity, at work in the simultaneity of its singular enunciation. In that case, there is no homonymy to dissipate, we cannot appeal to the *pragma* against the *onoma*, nor make out the signifieds beneath the signifier. It is no longer a matter of distinguishing between meanings but between sounds. All one can do is lend an ear: *oros*, unaspirated, means “mountain” and *horos*, aspirated, means “limit,” “voir quelqu’un frappé [silence] avec les yeux” and “voir quelqu’un [silence] frappé avec les yeux.”²⁶ And “in dealing with arguments which turn on language the solution will always depend on the opposite of that on which the argument turns: for example, if the argument turns on combination, the solutions will be by division, if on division, by combination. Again, if it turns on acute accentuation, grave accentuation will be the solution, and *vice versa*.”²⁷

Following Lacan and his wordplay with *sens* in *Encore*, I will refer to the irreducible *outsiders*²⁸ with a handful of syllables that should be heard before being written: *un-sens*²⁹ is a signifier put together ad hoc in order to suggest the whisper of opposites. The term plays on two meanings and as such, for Aristotle, it is a word that has no meaning. Clearly, each of these two meanings is indispensable to our argument. The first meaning is “one sense and not two.” In other words, the Aristotelian demand (*semainein*, to mean, is *semainein hen*, to mean only one thing) is met. But because of the second sense, there is also an effect of *mise en abyme* or irony: The second sense, with the privative Latin *in*, means “zero sense.” So the Lacanian nomothete plays on the fact that to have a meaning like *un-sens*, to have only one meaning, is to have no meaning.

Time, performance, and homonymy are all knotted together in “what is in the sounds of the voice and in the words” so as to make room for the very possibility of univocal meaning. It is here that the pleasure of speaking and the prompter’s box are combined. Which is what we hear with LOM, in the unchained free flow of the chain of signifiers at play in Lacan’s seminar “Joyce, le Symptôme”: “We are men [*Nous sommes z’hombres*]. LOM: in French it says what it means. It just needs to be written phonetically: to make it faunetic (faun . . .), as is fitting: ob-scene [*l’eaubscène*]. Write it as *ça eaub . . .* to remind us that *le beau* [beautiful]” and so on. “LOM, LOM as foundation [*LOM de base*], LOM hoo ‘as a body [*cabun corps*] and one Nonely [*nan-na Kun*]” (Figure 3).³⁰

<p><i>Aristotle</i></p> <p>One sense = only one sense</p> <p>To speak about and to speak to</p> <p>Sense-signified-reference</p> <p>Univocal meaning</p> <p>Man = animal endowed with <i>logos</i></p> <p>ONTOLOGY</p>	<p><i>Sophists, Freud and Lacan</i></p> <p><i>Un-sens/in-sens</i></p> <p>Speaking for the pleasure of speaking/speaking to no avail</p> <p>Signifier (what is in the sounds of the voice and in the words)</p> <p>Performance and homonymy</p> <p><i>Parlêtre</i> = LOM = plant <i>logos</i></p> <p>LOGOLOGY</p>
<p>LOGOLOGY</p>	

Figure 3. Ontology and logology.

Strange plants really, since like animals, they make sounds with their mouths. *Homoios phutôî*, you are like a plant if you speak without meaning. Why this comparison, specialists of Aristotle always ask themselves, and they scratch their heads. Lacan can help. He talks about “the plant’s *jouissance*” when he defines the Lacanian field.³¹ We can well imagine the famous lily in the fields, he says, “as a body entirely given over to *jouissance*,” the plant’s *jouissance*, or perhaps its “infinite pain,” nothing in any case allows a plant to escape from it, unlike an animal that can always move to feel less *jouissance*, thereby obeying what we call the pleasure principle. The plant remains “there where one enjoys,” because “God only knows where it might end.” You are like a plant if you speak without meaning, to be understood as: when, or if, speaking for you is to experience *jouissance*. To experience *jouissance* is what speaking must not be, at least not for Aristotle. This is his definition of a pervert, someone who would pervert the order of the world:

People then begin to meet perverts—they’re the ones Aristotle didn’t want to see at all costs. There is in them a subversion of behaviour based on a *savoir-faire*, which is linked to knowledge (*savoir*), knowledge of the nature of things—there is a direct connection between sexual behaviour and its truth, namely, its amorality.³²

The nonperverted man is defined as being in his place in the cosmos, in the midst of the living, *zôia*: neither plant nor God, and not just any animal but an animal/living being (the two translations are equally valid) endowed with *logos*, *zôion logon ekhon*. The hierarchy of species is the law, and this is what the *jouissance* of language puts into question. This is how I read the following lines in “La Troisième”:

What’s striking is this: if there is something that gives us the idea of “enjoying itself” [*se jouir*], it’s the animal. . . .

The question becomes interesting at this point, if we generalize it and if in the name of life, we wonder if a plant can enjoy. Still, this is something that has meaning, since this is where they pulled the old “lilies of the field” trick on us.³³

Not only have they pulled the old biblical “lilies of the field” trick on us—“‘They do not weave or spin,’ they added”—and they backed it up with scientific refutation; yet now that we can observe them under the microscope, it is clear that “they are woven [*c’est du filé*],” and “it’s precisely their business to spin and to weave.” For the still floating question is that of the whole relation between life and *jouissance*:

The question remains to be determined as to whether life involves *jouissance*. And that question remains doubtful for the vegetable, then that makes it even more pertinent that it is not so for speech. *Lalangue*, where *jouissance* creates a sediment [*dépôt*], as I said, not without mortifying it, not without it appearing like dead wood, nevertheless bears witness to the fact that life, whose language grows shoots [*fait rejet*], gives us the firm impression that there is something plant-like about it.³⁴

For perverse Lacan, too perverse or too sophistic for Plato's *Sophist* to interest him, there is no doubt that to speak is to experience *jouissance*. But it is difficult to know whether, for the living being endowed with logos, this *jouissance* is linked to life or to logos. If the animal, and the plant itself, experience *jouissance*, it is because the logos that defines man is grafted on to life. Language is an "offshoot" [*rejet*] of life,³⁵ and what testifies to this is the relation between *lalangue* and language. The language of the unconscious, the *lalangue* of every Freud-Lacanian, produces a sediment of *jouissance* within logos. It is not logos that experiences *jouissance* (neither *die Sprache* nor *die Sage*)³⁶ but every animal endowed with logos, redefined as a *parlêtre*.

Aristotle did not/would not want at any cost to see the perverse, the sophists, Lacan. Since with the *jouissance* sedimented in *lalangue*, one travels directly from discursive behavior to its truth, which is to say its amorality. To the truth that the principle of discourse is that there is no sexual relationship. That discursive *jouissance* properly speaking is the only *jouissance* there is, and not the *jouissance* of truth, or of desire, or of the love of truth. As for the truth, what we still do not know is whether what comes "with" it is of the order of *jouissance* or of the order of pleasure, insofar as it is a sign of happiness and not a sign of lack. "Speaking 'beings' are happy, happy by nature, this is even all that remains of the latter for them."³⁷ Are you aiming for the pleasure of the *matheme* or the *jouissance* of *lalangue*? That is the question.

If the characteristic of Greek man is to be neither an animal nor a god, it is not impossible that woman, Lacanian woman in any case, is this kind of speaking plant. The *jouissance* of the plant is invented so as to announce or introduce this: "She tends towards surplus *jouissance* [*le plus-de jouir*], because she, the woman, plunges her roots, like a flower, down into *jouissance* itself."³⁸ The usual slipping and sliding of metaphor? We will certainly come back to this.

Weighing Up Sense and Nonsense: Freud/Lacan

The only place the sophists Freud and Lacan can situate themselves is on the side of the plant. This is wrong insofar as they are, we all are, Aristotelian. But it is right because of a certain number of both caricatural and central positions that have the immense interest in drawing attention in other ways to what is at stake—for example, the way in which Freud's text on jokes and Lacan's commentary on it sometimes privileges sense within nonsense, sometimes nonsense within sense, and the way in which Lacan de-Aristotelizes or sophisticizes Freud in the privileged instance of the joke.

Freud, like the entire philosophical tradition and like us all, was steeped in the Aristotelian demand for meaning. There is not a single aspect of his theory or analytic practice that does not bear witness to this. The Freudian project consists, in sum, of a virtually infinite expansion of the domain of meaning so that we can bring into it what was always considered, more or less ponderously, as nonsensical. He brings the "secret of the symptom" into the realm of meaning: "an immense domain annexed by Freud's genius to man's knowledge that warrants the true title of 'psychoanalytic semantics,' including dreams, bungled actions, slips of the tongue, memory disturbances, whims of thought association, and so on,"³⁹ in short, everything that demonstrates or bears witness to the fact that the unconscious is constituted, structured like a language. The unconscious itself, of which such "disturbances" are the more or less direct formations, owes its status as a "necessary and legitimate hypothesis" only to a "gain in meaning and coherence."⁴⁰

Of all the definitions of the joke that Freud draws on, the one that in his eyes is particularly important is the recurrent one of "sense within nonsense"⁴¹: In our eyes this formulation could define the entire Freudian project as being subject to Aristotelianism. It is precisely on this point that Lacan goes past Freud and that he is, in my view, the most consistent of the non-Aristotelians: that he is more of a sophist than Freud.

But Freud is already pushing Aristotelianism to such an extreme that he becomes a sophist because of it or, at the very least, that he forces us to fundamentally rethink how these territories are mapped out. What causes Freud to oscillate is the way in which he struggles between two characterizations of the joke, that of sense within nonsense, and that of nonsense within sense.

We shall read this oscillation first of all through Freud's confusions as he classifies jokes according to different taxinomies (according to their "technique," words/thoughts, or according to their "purpose," innocent/

tendentious) and distinguishes an analytic part, a synthetic part, and a theoretical part, such that the results are very difficult to articulate. As it is genuinely confused, I prefer to show my hand. The problem is knowing whether it is a matter of real nonsense beneath apparent meaning (a “facade” of meaning) or if it is rather a matter of apparent nonsense beneath real meaning. Where is the facade, the semblance, and what is there, basically? The risky analysis, which Freud strives to overcome, is one that reads nonsense in a joke passing itself off as meaning: As (real) *nonsense* in (apparent) meaning, a joke, which Freud calls sophistry, is repugnant. The “correct” analysis for Freud the Aristotelian is the one that manages to find (real) *meaning* beneath (apparent) nonsense: Freud ends up giving the last word of a joke to its meaning, valorized as serious and enlightened, and that I would readily term humanist. This is how I understand Freud’s “charity”:

Analysis came to announce to us that there is knowledge that is not known, knowledge that is based on the signifier as such. . . . This is where Saussure was awaiting Freud. And it is where the question of knowledge is raised afresh. . . . There is here a sort of offshoot of charity. Wasn’t it charitable of Freud to have allowed the misery of speaking beings to say to itself that there is—since there is the unconscious—something transcendent, truly transcendent, which is but what the species inhabits, namely, language? . . . Wasn’t there, yes, charity in the fact of announcing the news that his everyday life has, in language, a more reasonable basis than it seemed before, and that there is already some wisdom—unattainable object of a vain pursuit—there?⁴²

Meaning in nonsense is dominant and reassuring, essentially and existentially.

But the greatest interest to me lies in Freud’s ambivalence with respect to these two positions, and the oscillation between his Aristotelianism and his sophistry.

We will later read this oscillation through a reading of Lacan, who privileges by turns each of the definitions. But Lacan ends up privileging, which Freud does not, nonsense in meaning: This is how, being himself more of a sophist, he sophisticizes Freud. The “meaning” that he then gives to nonsense is a very powerful way of escaping Aristotelian meaning, for which it would be appropriate to invent a negation that no longer has anything to do with the opposition sense/nonsense. It sends shockwaves, as Aristotle predicted, and we are dealing with the grandest words, the humanity in man.

FREUD'S OSCILLATION: NONSENSE IN MEANING OR MEANING IN NONSENSE?

The first occurrence of the term *sophistry* appears in relation to the salmon mayonnaise joke; it is the example I will follow since Freud comes back to it on several occasions, giving the meaning/nonsense difference different, even opposing, value and weight.

An impoverished individual borrowed 25 florins from a prosperous acquaintance, with many asseverations of his necessitous circumstances. The very same day his benefactor met him again in a restaurant with a plate of salmon mayonnaise in front of him. The benefactor reproached him: "What? You borrow money from me and then order yourself salmon mayonnaise? Is *that* what you've used my money for?" "I don't understand you," replied the object of the attack; "if I haven't any money I *can't* eat salmon mayonnaise, and if I have some money I *mustn't* eat salmon mayonnaise. Well, then, when *am* I to eat salmon mayonnaise?"⁴³

"Sophistry" designates very precisely, when he comes back to this example, "the diversion of the train of thought" that comes from "diverting the reply from the meaning of the reproach."⁴⁴

The man defends himself for having spent the money lent to him on a delicacy and asks, with an appearance of reason, *when* he is to eat salmon. But that is not the correct answer. His benefactor is not reproaching him with treating himself to salmon precisely on the day on which he borrowed the money; he is reminding him that in his circumstances he has no right to think of such delicacies *at all*. The impoverished bon vivant disregards the only possible meaning of the reproach, and answers another question as though he had misunderstood the reproach.⁴⁵

This "in fact illogical" answer, as Freud says again, "has been very markedly given the form of a logical argument": The sophistry or faulty reasoning is thus the illogical hidden beneath the logical, which reduces logic to being nothing more than a "form," a "semblance," an "as if," a "facade," a "display": Meaning acts as a facade for nonsense (Figure 4).

With this disjunction between beautiful or healthy appearance and disappointing reality, Freud comes back to one of the most traditional characterizations of sophistry since Plato and Aristotle, that which, to limit ourselves to the first chapter of *Sophistical Refutations*, compares sophistic reasoning to those men who appear handsome because of their makeup or

to those objects made of litharge, tin, or yellow metal. Sophistry as a kind of wolf in sheep's clothing plays on the idea of *pseudos*, a mix of inauthentic and of lying or bad faith, in order to pass itself off for what it is not: logic and wisdom.

The continuation of this taxonomy, whose criterion is the "technique" deployed in the joke, is nevertheless quite troubling. Having moved on to "conceptual jokes" as opposed to "verbal jokes," Freud is still concerned with "faulty reasoning." Two other series of examples follow on from the salmon mayonnaise, under a single heading of sophisticated faulty reasoning (Figure 5).

We should, however, note that the term *sophistry* is only used for the first series (our salmon mayonnaise) and the last one: The intermediate series in fact presents a difficulty. This is how Freud introduces it: "This [the salmon mayonnaise example] may serve to remind us, if *only by means of a contrasting connection*, of other jokes which, *quite the other way*, undisguisedly exhibit a piece or nonsense or stupidity."⁴⁶ The "most forcible and at the same time the plainest" example is that of the artilleryman Itzig, whom a friendly superior officer advises to buy a cannon and make himself

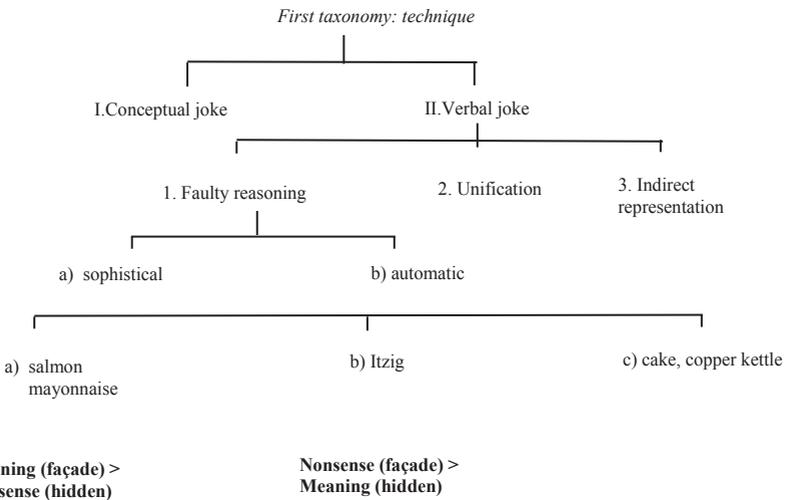


Figure 5. Sophistical faulty reasoning (detail).

independent.⁴⁷ Now “this advice, which may raise a hearty laugh, is obvious nonsense,” but “the advice is not mere nonsense but joking nonsense”: “He enters into Itzig’s stupidity and makes it clear to him.”⁴⁸ This time with Itzig it is nonsense that provides the “facade” of meaning or sense. The weighing up of meaning and nonsense has shifted accordingly. Freud thus comes back quite naturally to the canonical definition of a verbal joke as “sense in nonsense,” but it could be read ambiguously, both as an inversion and as a form of sophistry. So in this first taxonomy, Freud returns to all the most traditional elements of the devalorization of sophistry, aside from one disjunction that is a major one, since it coincides with the appearance of sophistry among the verbal jokes: the disjunction whereby it could, at least in the second series of examples, become the element of meaning within nonsense, rather than the element of nonsense within meaning.

The analysis of the second taxonomy will allow us to continue no less hesitantly along this path. Freud proposes a taxonomy whose criterion this time is the “purpose” or intention attributable to the person telling the joke. The joke can be either innocent or tendentious. Now, the analysis of the tendentious joke allows him to bring nonsense clearly under the jurisdiction of meaning by assigning a meaning—and what a meaning—to nonsense. Since sophistry becomes for Freud the representation of truth.

Reading Freud’s text closely, he was already suggesting this line of thinking when he proposed the “reduced version” of the salmon mayonnaise joke in the first taxonomy, in order to prove that this category of verbal jokes depends not on words but on concepts and on the shift from reproach to response. Indeed, when the gourmet replies “directly,” it is no longer a laughing matter. “The reduced version would then run: ‘I can’t deny myself what tastes good to me, and it’s a matter of indifference to me where I get the money from to pay for it. There you have the explanation of why I’m eating salmon mayonnaise on the very day you’ve lent me the money.’” But, Freud adds, “that would not be a joke; it would be a piece of cynicism.”⁴⁹ When he comes back to the analysis of the salmon mayonnaise joke from the perspective of the second taxonomy, Freud discovers, alongside two guarded tendencies of an obscene intention (the mind that undresses) and an aggressive or hostile intention, a tendency that is more difficult to pin down and that he describes provisionally as a “serious intention.”⁵⁰ The logical facade that, in the first taxonomy, only masked a devalorized “fault” as illogical now assumes another function, that of concealing the fact that “they have something—forbidden—to say”⁵¹ or, more terminologically, that of “displacing attention” by virtue of “getting rid of inhibitions”⁵²:

We shall not be mistaken if we assume of all these anecdotes with a logical façade that they *really mean what they assert for reasons that are intentionally faulty*. It is only this employment of sophistry for the *disguised representation of the truth* that gives it the character of a joke, which is thus essentially dependent on its purpose.⁵³

Truth, which until that point was the other of sophistry, is now revealed by it. Freud lifts not only the Aristotelian repression but also repression of any kind in order to let desire speak. Meaning is no longer where it appeared to be, in the logical facade, but it is to be found and located in nonsense. A sophistical joke can no longer be analyzed as either nonsense in or under sense, or as sense in nonsense: It is nonsense that makes sense.

Freud then continues the “interpretation” of the salmon mayonnaise joke in order to try to give a “special name” to the third class of tendentious joke:

We have since heard that if an appearance of logic is tacked on to the façade of a story the thought would like to say seriously “the man is right,” but, owing to an opposing contradiction, does not venture to declare the man right except on a single point, on which it can easily be shown that he is *wrong*. The “point” chosen is the correct compromise between his rightness and his wrongness; this, indeed, is no decision, but corresponds to the conflict within ourselves.⁵⁴

The logical facade now becomes the sign or the symptom of our approval; the point—which provokes our laughter—is a compromise formation, and the logical/illogical contradiction merely manifests, or masks, the morality/immorality contradiction into which we are all thrown. Indeed, if we are “shocked,” it is because the salmon man proclaims the truth of desire on the occasion of an “inferior” or “superfluous” *jouissance*. As for the special name, we cannot fail to notice that Freud invokes all the marginal or heterodox schools of antiquity: After sophistry, there is epicureanism, then cynicism and even, later on, skepticism. For it may be, he goes on to say, that the salmon mayonnaise is a “simply epicurean” anecdote: Ultimately, it says, “This man is right. There is nothing higher than enjoyment and it is more or less a matter of indifference how one obtains it.”⁵⁵ The justification of *carpe diem*, which “these jokes whisper,” is loudly affirmed these days, and even at length by Freud here, in the face of a morality that “demand[s] without offering any compensation”: If God is dead, this morality is only “a selfish regulation laid down by the few who are rich and powerful and who can satisfy their wishes at any time without any postponement.” Every honest man, so including Freud, “will end by making this admission,

at least to himself.”⁵⁶ And Freud adds abruptly, circling back to his first analysis: “We now know the name that must be given to jokes like those that we have interpreted. They are *cynical* jokes and what they disguise are *cynicisms*.” Whence the abundance of anecdotes within the sophisticated corpus of marriage and people marrying, which tell the truth about the conflict between civilization and sexual freedom, and the profusion of Jewish jokes, which express “the self-criticism of the Jewish people” and the “hopeless miseries of the Jews.”⁵⁷ We should, finally, point out what he terms “skepticism,” as “the problem of what determines the truth,” in relation to the singular but remarkable joke of the two Jews in the train (“What a liar you are! If you say you’re going to Cracow, you want me to believe you’re going to Lemberg. But I know that you’re in fact going to Cracow. So why are you lying to me?”⁵⁸). Since, from sophistry to skepticism, the serious tendentious joke is closely connected in a negative way to the non-tendentious joke, “it shatters respect for institutions and truths”⁵⁹ by becoming a critique of critical judgement. But beyond this and in a positive way it extols, in lifting inhibition through displacement and contradiction, rather than “philosophical truth,” this truer truth expressed by the unconscious, thereby reconnecting with the very *topoi* of sophistry under the names of the schools of antiquity: nature and law, desire, enjoyment, subjective measure.

Sophistry as a representation of true truth—what a triumph! But in triumphing over philosophy, Freud’s heart is no more gay than Lacan’s, as we shall see.

We will note, first of all, that sophistry also appears on the other side of the purpose taxonomy, as innocent and no longer tendentious. I would like to dwell on this for a moment, because it seems to me that Freud’s hesitation becomes such a tangible unease that it produces a visible incoherence, something like shame, and the impossibility of thinking it all the way through. Lacan is also lacking here, with his signifier and *jouissance* boots on.

In the synthetic section, Freud groups together all of his taxonomic headings and wonders about the “mechanism of pleasure” produced by jokes, with such clarity that I will use it to explain the notations of the “innocent tendentious” taxonomy that I am concerned with at present. In what sense are sophisticated jokes innocent, and what pleasure do they produce? When it is innocent, “the substance of a joke is independent of the joke,”⁶⁰ it is “an aim in itself”⁶¹: All we are trying to do with this “autonomous” function of the joke, analogous to aesthetic representation, is to arouse pleasure in the listener and to procure pleasure for ourselves.⁶²

Freud notes, in passing, that “innocent and trivial jokes are likely to put the problem of jokes before us in its purest form, since with them we avoid the danger . . . of having our judgement misled by their good sense.”⁶³ He repeats this comment in the synthetic section when he says in a footnote that “a ‘bad’ joke”—like the one about the Home-Roulard, the cake made at home, in which the homophony does not correspond to any “similarity in their sense”—“we find that the bad jokes are no means bad as jokes—that is, unsuitable for producing pleasure.”⁶⁴ With a pure innocent joke, there is no meaning in the bad play on words, but there is still pleasure, and one can even talk about “pleasure in nonsense.”⁶⁵

Freud then attempts to account for this type of pleasure by aligning it with his general principle of pleasure as the “saving of psychological expenditure.” This generates to my mind one of the craziest parts of the text of *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. There is not a single bit of this text that does not leave us incredulous, as if we were reading one vast denial. We already know that allowing the sound of a word to prevail over its meaning is an “economy in psychological expenditure,”⁶⁶ like a child or even a sick person. What is more surprising is that conceptual jokes, and thus faulty reasoning, depend on the same mechanism:

It is easier and more convenient to diverge from a line of thought we have embarked on than to keep it up, to jumble up things that are different rather than to contrast them—and indeed, that it is *especially* convenient to admit as valid methods of inference that are rejected by logic and, lastly, to put words or thoughts together without regard to the condition that they ought also to make sense.⁶⁷

The peremptory nature of this will be as symptomatic as the previous hesitations, since centuries of resistance to sophistry, the difficulty of abandoning the “line of thought we have embarked on”—already traced out by Parmenides’s goddess: Being is, nonbeing is not—indeed Freud’s attitude itself hardly convinces us that it is easier to abandon meaning. It is true that we are then no longer dealing with “serious life” but once again with the child, the alcoholic—tongue loosened by beer—the neurotic schoolboy, and certain categories of psychopaths. And Freud is surprised that “the hypothesis that behaviour of this kind by the joke-work provides a source of pleasure . . . since apart from jokes all such inefficient intellectual functioning produces in us nothing but unpleasurable defensive feelings.”⁶⁸ Children, the uncivilized, alcoholics, neurotics, psychopaths: This time we have the entire series of Freudian equivalences consonant with sophistry.

We are in a situation of complete ambivalence, since this devalorization of the pleasure of nonsense is quite simply juxtaposed with the valorization that its autonomous functioning had just suggested: It is a question, “with the consciousness that they are nonsensical, and that he finds enjoyment in the attraction of what is forbidden by reason,” of using nonsense, as an infant uses a game, “in order to withdraw from the pressure of critical reason” and to rebel against the tyrannical restrictions of “a child’s education . . . in distinguishing between what is true and false in reality.”⁶⁹

The analysis of the “extreme examples” that Freud proposes in a footnote right at the end of this first synthetic section illuminates even more this pleasure that the Aristotelian adult experiences when falling back into childhood.⁷⁰ A pleasure I cannot resist: “A man at a dinner table who was being handed fish dipped his two hands twice in the mayonnaise and then ran them through his hair. When his neighbour looked at him in astonishment, he seemed to notice his mistake and apologized: ‘I’m so sorry, I thought it was spinach!’” Freud, who does not know what to call these types of jokes—“they might well be described as ‘idiocy masquerading as a joke’”—explains to us that they produce their effect because they “rouse the expectation of a joke, so that one tries to find a concealed sense behind the nonsense. But one finds none; *they really are nonsense*” [author’s emphasis]. The analysis of the pleasure provoked by nonsense is unequivocal, it is the somewhat cruel pleasure of the “Got you!” in the school playground: “These jokes are not entirely without purpose: they are a ‘take-in,’ and give the person who tells them a certain amount of pleasure in misleading and annoying his hearer. The latter then damps down his annoyance by determining to tell them himself later on.” This is exactly the attitude that Aristotle assigns to the victim of a sophism that is so inextricably linked to the signifier, accentuation, and pauses that it becomes impossible to refute: An absurdity that is not susceptible of being clarified in the least, neither within or outside of its expression, has to be returned to the sender by simply repeating it, so that the victim thus becomes the tormenter.

There is thus a kind of purpose in the nontendentious joke that consists of using the weapons of reason—the principle of economy, the abundance of logical forms, the reflex of sense—against reason itself, in an always secondary, always critical violence, so as to make “sources of pleasure fertile” that have been “rendered inaccessible by internal inhibitions.”⁷¹ But this is, as with sophistry, a manifestation that is both salutary and unpleasant, and whose marginal character needs to be maintained. In short, when the pleasure in nonsense allows us to let go of the weight of logic, it is

somewhat valorized, but when there is nothing but nonsense beneath the nonsense, then we should be horror-struck.⁷² So all of the elements of a positive reinterpretation of sophistry are present in Freud, against a backdrop of the attention he gives to saying, the pertinence of what he does not name the play of the signifier, and the pertinence of faults in logic. But it is clear de facto that this completely new analysis of the pleasure of speaking cannot take place, even if the truth were to change meaning, outside the Aristotelian register of sense.

We come back to the familiar role of logical gadfly that philosophers, such as Alain Badiou, assign to the sophists, the same role, moreover, that Catherine Malabou assigns to women philosophers: "Women perhaps do not invent philosophical questions, but they create problems. Wherever they can, they put a stick in the wheels of philosophers and philosophemes."⁷³ Lacan says the same thing: "This is the beginning of the critique of the sophists. To anyone who states whatever is proposed as truth, the sophist demonstrates that he does not know what he is saying. This is indeed the origin of all dialectics."⁷⁴ But when we truly take pleasure in nonsense (and we should no doubt consistently use the term *jouissance* here instead of pleasure, linked to that of ab-sense instead of nonsense), then it is terrifying. In Lacanian terms, it is terrifying because we are touching the real: "The real is affirmed, through an effect which is not insignificant, by being affirmed in the impasses of logic. . . . We are touching here, in a domain that is apparently the most certain [arithmetic], and which contradicts the entire hold that discourse has, upon the exhaustion of logic, which introduces an irreducible gap [*béance*]. This is what we refer to as the real."⁷⁵ Whence my question, an insistent one since the prologue: Are there two quite distinct ways of touching upon the real, *jouissance* and the *matheme*?

DON'T TRY TO UNDERSTAND! LACAN'S HESITATION: ANOTHER SENSE OR THE FUNDAMENTAL NONSENSE OF ALL USE OF SENSE?

This, then, is the oscillation in Freud between a runaway Aristotelianism and the birth of psychoanalysis and that Lacan returns to with the slogan: *Don't try to understand!* This is what the Lacanian operation of taking Freud back to Freud involves.

In "The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of Psychoanalysts in 1956," Lacan amplifies Freud's expression "the dream is a picture-puzzle (rebus)" and comments upon it as follows: "Have the sentences of a rebus ever had the slightest meaning, and does its interest—that is, the interest

we take in its deciphering—not derive from the fact that the signification manifest in its images falls away, having no other scope than that of conveying the signifier that is disguised in it?”⁷⁶ Just prior to this is a reflection on the “ordinal finity” of the mantic battery, in which nothing is of value except in combination, “in which the giant of language,” as Lacan says, “takes on anew his stature by being suddenly delivered from the Gulliverian bonds of signification.”

Lacan thus rubs the Aristotelian side of Freud up the wrong way, and it ends with this magnificent apostrophe:

“Don’t try to understand!” and leave this nauseating category to Karl Jaspers and his consorts. May one of your ears become as deaf as the other one must be acute. And that is the one that you should lend to listen for sounds and phonemes, words, locutions and sentences, not forgetting pauses, scansion, cuts, periods and parallelisms, for it is in these that the word-for-word transcription can be prepared, without which analytic intuition has no basis or object.⁷⁷

Don’t try to understand!

And yet in the 1956–1957 seminar on the object relation, Lacan himself also hesitated between privileging sense or nonsense. I would like to juxtapose these two texts, one coming before the other, the first in which Lacan chooses sense or meaning, the play on meaning, and the creation of meaning, and the second in which he introduces the force of nonsense, its force and its intimacy with the signifier:

Man, because he is man, is put in the presence of problems which are as such problems of signifiers. The signifier, indeed, is introduced into the real by its very existence as a signifier, because there are words which are said, because there are phrases which are articulated and joined to one another, connected by a medium, a copula of the order of *why* or *because*. This is how ***the existence of the signifier introduces into the world of men a new meaning***. To put it in the terms I used to express myself once at the end of a short introduction to the first issue of the journal *La Psychanalyse*—*It is in traversing the course of things that the symbol becomes attached, so as to give it another meaning*. These then become problems of the creation of meaning, with all the freedom and ambiguity this implies, and the ever present possibility of reducing everything arbitrarily to nothing. The sudden appearance of a verbal joke [*mot d’esprit*] always has a completely arbitrary aspect, and Hans is like Humpty Dumpty in *Alice in Wonderland*. He is capable of saying at any moment—*Things are as they are because I say so, and because I am the master*.⁷⁸

Bizarre. You can see the slippage. “The *logos* that is in the sounds of voice and in the words,” that of Aristotle’s *legein logou kharin*, in other words our “existence of the signifier,” far from being the bastion of the sophistic resistance to meaning, serves instead to *introduce into the world of men a new meaning*. Mutatis mutandis, the signifier is more than ever linked to homonymy—this is even how it differs from the signified: As Lacan emphasizes in relation to little Hans, “none of the signifying elements of phobia have any univocal meaning, or are the equivalent of a single signified.”⁷⁹ This characteristic of the signifier is linked to its function as a symptom (no longer a speaking plant but someone with a phobia): “The symptomatic signifier is constituted in such a way that its nature is to encompass multiple, sometimes very different, signifieds in the course of its development and evolution. It is not only its nature to do so, but its function.”⁸⁰ A horse is thus “a sign that can properly do anything, just like a typical signifier can.”⁸¹

Now this same homonymy of the signifier in fact allows for an additional mastery: that of free creation. Man simply finds himself with even greater nomothetic power: “Things are as they are because I say so, and because I am the master.” In short, the signifier, lending playfulness to meaning, magisterially turns meaning into a game.

Now the second quotation, which follows the first and which I will comment upon within the text:

Freud’s *Witz* points directly, without giving way or straying into secondary considerations, to the essential aspect of the phenomenon. Just as in the first chapter of the *Interpretation of Dreams*, he foregrounds the notion that *the dream is a rebus*, and no-one notices—this sentence has until now gone almost completely unnoticed—[let us recall the “Don’t try to understand!”], so no-one seems to have noticed that the analysis of the characteristic of a joke begins with the analysis of a phenomenon of condensation, the word *famillionaire*, a fabrication based on the signifier, by superposing *familiar* and *millionaire*. Everything that Freud goes on to develop subsequently [I would have said rather: not everything Freud goes on to develop subsequently] consists in showing **the annihilating effect, the truly destructive, disruptive character, of the play of the signifier in relation to what one might call the existence of the real. In playing with the signifier, man radically puts his world into question at every moment.** [What a diagnosis, and worthy of Aristotle!] The value of the verbal joke, and what distinguishes it from the comic, is its potential to play **on the fundamental nonsense of every use of sense.** It is, at any

moment, **possible to put into question all sense or meaning**, insofar as it is founded on a use of the signifier. Indeed, this use is in itself profoundly paradoxical in relation to any possible signification, since **it is this use itself that creates what it is destined to support.**⁸²

A little while ago, Lacan was not exactly listening to Freud or to the signifier with this ear. It is no longer a matter of “the creation of a new meaning”—being more Aristotelian than Aristotle—but of the “fundamental nonsense of every use of sense”: This is precisely what Freud was afraid of with jokes, what engendered all of his hesitations, what repelled him while exciting him, what he had to recuperate by all available means and to bring back into the protective bosom of meaning. Clearly, Freud and Lacan are in basic agreement: Stopping at the fundamental nonsense of every use of sense is enough to shake to its core the Aristotelian world, that of the animal endowed with logos, namely, the principle of noncontradiction as decision of meaning. But they do not have quite the same reaction: For Freud, the value of nonsense is its sense; for Lacan, the value of nonsense is still nonsense. The *Witz* as a new *Treatise on Non-being*, “destroying, disrupting what we might call the existence of the real.” And for the same reasons as in Gorgias. It is necessary, and sufficient, to show that meaning, or the sphere of being, ontology, etc., rests on a *busteron proteron* that we might call “paradoxical”: It is only the use of the signifier that creates signification or, put another way, Being is an effect of saying. “It is this use itself that creates what it is destined to support” and it is for that reason that everything could fall apart: You will find no better illustration of the necessity and the impossibility of the demonstration-refutation. In short, “it gets very funny [*drôle*], with all the strange resonances that this word, *drôle*, carries with it.”⁸³

Sophistical Incursions into Psychoanalytic Technique

OF THE THREE CONSTITUENT HOMONYMIES AND OF THE HOMONYMY OF HOMONYMY

The conditions of possibility of the in-sense [*l'insens*] in general are: that there be a norm of language *and* that this norm can be (or even, cannot not be) transgressed. Ever since *Gamma*, the norm of language has been signification, whose sequential form I will recall one final time: to speak (*legein*) is to say something (*legein ti*), that is, to signify something (*sêmaneîn ti*), that is, to signify only one thing for oneself and for others (*sêmaneîn hen autôi kai allôî*). Now, reading Aristotle with a sophistic-analytic eye (for

want of an ear), we note that the transgression of this norm is inscribed in language itself and on three quite distinct levels: that of the constitution itself of language, or metaphysics; that of supplementary invention, or poetry; and that of the signifier, or analytic sophistry. The third level radicalizes a change in the definition of homonymy and takes us from ancient or classical homonymy, that of Aristotle, when one and the same word refers to things whose definition differs, to modern homonymy, which in reality is homophony, when one and the same sound sequence refers to several things.⁸⁴ The homonymy of homonymy is this move from a homonymy of signification to a homonymy of the signifier.

The first level, then, diagnosed by Aristotle in the first chapter of the *Sophistical Refutations* as a radical problem of language:

Words are finite, as are the quantity of sayings, whereas things are infinite in number. It is thus necessary that the same saying or a single word has several meanings.⁸⁵

There are more things in heaven and earth than man can ever dream of, there are more pragmata than words existing in the system of our language, even if it is expanding, and no doubt also more states of the word than there are sentences. The usefulness of language is first of all unthinkingly to substitute a symbolic relation for a deictic relation: It is easier to talk about a herd of elephants than to get them on to a table. So when one is Aristotelian, if homonymy is inevitable it is because things never stop proliferating, and verbal conventions do not follow. Immediately, although it is inevitable, homonymy is rightly also reducible, and the problem is no doubt more infinite-indefinite than radical: When one notices that two things do not have the same definition but bear the same name, all one needs to do is invent a new word. Aristotle thus sets to work on a tireless nomothetic activity: Every analogy, every category, whether it concerns ontology, zoology, or ethics, reveals fine distinctions or as yet anonymous spaces. Aristotle's work, the work of a philosopher, across his entire oeuvre (think, for example, of *Delta*, the first dictionary of homonyms) as in the more heated moments of the *Sophistical Refutations*, consists of allocating one signifier per signified.

Now, on a second level homonymy is linked to the remedy that linguistic invention offers. Since as poets—or indeed all speaking beings—never stop proving, what allows us to best fabricate these words that are constantly lacking, namely the perception of resemblances, depends on homonymy. And primarily metaphor, which works specifically by seeing and expressing resemblances. The *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* on this point run counter to both

the *Metaphysics* and the organon. Metaphor is defined as “the application of an improper name,”⁸⁶ but this very impropriety whereby we call something by a name that is fitting for something else “produces a science and a knowledge”: “As in philosophy, seeing what is similar in what is very distant belongs to the person whose aim is true.”⁸⁷ Even admitting that, whatever the price to pay, one can dispense with saying that the evening is the old age of the day, how can we talk about a table leg or the foot of a mountain other than using “leg” or “foot,” which only properly refer to the body of an animal?

Resemblance and homonymy. I would like to dwell on these for a moment, since we have not measured well (and I think I would include Lacan in that “we”) just how far the ancient conception of homonymy and metaphor runs counter to everything we think of today: When we think of resemblance, do we not assume motivation, image, semantic flux, indeed everything except homonymy? We are touching here upon the main difference between the two times. In order to understand the grounds of the canonical definition of homonymy as it is first proposed—and this is the only place that merits respect—we should refer to the opening lines of the *Categories*. Here is the text:

When things have only a name in common and the definition of being which corresponds to the name is different, they are called homonymous. Thus for example, both a man and a picture are animals. These have only a name in common and the definition of being which corresponds to the name is different; for if one is to say what being an animal is for each of them, one will give two distinct definitions.⁸⁸

The example is striking: An image and its model are homonyms. Resemblance (the kind that strictly speaking informs the Platonic system, *eidōs*–*eidōlon*, model–image and semblance, and that is clearly Aristotle’s target!) is a kind of homonymy. Elsewhere, he talks about a man and a statue or, quite frequently, about a living organ and a dead organ (hand, eye). Even those that the *Nicomachean Ethics* calls “chance homonyms” or “accidental homonyms” (*ta apo tukhês homônoma*)⁸⁹ resemble one another; Aristotle gives the example of *kleis*, both a “key” and a “clavicle,” “the bone that is below the neck of an animal, and what one uses to lock a door,” as well as the no less celebrated barking dog and Celestial Dog, or the eagle and the pedestal that spreads its wings above the columns, but what if not resemblance could have been the determining factor in their naming? Such that metaphorical uses of a term—and let us not forget, “to make a good metaphor is to see what is similar”⁹⁰—are effectively cases of homonymy.

What is inadmissible for modern linguists is precisely that there be any resemblance in homonymy.⁹¹ So as not to risk what remains of the definitional resemblance one could find between keys that lock doors and shoulders, or our “irises” (here one should read the end of René Char’s *Lettera amorosa*),⁹² and against the pertinence of metaphors used to describe both a voice and a night as “*blanche*” [white],⁹³ we could henceforth take as examples something like *verre* and *vair*,⁹⁴ for what French child has not been confused about the material Cinderella’s slipper is made from?

We come, then, to the third level. With sound and the signifier decoupled from meaning, at least up until Freud, there was never any danger. But once the signifier depends on meaning or sense (whether as sense in nonsense or nonsense in sense makes no difference) or, to Lacanize, once its effect is the signified, then of course there is no longer any chance or luck, only more and always more sense to find, more of the logos that there is in the sounds of voices and in the words to interpret.

Homonymy is for a third time necessary and inevitable because, on the side of the signifier, it is the privileged way in which the unconscious expresses itself as *parlêtre*, congested by multiple different senses, *sinthome*, *non-dupes errent*, *P’insu qui sait de l’une-bévue s’aile à moure*.⁹⁵ With, as *modus operandi*: cuts in time and the passage to writing.

KAIROS, SCANSION, AND TIME IN DISCOURSE

“The decision must be left to the analyst’s tact or sniffing out. A miscalculation cannot be rectified. The saying that a lion only springs once must apply here,”⁹⁶ says Freud of the “right time” for the “blackmailing device” that constitutes the fixing of a time limit by the analyst himself for the ending of an analysis. Sniffing out or intuition, *nous*, is as characteristic of Ulysses’s dog, the first to recognize (*noein*) his master and who falls dead on his dung heap, as of Aristotle’s god and his *noêsis noêseôs*, intuition of intuition. The instantaneous snapshot of the right moment is the time of analysis, as much for the calculation of the ending as for the moment the session is cut short and the scansion of the interpretation.

The Greeks have a word to express this nonspatializable time that, in the same way as *epideixis*, is a characteristic of sophistry: That word is *kairos*. It is represented in the features of a handsome young man, with winged heels, a shock of hair at the front, but bald at the back of his head, an opportunity to be grasped. *Kairos*, one of the most untranslatable of Greek words, with its background in the Hippocratic corpus, on the one hand, and Pindaric poetry, on the other, is particular to sophistic-analytic

temporality.⁹⁷ Kairos is dangerous. It is, like the zen instant of the release of the arrow, the moment of the opening of possibilities: the moment of “crisis” for a doctor, that is to say of the decision between healing and death, the moment the Pindaric or tragic archer shoots, between hitting and missing the target. For Onians, *kairos*, unlike *skopos* (the “bull’s-eye” at the center of the target), names the point where “a weapon could penetrate fatally”: It is a fateful shot that strikes right at the heart. It is the name of the target insofar as it depends entirely on the moment, the name of the place insofar as it is temporalized with nothing left over; it could be understood in the way the Latin *tempus* does not only mean “time” [*temps*] but also the “temple” of a head [*tempe*]. Close consideration of *kairos* helps to understand that the temple of a head, time, and a temple as a place of worship [*temple*] are part of the same family of words, derived from the Greek *temnô*, “to cut.” *Kairos* is at the same time a cutting and an opening: more exactly, the “gap in the armor,” as in the *Iliad*, the “boney suture,” “opportunity” as both port [*port*] and door [*porte*].

Onians’s magnificent hypothesis is that *kairôs*, with the accent on the omicron (“a true shot that hits the target,” as Chantraine says⁹⁸), and *kaîros*, with the accent on the iota (“the ‘cord’ that attaches the end of the chain to the loom,” as Chantraine says, who is not unresponsive to the connection being made) “are originally one and the same.” For Onians, *kaîros* is the name for the spacing, the gap, the opening created by the heddles of the loom. Gallet shows that it is not this opening itself but more precisely the “regulatory reed” that, like our comb, “separates the threads of the chain by keeping them parallel to stop them getting tangled,” so at the same time joining them up, thus it regulates both the vertical order and the horizontal order of interlacing of the weft by demarcating the area of work: This is sometimes held by a device installed at the top of the loom and that “holds up the woven work.”⁹⁹ It is thus the term used by syllepsis in Pindar, both literally and figuratively, to refer to the “process of interlacing themes.” In the articulation of *kairos*—and “articulation” is to be understood in all senses of the term: *kairon ei phthegxiao*, “if one articulates,” “if one enunciates,” *kairos*, says Pindar¹⁰⁰—words are both shot and woven. *Kairos* is autotelic, it contains within it its own end: It is the moment when *poiêsis* and *tekhnê*, the making and the know-how of which produces work externally, are at the peak of their inventiveness and touch on praxis, on the act that has its own end in itself, a kind of divine interiorization of finality. But perhaps it is not yet radical enough, and we need to go so far as to say that *kairos* is *poros*, the “passage” that makes *telos* redundant (hence the monotony of ends ascribed to anyone who gives in to *kairos*, sophists and analysts in general—money?).

We will therefore emphasize the link between *kairos* and singularity: With *kairos*, we rush into a single case, there are even nothing but cases.

I have the impression that I am touching upon what I would like to call the ethics of psychoanalysis (as much as, if not more than, its *vade mecum*, "do not give in to one's desire"). At least there is no doubting the connection to analytic practice and its due temporality. One of the best known and most commented places Lacan refers to the term *sophism* is, very early on, in "Logical Time." Lacan here talks about the "sophistic value" of the solution in the very ad hoc scheme he describes, not because there is any faulty reasoning but because time has become part of logic for good: There is no solution to the problem without the two "suspensive scansions."¹⁰¹ The role of the two scansions "is not that in the experience of the verification of an hypothesis, but rather that of something intrinsic to logical ambiguity." The important point is that of ambiguity, which is linked to the lapse of time that carries out the integral of the equivocations and imposes an interpretation and an action. The "function of haste" or the seizing of the *kairos* (it is almost already too late) is what points to the act.

The interpretation, like the act, is *kairos*, but this time it seizes linguistic ambiguity, linked to dis-course, to the lapse "between" the sounds that make the signifier, something like a subtractive ambiguity for which the *den* will serve as paradigm (that which Paul Celan could still bear within the German language, heard through a *Sprachgitter*, that window in a confessional that structures the signifying chain through a latticework of silences and that lets one hesitate and subtract so as to make it livable). "A happy chance out of which shoots a flash; and this is where interpretation can take place": because of our floating attention, we hear everything askew, "due to a kind of equivocation, that is to say, a material equivalence," and let the person who has just spoken notice the emergence of "his own semiotics," his *lalangue*.¹⁰² An interpretation shot and woven, thrust into the prompter's box. The perception and exploitation of homonymy via the independence of the signifier, the characteristic of the analyst's discourse, are made possible by the spacing between the chain and the weft, which weaves signifiers, and thus all kinds of silences, hiatuses, and gaps that scan, descan, and rescan them, teasing apart the fibers of time. To the point where one "kaironizes" Being itself, as a verb and a subject: "Ontology is what highlighted in language the use of the copula, isolating it as a signifier."¹⁰³

In short, logology is a chronology: It is time that is the effective principle of discourse. This is why I maintain that thought by philosophy,

“rhetoric” is invented by ontology in order to domesticate—to spatialize—time within discourse. Ever since Plato’s *Gorgias*, time has been reduced to space: A discourse is an organism that is spread out (it has a “map”) and articulated (as Plato says, one has to know how to “cut it up”). Rhetoric in Aristotle sits alongside all of physics (time as the image of movement) and the whole organon that organizes logoi according to the *hama*, “at the same time,” of the principle of noncontradiction, with all of the *sun* (syn-tax, syl-logism) needed to make it visible. It is always a matter of going from considering the act of enunciation [*énonciation*] to considering the statement [*énoncé*] itself, from the signifying chain and the seizing [*saisie*] of kairos, the point in time, to the topos and topoi, the topics of speaking well. If there is a sophistic-analytic specificity to the practice of language, it thus implies something like a rhetoric of time, in contrast to the philosophical rhetoric of space. A sentence from *Gorgias* just as much as a sentence from Lacan can attune us to their differential characteristics, which I will summarize as follows:

The present, and in particular the present of enunciation produced by it, is included in the chain and cannot exist apart from it: There is no residual presence of the present, nor any place for a metalinguage. Hence the contradictions, the reversals, in short: the paradoxology. This is the model of logical time, its scansion and conclusive turnarounds.

Sense is created in the very process of enunciation. This is what *Gorgias’s Treatise on Non-being*, and its exploitation of the slippery nature of any proposition about identity, makes us forever aware of: “Non-being is . . . ” (so it exists) “ . . . non-being” (so it does not exist anymore). It is this slippage that prevents the spatialization of *syn-tax* where subject and predicate are produced as non-negotiable places.

Attention is a listening attention of the ear, bearing on the logos that is in the sounds of the voice and in words; hence the privilege of the voice (*bombos, phônê*), on the one hand, and of homonymy, supported by signifiers and silences, on the other. When joined to the rapidity of the moment, this is what produces the verbal joke [*mot d’esprit*] and makes symptoms and interpretations resonant.

Improvisation, so aptly named eloquence *ex tempore*, is the manifestation par excellence of the rhetoric of time. *Skhedioi logoi*, “improvised speeches,” are the “rafts,” those “interlinked connections” on

which man has set sail over time, like Ulysses when he left Calypso to return to Ithaca: "It was Gorgias, Philostratus went on, who was the first to improvise: stepping forward on the stage in Athens, he had the audacity to say: 'Suggest something!' and he was the first to articulate such a risk, thereby demonstrating on the one hand that he knew everything, and on the other, that he would speak about everything in giving himself over to opportunity [*ephiesis tōi kairōi*]." "Set associations free!" as the new slogan: a "session" (why has epideixis not yet been translated in this way. . .), say whatever comes to you, "Away you go, say whatever, it will be marvelous!"¹⁰⁴ For whether you know it or not, and especially if you know nothing about it, you know everything.

WHY LACAN IS SO INTERESTED IN METONYMY AND METAPHOR, OR HOW THEY BECOME THE TOPIC OF TIME

One of the most successful achievements of philosophical rhetoric is the theory of topics (*topoi*) and figures (*tropoi*, or turns of speech), or restricted rhetoric. Nothing is more explicitly spatial than these repertoires and techniques attached to the arts of memory, which tell us where to seek and which routes to take. Now, here again, one of the characteristics of sophistry is that it escapes spatialization. "To Gorgianize": the word invented by Philostratus¹⁰⁵ tells us a lot because of its phonic power, and its Gongoric and love-hating [*hainamourée*] construction. Gorgias with his sonorous figures confers meter and music upon prose: What is more, this is why Aristotle accuses him of having "a poetic style (*poietikê* [. . .] *lexis*)" and of not yet having understood that "the style of *logos* is different to that of poetry."¹⁰⁶ The Souda affirms that he gives rhetoric its "phrastics" and attributes to him the use of almost all figures (tropes, metaphors, allegories, hypallages, catachreses, hyperbatons), but the properly "Gorgianic" figures are the ones, initially sonorous or audible, that end the enumeration: "and repetitions (*anadiplōsesi*) and reprises (*epanalēpsesi*) and reversals (*apostrophais*) and correspondences (*parisōsesin*)." These are in any case the ones that Diodorus retains when he describes the surprise of the "philologist" Athenians, lovers of discourse, listening for the first time to Gorgias and his "extraordinary" figures: "and antitheses (*antithetois*) and equal repetitive phrases (*isokolois*) and correspondences (*parisōsin*) and homeoteleutons (*homoioiteleutois*)."¹⁰⁷ The *Encomium of Helen* can be properly heard only in Greek: the iteration of alliterations—"toi smikrotatōi somati kai

aphanestatôî theiotata erga apotelei,"¹⁰⁸ a succession of sounds to describe the nature of logos and to bear witness to its dynasty.

Gorgianic tropes are contrasted with our ordinary spatial tropes. Metaphor and metonymy are two well-known ways of constructing a panoptic geometry, of establishing an analogy of proportion ("the evening is the old age of the day"), or of taking the part for the whole (the sail for the boat): It is always a matter of "seeing resemblance" in order to give an integral description of the world's stage and to plot its measured graph. This at least is what I used to think before understanding what Lacan does with metaphor and why he considers metonymy as primary.

Let us recapitulate in order. Lacanianism is untranslatable in an even better way than Gorgianism and for fundamental reasons, that is to say, reasons having to do with different times, with being conscious of the unconscious, which give the full weight of the real to the signifier and the symptom. We will come back to this with that theoretical and practical summa of Lacanianism that is "L'Étourdit." We have to make a clear distinction, however, between Lacan's style, on the one hand, his own "rhetoric," the way in which he "Lacanizes," and the way in which he is interested in rhetoric on, the other. In fact, and this is really a remarkable gesture, Lacan appropriates metaphor and metonymy, or rather metonymy and metaphor, starting out from the signifier and no longer from the signified, in such a way that that he shifts them from a rhetoric of space and of the signified to a rhetoric of time and of the signifier: I would say that he gives them back to logology.

Metonymy is consistently and vigorously primary in Lacan as a reader of the *Traumdeutung*: It is no longer, as in our manuals, a spatial figure that simply allows us to designate something by its most decisive or remarkable part, of a secondary order relative to the inventiveness of metaphor; it is rather at the very heart of Freud's discovery, like a vector of the flow that allows us to go from one signifier to another. Metonymy becomes, to put it in ultra-philosophical terms, the transcendental condition of the new subject barred by the unconscious. It ensures the possibility of the key logion "a signifier is what represents a subject for another signifier," such that, a lot more simply, "the subject is nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers."¹⁰⁹ Now this process that links the signifier to another signifier in a chain is, or is confused with, the course of time in dis-course. It is understood that the "signifying coordination" that metonymy is should be prior and necessary for the "transfer of signifieds" that are metaphors: "There would be no metaphor if there were no metonymy."¹¹⁰ As for

metaphor, that is all there is, that is how we speak. That is how she speaks and can be seen, she on the woman's side, whose stripped-down discourse in *Encore* constantly attests to the fact that jouissance is unsuited to the sexual relationship. She would do better remaining silent, but that would make the absence of sexual relationship even weightier. So she does not remain silent, and the first effect of repression is that she speaks about something else: "That is what constitutes the mainspring of metaphor."¹¹ Aristotle and Freud, no longer crisscrossing one another but fallen into the prompter's box, this is what awaits us.

The Jouissance of Language, or Lacan's Ab-Aristotelianism

The signifier is matter that is transcended in language. I leave you to decide whether to attribute this sentence to a communist Bouvard or to a Pécuchet who is thrilled by the marvels of DNA.

—JACQUES LACAN, "Answer to Students of Philosophy"

As for what comes from the field of *jouissance*—which, sadly, will never be called the Lacanian field, for I will surely not have the time even to sketch out the bases, but I have wanted to—there are some remarks to be made.

—JACQUES LACAN, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*

Ab-sense *and the Den*

SENSE AND ITS THREE NEGATIONS

"I am master enough of *lalangue*, the one called French, to have arrived at what fascinates in witnessing the *jouissance* that is properly part of the system. An opaque *jouissance* because it excludes sense. We had suspected it for some time. To be post-Joycean is to know it."¹

This sentence indeed excludes sense or meaning—but only just. If there were no protestation of mastery, we would have our doubts, and we would follow the path of its meaning by permitting ourselves to transform the performance into a typographical error. But when one Lacanizes, there is neither metareading nor metalanguage, nothing but an immersive learning about the/a *lalangue*, which is what makes the thing so captivating.

Alain Badiou, in particular in his commentary on "L'Étourdit," wants to reinscribe Lacan into philosophy as an antiphilosopher, the point of this reinscription being "the critique of meaning, or sense, in favor of a knowledge of the real."² The critique of sense ("Yes, we seek the ab-sense

of sense") is indeed common to the philosopher and the antiphilosopher psychoanalyst. The difference is that philosophy critiques sense in the name of truth ("Indeed, truth, the love of which, as we know, is the basis of all philosophy, is incompatible with the variability of sense,"³), whereas Lacan goes from sense to the real and not from sense to the truth (he remains an "anti," "not wanting 'truth' to be that whereby all knowledge maintains that it touches some real"⁴). According to Lacan, unlike philosophy in the way he conceives of it, there is no "truth of the real" accessible as wisdom and consolation.

In order to follow Jacques the Sophist, in my view, we have to link directly the critique of meaning or sense and the real (what is the real or, rather, how do we say what it is?) with discourse and jouissance. This is what I would like to do in taking as my starting point the idea of "ab-sense" as it appears in "L'Étourdit."

What is certain, and here I am in complete agreement with Alain Badiou, is that the real, whether or not we know what it is, is defined in relation to the absence of meaning. As he goes on to say, "absence as subtraction from meaning or sense from the classical decision of meaning . . . cannot be classified with sense or with the Aristotelian-type decision of sense. But nor can it be classified, via a negative reversal, with non-sense."⁵ I am again in agreement about making a radical distinction between "ab-sense" and "non-sense." But it is the following step, Badiou says, that is crucial: "It is of the utmost importance to understand that the negative expressions ('there is no such thing as,' 'there's such a thing as *ab-sense*') are equivalent to a non-negative formula, namely, 'ab-sex sense.'⁶ I am again in agreement here, but on one express and consistent condition: We have to maintain that the "nonnegative" formula—ab-sex sense—is not a positive formula but a subtractive formula. "An absence in sense, an ab-sense, or a subtraction of, or from, sense": perfectly put. This is why I am no longer in agreement about defining the real as "*sense* qua *ab-sense*,"⁷ because this give sense the upper hand over ab-sense, which in my view produces a harmful confusion of negations. Sense as such is on the same level as non-sense: They make a pair, a pair of opposite, contradictory terms. Ab-sense is no more non-sense than it is sense. *It is a hole in the pair.* Nor is it then obviously without-sense [*bors-sens*] either, for all that.⁸ "Ab-sense" could only be called "sense" ("ab-sex sense," the predicate should at least desemanticize the subject in dramatizing it) to the extent that we are Aristotelian when we speak (Lacan is too), since we are what Aristotle has seen and made of us. But since we are

also sophistic-analysts, we will stubbornly insist on making the distinction between the (at least) three negations of sense that allow us to go on dis-coursing about it:

In fact, there are at least three negations:

1. *Non-sense* that forms a couple with *sense*, a pair oriented by sense or meaning, as the *non* in *non-sense* indicates. It is the orb of the norm described by Aristotle. The fact that the pair is oriented signals the refutatively universal force of the mechanism, no more or no less: In other words, it is the effect of the decision of meaning that something either has sense or is not. But no one is, or has to be, Aristotelian in everything or all the way.
2. *Without-sense* (in a first table I called it “*un-sens/in-sens*” so as to detach it from univocality⁹), or the logos of plants, sent out of orbit by Aristotle as inhuman. When it is reclaimed as sophistic-analytic logology, via performance, homonymy, the signifier, and jouissance, it determines from outside the sense/non-sense orb and frames it as part of a more all-encompassing mechanism. This is where the refutation—which requires, as we saw, at least one exception for its demonstration and which performs the universal only by a process of exclusion—produces a sophistic effect that Aristotle can do nothing about since he needs it (he should no doubt not have stated the principle so as not to “un-found” [*effonder*] it but, to echo the *Witz* about the cake and the glass of liqueur,¹⁰ he would not then have founded it either). Ontology, which is by definition “humanist,” becomes a particularly prosperous subset of logology.
3. *Ab-sense* as a hole in the sense/non-sense norm: This is a “without-sense” of the inside, a hole in the sense/non-sense orb, an “extimacy” [*extimité*]. This is what interests us at this point.

I say “at least three” negations, since we would still have to situate denial: a modal or subjective negation, as we say in Greek grammar, interdiction via “anything but that” (it would be expressed in Greek by *mê: mê on*, “non-being,” is what is absolutely not, what cannot and must not be), but masked as an objective, factual negation, alongside a tranquil privation implying the shared horizon of an at least potentially common predication, with the possibility of “this” (expressed by a privative *alpha* or by an *ouk*; *ouk on* is “what happens not to be” and could be said of a dead person who was alive), the whole thing designating, with utmost precision, that what is at stake is the “this” of which you must not speak.¹¹

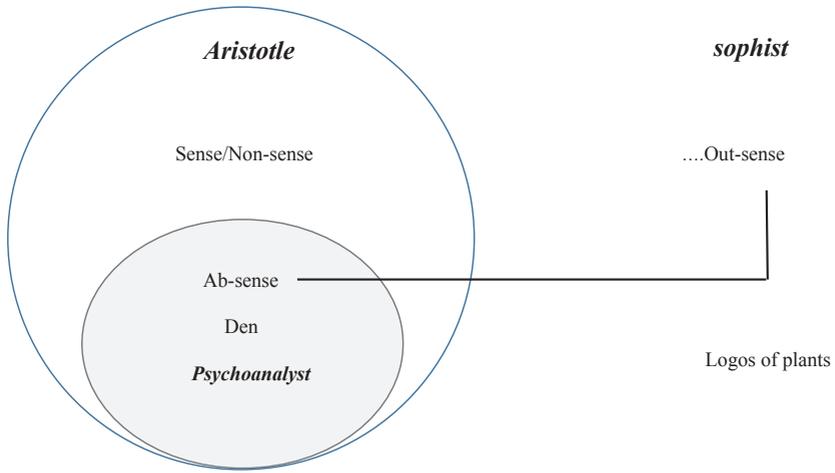


Figure 6. Sense and its three negations.

We can thus represent sense with its at least three negations (Figure 6). In order to understand the difference between sense/non-sense, without-sense and ab-sense, “L’Étourdit” provides the model of Democritus’s *den*, a “stow-away” of all ontology, “whose clam now shapes our destiny”¹²—the worm that eats a hole into the wood that usually burns us up.¹³ *Den* is very precisely how without-sense comes back (or has always already come back as a symptom that occurs each time in its complete newness) as ab-sense in the sense/non-sense orb. *Den*, the word that is not one, allows us to identify ab-sense as a question of subtraction and to understand within what kind of signifying secondariness we are moving. We need to hold on to the subtractive model *den*, which can bundle together the signifier, the real, and jouissance—and I will go into more detail a little later. But what I need to stress for now is the following relation: It is without-sense (the logos of plants), this alone and only this, that comes back to make a hole in sense/non-sense. It comes back extimate to sense as ab-sense. The organization of philosophy (what I have called “the sophistic-analytic listening to the history of philosophy”¹⁴) is structured just like repression. The return (of the repressed) produces the difference in times: This is the “Aristotle with Freud” about which Lacan talks. The sophist returns as a Lacanian psychoanalyst on the lookout for ab-sex sense—symptom, interpretation, jouissance—that is neither non-sense nor, indeed, sense but a definite effect of what Alain Badiou calls the “dubious properties of language.”¹⁵

I would like to draw this agreement/disagreement with Alain Badiou concerning subtraction to a provisional conclusion. In my view, the hole in sense is not sense, ab-sex sense is not sense, no more sense than it is nonsense. Why this quibble? Because if it is sense (ab-sex sense but ab-sex *sense* nonetheless), then there is the foundation of “the possibility of the matheme, of integral transmission, in short, of the formula.” The stumbling block, as in the philosophical polemic between Leibniz and Arnauld in their correspondence after *The Discourse on Metaphysics* (what is not *one* being is not one *being* either, they both repeated, with the accent sometimes on *being* and other times on *one*), has to do with where the accent is placed. Ab-sex *sense* or *ab-sex* sense? The accent reveals the finality, the existential care if you like: Why not the matheme, among others? I would readily say, like the sophist about the truth: But why, and for whom, this “integral transmission” (though I like even better: “Our inheritance was left to us by no testament” [*Notre héritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament*]. . .¹⁶)? With Alain Badiou's gesture it is first the orthodox question of the transmission of psychoanalysis that tempts Lacan the schoolmaster. But in fact a question of philosophy, and of what I would call a procedure of reintegration, not so much of Lacan within philosophy, as of philosophy within Lacanianism: “Philosophy can operate freely without abandoning any of its speculative ambition with respect to psychoanalysis and without having to jettison (along with ontology, for the sake of the dubious properties of language), its conviction that a truth, however without-sense or ab-sense it may be, is nonetheless a pure contact with the real.”¹⁷

My question has remained the same from the beginning: Do matheme and discourse touch the real differentially? For my part, and with another accent, instead of hitching together matheme and anxiety—anxiety is “the implicit guarantee of the truth effect produced by the function of knowledge in the real,” Badiou emphasizes¹⁸—I prefer hitching together discourse and jouissance. A world that Badiou/Lacan will be able to call feminine, but as we will see this is another story altogether, that is no less violent.

“LANGUAGE EATS INTO THE REAL,” OR THE LACANIAN DEFINITION OF LOGOLOGY

We know the philosophically correct position philosophy ascribes the sophist is to be a critical gadfly.¹⁹ In Lacanian language, the sophist, who puts his finger on the “impasses of logic,” stands on the threshold of the real. By impasses of logic we should understand (“L'Étourdit” dots the i's in a very Aristotelian way) everything we have looked at under the heading

of *in-sens* and the logos of plants: what comes under the heading of reasoning or the articulation of propositions between themselves ("sophistry" properly speaking), what comes under the heading of the syntax and grammar of an isolated proposition (amphiboly), and finally what comes under the heading of homonymy-homophony properly speaking (a word, a sequence of signifiers), this last one being enough moreover to generate all of the other ones.

The real . . . affirms itself in the impasses of logic. Here we put our finger, in a domain that is apparently the most certain [arithmetic], on what is opposed to the entire purchase of discourse in its logical exhaustion, and what introduces into this domain an irreducible gap [*béance*]. This is what we designate as the real. . . .

Naïve discourse is inscribed as truth from the start. It has always appeared easy to prove to naïve discourse that it does not know what it is saying. I am not speaking about the subject, I am speaking about discourse. This is the dawn of the sophist's critique. The sophist demonstrates to whoever states what has always proposed itself as truth that he does not know what he is saying. This is even the origin of all dialectic. . . . At the level of sophistic action, it is discourse itself that the sophist takes on.²⁰

Can we continue in the direction of language and not of the *matheme*? Of course. We are even touching here upon a "principal truth" (we are reminded of Plato, who answered *alêthestata*, "nothing could be truer," at the moment of maximum impossibility of the true):

Indeed, to my mind, if one doesn't admit the principal truth that language is tied to something that makes a hole in the real, it is not simply difficult but impossible to consider how it is handled. . . . It is on the basis of this function of the hole that language effects its purchase on the real.²¹

The series of holes, which earlier gave us pause for thought,²² indeed has its origin here, in the relationship of language to the real. "The truth as such is only possible when this real is hollowed out," Lacan adds. "Moreover, language eats into the real."²³

The key to the relationship between language and the real is the symptom. The symptom is defined as "what comes from the real,"²⁴ and equivocation is the only response to the symptom, interpretation operating only through equivocation ("equivocation [*l'équivoque*], that's all we have as a weapon against the symptom"²⁵). Psychoanalysis is one vast symptom,

which we ask to relieve us of the real and the symptom, and thus to finish itself off if it succeeds, exactly like the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Ab-sense is this link between language and the real, and the way in which language eats into the real. The term expresses how the real and meaning are distinct (“One can say that the real both carries and does not carry a meaning [*sens*], in view of the fact that the field of meaning is distinct from it.”²⁶). It makes present the hole in the sens/non-sense orb that the real makes language-ly [*langagièrement*] (or that language makes real-ly).²⁷ We thus find the most Lacanian definition of logology: “The efficacy of language is the fact that language is not in itself a message, but rather is only sustained [*il ne sustente que*] by the function of what I’ve called the hole in the real.”²⁸

For the definition to be complete, we should articulate it with jouissance. “Where It Speaks, It Enjoys, and It Knows Nothing” (“Là où ça parle, ça jouit et ça sait rien”) is the subtitle of chapter 11 of *Encore*:

*The unconscious is not the fact that being thinks, though that is implied by what is said thereof in traditional sciences, the unconscious is the fact that being, by speaking, enjoys [jouisse] and, I will add, wants to know nothing more about it. I will add that that means—know nothing about it at all.*²⁹

And we circle back to sense, which was where we started from:

Phallic *jouissance* is, however, located here at the conjunction between the symbolic and the real. This is so to the extent that, in the subject supported by the *parlêtre*, which is what I denote as the unconscious, we find the power [*le pouvoir*] of conjoining speech and a certain *jouissance*, the one called phallic. This phallic *jouissance* is experienced as parasitic due to the fact of this speech itself, to the fact of the *parlêtre*. It is the place of what in conscience is designated as power by the *parlêtre*.³⁰

The date of the oral seminar or of the written text is of little importance. We are here in one of the most perennial innovations of Jacques the Sophist. From “The Signification of the Phallus”³¹ [1958] through to *On a Discourse That Would Not Be a Semblance*³² [1971] and beyond, what is termed “phallus” is the power of signification: “*Die Bedeutung des Phallus* is, in reality, a pleonasm. There is in language no other *Bedeutung* than the phallus. Language, in its function as something that exists, ultimately only connotes the impossibility of symbolizing the sexual relationship for the beings who inhabit this language, for the reason that it is this habitat that provides them with speech [*la parole*].”³³

Simply put, we can interpret the phallus positively, as a primary anchor, even a piece of good news—Freud's charity. It is the equivalent of the "logical copula," the signifier "destined to designate in their ensemble the effects of the signified" via the two generative vectors of metonymy and metaphor, since it "gives the reason for desire" [*donne la raison du désir*]; Lacan thus gives a profoundly positive valence to the entire panorama of antiquity, right down to its Pompeian mysteries: "The function of the phallic signifier touches here on its most profound relation: that by which the Ancients embodied therein the *Nous* and the *Logos*," he says in the final sentence of "The Signification of Phallus."³⁴ But we can also interpret it subtractively, take it as the common name for ab-sense, tied to the absence of the sexual relationship, of which language and what is said constitute the proliferation, both exciting and monotonous. The signifier that is best adapted to signifying subtractively this primary signifier, in other words the proper name of subtraction, is then, by the very way in which it is produced, the *den* of Democritus.

THE STOWAWAY: *DEN*, THE SIGNIFIER OF THE SIGNIFIER

So this is Lacan's logological sequence: performance, homonymy, signifier, symptom, real, ab-sense, jouissance. I would like to shine a spotlight on two points that interest me particularly: the paradigm of the signifier that the *den* of Democritus represents and the relation between discursive jouissance, phallic jouissance, and feminine jouissance.

From anti-Aristotelianism to ab-Aristotelianism, we go from a refusal of the principle that "there is no contradiction" to the principle "there is no sexual relationship." It is the discursiveness of this new principle, there is no sexual relationship, that "L'Étourdit" puts to work.

"L'Étourdit," as a text in tongues, a text in super- or meta-French, is in my view the contemporary text that gives itself the best chance of escaping from Aristotelianism, precisely because it is not anti-Aristotelian but very actively ab-Aristotelian.

Democritus is the end point of "L'Étourdit," its final flourish with the "joke on the *mêden*." For Democritus is the first/only one in antiquity (should I say: before Lacan?) to write not only the signifier but also the hold it has on negation, exactly as Lacan does in "L'Étourdit":

But were one to *laugh* about it [*Qu'on en rie*],³⁵ the tongue I serve would end up remaking Democritus' joke on the *mêden*: extracting it by

dropping the *mê* from (the negation of) the nothing [*rien*] that seems to call it, as our strip [*bande*]³⁶ does itself, to our aid.

Democritus, in effect, gave us the gift of the *atomos*, of the radical real, by eliding the “not,” *mê*, from it, but in its subjunctivity, in other words, the modal used for demands requiring the subjunctive to be taken into consideration. As a result of which the *den* was indeed the stowaway, the clandestine passenger whose *clam* now controls our destiny.

No more of a materialist in that respect than any sensible person, myself or Marx, for example. As for Freud, I couldn't swear to it: who knows what seed of ravished words might have taken root in his soul from a country where the Kabala was making its way.³⁷

If the *den* turns out to be a “stowaway,” it is because Aristotle and the philosophy that follows his lead do not allow it to appear. They mask it by means of a radical translation that annexes what Democritus is doing to physics, to sense, and to truth. I have analyzed in detail elsewhere³⁸ how Aristotle and the whole doxographical tradition have transformed the strangeness of *den*, this word that does not exist, into a name for the atom, to distinguish it from the void, and have thus naturalized the signifying relation *den/mêden* into a physico-ontological designation, with atoms as the name for beings and nothing as the name for space. *Den* and *mêden*, atom and void, beings in the form of limitless unbreakable particles in a space limitless in size: Move along, there is nothing to see here, ontology is undamaged and science can start afresh.

Lacan undoes this masquerade, he hears with astonishing accuracy both “laughter” [*rire*] and “nothing” [*rien*] starting from the symptom that is *den* as a signifier, not a signifier equivalent to all others like the phallus but a model signifier, a paradigm of what a signifier is (let us cross out “is,” at least that will be done). An interpellation [*incise*] here: When a historian of philosophy reads Lacan, to judge from my own experience, he is scandalized by such flippancy regarding the thing he knows well and plucks away at with such reverential scrupulousness. Then, when he knows it very well and, let us say, authorizes himself as an authority, Lacan's traits come across as shot and woven, they traverse the distance in accordance with the *kairos* of interpretation. Such that the two senses of interpretation—historico-historical hermeneutics and psychoanalytic interpretation—in the end make an ambiguous couple.

LAUGHTER AND NOTHING, *RIRE* AND *RIEN*

Laughter and nothing. Let us start with laughter. "Democritus laughed at everything," *egela panta*, says Hippolytus³⁹: Laughter is the best ally for psychoanalytic interpretation. Democritus is the laughing philosopher, unlike Heraclitus who is represented in tears contemplating the passing of beings and of time. In all the good manuals, this laughter is attributed to his zen materialism: There are just atoms and the void, no point in getting upset; and it is read alongside the moral contentment of the sage of antiquity, praised by Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault alike, happy in his self-sufficiency to escape human troubles, as he looks down on his fellow humans while berating them with nagging apothegms (we should reinterpret these many Democritean apothegms too and reinvent the "convention" in the same way that Democritus asks us to reinvent white and black and all of the qualities of the senses). Let us take a closer look at the different mugshots of Democritus painted by the Dutch, the one by Terbrugghen with his hat to one side and pointing with his index finger, and especially the one by Johannes Moreelse, who is pointing with both fingers in the shape of horns: It is very clear that he is poking fun, poking fun at physics represented by the globe of the earth that he is leaning on, poking fun at ontology.⁴⁰ Physics and ontology are cuckolds! "Come on then, and may Heaven bless us with children, of whom we shall be the fathers!" Molière's *Étourdi* [*The Bungler*] concludes.⁴¹ I like the fact that the oil on the canvas offers greater insight than centuries of commentary.

Let us now start with nothing [*rien*] and what it has in common with laughter [*rire*]: *rie*.

Atoms, contrary to what tradition has made of them, are not unbreakable bodies, even the very smallest ones: They are neither things nor beings but "ideas" and "schemes." *Atomos idea*: The atom is an idea—"The atoms he also calls ideas are everything."⁴² Democritus is not "materialist" any more than Freud or you and me, says Lacan who invokes him frequently in "L'Étourdit," *Encore*, or *The Four Fundamental Concepts* at the point of articulation with idealism. The idea that is the atom has constantly been masked by materialism and been rephysicized; but the word *den* makes the symptom obliging for anyone who would hear it and not pass over it too quickly. It really is the signifier that signifies the signifier. How so?

Democritus makes up a word that does not exist in his tongue. He cuts *mêden* ("nothing"), a common pronoun, well-formed from *mêd'ben* ("not even one"), to invent *den*, something like "less than nothing," a bit of the word *nothing* badly cut, a subtraction from nothing. To render this thingy



Figure 7. Johannes Moreelse, *Democritus, the Laughing Philosopher*. c. 1630. Reproduced by permission of Mauritshuis, The Hague.

in the same way as it has been formed, we could say like Lacan, dropping the *n*, something like *rie* or, rather, cutting the start of the word as Democritus does, and dropping the *r*, something like *ien*.⁴³ *Den* is not in fact a Greek word: It appears in neither Bailly's Greek-French dictionary nor the more comprehensive Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English one; it does not exist in the finite nomenclature that ancient Greek constitutes.⁴⁴ However, it does appear in an excellent dictionary, the *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* by Chantraine,⁴⁵ who refers precisely to fragment 156 of

Democritus and his expression “*mê mallon to den ê to mêden einai*,” where *den* is explained by *sôma* (“body”) and *mêden* by *kenon* (“void”): “to be no more a body than a void.”⁴⁶ Chantraine adds that “this is clearly a term derived more or less artificially from *ouden*.” More or less artificial, and rather more than less, this thingy that is not to be found in different language dictionaries is a “coined word” according to Lacan, precisely, in the *Four Concepts*.⁴⁷ The Democritean *terminus technicus* is a Greek play on words. To understand the ways in which the word was coined, we need tools such as signifier, writing, negation, modality, one, and, above all, we need the idea of a cut, a false cut. The *den*—if I wanted to define it in such a way that one understood the “nothing” in it—is a signifier produced by an atotopological cut in the writing of the subjective modal negation, such that, by saying one, the other is also produced.

THE FALSE CUT, OR OF “MOTERIALISM”

Let us stick with the word that does not exist, because it does not exist in a very specific way. Like all signs, it is “arbitrary” in the sense that its value is only determined by difference. What *does* exist, and that it is different from, is the negative term, which can take two forms, *ouden* or *mêden*. These are two adjectives (“no” in the masculine and feminine forms) and two pronouns (“no one,” “nothing”) that, in the neuter accusative, can act as adverbs (“in no way,” “not at all”). The fact that there are two of them is very characteristic of the Greek language: It has, in fact, as we mentioned earlier, two kinds of negation, a so-called factual or objective negation, in *ou*, and a modal negation, of impossibility and prohibition, a so-called prohibitive, subjective negation, in *mê*. The latter is used, primarily in moods other than the indicative, in both main and subordinate clauses, for orders, warnings, wishes and regrets, and eventualities and possibilities that are denied or feared. *Mêden*, like *mê on*, is something that cannot and must not be, or “be there” or “be such and such a way”; it is nothingness, perhaps. *Ouden*, however, like *ouk on*, is merely something that is not, that is not there, that is not such and such a way, but might well be or might have been: a person who is dead, for example, or “something not there” [*un rien*], perhaps.⁴⁸ So *den* contrasts with *ouden* (in the Democritean doxography of Simplicius) and, in a more insistent, assertive way, with *mêden* (in those of Plutarch and Galien). In both cases, the negative word is very obvious: It is based on *hen*, “one,” the numerical adjective in the neuter, preceded by a negative prefix. What is more, it is not a question of simple negation (*ou* or *mê*, “not”) but of the simplest of compound negatives, formed

in this case from the most common and smallest negative prefix in Greek: *de* (*ou-de*, *mê-de*: “not even,” like the Latin *ni quidem* or the French “*ni . . . ni . . .*” [neither . . . nor . . .] when it is doubled).⁴⁹ So in *ouden*, as in *mêden*, one hears: *oude hen* “not even one” and *mêde hen* “not even, and especially not, one.” From *oude hen* to *ouden*, and *mêde hen* to *mêden*, it follows inexorably: This is proper Greek, sound etymology.

The problem is that, along this road, we do not encounter *den*: I would even say that it is impossible to encounter *den* when we follow the thread of language (and to say that sentence in Greek, I would use *mê* not *ou!*). *Den* is the product of a false cut, anomalous when compared with the etymology inscribed within the words: It is something of a signed signifier, a deliberate fabrication, the mark of a gap (Figure 8).

I would add that it is impossible to regard this as anything but a sort of violence, a violence that would be evident, I dare say, to all Greeks. Negation has an ontologically charged heritage in all languages. Standard French, to an even greater extent than Greek, bears witness to this. Thus, *personne* [nobody] was originally somebody, a person, from *persona*, the actor's mask, which is hardly something insignificant; and *rien* [nothing] was originally *rem*, a thing, in the accusative, *une rien* (feminine) in Old French, which *un rien* (masculine) gradually did away with: “The word,” as the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* indeed says, “provides an abridged version of the evolution of the etymological meaning of ‘thing’ reversed into ‘nothingness.’”⁵⁰ The same is true of the Spanish *nada*, based on the Latin [*res*] *nata* (the past participle of *nasci*, “to be born”): “nothing,” which is to say, “a girl born.” And when it is not the positive thing that changes meaning directly, the difference between and the inventiveness of languages can be seen in the choice of what is negated, for example: “*I don't*

Affirmation	Objective negation	Subjective negation Interdiction	Signifying invention
<i>Hen</i> (root word) “one”	<i>ouden = oud'hen</i> (etymology) “nothing” = not even one	<i>mêden = mêd'hen</i> (etymology) “nothing” = anything but one	<i>mê/den -> den</i> (false cut) less than nothing “iun”

Figure 8. *Den*, the signifier of the signifier.

believe it,” “I don’t see a thing,” “I don’t understand jack,” and even “I don’t understand diddly squat about it.”⁵¹ *Mêden, mêtis*, not one, not anyone; *nihil*: no *bilum* (if the dictionaries know what they are saying), that little black spot at the tip of a bean, and *nemo*, not a man; *nothing* and *nobody*, not a thing and not a body; and *nichts* (“nothing” in German), not a *Wibt*, or little demon, in terms of *muthos*, or in terms of *logos*, not a *Wicht*, from *Wesen*, or essence.

It is from this general order of languages, the order of their meaning, which makes negation the negation of a positive thing (*omnis determinatio est negatio* takes on more than one extra meaning⁵²), that the *den* differs even as it reveals it. Through the odd conflation of the last letter of the negation and the negated positive, it forces us to understand that the atom is not only not an affirmation or a position—being or one—but also not their negation, that it does not have the consistency of “no-thingness” [*né-ant*] or of “nothing” [*rien*]: “*Nothing, perhaps?* No—*perhaps nothing*, but *not nothing*.”⁵³ The atom is literally less than nothing, which is why I proposed calling it “othing” [*ien*], or better still to preserve its rejected etymology, “ot-one” [*iun*]. *Den, ot-one*, is the name of the atom insofar as it can no longer be confused with the Being of ontology or be regarded as an elementary body in physics. It is well and truly a play on words, and a rather funny one. To let us know that the atom is not first a body but first a signifier, that physics is not first matter but rather language and even writing, a writing game. Democritus “laughs at everything” because “materialism” is, in all the rigor of the term, a “moterialism.”⁵⁴

FROM THE JOUISSANCE OF BEING TO THE JOUISSANCE OF THE BODY

Encore thematizes the first part of the trajectory very clearly: In moving from Aristotle to Democritus, we go from Being and the “jouissance of Being” (with the whole saintly kit and caboodle, from Thomas to Rousselot, and well-ordered charity⁵⁵) to—if we have to still keep the word being—“the being of signifierness [*signifiance*]” and its *raison d’être*, “the jouissance of the body”:

What Aristotle wanted to know, and that paved the way for everything that followed in his wake, is what the *jouissance* of being is. . . .

Being—if people want me to use the term at all costs—the being that I oppose to that . . . is the being of signifierness. And I fail to see in what sense I am stooping to the ideas of materialism—I say to the “ideals” because they’re beyond its scope—when I identify the rea-

son for the being of signifierness in *jouissance*, the *jouissance* of the body.

But, you see, a body hasn't seemed materialistic enough since Democritus. One has to find atoms and the whole thingy [*machin*], not to mention sight, smell, and everything that follows therefrom. All that goes together.

It's no accident that Aristotle occasionally quotes Democritus, even if he feigns disgust when he does so, for he relies on the latter's work. *In fact, the atom is simply the element of flying signifierness, quite simply a stoikeion.*⁵⁶

The atom is an element of flying signifierness, the way *mana* is a floating signifier: They are signifiers consistent with their being that is not one, namely, their equivocal being as signifiers, their lack of identity (a *denial*, if I dare say so). For, as we eventually learn, "what distinguishes the signifier is simply being what all the others are not"; it shows "the presence of difference as such and nothing else."⁵⁷

It must be firmly maintained that this is not a way of founding the one. The *den* cannot be tamed inasmuch as it does not become a principle. This is why it differs markedly from what Lacan, at almost the same time his attention was drawn to it, calls "*la nade*," explicitly taking advantage of *nada*, which comes first before the monad, "constituted from the empty set whose breaking through [*franchissement*] is precisely how the One is constituted," "the way in designated by lack," "the place where a hole is made," the "bag with a hole in it [*sac troué*]" at the "basis of *Yad'lun*."⁵⁸ The *den* can only be thought *after* the one, as a subtractive operation and not as an origin, with a hole in it or not. It is not dialectizable precisely insofar as it is not an assumed and sublated negation but a subtraction from negation and therefore a trick, a fiction, obtained by critical secondarity. It is not a way in but a way out, an escape hatch that acts as a stumbling block to philosophy's origin and makes its history, hence that of physics too, change direction, like the *clinamen* to which Lacan compared it early on.⁵⁹ Perhaps in place of the hole we should maintain the cut and go back to the *Bedeutung* we started out from: "The phallus is the conjunction between what I've called this *parasite*, which is the little scrap of a dick in question, and the function of speech."⁶⁰

Den, a little bit cut off the end, is in its turn the parasite of ontology. It is with the signifierness it incarnates that we go from the *jouissance* of being, phallic *jouissance* outside the body, that of Aristotle philosophizing, to the *jouissance* of the body—which one, and whose exactly?

THE LETTER AND THE *LALANGUE*

The force of the *den*, represented by the false cut, is that subtraction is written into it: It only exists as an effect of writing in the *scriptio continua*. In this respect it could serve as a paradigm: "The signifier is not the phoneme. *The signifier is the letter. Only the letter can make a hole.*"⁶¹

"L'Étourdit," which inscribes in its title the equivocation of the letter the better to foreground the signifier, has all the more reason to end with the *den* insofar as Democritus conceives of his atoms as letters. The properties of the atom refer to the *ductus* of writing. Aristotle, who distorts atomism into the physics of elementary bodies, is honest and crafty enough not to conceal anything about the model of writing, though he immediately proposes a translation-reduction of it into characteristics compatible with those of the bodies of his own physics. In Book *Alpha* of the *Metaphysics*, the three "differences" that are the causes of all the others are so named by Leucippus and Democritus and named again by Aristotle:

These differences [Leucippus and Democritus] say, are three—shape [*skhêma*] and order [*taxin*] and position [*thêsin*]. For they say that what is is differentiated only by "rhythm" [*thusmôî*] and "inter-contact" [*diatigêi*] and "turning" [*tropêi*]; and of these rhythm is shape, inter-contact is order, and turning is position; for A differs from N in shape, AN from NA in order, and Z from N in position.⁶²

"Rhythm"—that of the waves, of the vicissitudes of life, or of people's moods—does not connote the "shape" or the "figure," the visible "form" (*skhêma*, *morphê*, *eidos*) that enables an object to be self-identical and recognizable to anyone looking at it, but the way the object arises out of its movement, caught up in change and flux the way music is, the *ductus* of writing that produces one letter rather than another. "Inter-contact" is not the "order" that inscribes succession in space and in a hierarchy but the points of contact that determine both the way that the *ductus* divides into sections to form a letter and the way the letters group together to produce words. "Turning," a turn of phrase or trope, is not the perennial "position" an object occupies in space but the way in which the *ductus* turns to produce the trajectory of a letter and the inscription of that trajectory in space. Waves and wave propagations, effects and effects of effects, prior to becoming bodies. *Den*: The name of the signifier when it is invented as such, being unable to coincide with any signified or referent, is connected to the letter and the presentation of discourse by means of the letter. Such

is the scope of the “clam” that constitutes the complicated workings of “L'Étourdit.”

The Lacanian logological sequence is clarified and developed as: signifier-letter-lalangue. “There is no letter without some *lalangue*. This is the problem—how can *lalangue* be precipitated into the letter?”⁶³ “L'Étourdit” relates this strange property to the constitutive nature of equivocation: “The saying [*dire*] in analysis only proceeds from the fact that the unconscious, because it is structured like a language, which is to say the *lalangue* that inhabits it, is subjected to the equivocation by which each one is distinguished. A language among others is nothing more than the integral of the equivocations that its history has left in it.”⁶⁴ This last sentence, I repeat, has become a fetish-sentence for me;⁶⁵ when one stops at this point, putting aside the fact that the lalangues in question are those of the unconscious, when one takes the sentence just for what it is saying, one comes up with a dictionary of untranslatables, *a vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, that is based on the integral of the equivocations that the history of each language has left in it—in this case, dealing with the languages of Europe, if not of the world.⁶⁶ Support is found here in equivocations and homonymies: “sense” (meaning), “sense”(sensation) and “sense” (direction), *mir* (peace/world/peasant commune), or *logos*, and they are explored text by text as so many symptoms of different worlds.⁶⁷

MONOTONY OF “THERE IS NO SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP”

But the sentence in “L'Étourdit” is followed by others. Here they are: “A language among others is nothing more than the integral of the equivocations that its history has left in it. This is the vein in which the real, the only one for analytic discourse to motivate its outcome, the real that there is no sexual relationship, has left a deposit there over time.” And it could be there that the philosopher becomes disenchanted or bored. In a dictionary of untranslatables, taking each language as a lalangue, we discovered the way in which the real, namely that there is no sexual relationship, has left a deposit. This is not very funny—or maybe it is very funny? What kind of a reduction is that? Where is the gain? We went from the truth to the real, and the real is that there is no sexual relationship, period. This is the starting and end point of everything. Being is an effect of discourse among others, “notably,” and ontology is a kind of shamefulness (“*bontologie*”⁶⁸), but “what to say”? The real, that there is no sexual relationship: no longer notably (*notamment*) but monotonably (*monotamment*).⁶⁹ That

there is no sexual relationship. No other real, and nothing else to be said. It is monotonous. And the way to say it is to write the Real, which is then no longer any real, with a capital letter. It is easier to write than to say, even though some people may always be nattering on about it.

D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, then *Encore*, make explicit the link between this new principle and the letter. "There's no such thing as a sexual relationship" should obviously not be understood in terms of homology: There is no question of essentializing the nonrelationship—"people still have sex, don't they?"⁷⁰ It is just that "the sexual relationship cannot be written."⁷¹

Were there no analytic discourse, you would continue to speak like birdbrains, singing the "current disk" (*disque-ourcourant*),⁷² making the disk go around, that disk that turns because "there's no sexual relationship"—a formulation that can only be articulated thanks to the entire edifice of analytic discourse, and that I have been drumming into you for quite some time.

But drumming it into you, I must nevertheless explain it—it is based only on the written in the sense that the sexual relationship cannot be written. Everything that is written stems from the fact that it will forever be impossible to write, as such, the sexual relationship. It is on that basis that there is a certain effect of discourse, which is called writing.

One could, at a pinch, write $x R y$, and say x is man, y is woman, and R is the sexual relation. Why not? The only problem is that it's stupid, because what is based on the signifier function (*la fonction de signifiant*) of "man" and "woman" are mere signifiers that are altogether related to the "curcurrent" (*courcourant*) use of language. If there is a discourse that demonstrates that to you, it is certainly analytic discourse, because it brings into play the fact that woman will never be taken up except *quoad matrem*. Woman serves as a function in the sexual relationship only *qua* mother.

Those are overall truths, but they will lead us further. Thanks to what? Thanks to writing.⁷³

Everything we say when we speak (the "*disque-ourcourant*") expresses this nonrelation, this evidence of which is formulated and drummed into us by Lacanian psychoanalysis. This evidence needs writing to be seen and to be thought, but staging the impossibility of writing the relation leads to a proliferation that is analogous to that of discourse: Everything that is written is only ever written on the basis of this impossibility, proceeds from the same hole, and falls back down into the same hole. When we write $x R y$, we write

it “but the only problem is that it’s a mistake.” Woman will only ever be taken *quoad matrem* and man *quoad castrationem*: as, *als*, *bêi*, like Aristotle’s being outside of first philosophy qua number, line, fire, but not qua being. We are in the realm of strict doctrine here, and there is no way out of it: Aristotle “doesn’t have the slightest idea that the principle is this: that there is no such thing as a sexual relationship.” “Language . . . ultimately only connotes the impossibility of symbolizing the sexual relationship for the beings who inhabit this language, for the reason that it is to this habitat that they owe the ability to speak.”⁷⁴ If interpreted straightforwardly, this striking sentence is the final or definitive equivalent of the animal endowed with logos, along with something of Heidegger’s “dwelling” standing in for the political (“more political than all the other animals,” Aristotle began, precisely because he is endowed with logos). “There’s no such thing as a sexual relationship” begins to resemble an originary veiling-unveiling, a rect(or)al hole [*trou recteur*]⁷⁵ (if I dare say so), and a proliferation of guises—without being able to imagine, moreover, how writing, both formulas and mathemes, could escape the machinery [*dispositif*].

AB-SENSE AND JOUI-SENS

Let us recap.

The stowaway of all ontology is the radical real. The *den* of Democritus is the signature of the sophistic-analytic discursive operation in (or as?) the unconscious of philosophy. In relation to language itself (“The unconscious means nothing if it does not mean that whatever I say, and wherever I am positioned, even if I am well positioned, I don’t know what I’m saying. . . . Even if I know what I’m saying . . . , I say that the cause of this is only to be sought in language itself. What I’m adding to Freud . . . I’m adding that the unconscious is structured like a language”⁷⁶), ab-sense is located right within the relationship between performance and signifier, or: The relationship between performance and signifier defines Lacanian sophistry.

If we somehow manage to think the Real—the real of the principle “there is no such thing as a sexual relationship”—in terms (rendered illegible by Aristotle) of the stowaway, the *den*, it may actually turn out to be quite funny. Lacan has Democritus say: “*Nothing, perhaps?* No—*perhaps nothing*, but *not nothing*”⁷⁷: I would like to have him say: *Not nothing, but less than nothing—not-one, since bibanappât*.⁷⁸ Ab-sense is linked to the impasses of logic (the sexual relationship cannot be written) and to the (being of the) letter as pure wordplay. Of course, the absence of sexual relationship determines ab-sense as the only dish on the menu in the prompter’s box. Not

less monotonous, maybe even more monotonous, than sense. The difference is that the feature of these monotonous apparitions, slips of the tongue, symptoms, and interpretations is not that they are true, even when put down in writing, but perhaps that they are funny.

To put it more laconically or Lacanically, ab-sense has to be related to jouissance or perhaps to *joui-sens*.⁷⁹ “*Joui-sens?*” This is a term Lacan invents in *Television*—what is at stake is much weightier than the light-hearted proliferation of terms in *Encore*: “*mi-sens*” [half-sense], “*indé-sens*” [inde-sensy], “*réti-sens*” [reti-sense]. “These chains,” he says, when speaking about symptoms, knots of signifiers, and signifying matter, “are not of meaning [*sens*], but of *joui-sens*, which you can write as you wish, as is implied by the equivocation that constitutes the law of the signifier.”⁸⁰ We enjoy meaning or sense [*on jouit du sens*]: In contrast to the sadness, the moral failing, the cowardice that is melancholic psychosis, understood as the return into the real of this unconscious reject that is language, there is the virtue of “gay science.” What one enjoys then is deciphering: “not understanding, not a diving at the meaning, but a flying over it as low as possible without the meaning gumming up this virtue [‘gay science’], thus enjoying [*jouir*] the deciphering,”⁸¹ and this produces “good luck” [*du bon heur*]⁸² precisely everywhere. “The subject is happy-go-lucky” when he is a philologist and a hermeneut. . . . “*J’ouïs-sens*”⁸³: The subject is happy when he is, *ant/é*, in analysis.⁸⁴ *Jouis-sens, j’ouïs-sens*: We have to trust in the singularity of laughter, homonymy, and the signifier in order to maintain “once again” (*encore*) that the analyst and the coming subject do not go back into the bosom of meaning or sense that they fly over [*rasent*] (would that be boring? [*rasant*])⁸⁵ and that ab-sense is happiness.

“Now, if there’s no such thing as a sexual relationship, we must see in what respect the *jouissance* of the body can serve a purpose here.”⁸⁶

They Do Not Know What They Are Saying

JOUISSANCE AND TRUTH

We need to mark out clearly, to begin with, the relationship between jouissance and truth and of what the second limitation on truth consists.

The first limitation is that the truth can only be half-said. As *Encore* is constantly stressing, it is “not-whole” [*pas-toute*], like Woman.⁸⁷ It is this shared quality/quantity that we keep coming back to as a point of reference.

But there is a second limitation: "Another thing binds us as far as the truth goes, it is that *jouissance* is a limit. . . . *Jouissance* can only be called, evoked, tracked down, elaborated on the basis of a semblance [*à partir du semblant*]."88 *Jouissance* in its relation to semblance limits the truth. Faced with such a simple proposition, each of us runs the risk of understanding it by drawing on our own experiences, and all the more so since we are not certain about the meaning of the words.

For my part, I have talked with a kind of "discursive *jouissance*" as if the thing were self-evident. This natural epithet obviously emerges in my mind out of my "experience" of sophistic discourse, as well as of Lacanian discourse. Lacan himself talks of *jouissance* tied to discourse or/and of *jouissance* tied to language, to speech, and, more singularly, of *jouissance* tied to *lalangue* ("*lalangue* where *jouissance* leaves a deposit"89), but to my knowledge he does not use the adjective or the noun *discourse* as a subject-object genitive.

The idea that I would like to put forward is that discursive *jouissance* and feminine *jouissance* are closely bound up with one another and can be thought together in relation to, or by comparison with, the other *jouissances*, in particular the *jouissance par excellence* that is phallic *jouissance*. It is very logically a cause or an effect (it matters little which) of the position of truth as not-whole, not-whole just like Woman, and of the relation between *jouissance* and truth.

Lacan's texts are for me all the more difficult to read because as usual (and this is fascinating, in the strictest sense of the term) I only think I understand them at the impossible instant when I keep them all together, including elusive and published ones, as a whole in my mind at the moment when I re-re-re-read them—"is a rose" four times and not three, echoing Gertrude Stein.⁹⁰ But it is perhaps a matter of an even more violent reason: "I don't know how to approach, why not say it, the truth—no more than woman. I have said that the one and the other are the same thing, at least for a man."⁹¹ Indeed, one cannot not think that there is undoubtedly nothing innocent about changing the subject of enunciation in this regard, once it becomes a question of the other and the Other, and a woman begins to say "I," including when she says "for a man."

A BRIEF INVENTORY OF JOUISSANCES

Jouissance of life. *Jouissance* of the cat. *Jouissance* of thought. *Jouissance* of Being. Phallic *jouissance*. Sexual *jouissance*. Penile *jouissance*. *Jouissance* of the body. *Jouissance* of the woman's body. *Jouissance* of the Other. *Jou-*

issance of the Other of the Other. Jouissance of Woman. Jouissance of the mystics. Jouissance of God. Jouissance of language. Jouissance of the signifier. Jouissance of blabber. Jouissance of deciphering. Jouissance of language. And I could go on, of course, with more or fewer terminological variations.

We know that some of them do exist, such as phallic jouissance. Others, we know that they are not, such as jouissance of the Other, or of the Other of the Other. Maybe some of them are, maybe they are not.⁹² How are we to put them together, contrast them, combine them, deduce them? When do we make room for them—theoretically, that is?

The simplest one to deal with, the degree zero in short, is jouissance of life, which has echoes of the juridical term *fruitio*: It comes from the real, and we can say nothing about it. “Of life, beyond that vague term which consists in talking about the *enjoyment of life*, we undeniably know nothing else. . . . The only thing science leads us to see is that nothing is more real than this [*ça*], meaning nothing more impossible to imagine.”⁹³ The most slippery one, at the other end, is jouissance of the Other. As we read in “La Troisième”: “This *jouissance* of the Other, everyone knows how impossible it is”; everyone can read it, not knowing which opposition to trust in, since “it exists, can only exist, through the intermediary of the spoken word,” the word of love, when it is however “without-language, without-symbolic,” such that there is only one way to fill it, in “the field in which science was born.”⁹⁴ Reading the well-distributed schema we find at the end of “La Troisième,” endlessly reworked and rewritten, and so clear that its terms for me function as pure “definitions of words” in the manner of Leibniz, the jouissance of the Other with a capital O that will have to be barred, is positioned at the intersection of the real and the symbolic, sense (what jouissance: *joui-sens*?) at the intersection of the imaginary and the symbolic and, bingo, the object *a* (“surplus jouissance”) at the intersection of the three.⁹⁵ Now the woman, “the” in lowercase without italics, Lacan says early on, “tends towards surplus *jouissance*, because she, the woman, plunges her roots, like a flower, down into *jouissance* itself.”⁹⁶

There are, according to Nestor Braunstein, three kinds of jouissance: the jouissance of the being of the thing (mythic), phallic jouissance (of the signifier, of language), and a third, supplemental one, for which he suggests reserving the name of jouissance of the Other (feminine, ineffable). This at least is his final “synthesis,” which he describes as “concentric.”⁹⁷ But he immediately turns these circles into Möbius strips—not without forcing them, he says—in order to prevent the Lacanian conception of femininity transforming “women into beings who could only ek-sist as

beings of language, and tied to the order and the law of the phallus," such that "as women, the only space that would remain for them would be that unthinkable place of the Thing where silence is confused with the scream, where all significations vanish." Women then, if we are not careful, would have the same phallic jouissance as men and, exclusively, the silence of trees and oysters.⁹⁸

He is right to be wary, since this is how *Encore* allows itself to be read, seen from up in a plane as one sees the outline of the Amur River when flying over Siberia in the small hours of the morning. Dotting the *i*'s of the bifid diagram, split on the woman's side⁹⁹: a) phallic jouissance is the most widely shared thing in the world¹⁰⁰ and indifferent to the difference of the sexes; it is penile/clitoral jouissance (smaller, admittedly, but with more nerve endings, *n'est-ce pas?*). Since man is a parlêtre and not a rabbit, this jouissance only exists joined to the symbolic that is language: It is the jouissance of the idiot (male or female), who is no less man (or woman). It is linked to the fact that there is no such thing as a sexual relationship, on neither the man's nor woman's side. It is, moreover, constantly said to be without-body [*bors-corps*] (which conflicts markedly with the ordinary discourse of sensual experience), insofar as the penis or the clitoris are not of or in the body but excrescences. b) "La troisième," the third jouissance? An other jouissance, beyond the phallus, proper to women, without any equivalent for men, and outside language? We would be so lucky: A woman can come to jouissance in two ways (Tiresias preferred being a woman, that is, coming to jouissance as a man and as a woman¹⁰¹), she is split, which is the advantage of being "not-all." Only the second way, which Lacan apparently encountered de facto with at least one female companion, the third jouissance, that of intense orgasms and swooning, so with their whole body, renders them dumb. Outside the symbolic, like the jouissance of the barred Other, with the ever-present confusion between the other jouissance, and the jouissance of the Other. So in effect, via Hade-wijch of Anvers¹⁰² and the mystics ("There are men who are just as good as women"¹⁰³), we slide from woman's jouissance to God's jouissance. Lacan "believes in it," he says: "I believe in the *jouissance* of woman insofar as it is extra [*en plus*], as long as you put a screen in front of this 'extra' until I have been able to properly explain it. And why not interpret one face of the Other, the God face, as based on feminine *jouissance?*,"¹⁰⁴ of a God who "has not yet made his exit."¹⁰⁵ Obviously, the ruse and precaution are entirely in the "the" [*la*], since it can be "The/a-ized" and pluralized [*la-uner et pluraliser*], or it can be capitalized [*La*] and barred: "The full necessity of the human race is that there should be an Other of the Other. This is what

is generally called God, but which analysis unveils as being quite simply Woman [*La femme*].”¹⁰⁶ “Analysis will thus have made more worldly-wise.”¹⁰⁷ The dormant Thomist in Aristotle, and the times will have revealed that Woman is no more or no less—thus as little as—God, of which she would be, unless this has not already changed, the ultimate name.

ENCORE HELEN

I would like to suggest another reading of *Encore*, track down and break down the schema, and play in this same text with another experience of the link between feminine jouissance and language.

So we were talking about sophists and psychoanalysts, on the same side of the “sense” taxonomy. I could equally have said of plants and women: *homoios phutōi*, a plant discourse.

“There is no such thing as Woman because, in her essence . . . she is not-all.”¹⁰⁸ If Helen could serve as an emblem here, it is precisely because she, who par excellence is equivalent to all women (if there were The/A Woman, it would be her), is also par excellence not-whole. And for reasons that have to do with language, according to a motif I believe determines feminine jouissance.

THE HELENIC THESIS

Gorgias makes visible the link between feminine jouissance and language, before and beyond his *Encomium of Helen*. We have already approached this via the Homeric staging of the voice.¹⁰⁹ It is even clearer a *parte post*, via the staging of the relationship between thing and word that forms the plot in Euripides's *Helen*, explicitly linked to the “new Helen” of Gorgias. In Euripides's *Helen*, what is new is that there are in fact two Helens. There is a real one—although, I do not know which one we ought to call real. Let us say there is a Helen who is Helen and that Hera, the wife par excellence, to help her escape from Paris and from infidelity, transports her to Egypt and to Proteus, an old king who can hardly do her any harm. Helen waits and makes sacrifices, as the perfect wife of a husband who has gone to fight in a war. And then there is a second Helen who is nothing but *flatus vocis*, sound fog, an agalma of cloud, an eidolon, a phantom: the name Helen or “Helen.” This Helen is the one Paris abducted, who sailed as far as Troy, who climbed up onto the ramparts, the one the Greeks fought and killed each other for.¹¹⁰ She is also the one Menelaus captures, with whom he runs aground on the shores of Egypt, and whom he hides in a cave.

Then a brilliant scene of misrecognition/recognition takes place, which I cannot resist recounting in a rather trivial manner. When Menelaus gets out of the boat, he sees a woman who looks very much like Helen, and in his state of astonishment, he says to her something like: "Ah! What is your name?" She replies: "Helen." "Well, you cannot be Helen, since I have her here with me, I left her nearby, in a cave." She replies in turn: "You look very much like Menelaus!" As she knows everything, she tries to explain to him that "the name may be in many places, but not the body." It is at that point that Menelaus resists with all his force with this magnificent line: "The greatness of my troubles over there convinces me; you do not."¹¹¹ Ernst Bloch repeats it forcefully for Menelaus in *The Principle of Hope*: I believe in "those utopian ten years, with the bitter pain and love-hatred of a wronged husband, with all those nights spent so far from his homeland," and not in you I see, not in you I touch and who is talking to me; I believe, even if it is a ghost, in what has had so much effect for me and for the Greeks. This tragi-comedy of Euripides is the most anti-Platonic possible, for the word is more real than the thing and the real is in the word, it is the effect it makes.

Helen is "Helen" because "Helen" is the name of saying as effective. Helen is thus an object who tells us a lot about the object: that it is an effect, something missed, a semblance. It is this kind of constitution of objectivity that links sophistry and Lacanian analysis so rigorously.

We could say that *Encore* is all about Helen, as missed object on man's side and as missed subject on woman's side.

If it is all about Helen, it is for one very simple reason: Lacan moves, in general and specifically in relation to woman, from the anatomical to the discursive. Our daily bread is no longer made from "some psychological consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes"¹¹² but from some effects of the distinction between discourses. No longer "anatomy is destiny" but "tell me how you speak."

Nevertheless, the logic of the lack is not dismissed but is instead generalized, such that lack does not constitute any pertinent difference between man and woman. But the trope of lack does.

The Lacanian posture is, as we have seen, sophistic, logological: "Every reality is founded and defined by a discourse."¹¹³ And psychoanalysis is among those discourses that perform: "That is why it is important for us to realize what analytic discourse is made of. . . . We speak therein of fucking, and we say that it's failed."¹¹⁴ This failure "is the only way of realizing the sexual relationship. . . . It is not a matter of analyzing how it succeeds. It's a matter of repeating until you're blue in the face why it fails."¹¹⁵

Whence, transitively, the following thesis: "Reality is approached with the apparatuses of *jouissance*. . . . There's no other apparatus than language. That is how *jouissance* is fitted out [*appareillée*] in speaking beings."¹¹⁶ This knot between reality—language—*jouissance* I propose to call the Hellenic thesis. It contrasts opportunely with the ontological thesis of Heidegger reading Parmenides's *Poem* and affirming the cobelonging of being, thinking, and saying, with man as the shepherd of Being, transfixed by saying.

ON THE MAN'S SIDE: HELEN AS OBJECT *a*

Now, there are two ways of saying it has failed and thus two ways of it failing. Lacan makes the distinction between man "on the one side" and woman "on the other": "There's no sexual relationship because one's *jouissance* of the Other taken as a body is always inadequate—perverse, on the one hand, insofar as the Other is reduced to object *a* and, I'll say, crazy and enigmatic on the other."¹¹⁷ Crazy and enigmatic how, exactly?

On the man's side—let us not forget that "one ultimately situates oneself there by choice—women are free to situate themselves there if it gives them pleasure to do so. Everyone knows there are phallic women, and that the phallic function doesn't stop men from being homosexuals. It is, nevertheless, the phallic function that helps them situate themselves as men and approach women."¹¹⁸ On the man's side, then, things fail for two related reasons: the phallic function and the object *a*. Things fail because of the phallus: "Phallic *jouissance* is the obstacle owing to which man does not manage to enjoy woman's body, precisely because what he enjoys is the *jouissance* of the organ."¹¹⁹ He loves "to" her, though he does not "enjoy" her but himself—anatomy almost becomes his destiny. She, on her side, is not all, not all to him. In any case, the pleasure of the organ becomes an obstacle to *jouissance*, because that is not it: "That's not it—that is the cry distinguishing the *jouissance* obtained from the one that was expected."¹²⁰

It fails, however, with respect to the object of desire: "It is inasmuch as object *a* plays the role somewhere—from a point of departure, a single one, the male one—of that which takes place of the missing partner, that what we are also used to seeing emerge in the place of the real, namely fantasy, is constituted."¹²¹ For the male, the only partner is a missing one, reactivated as the cause of desire.

It is not difficult to map this on to our exemplum. Helen functions for man as object *a*, cause of desire; she is an eidolon, bound up with fantasy. Because for Helen, there are two ways of making love, which is to say two of not making love to her, and they are equivalent to the difference between

lover and husband, Paris and Menelaus: "There is no chance for a man to have *jouissance* of a woman's body, otherwise stated, without castration [*à moins de castration*], in other words, without something that says no to the phallic function. This is the result of analytic experience. That doesn't stop him from desiring woman in every way, even when that condition does not obtain. He not only desires her, but does all kinds of things to her that bear an astonishing resemblance to love"; what the man approaches "is the cause of his desire that I have designated as object *a*. That is the act of love. To make love, as the very expression indicates, is poetry.¹²² But there is a world between poetry and the act. The act of love is the male's polymorphous perversion, in the case of speaking beings."¹²³ The first way is that of Paris: Paris homosexualized, all in fleshy curves and fine garments, "makes love," that is, makes poetry, poematizes, with Peitho, the goddess of the persuasion of logos, as intermediary. The second, strong way: Menelaus using every means to pursue Helen, capture her, drawing her to him, does something (but what) that resembles love, sword down, scabbard brandished. An active silence, the astonished act of polymorphous perversion.

ON THE WOMAN'S SIDE: AN OTHER SATISFACTION, THE SATISFACTION OF SPEECH

On the woman's side, things fail in a "crazy, enigmatic" way. What does this mean? Let us start with the provocation: "A woman cannot but be excluded from the nature of things, which is the nature of words, and it must be said that if there is something that women themselves complain about enough for the time being, that's it. It's just that they don't know what they're saying—that's the whole difference between them and me." What does Lacan know that they do not yet know? He knows that woman is "not-all": "The Woman [*La femme*] can only be written with a bar through it. There's no such thing as The Woman [*Il n'y a pas La femme*], with the definite article designating the universal. There's no such thing as The Woman because, in her essence—I've already risked using that term, so why should I think twice about using it again?—she is not-all."¹²⁴

This not-all defines the woman's relationship to language: "*Regarding feminine sexuality, our colleagues, the lady analysts, do not tell us . . . the whole story! [Pas tout!]*. They haven't contributed one iota to the question of feminine sexuality. There must be an internal reason for that, related to the structure of the apparatus of *jouissance*"¹²⁵—an apparatus, let us not forget, that is language and only language. Following the Hellenic principle, the relation of the woman to the body, to language, and to *jouissance* are

codefined: "The sexed being of these not-all women does not involve the body but what results from a logical exigency in speech."¹²⁶ Compactly put, said he.

There we have how things do not work out on the side of woman: "For ~~The~~ Woman, something other than object *a* is at stake in what comes to make up for [*suppléer*] the sexual relationship that does not exist." It is a question of "another *satisfaction*, the satisfaction of speech."¹²⁷

Just as Plato succeeds in having Protagoras speak through Socrates in the most Protagorean way possible (this is the "Praise of Protagoras" in the *Theaetetus*), so Lacan manages to articulate the discourse of feminine jouissance in the most femininely joyous [*la plus fémininement jouissive*] way possible. But in Plato, as in Lacan, it is difficult to decide in what way going through the mouth of the Other deforms.

THE TREATISE ON NON-BEING OF FEMININE JOUISSANCE

It is easy, by contrast, to isolate in *Encore* what constitutes the treatise of nonbeing of feminine jouissance or treatise of feminine non-jouissance.

Like Being in Gorgias's *Treatise on Non-being*, feminine jouissance is approached according to a very precise logical structure, which Freud is already calling "sophistry." We know that: "A. borrowed a copper kettle from B. and after he returned it was sued by B. because the kettle now had a big hole in it which made it unusable. His defence was: 'First, I never borrowed a kettle from B. at all; secondly, the kettle had a hole in it already when I got it from him; and thirdly, I gave him back the kettle undamaged.'¹²⁸ This structure of progressive retreat is constitutive of Gorgias's *Treatise on Non-being*: 1. "Nothing is." 2. "Even if it is, it is unknowable." 3. "Even if it is, and it is knowable, it cannot be shown to others."¹²⁹

Here is the new treatise:

FIRST THESIS: NOTHING IS = SHE DOES NOT COME TO JOUISSANCE

This thesis can itself be broken down according to the same structure:

- a) "There is no other jouissance than phallic jouissance."
- b) And if there were another one, but there is not, "were there another one than phallic jouissance, it would have to not be that one."

"Were there another one," but there is no other than phallic jouissance—except the one about which woman does not breathe a word, perhaps because she does not know it, the one that makes her not-all. It is false that there is

another one, but that does not stop what follows from being true, namely, that it should not be/could never fail to be that one [*il ne faudrait pas que ce soit celle-ci*].¹³⁰

The second thesis is wrapped up within the first: “there is no other except” such that the exception is knocked back, repressed, by virtue of the old denialist strategy of Stoic material implication (*ex falso sequitur quodlibet*); it is false that there could be another one, but it is true that it would not be that one.

With Gorgias, Being is not for two complementary reasons: because it does not exist as a verb (it “is” not) and because it has no possible predicate (it is not such and such). In the same way, feminine *jouissance* is not, and if it is, it is not such and such—that is, feminine. There are two very weighty complementary reasons for this.

Indeed, “the universe is the place where, due to the fact of speaking, everything succeeds . . . in making the sexual relationship fail, in the male manner.” Why? Because “this is what I mean when I say that the unconscious is structured like a language.”¹³¹

Or because of the relation, and this amounts to the same thing, between saying and *jouissance*: All we can say about *jouissance* is simply that it is not that [*ça*]. “People repress the said *jouissance* because it is not fitting for it to be spoken, and that is true precisely because the speaking thereof can be no other than the following: qua *jouissance*, it is inappropriate.”¹³² Repression means that “*jouissance* is inappropriate—*non decet*—to the sexual relationship. It is precisely because the said *jouissance* speaks that the sexual relationship is not. Which is why *jouissance* would do better to hush up, but when it does, that makes the very absence of the sexual relation a little harder to bear. Which is why, in the final analysis, it doesn't hush up, and why the first effect of repression is that it speaks of something else. That is what constitutes the mainspring of metaphor.”¹³³ “It” [*Elle*]¹³⁴: This is true of *jouissance*, but it is even more true of the *jouissance* that should not be, feminine *jouissance*. *Jouissance* causes the sexual relationship to fail because it speaks—be beautiful and shut up, silence is women's *kosmos*, their “world,” as Hesiod said. So woman, in order not to make the relation fail, speaks of something else: Repression produces the metaphor, or worse [*ou pire*], it speaks of nothing, it speaks for the sake of speaking. How wrapped up in language it is: It is indecent for her *jouissance* to speak and unbearable that it not speak.

“A woman cannot but be excluded from the nature of things, which is the nature of words.” No surprise that, on the side of woman, things fail in a “crazy, enigmatic” way: Things fails because all reality, the whole

universe, is a male rhetorical flower, blah-blah of being, and things fail at the same time because *jouissance*, insofar as it is essentially inappropriate, is feminine.

SECOND THESIS: IF IT IS, IT IS UNKNOWABLE = IF SHE DOES
COME TO JOUISSANCE, SHE KNOWS NOTHING OF IT

The structure of progressive retreat allows us to start from the negation of the previous thesis.

Let us assume that she comes to *jouissance*: “If she is excluded by the nature of things, it is precisely in the following respect: being not-all, she has a supplementary *jouissance* compared to what the phallic function designates by way of *jouissance*” (“You will notice,” adds Lacan, “that I said ‘supplementary.’ If I had said ‘complementary,’ what a mess we’d be in! We would fall back into the whole”¹³⁵). We suppose then that “there is a *jouissance* . . . *beyond the phallus*,” but the hypothesis has difficulty getting by without a *joke*¹³⁶: “It’ll be the next book in the Galilée collection—‘beyond the phallus.’ That would be cute, huh? And it would give another consistency to the women’s liberation movement. *A jouissance beyond the phallus.*”¹³⁷

Or in terms of the new thesis: If she comes to *jouissance*, *she knows nothing of it*.

There is a *jouissance* that is hers [*à elle*], that belongs to that “she” [*elle*] that doesn’t exist and doesn’t signify anything. There is a *jouissance* that is hers about which she herself perhaps knows nothing if not that she experiences it—that much she knows. She knows it, of course, when it comes. It doesn’t come for all of them.¹³⁸

A languid, almost fraternal thesis: about which she herself “perhaps” knows nothing, “if not that she experiences it.” That is already not bad for knowledge, knowing that one experiences something, especially in relation to the body, to experience is usually a quite well-known knowledge.

The sharp edge is somewhere else. She is not-all, which has just been accommodated as a supplementary *jouissance*, and it is also “not all” [*pas toutes*] in the plural. “It doesn’t come for all of them.” A brutal, apparently “real” division between the fortunate ones and the others?

I don’t want to end up talking about putative frigidity, but one must isolate the aspect of relations between men and women that is related to current trends [*la mode*]. It’s very important. Of course, in Freud’s discourse, alas, as in courtly love, all of that is covered over by minute considerations that have led to all kinds of problems [*ravages*]. Minute

considerations concerning clitoral *jouissance* and the *jouissance* that people call by whatever name they can find, the other one, precisely, the one that I am trying to get you to approach by a logical pathway, because, as things currently stand, there is no other.¹³⁹

Deny, put it down to the effect of fashion. But women do not recover so well from this strange division that itself is not yet analyzed in *Encore* in terms of logic, or rather, in the way it is enunciated by Jacques Lacan.

THIRD THESIS: IF IT IS, AND IT IS KNOWABLE, IT IS
INCOMMUNICABLE = IF SHE COMES TO JOUISSANCE,
AND IF SHE KNOWS IT, SHE CANNOT SAY IT

The plausibility of what I am claiming here—namely that woman knows nothing of this *jouissance*—is underscored by the fact that in all the time people have been begging them, begging them on their hands and knees—I spoke last time of women psychoanalysts—to try to tell us, not a word! We've never been able to get anything out of them. So we call this *jouissance* by whatever name we can come up with, “vagi-nal,” and speak of the posterior pole of the uterine orifice and other such stupid things [*conneries*], that's the word for it! If she simply experiences it and knows nothing about it, that would allow us to cast myriad doubts on this notorious frigidity.¹⁴⁰

Let us admit, as a gesture of peace, that what does not come for all of them is knowing it. The third thesis is that, if they know it, and even if the analysts are paid to know it, they do not know how to say it, to communicate it to others.

Since in the end women do not “say” it, then as good logologists, we understand that the universe is a male flower of rhetoric. “That is how *jouissance* is fitted out [*appareillée*] in speaking beings. . . . Reality is approached with the apparatuses of *jouissance*.”: If The/a woman does not say but metaphorizes, chats, and hushes up what we understand as far as the Hellenic thesis goes is that, if I dare to put like this, it is simply chasing its own tail [*se morde la queue*].¹⁴¹

MAN FAILS AND COMES TO JOUISSANCE AS A PHILOSOPHER,
WOMAN FAILS AND COMES TO JOUISSANCE AS A SOPHIST

One can risk outright the following comment: On the male side, failure and *jouissance* are linked to the object, while on the female side, failure and

jouissance are linked to speech. On the man's side: "Thought is *jouissance*. What analytic discourse contributes is the following, and it is already hinted at in the philosophy of being—there is *jouissance* of being."¹⁴² On the side of woman, as we have just said: "Another satisfaction, the satisfaction of speech." Man fails and comes to jouissance as a philosopher, woman fails and comes to jouissance as a sophist.

More Lacanically, Helen is the object *a* and the cause of failure on the male side. Socrates is the subject presumed to know and the cause of failure on the female side. Of course, man is the master, it is "the stupidity of the master's being."¹⁴³

That said, man is less stupid when he is Lacanian, since he knows that the being he addresses is a semblance of being: "*Jouissance* is questioned, evoked, tracked, and elaborated only on the basis of a semblance. Love itself . . . is addressed to the semblance. And if it is true that the Other is only reached if it attaches itself . . . to *a*, the cause of desire, then love is also addressed to the semblance of being. That being-there is not nothing. It is supposed to that object that is *a*."¹⁴⁴ He is an expert on Helen, in *a*, it is Gorgias, it is Euripides, it is Nietzsche ("There is only one way to be able to write *The Woman* without having to bar the *The*—that is at the level at which woman is truth. And that is why one can only half-speak of her").¹⁴⁵ Man is less stupid, the philosopher is less of a master, when he is steeped in analysis or sophistry. He sees Helen in every woman, "repeats until he is blue in the face why it fails,"¹⁴⁶ and does it "because to speak of love is in itself a *jouissance*."¹⁴⁷

I like it, she says, when I am spoken love to and when I am made love to. As for jouissance, we have known this from the beginning, "*Jouissance* is what serves no purpose [*ne sert à rien*]. . . . Nothing forces anyone to enjoy except the superego. The superego is the imperative of *jouissance*—Enjoy [*Jouis*]!"

A WOMAN AND *LALANGUE*—TRUTH, MY UNFUCKABLE PARTNER

Instead of the breakaway *The Woman* and God risked a little earlier, we will for now stay with *lalangue*, not for nothing so-called maternal,¹⁴⁸ and it is from this side that we will most readily break away. With Jacques the Sophist and the part of him that is woman. We are saying, then, that there is no such thing as a sexual relationship for the speaking being: The sexual relationship is speech.¹⁴⁹ The presence of the sophist, but in our time, the unconscious is that being in speaking comes to jouissance.¹⁵⁰ The signifier is the cause of jouissance,¹⁵¹ the signifier in which equivocation is written

in a lalangue that is its integral.¹⁵² The unconscious is a knowing how to do things with lalangue.¹⁵³ But the lalangue in which jouissance leaves a deposit is presented as dead wood.¹⁵⁴ It is not because the unconscious is structured as a language that lalangue does not have to play against its coming to jouissance [*ce jouir*], since it is made precisely from this coming to jouissance.¹⁵⁵ This is why the only interesting thing is what happens in the performance, that is, the production of surplus jouissance.¹⁵⁶ “Truth, my unfuckable partner”¹⁵⁷: If it is a woman speaking, she will hear it as being about another woman, of whom it is said she is not fuckable.

The psychoanalyst, Lacan in particular, is the presence of the sophist in our time. He is not fucking or looking to fuck the truth, unfuckable in any case. As a sophist, it is a matter with him and for him of a discourse that acts more than it expresses, and not through persuasion but through performance: a logos-pharmakon with an effect on the other and a world-effect, via the same anti-Aristotelian stipulations—performance-enunciation and homonymy-signifier. But they have become in our time, which is to say with the unconscious as a prompter's box, ab-Aristotelian, such that they come back in the decision of meaning to unfound it. What I am advancing here as a step forward: The without-sense of the Aristotelian sophist becomes ab-sense, by means of the transformation of sense-in-nonsense, a hyper-Aristotelian Freudianism, into nonsense-in-sense, a Lacanianism that well and truly causes man's world to shake down to its roots. Without-sense thus returns within sense, by means of Lacan's modern sophistry, which bores the hole of the prompter's box into the orbit of sense. The sophist, expelled as a plant, returns as a Lacanian psychoanalyst to diagnose Aristotle's foolishness [*connerie*] and to unfound sense. He is helped by a number of minute operators, created by Lacan to show the new principle (that there is no sexual relationship, he says), named *den* and feminine jouissance, as quintessences of nothing more fleeting than the object *a*, linked to the signifier of the signifier and to what is not even if it were. The change in times is announced unsurprisingly but vigorously by the weighty presence of the subject, even if barred, in the place of the political, even if still to be constituted and ghost-like. See Lacan remain, arms dangling between the love of the matheme with a whiff of philosophy, and the effectivity, with at least as much joy as anguish, of the blah-blah of the parlêtre—which, and not only as a woman, I hereby choose.

The Drowning of a Fish

There was a time in my life when I taught psychotic adolescents in the Etienne Marcel day hospital, on rue Etienne-Marcel in Paris. First of all on a casual basis, then as an assistant. At the same time I was writing a thesis (a “third cycle” thesis, as they say: “Si Parménide”). It was my first job. I loved this job unreservedly. Including the rigidity or the rather showy, slightly constrained nature of the team meetings in the basement with real nurses, professional psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, experienced pedagogues. I had everything to learn, about everything, and I had the impression I was learning it. I would have been happy to stay there, and would then, of course, have undergone analysis myself. But without analysis, it was marvellous, a marvel, because I never stopped guessing and not knowing, with no constraint or fear, and with the most indubitable, very constant, impression of ageing two seconds for every second. This was my only certainty, from morning to night. On a razor’s edge, but never feeling it could cut, on the contrary; when you hold it, when you hold yourself on that edge, the edge is much wider than you think, like a trampoline, no doubt because there you are never alone, but there are at least two of you. Such that everything is possible once again; once again after nothing has happened, something happens. Or something other, something of an other, and life grabs you by the pit of your stomach, as tenderly as a lily in the fields.

Ἡ δ' ἀλήθεια, καὶ τοῦτο τοῖς ἄλλοις εἶκε συγκεκριτήσῃ·
 ἢ γὰρ θεία τοῦ ὄντος ἄρα εἶκε προσειρῆσθαι τοῦτο
 τῷ ῥήματι, τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, ὡς θεία οὐσα ἄλη.

Alêtheia, the truth, seems to be a word composed from a sentence meaning the divine movement of being, which is indicated by that word, the "truth": a "divine wandering," theia alê.

—PLATO, *Cratylus*

Distinguishing the dimension of the signifier only takes on importance when it is posited that what you hear, in the auditory sense of the term, bears no relation whatsoever to what it signifies. That is an act that is instituted only through a discourse, scientific discourse. And it is not self-evident. Indeed, it is so scarcely self-evident that a whole discourse—which does not flow from a bad pen, since it is the Cratylus, by none other than Plato—results from the endeavour to show that there must be a relationship, and that the signifier in and of itself means something. This attempt, which we can qualify from our vantage point as desperate, is marked by failure because another discourse, scientific discourse, due to its very institution—in a way whose history we need not probe here—gives us the following, that the signifier is posited only insofar as it has no relation to the signified.

—LACAN, *Encore*

Language is merely what scientific discourse elaborates to account for what I call lalangue. Lalangue serves purposes that are altogether different from that of communication. That is what the experience of the unconscious has shown us, insofar as it is made of lalangue, which, as you know, I write as one word to designate what each of us deals with, our so-called mother tongue (lalangue dite maternelle), which isn't called that by accident. . . .

But the unconscious is knowledge, a know-how (savoir-faire) with lalangue. And what we know how with lalangue goes well beyond what we can account for under the heading of language.

—LACAN, *Encore*

She went camping with kids who were mad.

The day before in the evening, with an entomologist, they had cooked rabbit for forty, but in the early hours yellow bubbles started to appear, like Lake Titicaca, and everything had to be thrown out.

Ten of them headed off with canned goods, sardines, cassoulet, pineapples, concentrated milk, to set up camp near to the pond. It was the hottest

summer since 1904, the air was breaking up, the forest was steaming, the pond was spewing slightly foul-smelling mist, perfect for hippopotamuses and inflatable mattresses. After all, there was a man, a proper gym teacher, thin and slippery despite the heat, to look after the children with her.

She never had children, too young for that, and she was the kind not to put up with other people's children, so with any children. It was her first paid job, found by chance, that is thanks to a lover, because her philosophy studies were leading really nowhere. Except there, to a hospital. In a day hospital for psychotic adolescents, where she shared as well as she could what she knew and what she did not know. Unarmed, unprotected, and with no safety net. Reading Plato's *Cratylus*, for example, in the middle of a barnyard, in a building surrounded by the whores, to make these funny children see—with nothing but Greek writing on the blackboard, and the obviously strange forms of the letters, the gaps between them, aspirations, up-and-down accents, everything that helped to sound out the words—that one tongue at least was for them more unknown than their own. Out of this it emerged, with the most implacably warm logical affect, that whatever they thought about it, they had a mother tongue. At any rate, more of a mother tongue than others. We all know, do we not, that in the *Cratylus*, Socrates invents outlandish, hypersignifying, and gloriously contradictory etymologies for one and the same word, he burns onomatopoeia at both ends with the playfulness of a dolphin and the violence of a torpedo. It made them laugh, they became daring and free with the sounds and senses of this damn mother tongue that had rendered them mute, by gleefully proposing together the etymology of *con-cierge*.¹ We laughed together using whatever crude or bizarre means available, which certainly aged us two seconds for every second. Unpreparedness, impropriety that, with disability responding to disability, dared to call itself an institution, like drums, fifes, and foot soldiers, the pâté meat that would win wars. What snobbery in scouting, what scouting in snobbery, in the love of art and in exploitation.

At the start of the summer, the hospital headed off to the fields, to set up camp. And lo, it came to pass, it was even customary, that the -ers suggested coupling up, tent by tent, secretly or publicly. As for the -ees,² we were never too sure, we presumed not, we presumed that if they did, it was for the best.

An underpaid camp with kids who were mad. Mad boys, mad girls, I mean psychotics, captain, you perhaps know what the word means. From *psukhê*, the soul, and *-tic*, as in cahotic, chaotic, indicating monotony in the inventiveness of grief. We only noticed at dinnertime, when giving out

rations, because there was a certain number of plates and the last one was still full of food. But I had yelled at everyone in the afternoon because a mattress was left floating in the middle of the pond.

We would meet him at the corners of walls, we thought we would bump into him there, flat against the wall, like the wall, like the angle of the wall. He himself always seemed to bump into a translucent extension of the wall. He opened his mouth in an oval shape, with a very slight movement of his neck every few seconds, like a tortoise, in the utmost calm, like Anna Karina in *Pierrot le fou*³ imitating a goldfish knocking into the side of its bowl, but for real.⁴ He must have been handsome, tall, blond, muscular, with downy hair on his chin and cheeks, the shadow of a moustache—a Greek loved one, if he had not been whiteish, dematerialized, with opaque bits and transparent bits, reflecting and absorbing light like those living on the moon, or the blind in the deep blue sea. He didn't speak. When he spoke, he would say something that made sense, but he didn't speak. He was content to open his mouth a little wider, and when you weren't listening hard, you thought you could hear him. No one spoke to him. No one knew him. I am no longer sure of his name. We only knew his corners, the walls where we might find him. I would sometimes take him by the hand toward the middle of a room, talk to him while looking at him, laugh to him, and perhaps his eyes changed and he began to have eyes. It gave me pleasure to do this because when you touched him you noticed he was handsome, I mean antotypically, but the ectoplasm returned like wavelets of icing covering over a cellophane cake. I think he never saw himself, he lived in the depths of the ocean he had retreated to, I imagine, when his father died and his older brother had taken the place in their mother's permeable bed. So, from one wall to the next he institutionalized himself as a fish seldom caught.

That day we were all, the maddening and the maddened, tired out from setting up camp.

The pyromaniac had immediately stashed his matches in the woods. He was a pyromaniac in a frame. Pyromania was really his second profession, a *bobby*.⁵ His first was as a framed itinerant, James, framing his head inside his arms, his left arm at a right angle pointing down, and his right at a right angle pointing up; he would always be missing one side, for want of a third arm. But transformed in this way into an image on a TV screen, he emitted a few unknown English words, interrupted by the crackling noises of a crystal radio. In the approved host family who had collected him, and where one politely ate potatoes, he had picked up that his father was an American film star. Framed in this way, he sometimes would free his

hands to start a fire, or pretend to start a fire, and in the torrid undergrowth, I was always coming across little piles of leaves and twigs waiting to be lit.

What preoccupies us teachers monitors guards servants deportees deserters, what preoccupies us most is the fact that there are boys and girls who, you see, are actually not the same sex. The kids who are mad are coed, and insofar as they are coed, they are like us normal attentive romantic hotheaded, they desire and exclude. This entire group who are so dreary most of the time, spark into life in the open air of their fourteen-seventeen years, dusty and warm like the mud at the edges of the lake. This open-air commingling, their flesh quite a bit less dull and larva-like than on the beach, led us to say that they were doing well, that the camp was a success, that we could organize things as if in a summer camp, captain. As for me, all I saw was the fire that had not yet been lit, the pyre of the maniac, and it was the sniggering of his chewing gum I kept a close eye on. "Well, did you let your guard down?" the director asked me on the last night, having come expressly straight from Paris, although she was already in her nightdress over her firm fat body of a Catholic choir singer, Madame de Grand Air in *Bécassine*.⁶ You understand of course, captain, that it is impossible, qualified or not, to keep a close eye on a dozen psychotics twenty-four hours a day on the shores of a lake. And that no one asked me if I knew how to swim or explained to me how I could help a fish.

We beat through the woods. It rained. After two days searching, his body was found in the mud of the lake. His mother and brother came to confirm it was him. She was relieved that it was all over, and we helped them to be aware of this, so there was no need for a trial. The corpse had a massive hard-on when the body was identified, and I am led to understand that you yourself found him beautiful.

But I have to add one more fact.

On the train back, just as one dream can pay back another, something else happened. We were all exhausted, all more exhausted than each other if that is possible. I was dropping-falling from sleep deprivation. In the midst of the cacophony of a regiment on leave, of a canteen in the middle of the desert. I fell into a deep sleep, saliva drooling from my mouth, interrupted by coconuts on my head. A child, always the same one, was pulling on my collar and sleeve to wake me up. Once, twice, forever. This child was uttering the sounds of a broken music box, a series of noises so carefully and rapidly articulated that no one could ever make out a single word. Not a sharing of language but just looks, jostled looks. For the tenth time,

he hauled me up out of sleep to mumble in my face. Suddenly I lost my temper, having woken up inside, I sat up on the seat, I ran my hand through my hair, and I finally said to him with the utmost clarity, as one happens to say “I love you” just before making love: “Now just listen to me. You can see that I can’t take any more, I’m dying of sleep. But you have woken me up again. Well, I agree I should be woken up again. I have woken up because you have woken me up. But pay attention, I am listening to you. Now you in turn, in exchange, have to say something.”

He could barely stand up in the corridor between the seats, swaying with each jolt of the train. He blinked as if out of shock. In his hand he had the train timetable that he had picked up in the station. He held it open at eye level, and he read out solemnly: “The 9:02 from Poitiers with supplement, arrives in Paris 12:15. Nemours. . . .” It was with these words that he began to speak forever. The director will never have known a thing about this. But I was freed, I was able to leave.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ah! You see. . . . It is all there, my good fellow, in order
to get them out of there, you have to go in there.

—JACQUES LACAN, “L’impromptu de Vincennes,” December 3, 1969

I am here weaving together several texts invented within a number of heterogeneous frameworks, such as *La Décision du sens* (Paris: Vrin, 1989, with Michel Narcy), *L’Effet sophistique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), *Voir Hélène en toute femme* (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de tourner en rond, 2000, with Maurice Matieu), *Avec le plus petit et le plus inapparent des corps* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), *Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel* (Paris: Fayard, 2010, with Alain Badiou), as well as in an unpublished work written at the request of Diana Rabinovich for Manantial Press (Buenos Aires, Argentina). These intersect with analyses suggested by dialogues with Françoise Gorog, with Elisabete Thamer in her thesis “Logologie et parlêtre” (University of Paris 4, 2008), and with Monique David-Ménard in her *Éloge des hasards dans la vie sexuelle* (Paris: Hermann, 2012).

The motivation behind this little book, put together at the request of Jean Allouch and Thierry Marchaisse, who came up with its title, was to give readers of Lacan and psychoanalysts certain Greek tools and concepts that could be advantageous, even if not necessary, not true but useful, in order to read in Lacan a certain Lacan and to see in psychoanalysis a certain kind of discursive practice whose exclusive and primary nature, but not its interest, one might contest.

I would like to thank Sophie Legrain for her help with editing and composing the manuscript.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Performing Untranslatability

Michael Syrotinski

The French original of this text, *Jacques le Sophiste: Lacan, logos et psychanalyse* (Paris: Epel, 2012), poses a unique set of problems for anyone attempting to translate it into English, for a number of interconnected reasons.

Firstly, this is a text that has at its heart a critical engagement with the philosophically contested status of language itself. Hence the importance of conveying subtle nuances and differences associated with particular terms relating to language and discourse, in both Greek and French, whether it be the rich polysemy of *logos*, Saussure's *langue/parole* distinction, the difference between a language—spoken or written—and a tongue, Jacques Lacan's reformulation of language as a more all-inclusive, individualized *lalangue*, the different valences of "discourse," Foucauldian or otherwise, the fact that *un discours* can also be a speech in French, and so on. Many of these translation difficulties are easily surmountable in other Romance languages, where the lexical, syntactical, and semantic similarities to French enable closer literal translation, which explains the earlier translations into Spanish and Portuguese of *Jacques le Sophiste*.

Secondly, Cassin's book constitutes an important rereading of Lacan and a sustained commentary on his interpretation of Greek philosophers, most notably the sophists. More broadly, its central thesis concerns the relationship between psychoanalysis and sophistry, and as such it deals with the slippery nature of language generally. Sophistry, since Plato and Aristotle, has been represented as philosophy's negative alter ego, its bad other, and Cassin has long been fascinated by the modalities of discursiveness we find in the texts of the sophists. This allows her to draw out the "sophistic" elements of Lacan's own language; how, as she puts it, Lacan "philosophitizes." What they have in common is that they both radically challenge the relationship of language to meaning:

Let us just say provisionally that the respective discourses of sophistry and Lacanian psychoanalysis share a rebellious relationship to meaning,

which operates performatively, at the level of the signifier, and distances itself from the truth of philosophy. Our time is the time of the subject of the unconscious bound to the sexual relationship that does not exist, by contrast with the Greek political animal, but both are first and foremost speaking beings. (Chapter 2)

This perspectival shift Cassin calls logology (a term first coined by Novalis in his “Logological Fragments”) as opposed to ontology, and she maps this out in a number of different formulations, showing the contrasting aspects of each and reversing the assumed priority of meaning (signified) over language (signifier, or discourse, in the sense in which Lacan uses it). So in many ways this is close to Derrida’s reading of Logos in *Of Grammatology* and of pharmakon in his “Plato’s Pharmacy,” and indeed in Chapter 3 Cassin links the inherent ambivalence of logos-pharmakon, both linguistic remedy and poison, to psychoanalysis as “talking cure.”

Thirdly, if the unconscious is “structured like a language,” as Lacan claims, and man is essentially a speaking being (whether as an Aristotelian “animal endowed with logos” or a Lacanian parlêtre), this has profound implications for the relationship of language to the subject, or the unconscious of the subject, as represented by all the different visual models of increasing complexity that Lacan tested out in his seminars and written texts. This uncontrollable quality of language uncovered at first by Freud in the more familiar symptomatic slips of the tongue, verbal jokes, hidden meanings, or homophonic wordplay is for Lacan the key to understanding the originality of Freudian psychoanalysis and becomes the generative force of Lacan’s own endlessly inventive relationship to the French language and his many resonant neologisms.

How one goes about translating into English those sections of Lacan that are quoted by Cassin, and her references to Lacan generally, is thus no simple task. There are now many excellent published translations of Lacan’s seminars and of his *Écrits*, thanks to the brilliance and deep erudition of translators such as Bruce Fink, Russell Grigg, Alan Sheridan, and others, and where possible relevant terms have been more or less adopted and incorporated as standard translations. However, by no means all of Lacan’s texts have been translated, or they exist only in unpublished form (notably Cormac Gallagher’s fine working translations on his “Lacan in Ireland” website), and it is precisely those that have often been characterized as “untranslatable” that are at the heart of Cassin’s text—“L’Étourdit,” “La Troisième,” and *Joyce le Sinthome*, among others—and seem to exert the most powerful attraction for her. As Cassin notes in her acknowledgments

at the end of this text, portions of it have been published in earlier forms and versions in other contexts, most notably the philosophical dialogue jointly authored with Alain Badiou, *Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel* (2010), in which they both read, differently, Lacan's notoriously dense and complex "L'Étourdit." I am indebted to the excellent translation and edition of the Cassin-Badiou dialogue by Susan Spitzer and Kenneth Reinhard, *There's No Such Thing as a Sexual Relationship: Two Lessons on Lacan*, and for the most part follow their translation for those sections, as well as their translation choices when it comes to Lacan's terminology. I have occasionally departed from their translation where the different inflections and emphases in Cassin's text seem to call for it, and the rationale for these departures is highlighted accordingly. I have respected the more or less consensually agreed-upon conventions, such as "subject presumed to know" for *sujet supposé savoir*, or "mirror stage" for *stade du miroir*, or the retention of the original French for terms that have very particular connotations and resonances in Lacan, such as *jouissance* or *lalangue*. However, Cassin's very singular engagement with Lacan—and as she says, with Lacan there are perhaps only ever singular cases—requires a very particular attention to the materiality and performativity of her own language, listening with the ear of the other, as Derrida might say.

As Cassin notes, she is not exempt from the processes of transference and mirroring whereby any engagement with Lacan involves something of an irresistible identification:

It is most remarkable, but also very normal since the maneuver involves transference and homonymy, that we all see something of ourselves in Lacan, that is, we fixionalize¹ our Lacan in order to get back from him what we authorize ourselves to ask of him (and I am certainly no exception here). (Chapter 3)

This surfaces explicitly within her own playfully inventive language: She "Lacanizes" in the same way that the Greeks, homologously, would say of those who speak "like Gorgias" and other sophists "Gorgianize." I have explained such nuances in Cassin's original French in my footnotes, since at times it is just as important to catch not just what Cassin is saying but what she is doing in her narrative, making the text as much a "fixionalized" immersion in the *lalangue* of her sophistic-analytical performance as it is a serious and profound philosophical demonstration. The narrative form of this text itself could be read as a kind of singular performance, and it was crucial to respect the elliptical, at times disjunctive, but often very playful and witty style of the linguistic performance of Cassin's French

original. Her “Lacanized” French, though, is by no means a kind of deferential mimicry, since it engages critically with Lacan at a number of points, particularly around the question of feminine *jouissance*. Indeed, insofar as this is a very singular text, one might venture to describe it as “Cassinizing,” and in talking about this text Cassin has referred to it as a “philosophical novella,” which has an explicitly autobiographical (or perhaps autofictional) prologue and epilogue and takes the form of a testimonial account of the deep and transformative effect of her encounter with Lacan and Lacanian psychoanalysis. I would suggest, though, that the text does not necessarily give access to a certain autobiographical intimacy, since what she is concerned with is the dislocating, alienating, and equivocal effects that language has on the subject, so one might speak more properly of *extimacy*, to borrow Lacan’s neologism, rather than intimacy.

Cassin returns incessantly to the problem of equivocation (which is how I am translating Lacan’s *équivoque*), as opposed to univocal meaning. This is closely linked to her analysis of homonymy, both in ancient Greece and in the meandering path this word and concept has taken over time to our present-day understanding of the term. In Aristotle’s time, homonyms were aligned with the fundamental principle of noncontradiction, that something “cannot be and not be at the same time,” which underpinned the prohibition of homonymy (one word cannot mean more than one thing). This is what Cassin has elsewhere theorized as the Aristotelian “decision of meaning” or *logos* as an operation of exclusion of its “bad others,” including polysemy, homonymy, and nonsense. Equivocation becomes for Cassin, as it is for Lacan, not simply one aspect among others of language (and by extension, of translation) but its very condition of possibility—in other words, a radical ambiguity at the level of both semantics and syntax, or what could be termed more precisely amphibolic homophony. This attention to infinite plurality of different meanings, nuances, and associations, both within each language but more importantly between languages, is of course the driving force behind Cassin’s *Dictionary of Untranslatables* project, which could be seen as a multilingual philosophical performance, readable like the unconscious through its infinite and ultimately uncontrollable linguistic slippages and detours.

This is indeed the link Cassin makes herself toward the end of *Jacques the Sophist*, with what she acknowledges has become for her a “fetish sentence” from Lacan’s “L’Étourdit”: “A language among others is nothing more than the integral of the equivocations that its history has allowed to persist in it.” As she goes on to say, “when one takes the sentence for what it is saying, one comes up with a dictionary of untranslatables, a *vocabulaire*

européen des philosophies, that is based on the integral of the equivocations that the history of each language has left in it—in this case, dealing with the languages of Europe” (Chapter 5). *Integral* as a noun is often mistranslated as “sum” but is to be understood very explicitly as a complex mathematical function, an operation of integral calculus, to the extent that Lacan was trying to mathematize the ways in which intersubjectivity and desire are bound up in language and its inherent equivocations.

One consequence of this emphasis on logology as opposed to ontology is to relegate the traditional cornerstones of philosophy, truth and being, to a more “lowly status,” and Cassin does this in *Jacques the Sophist* by setting the performative force of language over and against its constative meaning, thus taking on the core belief in the analytic tradition that one can philosophize and think without having to worry about language and its effects. She takes this further by trying to understand what is at work in the various negations involved in the “other” of meaning, beyond simply nonsense (Freud’s analysis of jokes as the *Unsinn* in *Sinn*). She thus moves past the philosophically comfortable couple of sense/nonsense to something outside the orbit of meaning altogether, theorizing this otherness as something closer to Lacan’s “real” or “ab-sense” in relation to what she calls “ab-sex” (more or less her translation of Lacan’s celebrated “there is no such thing as a sexual relationship”). This organizing principle of otherness within language, as well as between languages, could also be termed “untranslatability.”

It is in this respect that Cassin’s reading of Greek philosophy is so profoundly original, since she demonstrates through an extraordinary attention to philological detail that the Greeks—notably Democritus, Gorgias, and Parmenides—were just as aware as we are of the “play of the signifier,” the materiality of the letter, or a kind of nonsignifying performative force within language, which we often assume uncritically to be very contemporary literary or linguistic phenomena. In other words, we may ironically be more Aristotelian in our assumptions about language than the Greeks in fact were. One startling example of this is her discussion toward the end of the text of a passage from Democritus. Democritus is credited with being the first great theorist of atomism, but his philosophy has often been discredited for its cynical materialism. In reading Democritus, however, Cassin comes across the word *den*, a strange bit of a word that does not in fact exist, and never existed, in the Greek language. What Democritus is doing, according to Cassin, is to think through the big questions of being and nothingness and how one can express nothingness, negation, absence, subtraction, and so on, in and through language. Cassin’s translation of *den*

as *-ien* (which I have followed Reinhard and Spitzer in translating into English as “-othing”) is no longer bound by meaning but performs an analogous subtraction from meaning or, rather, from the nothing of meaning that is ab-sense, radically undermining the very foundation of materialist physics, just as Lacan, who likewise homes in on this passage in Democritus, undermines rationalist models of contemporary science. As Lacan puts it, “Democritus ‘laughs at everything’ because ‘materialism’ is, in all the rigor of the term, a ‘moterialism.’” “Moterialism” (based on the French for “word,” *mot*) is Lacan’s neologism, reinvented and rematerialized by Cassin as a problem of translation.

It is this emphasis on performativity and untranslatability that is at the heart of Cassin’s text, and its autofictional (or perhaps autofixional) engagement with Lacan, and both the discourse and reality of the world of psychoanalysis. In the prologue, she recounts how, as a young Hellenist starting to make her name in early 1970s in Paris, she had been recommended to Lacan to help him get a better understanding of the pre-Socratics and went along to meet him once a fortnight for several months. Not convinced he in fact understood anything of what she tried to explain to him, the sessions ended quite abruptly in a somewhat comical scene of misrecognition. The Epilogue, at the other end of this “philosophical novella” is a moving confessional narrative about Cassin’s first paid job while still a doctoral student, as a tutor teaching Greek to psychotic adolescents in the Etienne Marcel day hospital in Paris. This narrative, while set apart, is also woven into the fabric of the rest of the text, bringing together Lacanian motifs, Greek myths, and a playful attention to the Greek language, as well as her own experiences of helping her profoundly troubled young charges to gain access to their “mother tongue.”

I worked closely with Barbara Cassin in preparing the English translation of this extraordinary text and the translator notes that accompany it, and my debt to her is incalculable. We spent countless hours of conversation and email exchanges, including an intense few days in Pino Marine on Corsica, going over in detail every line, indeed every word and bit of word, of the French original. This afforded me a unique perspective and a singular proximity to her text, as perhaps only the act of translation can. I would also like to thank the anonymous readers at Fordham University Press, whose insightful comments and suggestions helped make this a better translation and edition than it otherwise might have been, although any residual mistakes or errors of interpretation are of course my own.

NOTES

PROLOGUE: "HOW KIND OF YOU TO RECOGNIZE ME"

1. Jacques Lacan, "Proposition du 9 octobre 1967 sur le psychanalyste de l'école," in *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 251, trans. by Russell Grigg as "Proposition of the 9 October on the Psychoanalyst of the School," *Analysis* 6 (1995): 6.

2. Alain de Libera, *La querelle des universaux. De Platon à la fin du Moyen Âge*, expanded edition (Paris: Seuil Points, 2014).

3. ["Or worse" is of course an allusion to Lacan's Seminar XIX (1971–72), *Ou pire . . .*—Trans.]

4. As Jacques-Alain Miller puts it, "We do not even know whether the unconscious has an existence of its own,' writes Lacan, and he goes as far as to say that the more it is interpreted, the more it is." Would I say that my unconscious is enough as it is? Jacques-Alain Miller, "Vie de Lacan," *La Cause freudienne* 79 (2011): 320.

5. [In English in the original. *Peer* is a near-homophone of the French *pire*. The French term *trouaille* is an allusion to Lacan's use of the term in his play on words "Il n'y a que le trou qui vaille" (only the hole is worth anything).—Trans.]

6. [Lacan, in wanting to preserve a certain subjective freedom within a group, introduced two new structural innovations: the devices of "cartels" and "*la passe*." "*La passe*" (the pass) was the institutional framework set up by the Freudian School of Paris to allow an analysand, having undergone analysis, to testify to a jury who decided if he or she was qualified to become an analyst. A cartel is described by Lacan as follows: "Each of the small groups (we have a name for designating the groups) will be composed of at least three individuals, five at most, four being the proper measure (or number is a possible translation). PLUS ONE charged with selection, discussion and the outcome. . . . After a certain period of functioning, the elements of a group will be invited to shift to a different group" (Jacques Lacan, "Founding Act," trans. Jeffrey Mehlmann, *October* 40 [1987]: 96). This was Lacan's first definition of the cartel, and he chose the name since it suggested "*cardo*," a name for the committee of entry (*le comité d'accueil*) to the school. *Cardo* is a Latin

word meaning “a hinge on which a door turns,” thus an opening, and cartels were meant to be a mode of entry. It also implied the number four (*quatre*), which was for Lacan the right number for a cartel. This was also the number of different discourses depending on the effect and position of the master signifier S_1 —the discourse of the Master, the University, the Hysteric, and the Analyst—which, according to Lacan, are strictly limited to four.—Trans.]

I. DOXOGRAPHY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS, OR RELEGATING
TRUTH TO THE LOWLY STATUS IT DESERVES

1. See my *Parménide. Sur la nature ou sur l'étant. La langue de l'être?*, Points-bilingues (Paris: Seuil, 1998), 73.
2. Jacques Lacan, “On the Subject Who Is Finally in Question,” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Frink (New York: Norton, 2006), 189.
3. Jacques Lacan, “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’” in *Écrits*, 43. Emphasis added. [Translation modified.—Trans.]
4. Jean Ballock and Heniz Wismann, *Héraclite ou la séparation* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972); Jean-Paul Dumont, *Les Présocratiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988). Aristotle’s entire dialectic is based on the fact that it is right to take as a starting point accepted ideas, that is, opinions that are reliable inasmuch as they are received by reputable men: the doxai of the *dokimôtatoi*.
5. Cassin, *Parménide*, 72–73.
6. Plato, *Gorgias*, 82 B 26 DK, often quoted by Hannah Arendt, in order to show how doxa, which constitutes the City as a “space of appearances,” provides what she calls “the Greeks’ solution to the fragility of human affairs” (see, for example, Mary McCarthy, ed., *The Life of the Mind* [New York: Harcourt, 1978], part 1, “Thinking,” 37, and the commentary on Merleau-Ponty that follows: “Every *Schein* has an equivalent *Erscheinung*”). [Unless indicated otherwise, the English translations from the Greek are based on Cassin’s own French translations.—Trans.]
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Ante-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
8. Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pécuchet with the Dictionary of Received Ideas*, trans. and with an introduction by A. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin Classic, 1976), 14. Translation modified.
9. Charles Nodier, *Histoire du Roi de Bohême et de ses sept châteaux* (1830; repr. Paris: Editions Plasma, 1979), 47–50.
10. Plato, *Sophist*, 242c–d.
11. Cf. Hermann Diels, “Prolegomena,” in *Doxographi Graeci* (Berlin: 1879), 1–40. This *Epitomê*, or “summary of opinions,” without doubt dates

from the second century AD. We can also tell that “Plutarch” usurps the name of the very noble author in the *Stromates* from one very clear symptom: the hiatus (“The tenuousness of the subject matter and the unevenness of the form, which can be seen particularly in the frequent use of hiatus, provide the clearest evidence of fraud,” Diels, “Prolegomena,” 156). [English translation based on Cassin’s own French translation.—Trans.]

12. Diels, “Prolegomena,” 45ff.

13. “The further back we go to the time of the compilers of the sources themselves, the more difficult the question becomes, and the greater the doubt. For we had sound reasons to go from Plutarch and Stobaeus to Aetius, then by probable conjecture we separated the ancient *Placita* from the remaining mass of extracts. But now, if we try to go even further back, we have to take the utmost care to prevent the fire of divination transporting us to that shore they say is inhabited by dreams.” Diels, “Prolegomena,” 214.

14. The list of works by Theophrastus, of which there are different versions, fills several pages of the *Lives* of Diogenes Laërtius (5:42–50), but the only work by him that has reached us “directly” is a fragment of one of these that became detached during the Alexandrine age: the ninety-one paragraphs of the *Treatise on Sense Perception*. The unity of the *Phusikôn* or *Phusikai doxai* only takes shape because of the reconstitution by Diels and Usener, which is then followed by other efforts by more “scientific” philologists such as Jaap Mansfeld, who is unfortunately given to a habitually disdainful positivism (for an echo of these discussions as they relate to the example of *De Melisso Xenophane et Gorgia*, see Barbara Cassin, *L’Effet sophistique* [Paris: Gallimard, 1995], 121–28). The key point of reference for scholarship on Diels and ancient doxography is now Jaap Mansfeld and David T. Runia’s *Aëtiana: The Method and Intellectual Context of a Doxographer*, vol. 1, *The Sources* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1977); vol. 2, *The Compendium* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009); and vol. 3, *Studies in the Doxographical Tradition of Ancient Philosophy* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009).

15. See Cassin, *Parménide*, 53–64.

16. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *General Hermeneutics, 1809–1810*, in *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 253.

17. Diels, “Prolegomena,” 132.

18. Diels, 163.

19. Diogène Laërce, *Vies, doctrines et sentences des philosophes illustres*, trans. Robert Genaille (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1965), vol. 1, 16. Compare this with D. Laërce, *Vies et doctrines des philosophes illustres*, ed. Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, La Pochothèque (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1999).

20. Jacques Lacan, “The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of Psychoanalysts in 1956,” in *Écrits*, 396.

21. Laërce, *Vies, doctrines et sentences des philosophes illustres*, vol. 1, 27.
22. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 11, 1259a 6–23; cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 7, 1141b.
23. Emile Benveniste, *Vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1970), vol. 2, 133.
24. Jacques Lacan, “La Troisième” [1974], 7th Congress in Rome of the Ecole Freudienne de Paris, first published in *Lettres de l’Ecole Freudienne* 16 (1975): 177–203, and more recently edited by Jacques-Alain Miller in *La Cause Freudienne* 79 (2011): 1–33 at 18.
25. “Préambule,” preface to *Annuaire de l’Ecole Freudienne de Paris* 1 (1965), repr. in Jacques Lacan, “Acte de Fondation,” in *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 237.
26. Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire livre XX : Encore* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), 89, trans. by Bruce Fink as *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (New York: Norton, 1998), 57. [Subsequent references will be abbreviated to *Encore*, with French pagination following English pagination in parentheses.—Trans.]
27. Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, trans. Robert Drew Hicks (1935; repr. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), book 1, 15. Available online at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Lives_of_the_Eminent_Philosophers/Book_I#Prologue.
28. “Proposition du 9 octobre 1967 sur le psychanalyste de l’école,” in *Autres Écrits*, 253. English translation by Russell Grigg, in *Analysis* 6 (1995): 7.
29. Jean-Claude Milner, *L’Oeuvre Claire* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).
30. Lacan, *Encore*, 108 (119).
31. Jacques Lacan, “L’Étourdit,” *Scilicet* 4 (1973): 39.
32. Jacques Lacan, “Letter of Dissolution” [1980], trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *October* 40 (Spring 1987): 129.
33. Milner, *L’Oeuvre claire*, 125.
34. Lacan, *Encore*, 114 (104).
35. [The “object *a*” is Lacan’s term for the unattainable object in the various graphs he elaborated to represent the structure of desire in his psychoanalytic theory. He was insistent that it should remain untranslated for this reason.—Trans.]
36. [The Diadochi (from Greek *Diádokhoi*, “successors”) were the rival generals, families, and friends of Alexander the Great who fought for control over his empire after his death in 323 BC. The Wars of the Diadochi mark the beginning of the Hellenistic period.—Trans.]
37. Milner, *L’Oeuvre claire*, 128.
38. [Nicolas Bourbaki was the collective name of a group of mostly French twentieth-century mathematicians. Their aim was to base all of

mathematics on set theory, and their work continues to be influential in mathematics today.—Trans.]

39. [A Lacanian-style neologism by Cassin, splicing together doxography and psychoanalysis.—Trans.]

40. [Lacan's famous 1965 Seminar on "La lettre volée" is a reading of Edgar Allan Poe's detective short story "The Purloined Letter," a case investigated by Poe's fictional detective Dupin involving a compromising letter stolen from the Queen's boudoir. Lacan argues that the content of the Queen's letter is irrelevant to the story and that the proper "place" of the signifier (the letter itself) is determined by the symbolic structure in which it exists and is displaced, first by the Minister and then by the Prefect of Police.—Trans.]

41. Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" in *Écrits*, 17.

42. Lacan, "The Purloined Letter" ("Parenthesis of Parentheses" added in 1966), 41.

43. Lacan, 33.

44. Lacan, *Encore*, 107–8 (97). [Bruce Fink's translator note usefully glosses Lacan's term *dit-mension*: "*Mension* is a neologism, combining the homonyms *mansion* (from the Latin *mansio*, 'dwelling,' which in French was the term for each part of the theater set in the Middle Ages) and *mention* ('mention,' 'note,' or 'honors,' as in *cum laude*). It is also the last part of the word 'dimension.'"—Trans.]

45. Lacan, *Encore*, 110 (98).

2. THE PRESENCE OF THE SOPHIST IN OUR TIME

1. Jacques Lacan, "Variations on the Standard Treatment," in *Écrits* (1953; repr. Paris: Seuil, 1966), 361, translated by Bruce Fink as *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: Norton, 2006), 299. Translation modified.

2. "Others who were no fools said of the oracle that it neither reveals nor hides, but it is a sign [*sêmainaei, il fait signe*]. This was before the time of Socrates, who is not responsible, even though he was a hysteric. Which is why Freud, listening to the Socratics I have mentioned, returns to those who came before Socrates, who in his eyes were alone able to bear witness to what he found." Jacques Lacan, introduction to the German edition of *Écrits* [1973], in *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 558.

3. "Ho anax, hou tou manteion esti to en Delphois, oute legei oute kruptei alla sêmainei" (22 B 93 DK). Here are two translations that differ significantly from the one given in the previous footnote. Parmenides was wrong and Heraclitus right. That is clinched by the fact that, in fragment 93, Heraclitus enunciates *oute legei oute kruptei alla sêmainei*—"he neither avows

nor hides, he signifies”—putting back in its place the discourse of the winning side itself—*Hoanax, bou tou manteion esti to en Delphois*, “the prince”—in other words, the winner—“who prophecizes in Delphi” (Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire livre XX : Encore* [Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975], 114, trans. by Bruce Fink as *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* [New York: Norton, 1998], 103. [Subsequent references will be abbreviated to *Encore*, with French pagination following English pagination in parentheses.—Trans.]), where I appreciate that Heraclitus was right in relation to Parmenides, when Heidegger would have them equally Parmidean, originally “uncovering.” And the earliest one, which I prefer as the most Lacanian: “About the prince, about the one to whom there belongs the place of divination, the one at Delphi, he does not say, he does not hide, he *makes something signifying* (*il fait du signifiant*)” (Jacques Lacan, Seminar XII, *Problèmes cruciaux de la psychanalyse*, March 17, 1965, emphasis added).

4. Friedrich Nietzsche, “The History of Greek Eloquence,” in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, ed. Sander Gilman, Carole Blair, and David Parent (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 213.

5. I should mention here, and applaud, the thesis defended, but as yet unpublished, by Elisabete Thamer, “*Logologie et parlêtre: sur les rapports entre psychanalyse et sophistique dans l’oeuvre de Jacques Lacan*” (PhD diss., Paris-Sorbonne, December 13, 2008), which contains in an appendix a list of all the occurrences of *sophist* (12) and of *sophistic* (7) in Lacan’s work.

6. Sigmund Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 23 (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 248.

7. Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 23 (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 129.

8. Jacques Lacan, Seminar XII, *Problèmes cruciaux de la psychanalyse*, May 12, 1965.

9. Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007), 172.

10. Jacques Lacan, Seminar XII, *Problèmes cruciaux de la psychanalyse*, May 12, 1965.

11. The word is from Novalis, in his “Logological Fragments,” in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahoney Stoljar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

12. Jacques Lacan, *Transference*, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 317. Originally published as *Le Transfert. Séminaire XXII*, May 24, 1961 (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 376.

13. Just as at Sainte-Anne, there were “all sorts of signs of drug addiction and homosexuality” (Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 26).

14. [Lacan's neologism ("hate-loving"), which redefines Freud's "ambivalence."—Trans.]
15. [Delphine Seyrig was a French actress, famous from the 1950s to the 1970s.—Trans.]
16. Plato, *Protagoras*, trans. C. W. W. Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Philostratus, *The Lives of the Sophists*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Oxford: Loeb Classical Library, 1989).
17. Jacques Lacan, "Joyce le symptôme" [1975], in *Autres Écrits*, 569.
18. A question that indeed perplexed him, since on February 11, 1970, he asked it again: "I suddenly asked myself 'But how do you say 'sex' in Greek?'" (Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 75).
19. [Cassin's French original reads: "comment on (y,en) soigne; puis comment on (y,en) signifie; puis comment on (hi, han) jouit." This is appropriately untranslatable in English and could be read as an example of Cassin's own playful performative engagement with the wit of Lacan's French. The two pronouns replacing verbal prepositions in French, *y* and *en* of *soigner* and *signifier*, are linked as homophones to the "hi, han" of *jouissance* (the analogous French onomatopoeia for a donkey's braying, "hee haw," and used frequently by Lacan to reference the signifying lack or "*ânerie*" [nonsense, with "*âne*" meaning a donkey], of the sexual relationship).—Trans.]
20. Jacques Lacan, "La Troisième" [1974], *Lettres de l'École Freudienne* 16 (1975): 12.
21. "*Eidos*, which is translated improperly as form, is something which already promises to circumscribe for us the gaping hole within speech. In other words, Plato was to all intents and purposes a Lacanian. Of course, he could not know it. What it more, he was rather stupid or debilitated [*débile*], which didn't make things easy, but it surely helped him. What I am calling mental debility is the state of being a speaking being who is not fully integrated into a discourse. This is the price one has to pay for debility." Jacques Lacan, . . . *ou pire* (1972; repr. Paris: Seuil, 2011), 131.
22. André Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie* (1926; repr. Paris: PUF, 1926), s.v. "sophistry."
23. Plato, *Sophist*, 231a.
24. Himeros, *Discourse X*, "Let your ears be your eyes."
25. Aristotle, *Topics*, I, 105a 5–7.
26. In an interview with students at Yale University, this was how he referred to the "unconscious of the subject." Jacques Lacan, *Lectures and Interviews in North American Universities, Scilicet 6/7* (1976): 32.
27. The reference here is to Thesis XVI in Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940): "The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called 'Once upon a time' in historicism's bordello."

28. Allow me to again refer to Barbara Cassin, *Parménide. Sur la nature ou sur l'étant. La langue de l'être?*, Points-bilingues (Paris: Seuil, 1998).
29. "A language is, among other things, nothing but the integral of the equivocations that its history has allowed to persist in it" (Jacques Lacan, "L'Étourdit," *Scilicet* 4 [1973]: 47) has become for me a fetish-sentence in relation to the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (Paris: Seuil/Le Robert, 2004). English translation, *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood, trans. Christian Hubert, Jeffrey Mehlman, Steven Rendall, Nathanael Stein, and Michael Syrotinski (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2014).
30. Lacan, *Encore*, 31 (33).
31. Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 150 (175).
32. Lacan, *Encore*, 30 (33).
33. Lacan, 61 (56).
34. Emile Benveniste, "Remarks on the Function of Language in Freudian Theory," in *Problems in General Linguistics* (1956; repr. Miami, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971), 66.
35. Emile Benveniste, "Analytical Philosophy and Language," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, 237.
36. Novalis, "Logological Fragments," trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar, in *Novalis: Philosophical Writings* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997).
37. Novalis, "Logological Fragments," 83.
38. Lacan, *Encore*, 86 (79).
39. Lacan, *Encore*, 22 (25).
40. Lacan, "La Troisième," 12. [Lacan's neologism here plays on *je suis* and incorporates *sous* ("under") to indicate the barred, split subject of language of his own reinterpretation of the Cartesian cogito.—Trans.]
41. Lacan, *Encore*, 105 (96). [Bruce Fink in his translator notes comments that "*Le pensé* (unlike *la pensée*, thought) is 'that which is conceptualized.'"—Trans.]
42. Lacan, 108 (119).
43. Lacan, 107 (118).
44. Lacan, 33 (34).
45. Gorgias, *Treatise on Non-being* (Sextus, VII, 85 = 82 B 3 DK), where the doxographer Sextus uses the Stoicist and Skeptic difference between a "commemorative" sign, which recalls (*parastatikon*) and an "indicative" sign, which reveals (*mênutikon*).
46. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

1989), §148, 84. I am taking this (magnificent) sentence outside the genre of discourse to which it belongs; the context in which it appears in fact only relates to the way in which a genre of discourse and its stakes determine the connections between phrases: “A genre of discourse exerts a seduction upon a phrase universe.”

47. [See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (1962; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). Austin’s theory of performative language is a constant critical point of reference in Cassin’s other texts.—Trans.]

48. Lacan, “La Troisième,” 15.

49. Lacan, *Encore*, 43 (43).

50. Lacan, 105 (96).

51. Lacan, 107 (97).

52. Lacan, 119 (107).

53. Lacan, 29 (31).

54. Lacan, 34 (33).

55. Lacan, “La Troisième,” 14.

56. Philostratus, *Epistulae* 73 (= 82 A 35 DK).

57. Alain Badiou, “Lacan et Platon: le mathème est-il une idée?,” *Lacan avec les philosophes*, ed. Jacques Derrida (Paris: Albin Michel, 1991), 135–54.

58. While waiting for the *Republic*: “The Plato symptom is universally valid as concerns the position of our contemporaries with respect to philosophy” (Badiou, “Lacan et Platon,” 136).

59. See Chapter 5.

60. Badiou, “Lacan et Platon,” 137.

61. Lacan, introduction, 558.

62. “Plays old Harry with two fetishes . . . the true-false fetish, and the value-fact fetish.” Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 151. [“Play old Harry” in English in the original.—Trans.]

3. LOGOS-PHARMAKON

1. Aristophanes, *The Birds*, line 1696.

2. [In English in Lacan’s French original.—Trans.]

3. Jacques Lacan, “Mon enseignement, sa nature et ses fins,” in *Mon Enseignement* (1968; repr. Paris: Seuil, 2005), quoted by Elisabete Thamer, “*Logologie et parlêtre*: sur les rapports entre psychanalyse et sophistique dans l’oeuvre de Jacques Lacan” (PhD diss., Paris-Sorbonne, December 13, 2008), 287.

4. See also, besides Plato, Diogenes Laërtius (IX, 56 = 80 A 1 DK) for the dispute with his student Euathle who refused to pay him, and the commentary by Philostratus (*Lives of the Sophists*, I, X, 1 = 80 A 2 DK): “He was

the first to have the idea of being paid for his sessions and the first to transmit the idea to the Greeks, which is not to be looked down on, since we attach ourselves more to what we pay money for than to free things.”

5. Jacques Lacan, “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’” in *Écrits* (1953; repr. Paris: Seuil, 1966), translated by Bruce Fink as *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: Norton, 2006), 27.

6. Jean-Paul Dumont, *Les Sophistes, fragments et témoignages*, SUP—Les grands textes (Paris: PUF, 1969).

7. Plutarch, *Vie des dix orateurs*, I, 833 c (= Antiphon, 87 A 6 DK).

8. Lucien, *Histoire véritable*, II, 33 (= Antiphon, 87 A 7 DK).

9. [The reference here is to Jacques Derrida’s seminal essay “Plato’s Pharmacy,” in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).—Trans.]

10. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 17th ed. (New York: American Book Company, 1901), 1657.

11. Jacques Lacan, “Founding Act,” trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, *October* 40 (1987): 96–105, at 96.

12. Lacan, “Founding Act,” 104.

13. Jacques Lacan, *Television*, trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson (1973; repr. New York: Norton, 1990), 7.

14. [In English in the original.—Trans.]

15. Sigmund Freud, “Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1963), 17, originally published as “Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse” [1916–1917], in *Gesammelte Werke XI*, 10 (emphasis added).

16. Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen* (82 B 11 DK), § 9–11 (emphasis added). English translation by Edward Corbett and Robert Connors in *Classical Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 50. I give a full translation in French in my *Voir Hélène en toute femme d’Homère à Lacan*, *Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 78–81.

17. [In French *hainamorée*, which is a play on Lacan’s neologism *hainamoration*.—Trans.]

18. Homer, *The Odyssey*, IV, 221–90. English translation by E. V. Rieu [1946], revised translation by D. C. H. Rieu [1991] (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 61–62.

19. Homer, *Odyssey*, 62. [In her French original Cassin inserts the following, referring to Victor Bérard’s French translation and notes (Homère, *Odyssée*, trans. Victor Bérard [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1972]): “This is an athetese (passage adjudged inauthentic by critic), since why would Menalaus

recall how many arms Helen had passed through before coming to Deiphobus. The square brackets are Bérard's, who has a sense of decorum."—Trans.]

20. [Cassin also notes Bérard's comment here that this is commonly accepted as a "unanimous athetese."—Trans.]

21. Homère, *Odyssée*, 88n1.

22. Homère, *Odyssée*, trans. P. Jaccottet (Paris: Maspéro, 1982), 65n7.

23. Jacques Lacan, "La Troisième" [1974], trans. Yolande Szczech (working paper, 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307210365_Lacan's_La_Troisieme_English_Translation), 5.

24. See, for example, Plato, *Hippias Major*, 282 c, 286 a; *Hippias Minor*, 363 c; or *Gorgias*, 447 c.

25. Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists*, 1, 16.

26. [In English in the original.—Trans.]

27. Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, §8. [I have retained Cassin's French translation of the one specific phrase, since it is also the title of a related text and critique by Cassin of the omnipotence of logos, *Avec le plus petit et le plus inapparent des corps* (Paris: Fayard, 2007).—Trans.]

28. Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, §14.

29. Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations*, 165 a 6–8.

30. Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists*, 82 A 2 and 4 DK.

31. See Chapter 4.

32. Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, §1–2.

33. "Phère dê pros allon ap'allou metastô logon," *Encomium of Helen*, §9. This is how Gorgias punctuates his praise of poetry, by drawing attention to the process whereby the act of language is accomplished and happens.

34. ["Happening" is in English in the original.—Trans.]

35. Plato, *Gorgias*, 456 bc.

36. Plato, 465 bc.

37. Plato, 465 a.

38. [The reference here is to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols, or How to Philosophize with a Hammer* (1889).—Trans.]

39. [*Le suspense* in French is a direct translation of "suspense" in English, as the quality of tension in a thriller, for example, with the final voiced *s* of the second syllable pronounced more or less the same in both languages. *Le suspens*, as it is in Cassin's original, and the expression *en suspens* in French, pronounced with a final nasal vowel and unvoiced *s*, mean "something unresolved" or "to remain unresolved." Both (overlapping) senses of the term are thus brought into play here.—Trans.]

40. [*Fixionner* in French original.—Trans.]

41. [The ambiguity is intentional here in French, since “ne jamais céder sur” could mean either an uncompromising commitment to desire(s) or an uncompromising resistance to giving in to those same desires, formulated together as an ambiguous Lacanian ethical imperative.—Trans.]

42. Alain Badiou, “Choose Your Lacan,” *Philosophie-Magazine*, September 2011, 78–79.

43. For more on the history of logos-pharmakon from Gorgias to Desmond Tutu (via Plato’s *Gorgias* but also Aelius Aristides’s *Sacred Tales*), see my *Voir Hélène en toute femme*, 105–12.

44. [In English in the original.—Trans.]

45. Desmond Tutu, *Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, vol. 3, § 124 (1998). [The full report of the TRC is available online at <http://justice.gov.za/trc/report/>. Cassin refers to the French translation by P.-J. Salazar (Paris: Seuil, 2004), which does not include the passage quoted.—Trans.]

46. [In English in the original.—Trans.]

47. The two words in French are one and the same in Greek, and the first known amnesty, the one decreed in 403 in Athens following the civil war and the tyranny of the Thirty, was imposed as *mê mnêsikakein*, or “not remembering the evils of the past,” on penalty of death.

48. [In English in the original.—Trans.]

49. Lacan, *Écrits*, 270 (324).

50. Serge Cottet, “Latéralité de l’effet thérapeutique en psychanalyse,” in “Qu’est-ce que la psychanalyse appliquée?,” special issue, *Mental* 10 (accessible online at <http://wapol.org/ornicar/articles/215cot.htm>).

51. [In English in the original.—Trans.]

52. Directed by Ilan Klipper (Les films Grains du Sable/Arte France, 2010), one of the documentaries shown and discussed at the festival *Vous êtes fous!? [Are You Crazy!?!]*, proposed by the Appel des Appels at the Cinéma des 3 Luxembourg, Paris, June 2011.

53. Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan XVII*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 78. Translation slightly modified. Originally published in French as Jacques Lacan, *L’Envers de la psychanalyse*, *Seminaire Livre XVII* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1991), 90.

54. Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 55 (62).

55. Lacan, 52 (58).

56. [This foregrounding of the expletive *ne* in French is in Cassin’s French original and suggests a certain intentional ambiguity about the analogy between Protagoras and Lacan. It also anticipates the lengthy discussion of negation in Chapter 5.—Trans.]

57. [Another untranslatable example of Cassin’s Lacanian play on the signifier. The French reads: “contrairement à l’analyste (à la nalyste).” This should be read in relation to the discussion of the *den* as a part-word, or as “less than nothing,” in Chapter 5.—Trans.]

58. See Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” originally published in English in the *New Yorker*, February 25, 1967.

59. I am here quoting from and commenting on Plato’s *Theaetetus*, 166b–167e. [English translation, Benjamin Jowett.—Trans.]

60. Jacques Lacan, introduction to the German edition of *Écrits*, in *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2001), 553–54.

61. [The allusion here is to Heidegger’s (in)famous 1933 *Rektoratsrede* and his political affiliation to Nazism more generally, which Cassin has written about at greater length elsewhere.—Trans.]

62. Lacan, *Encore*, 30 (32).

63. Lacan, 54 (51).

64. Lacan, 82 (76).

65. The reference is to Lacan, 106 (95).

66. Lacan, 79 (74). [In the footnote commentary on the English translation of this passage, Bruce Fink makes the following useful observations: “The French, *semblant*, was still in currency in English in Carlyle’s time. . . . It took on the meanings of seeming, apparent, and counterfeit, meanings still associated with the contemporary English ‘semblance.’” A fuller articulation is of course Lacan’s seminar XVIII *D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant* (On a discourse that would not be based on semblance). As Fink also notes, *motus* can also mean “Don’t breathe a word of it,” and *sens* in French also means direction. (Lacan, *Encore*, 79nn2–3).—Trans.]

67. [Deleuze first introduces the neologism—a condensation of *fonder* (to found) and *s’effondrer* (to collapse, or crumble, as a foundation might)—in his *Difference and Repetition*.—Trans.]

68. We know, based on chapter 1 of *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (“Production of the Four Discourses”) and chapter 2 of *Encore* (“To Jakobson”) that there is no place for a fifth discourse, with the quarter turn operating on four terms whose sequence is immutable making four discourses and not a single one more. If there were one more, but there is no other (I am paraphrasing Lacan on *jouissance*), if there were a discourse of the sophist, if . . . one can always imagine that it would have in common with analytic discourse the same position for *a*, as agent, and that one difference would be that it would not put knowledge, S_2 , in the position of truth, under the bar of *a*. It would be replaced by S_1 , the master signifier, S_2 moving to the other side under the bar in the position of production . . . Let us recall the places and elements or terms:

<i>Places</i>		<i>Elements or terms</i>
<u>agent</u>	→	<u>other</u>
truth		production
		S master signifier
		S knowledge
		§ subject
		<i>a</i> surplus jouissance [<i>plus-de-jouir</i>]

The philosopher, who likes to play the devil's advocate, would perhaps want to write, reversing the terms in their places:

Analyst		Sophist
<u><i>a</i></u>	→	<u><i>§</i></u>
S ₂		S ₁
		<u><i>a</i></u>
		S ₂

69. Jacques Lacan, "Variations on the Standard Treatment," in *Écrits*, 275 (330).

70. Lacan, "Variations on the Standard Treatment," 276 (332). [*Sans ambages* literally means "unambiguously."—Trans.]

4. SENSE AND NONSENSE, OR LACAN'S ANTI-ARISTOTELIANISM

1. The "full word" is a word that is "full of meaning": "wanting to mean consists of eliminating double meanings." *Ornicar?* 17–18 (March 15, 1977): 11.

2. [In English in the original.—Trans.]

3. Jacques Lacan, "Joyce, le Symptôme," in *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 565–66. Cited and discussed by Elisabeth Thamer, as is the following quote, "*Logologie et parlêtre: sur les rapports entre psychanalyse et sophistique dans l'oeuvre de Jacques Lacan*" (PhD diss., Paris-Sorbonne, December 13, 2008), 71–72.

4. Conference at Columbia University [1975], *Scilicet* 6–7 (1976): 49.

5. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 3, 1005 b 19–23.

6. As Lacan notes, "Not our poet" but "a chap who was at the University of Berlin."

7. [*Commerie* is of course a deliberate play on *con*, the French for "cunt." Although there are several inventive English translations that attempt to capture Lacan's linguistic play—Bruce Fink suggests "cunt-torsions" (*On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972–1973. Encore, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. and with notes by Bruce Fink [New York: Norton, 1998], 75 [70]), and Cormac Gallagher, with untranslatable Irish wit, "feckology"—I have chosen to stick with a plain, literal translation for the sake of consistency.—Trans.]

8. Jacques Lacan, . . . *ou pire* [December 15, 1971] (Paris: Seuil, 2011), 29.
9. [The French original explains the pun here: “Il n’y a que le trou qui vaille (rions),” which plays on the word Lacan often uses to describe Freud’s innovations, *trouvailles*.—Trans.]
10. See Barbara Cassin, *Aristote et le logos* (Paris: PUF, 1997), chap. 1.
11. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 4, 100 a 1–100 b 1 (emphasis added).
[The French here is the text Cassin cotranslated with M. Narcy in *La Décision du sens* (Paris: Vrin, 1989), 127–29.—Trans.]
12. Lacan, *Encore*, 54 (51).
13. See Figure 3.
14. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV: “They are not challenged on what they think, but on what they say,” 1009 a 18–19; “to speak for the sake of speaking,” 1009 a 21 and 1011 b 2s; and “just saying what they are saying,” 1011 a 4.
15. “Tu en tēi phonēi logou kai en tois onomasin,” *Metaphysics*, 1009 a 21–22.
16. [Cassin’s French subtly introduces the homophonic *s’en—tenir à* with a noun complement means something like “to be attached to” and *s’en tenir à* something like “to stick to”—thus echoing both *son* and *sens*.—Trans.]
17. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 6, 1011 a 16.
18. “Kai legei ho legôn” (Pseudo-Aristotle, *On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias*, 980 b 4; see Barbara Cassin, *Si Parménide* (Lille, France: PUF-MSH, 1980), 98ff).
19. For an analysis of the key passage of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* that I am summarizing here, see the entries “Sign” and “Signifier” in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014).
20. Plato, *Cratylus*, 439 a.
21. Lacan, *Encore*, 29 (31), and 33 (34).
22. I would really recommend two, in fact: Hesiod’s *Theogony* and Aristotle’s *Sophistical Refutations*, two great worksites.
23. [In French *apprendre* can mean both “to teach” and “to learn” depending on context and syntax.—Trans.]
24. [The syntactic ambiguity of Cassin’s example in French is that it could mean either “to wish that I am captured by the enemy” or “to wish for my sake that the enemy is captured.”—Trans.]
25. Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations*, 177 a 20–21.
26. [The example in French has two identically worded expressions that shift meaning depending on the prosodic emphasis and the placement of the pause. The first means “to see someone being struck, with one’s own eyes,” the second “to see someone being darted a look.”—Trans.]

27. Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations*, 23, 179 a 12–15.
28. [In English in the French original.—Trans.]
29. [As will become clearer in the second half of Cassin's text, where the wordplay around *sens* constitutes a focal point of her argument, the two homophonic terms in French *un-sens* (one-sense or one-meaning) and *in-sens* (with the privative “in,” so deprived of sense or meaning) are differentiated purely at the level of the signifier.—Trans.]
30. Lacan “Joyce, le symptôme,” 565. [Lacan's extensive wordplay on and around the phonemes LOM (*l'homme* in French is man) is developed throughout the seminar in his phonetic (and in French homophonic) rewriting of *symptôme* as *sinthome*—saintly man—in recognition of Joyce's own rich multilingual wordplay at the level of the signifier. This passage is of course by its very nature untranslatable, and I have merely tried to give a flavor of the playfulness of Lacan's French here. Lacan's Seminar XXIII has been translated as *The Sinthome* by A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), although it does not include this passage.—Trans.]
31. Jacques Lacan, *L'envers de la psychanalyse. Le séminaire Livre XVII* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 88, trans. by Russell Grigg as *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII* (New York: Norton, 2007), 77.
32. Lacan, *Encore*, 87 (80).
33. Jacques Lacan, “La Troisième” [1974], *Lettres de l'École Freudienne* 16 (1975): 43.
34. Lacan, “La Troisième,” 43. [The French *faire rejet* can also mean “to reject.”—Trans.]
35. Aristotle also talks about “offshoot” (“paraphues ti,” *Rhetoric*, 1356 a 25) with regard to the relationship between rhetoric and dialectics.
36. [The reference here is to Heidegger's distinction and one way of articulating the ontological difference between *die Sprache* as language or speech and *die Sage* as a more essential “saying.”—Trans.]
37. Jacques Lacan, “Introduction à l'édition allemande des *Écrits*” [1973], in *Autres Écrits*, 556.
38. Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 78 (89).
39. Jacques Lacan, “Variations on the Standard Treatment,” *Écrits*, 277 (333).
40. Sigmund Freud, “The Unconscious,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, *Papers on Metapsychology*, trans. and ed. James Strachey with Anna Freud (London: Hogarth, 1957), 166–76.
41. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 8, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. and ed. James Strachey with Anna Freud (London: Hogarth, 1960), 11–14.

42. Lacan, *Encore*, 96 (88).
43. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 49–50.
44. Freud, 50. The salmon mayonnaise “presented us with a façade, in which a striking parade of logical thinking was exhibited; and we learnt from analysing it that this logic was used to conceal a piece of faulty reasoning [*sophisme*]—namely a displacement of the train of thought” (56).
45. Freud, 50.
46. Freud, 56.
47. Freud, 56.
48. Freud, 56–57.
49. Freud, 52.
50. Freud, 109.
51. Freud, 106.
52. Freud, 134.
53. Freud, 107–108. Emphasis added.
54. Freud, 109.
55. Freud, 109.
56. Freud, 109–10.
57. Freud, 114.
58. Freud, 115.
59. Freud, 133.
60. Freud, 92.
61. Freud, 96.
62. Freud, 96ff.
63. Freud, 94.
64. Freud, 94, 121n. [The “bad” pun involved here is the play on “home rule.”—Trans.]
65. Freud, 125.
66. Freud, 119.
67. Freud, 125.
68. Freud, 125.
69. Freud, 126.
70. Freud, 138–39n1. See also the “Theoretical Section,” 223ff.
71. Freud, 130.
72. The “dream’s navel” is also a stopping point of meaning and interpretation, but it has nothing horrifying about it, since there is no intention, puerile or malevolent, of nonsense for the sake of nonsense; it is simply a point of origin, or anchoring point, that is both contingent and structurally linked to the unconscious. I would note that it is affected by the same “Move along, there is nothing to see”: “There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because

we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled, and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown." Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 5, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. James Strachey with Anna Freud (London: Hogarth, 1953), 525.

73. Catherine Malabou, *Changer la différence. Les femmes et la philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 2009), 128, translated by Carolyn Shread as *Changing Difference: The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

74. Lacan, . . . *ou pire*, 41. See also Chapter 5 of the present text.

75. Lacan, 41.

76. Jacques Lacan, "The Situation of Psychoanalysis and the Training of Psychoanalysts in 1956," in *Écrits*, 394 (470).

77. Lacan, "Situation of Psychoanalysis," 394 (471), where we clearly find "what is in the sounds of voices and in words," which escapes the Aristotelian analysis of homonymy.

78. Jacques Lacan, *La Relation d'objet* [April 10, 1957] (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 293. The italics are Lacan's, but my added emphasis is in bold. [My translation.—Trans.]

79. Lacan, *La Relation d'objet*, 286.

80. Lacan, 288.

81. Lacan, 289.

82. Lacan, 294. My emphasis in bold.

83. Lacan, 295.

84. Saying this, I think I am describing in a less Aristotelian manner than Lacan the three levels of equivocation are they are deployed in "L'Étourdit" and acknowledge my disappointment from then (see *Il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel. Deux leçons sur "L'Étourdit" de Lacan*, with Alain Badiou [Paris: Fayard, 2010], 30–44). The essential point remains, obviously: It is homophony that is the turning point, which Lacan enacts and writes.

85. Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations*, I, 165 a 12 s.

86. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 21, 1457 b 7–8.

87. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III, 1410b 15–16 and 1411 b 22–24.

88. Aristotle, *Categories*, I, 1 a 1–6.

89. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 4, 1096 b 26 s.

90. Aristotle, *Politics*, 22, 1059 a 7 s.

91. See, for example, Jaakko Hintikka, for whom it is self-evident that "homonymy equals accidental homonymy." "Aristotle and the Ambiguity of Ambiguity," *Inquiry* 2 [Autumn 1959]: 137–51, at 139, reprinted in *Time and Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1976), 1–26. See also the entry on "Homonym" in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*.

92. [René Char, *Lettera amorosa* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007). Char's poem is a love poem to a woman he names Iris and at the same time a lyrical celebration of the iris in all its sensual and metaphorical richness.—Trans.]

93. [“Une voix blanche” is an expressionless voice, “une nuit blanche” a sleepless night.—Trans.]

94. [*Verre* in French is glass, and the homophone *vair*, “vair” in English, is a bluish-gray and white squirrel's fur. Perrault's original story has gone through a number of variations and rewritings where one or the other is used to describe Cinderella's slipper.—Trans.]

95. [These are all homophonic titles of Lacan's seminars that feature particularly untranslatable wordplay.—Trans.]

96. Sigmund Freud, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable” [1937], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 23, trans. and ed. James Strachey with Anna Freud, 209–53 (London: Hogarth, 1964), 218. [Translation slightly modified.—Trans.]

97. For more discussion of *kairos*, see Bernard Gallet's *Recherches sur kairos et l'ambiguïté dans la poésie de Pindare* (Pessac, France: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1990); the work of Monique Trédé, *Kairos: l'à-propos et l'occasion (Le mot et la notion d'Homère à la fin du IVe siècle avant J.-C.)* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1992); and, above all, the book by Richard Broxton Onians, *The Origins of European Thought: About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951). This last work is the third one I would recommend all analysts read!

98. Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968–1980; repr. as a single volume, 2009).

99. Gallet separates out, then verifies, the four technical functions that produce a semantic lineage: Like a “guiding thread,” *kairos* is a “hold,” an “influence,” a “control”; like the “regulating thread” of the width of the loom determining the area to be woven, it is a “ruler,” a “correct order,” a “true measure,” a “brevity,” and an “advantage”; like an “interlaced thread,” meeting each of the threads of the chain at a right angle, it is a “conjunction,” a “conjoining,” an “occasion,” a “favourable moment”; like the “dividing thread” between the cloth of even threads and the cloth of odd threads, it is a “choice,” a “separation,” a “judgement,” a “decision” (Gallet, *Recherches sur kairos*, 65ff).

100. Pindar, *Pythians*, I, 81 = Verse 5, 157.

101. Jacques Lacan, “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty,” in *Écrits*, 162 (201), and 165 (202).

102. I am here paraphrasing and quoting Jacques Lacan, “Les non-dupes errent,” Seminar XXI, June 11, 1974.

103. Lacan, *Encore*, 31 (33).

104. Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 52 (59).

105. See Chapter 2. In *The Lives of the Sophists* we find, for example: “Agathon . . . often gorgianizes in iambs” (493); and when Proclus de Naucratis launched into an exordium, “he became like a Hippias or a Gorgias” (*hippiazonti te . . . kai gorgiazonti*, 604); “to gorgianize,” if we are to believe Plato, is also what the cities of Thessaly did (501).

106. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III, 1404 a 24–29; see 1406 b 9, 1408 b 20. Aristotle says more explicitly that “the form of style (*to skhêma tês lexeôs*) should be neither metrical (*emmetron*) nor arhythmic” (9b 21 ff.).

107. Souda = 82 A2 DK (II, p. 272); Diodorus, *History*, XII, 53 = 82 A4 DK (p. 273).

108. [“The smallest and least apparent of bodies accomplishes the most divine works.” Cassin returns to this key phrase in Chapter 5 and elsewhere in her work in discussing Helen of Troy.—Trans.]

109. Lacan, *Encore*, 50 (48).

110. Jacques Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious*, trans. Russell Grigg (1957–1958; repr. Cambridge: Polity, 2017), 67.

111. Lacan, *Encore*, 62 (57).

5. THE JOUISSANCE OF LANGUAGE, OR LACAN’S AB-ARISTOTELIANISM

1. Jacques Lacan, “Joyce, le symptôme,” in *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 570.

2. Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin. *Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel. Deux leçons sur “L’Étourdit” de Lacan* (Paris: Fayard, 2010), 107. I would like to continue that discussion here. [English translation by Susan Spitzer and Kenneth Reinhard, *There’s No Such Thing as a Sexual Relationship: Two Lessons on Lacan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 48. Unless indicated otherwise, English translations will be from this translation and edition.—Trans.]

3. Badiou and Cassin, *Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*, 107 (48).

4. Badiou and Cassin, 107 (48).

5. Badiou and Cassin, 112 (50). [Translation slightly modified.—Trans.]

6. Badiou and Cassin, 111 (50).

7. Badiou and Cassin, 110 (49). Badiou’s emphasis.

8. [Susan Spitzer and Kenneth Reinhard translate *hors-sens* as “outside-sense,” whereas I prefer the term “without-sense” because of its now slightly archaic spatial meaning of being beyond the limits, as the opposite of within.—Trans.]

9. See Figure 3, Chapter 4.

10. “A gentleman entered a pastry-cook’s shop and ordered a cake: but he soon brought it back and asked for a glass of liqueur instead. He drank it and began to leave without having paid. The proprietor detained him. ‘What

do you want?’ asked the customer.—‘You’ve not paid for the liqueur.’—‘But I gave you the cake in exchange for it.’—‘You didn’t pay for that either.’—‘But I hadn’t eaten it.’” Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 8, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. and ed. James Strachey with Anna Freud (London: Hogarth, 1960), 60.

11. On this difference *ou/mê*, see later in Chapter 5 in relation to *mêden/ouden*.

12. Jacques Lacan, “L’Étourdit,” *Scilicet* 4 (1973): 51.

13. [The French original is “le ver qui creuse le bois dont on se chauffe d’habitude,” with an almost untranslatable play on the idiomatic expression “je vais te dire de quel bois je me chauffe” (I’ll tell you what really makes me angry, gets my goat, etc.).—Trans.]

14. See Chapter 2.

15. Badiou and Cassin, *Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*, 136 (62).

16. [This is an aphorism by the French poet René Char, which Hannah Arendt quotes in the introduction to her 1961 collection of essays, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking, 1961). Cassin quotes this regularly in other texts and contexts, particularly in relation to discussions of translation and the Untranslatable. See, for example, Barbara Cassin, “The Energy of the Untranslatables,” in “Translation and the Untranslatable,” special issue, *Paragraph* 38, no. 2 (June 2015).—Trans.]

17. Badiou and Cassin, *Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*, 136 (62).

18. Badiou and Cassin, 131 (59).

19. See Chapter 4.

20. Jacques Lacan, . . . *ou pire* [January 12, 1972] (Paris: Seuil, 2011), 41–42.

21. Jacques Lacan, *The Sinthome: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XXIII*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 21, originally published as *Le séminaire. Livre XXIII. Le Sinthome* [1975–1976] (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2005), 31.

22. See Chapter 4.

23. Lacan, *Sinthome*, 21 (31).

24. “J’appelle symptôme ce qui vient du réel.” Jacques Lacan, “La Troisième” [1974], *Lettres de l’École Freudienne* 16 (1975): 5.

25. Lacan, *Sinthome*, 9 (17).

26. Lacan, 115 (134).

27. [It becomes clearer that *langagièrement* should not be translated as “linguistically” in the context of this session of *Sinthome*, where Lacan distances himself unequivocally from Noam Chomsky, whom he had met

recently on a visit to the United States, and from linguistics as a science or discipline more generally.—Trans.]

28. Lacan, *Sinthome*, 22 (31).

29. Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire livre XX : Encore* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), 104, trans. by Bruce Fink as *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (New York: Norton, 1998), 95.

30. Lacan, *Sinthome*, 43 (56).

31. Jacques Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus,” in *Écrits*, 575–84.

32. Jacques Lacan, *D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

33. Lacan, *D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, 148. See also . . . *ou pire* [April 19, 1972], or the definition of the phallus in *Sinthome* [1975–1976]: “The phallus is the conjunction between what I’ve called *this parasite*, which is the little scrap of a dick in question, and the function of speech” (Lacan, *Sinthome*, 7 [15]).

34. Lacan, “Signification of the Phallus,” 584 (695).

35. [Cassin’s demonstration in cutting up the letters of *rien* (“nothing”) in French to produce *rire* (“laugh”), and later *ien*, is of course intended to bring together laughter (*rire*) and nothing in an analogous wordplay at the level of the signifier.—Trans.]

36. [There is undoubtedly a wordplay here on *bander*, French for “to get a boner or a hard-on.”—Trans.]

37. Lacan, “L’Étourdit,” 50–51. [Lacan’s original French text is notoriously untranslatable, and intentionally so for all the reasons Cassin explains. I am largely following Spitzer and Reinhard’s translations of these passages where they appear in *There’s No Such Thing as a Sexual Relationship* but am also indebted to various other unpublished English translations, such as those by Cormac Gallagher and Jack Stone, although I have taken the liberty of modifying details where appropriate for the present context.—Trans.]

38. See Badiou and Cassin, *Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*, 64–69. I am borrowing elements of that analysis here as needed.

39. Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations*, 1, 13 = 65 A 40 DK, t. II, p. 94.

40. See “Le passager clandestin” [on *Democritus, the Laughing Philosopher* by Johannes Moreelse], in *Portraits de la pensée*, ed. Nicolas Chaudun, exhibition curated by Alain Tapié and Régis Cotentin, Palais des beaux-arts de Lille (Paris: Editions Nicolas Chaudun, 2011), 130–33.

41. [The title of Molière’s play is of course intended to echo Lacan’s text “L’Étourdit.”—Trans.]

42. Plutarch, *Adversus Colotem*, 8, 68 A 57 DK, p. 110 F.

43. [If we were to form an English equivalent, it would be something like *-othing*.—Trans.]

44. The first scholar to have drawn attention to *den* (or my attention at any rate) and the first to have interpreted atomism on the basis of this invention by Democritus, and against his Aristotelian rewriting, is Heinz Wismann, in his seminars and, for example, in “Atomos Idea,” *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 15–26 (1976): 34–52. More recently, see his study *Les Avatars du vide. Démocrite et les fondements de l'atomisme* (Paris: Hermann, 2010).

45. Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968–1980; repr. in a single volume, 2009).

46. Chantraine adds that we already find a genitive *denos* in the Greek lyric poet Alcaeus (7–6 BC, Alcaeus 320 LP): “in a dubious and obscure text, *kai k'ouden ek denos genoito*, where *denos* is translated as ‘nothing’ or rather ‘something.’” The equivalence between “nothing” and “something” is to be emphasized. And he ends with a glorious denial: “This has nothing to do with the modern Greek *den*, ‘nothing’” (Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, 251).

47. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977), 63. This is, along with *Encore* (71 [66–67]), the other key passage where he talks about it, and we will return to these two texts.

48. The difference is dramatized in Parmenides’s *Poem* (see Barbara Cassin, *Parménide. Sur la nature ou sur l'étant. La langue de l'être?*, Points-bilingues [Paris: Seuil, 1998], 200–11).

49. The fact that it is a compound negation has an impact on the syntax of the negations. In Greek, when a compound negation follows a simple negation, this is not equivalent to an affirmation, as we might be led to think from the French, but rather, it reinforces the negation.

50. *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, ed. Alain Rey (Paris: Le Robert, 1993), 2:1808.

51. [Cassin’s examples of compound negations in French are progressively more informal and “inventive”: “Je n’y crois pas,” “Je n’y vois goutte (lit. see a single drop),” “Je n’y entends mie (lit. a crumb),” “Je n’y entends que dalle” (*ne . . . que dalle*, or *que dal*, is popular slang and of uncertain origin). The main point is that the thing negated is at the same time affirmed. In less formal spoken French, ironically but perhaps significantly, one often drops the *ne* in expressions like these.—Trans.]

52. [“Every determination is a negation.” Attributed originally to Spinoza, it is of course the core principle of the Hegelian dialectic.—Trans.]

53. Here is the full passage that I have been commenting on in snatches: “*Tuchê* brings us back to the same point at which pre-Socratic philosophy sought to motivate the world itself. It required a *clinamen*, an inclination, at some point. Democritus tried to designate it, presenting himself as already

the adversary of a pure function of negativity in order to introduce thought into it, he says, *It is not the mêden that is essential*, and adds—thus showing you that from what one of my pupils called the archaic stage of philosophy, the manipulation of words was used just as in the time of Heidegger—it is not a *mêden*, but a *den*, which, in Greek, is a coined word. He did not say *ben*, let alone *one*. What, then, did he say? He said, answering the question I asked today, that of idealism, *Nothing perhaps?*—not *perhaps nothing*, but *not nothing*.” Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, 63.

54. Jacques Lacan, “Conférence à Genève sur le symptôme du 4 octobre 1975,” *Bloc-notes de la psychanalyse* 5 (1985): 5–23. English translation by Russell Grigg, “Geneva Lecture on the Symptom,” *Analysis* 1 (1989): 7–26. [The neologism *moterialism* is a term first introduced there by Lacan to describe the materiality of words (*mots*) in the unconscious.—Trans.]

55. [Lacan mentions Saint Thomas and the Abbé Rousselot in *Encore* and uses this expression in one of the elided sentences of the long passage quoted. The allusion is to a well-known French proverb, “Charité bien ordonnée commence par soi-même” (lit. “Well-ordered charity begins with oneself”). The more or less equivalent English proverb is “Charity begins at home.”—Trans.]

56. Lacan, *Encore*, 70–71 (66–67). Emphasis added.

57. Jacques Lacan, *Identification*, Seminar IX [December 6, 1961].

58. Lacan, . . . *ou pire* [April 19, 1972], 147. [*Yad'lun* is a term introduced by Lacan in this seminar in thinking about the One in relation to the Real and to set theory. It approximates as “Il y a de l’Un” (lit. there is some One) and works in the way the French language allows with the partitive *de* but English does not.—Trans.]

59. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, 63.

60. Lacan, *Sinthome*, 7 (15).

61. Jacques Lacan, question and answer session, with Lacan at the blackboard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology [December 2, 1975], “Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines,” *Scilicet* 6/7 (1976): 60.

62. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A 985 b 13–19. The comparison with letters is attested in the context of the *De Generatione et Corruptione* as an example of the plasticity of the connections between atoms: “Indeed, they are the same letters that produce tragedies and comedies” (I, 2, 315 b 14 s).

63. Lacan, “La Troisième,” 24.

64. Lacan, “L’Étourdit,” 47.

65. See Chapter 2.

66. [The reference here is to Cassin’s groundbreaking *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies* (Paris: Seuil/Le Robert, 2004), English translation edited

by Barbara Cassin, Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood, *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014). Lacan's sentence is quoted by Cassin in her introduction to the latter (xix). The qualification "if not of the world" was added by Cassin in view of the many different translations of the original *Vocabulaire* now being produced, including in non-European languages.—Trans.]

67. [Cassin gives a few examples here of headings of actual entries in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*.—Trans.]

68. Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007), 180. [The play on words here combines *ontology* and the French word for shame, *honte*, to produce the neologism *bontology*.—Trans.]

69. [Cassin's wordplay here between *notamment* and *monotamment* adds the homophone *mot* to the front of *notamment*.—Trans.]

70. Lacan, *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, 107.

71. Lacan, 135. "There is no such thing as a sexual relationship, I have already formulated as the fact that there is no means of writing it at present" (83).

72. [Bruce Fink provides the following very helpful gloss on "*disque-ourcourant*" in a footnote to his translation: "*Courcourant* involves a doubling of the first syllable of *courant*, 'current' (in all senses of the term), making it a bit singsong-like. *Cour* alone is courtyard, also suggesting that this is a courtyard or backyard use of language. *Cou cou* is the sound birds (or birdbrains?) make in French, and a coucou is a cuckoo (bird or clock). Coucou is also what you say to a little baby to say 'Peek-a-boo!' *Courrant* means running, giving the additional sense of a use of language that runs (drivels?) on and on. *Courcourant* is derived from the neologism Lacan provides, *disque-ourcourant*, by lopping off the 'dis.'" Lacan, *Encore*, 35n31.—Trans.]

73. Lacan, *Encore*, 34–35 (35–36).

74. Lacan, *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, 148.

75. [Cassin is again alluding, through the play on rectal and rectoral, to Heidegger's famous *Rektoratsrede*.—Trans.]

76. Lacan, *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, 44.

77. "He did not say *ben*, let alone *on*. What, then, did he say? He said, answering the question I asked today, that of idealism, *Nothing, perhaps?*—no—*perhaps nothing*, but *not nothing*." Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, 64 (62). [Translation slightly modified.—Trans.]

78. "Hinanappât," in *Le savoir du psychanalyste* [The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst], Seven talks at Sainte-Anne Psychiatric Hospital, 1971–1972, in addition to the Seminar . . . *ou pire* that year. [*Hibanappât* is a neologism and homonym of "Il n'y en a pas" (Lit. There is nothing of it). *Hiban* is the

onomatopoeic French for the heehaw sound a donkey makes, and *appât* means “bait.” See also Chapter 2, note 19, of the present text.—Trans.]

79. [A neologism and homonym of *jouissance* that allows for the play on *sens* (sense) here, as with the other similarly formed abstract nouns Lacan refers to meaning reticence, indecency, and so on. While *ab-sens* more or less works as a translation of *ab-sens*, the same is not true of *joui-sens*, which is for that reason retained here in the French original. Jeffrey Mehlman suggests “enjoy-meant” as a possibility in his translation of *Television*. Jacques Lacan, *A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, in Jacques Lacan, *Television*, trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson (1973; repr. New York: Norton, 1990), 10.—Trans.]

80. Lacan, *Television*, 10. [Translation slightly modified. Jeffrey Mehlman translates *équivoque* interestingly as “punning” here.—Trans.]

81. Lacan, 22.

82. [The intentional pun here is that *bon heur* in French is also a homonym of *bonheur* (happiness).—Trans.]

83. Lacan, *Sinthome*, 58. [Another homophonic equivalent of *jouissance*. As Lacan goes on to explain in this passage in *Sinthome*, “It is the same thing as *ouïr*, hearing, a *sens*, meaning.” The homophonic link between Joyce and “*jouisse*” is central to Lacan’s seminar and reading of Joyce.—Trans.]

84. [The expression “*ant/é*,” as a homophonic combination of “(qu)*and*” and “*est*,” with a part word, and possibly elided or barred subject, as well as the endings indicating the subject/object positions of analyst/patient (*analy-sant/analysé*), is untranslatable but is another of Cassin’s performative demonstration of the play at the level of the signifier.—Trans.]

85. [A play on words involving the verb *raser*, which can mean “to shave,” “to pass close by overhead,” “to demolish (raze to the ground),” but also “to bore,” precisely “to be monotonous.”—Trans.]

86. Lacan, *Encore*, 71 (67).

87. “There is only one way to be able to write Woman without having to bar it [*écrire la femme sans barrer le la*—that is at the level at which woman is truth. And that is why one can only half-speak of her” (*Encore*, 103 [94]).

88. Lacan, *Television*, 22.

89. Lacan, “La Troisième,” 23.

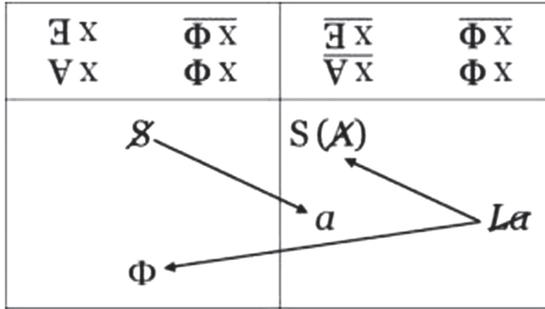
90. “Ten years is enough for everything I write to become clear to everyone,” and “What is well-spoken, one [a very long “one”] conceives clearly—clearly means that it makes its way” (Lacan, *Television*, 45).

91. Lacan, *Encore*, 120 (108).

92. Besides *Encore* and *Television*, I am drawing in particular on “La Troisième” [1974] and *Sinthome* [1976], especially chapter 8.

93. Lacan, “La Troisième,” 30.

94. Lacan, “La Troisième,” 31–32.
 95. Lacan, “La Troisième,” 29. See, for example, Lacan, *Sinthome*, 58.
 96. Lacan, *Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, 78 (89).
 97. Nestor Braunstein, *La Jouissance, un concept lacanien* (Toulouse: Érès, 2005), 143.
 98. Braunstein, *La Jouissance*, 148.
 99. See the schema in Lacan, *Encore*, 78 (73):



100. [The allusion here is to Descartes, who described reason using this expression.—Trans.]
101. [The reference is to the character Tiresias in Greek mythology who, as a young man, came across two snakes mating on Mount Cyllene and killed one or both. Hera punished him by turning him into a woman for seven years, during which time she served as a priestess, married, and had children. After seven years she came across another pair of snakes and left them alone. The curse was reversed, and Tiresias was turned back into a man.—Trans.]
102. [Hadewijch was a thirteenth-century lyric poet and visionary mystic living in the Duchy of Brabant.—Trans.]
103. Lacan, *Encore*, 76 (70).
 104. Lacan, 77 (71).
 105. Lacan, 85 (78).
 106. Lacan, *Sinthome*, 108 (128).
 107. [Cassin’s French, “aura déniaisé,” also means more explicitly “will have sexually initiated.”—Trans.]
 108. Lacan, *Encore*, 72 (68). [Translation modified.—Trans.]
 109. See above. For what follows, see also my *Voir Hélène en toute femme, d’Homère à Lacan*, *Les empêcheurs de penser en rond* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).
 110. This is how Helen presents things herself in her first monologue: “But Hera, indignant at not defeating the goddesses, made an airy nothing of my marriage with Paris; she gave to the son of king Priam not me, but an image, alive and breathing, that she fashioned out of the sky and made to look

like me. And he thinks he has me—an idle fancy, for he doesn't have me. . . . So I was set up as the Hellenes' spear-prize, to test the courage of the Trojans. Or rather not me, but my name" (Euripides, *The Complete Greek Drama*, ed. Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, vol. 2, *Helen*, trans. E. P. Coleridge [New York: Random House, 1938], v. 31–45). Not to be read in the Grégoire translation published by Les Belles Lettres, which for example, translates "I was named Helen" (v. 22) as "I am Helen."

111. Euripides, *Helen*, v. 593, quoted by Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 1, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Place, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986).

112. [The title of the article by Freud from 1925.—Trans.]

113. Lacan, *Encore*, 32 (34).

114. Lacan, 32 (33). [In the French, Lacan uses the verb in English "to fuck." As a noun, *le foutre* in French means "cum."—Trans.]

115. Lacan, 63 (58). [Translation slightly modified.—Trans.]

116. Lacan, 55 (52).

117. Lacan, 144 (131).

118. Lacan, 71 (67).

119. Lacan, 7 (13).

120. Lacan, 113 (103).

121. Lacan, 63 (58).

122. [As Bruce Fink points out in a footnote, *faire l'amour* can also mean something like "playing at love" in French here.—Trans.]

123. Lacan, *Encore*, 72 (67).

124. Lacan, 73 (68).

125. Lacan, 54 (57).

126. Lacan, 10 (15).

127. Lacan, 59 (63), 61 (64).

128. Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 62.

129. *On Melissus, Xenophanes and Gorgias*, 979 a 12 s, see 82 B 3 DK. I have translated into French and commented on this text in *L'Effet sophistique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

130. Lacan, *Encore*, 60 (56).

131. Lacan, 56 (53), 15 (20).

132. Lacan, 60 (57). [Lacan's French original has "il ne convient pas," which can be translated variously as not "fitting," "suitable," "becoming," "appropriate," or "proper." It is a close equivalent to *non decet*, and Cassin is of course here picking up on her commentary on this in relation to doxography.—Trans.]

133. Lacan, 61–62 (57).

134. ["Elle" in Cassin's original stands alone as the speaking of the feminine jouissance that "is not," as well as a ghostly reappearance of "Helen." It

is of course untranslatable as a feminine pronoun in English, since *she* would refer only to one woman (Helen?), not *jouissance*, as it does in the quotation from Lacan.—Trans.]

135. Lacan, *Encore*, 73 (68).

136. [In English in Cassin's French original.—Trans.]

137. [Les Editions Galilée, founded in 1971, published many of the works of the leading French intellectuals of the post-1968 generation—hence the reference to the Mouvement de la Libération des Femmes as well—and was perhaps the most avant-garde of publishers at the time Lacan was writing.—Trans.]

138. Lacan, *Encore*, 74 (69).

139. Lacan, 74–75 (69).

140. Lacan, 75 (70–71).

141. [Literally “biting its own tail,” but the risqué joke here is that *queue* is also French slang for “penis.”—Trans.]

142. Lacan, *Encore*, 70 (66).

143. [Lacan's French original is “la bêtise du discours maître,” with the homophonic play on *maître* and *m'être*.—Trans.]

144. Lacan, *Encore*, 92 (85).

145. Lacan, 103 (94).

146. Lacan, 63 (58).

147. Lacan, 85 (92).

148. Lacan, 103 (94).

149. Lacan, *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, 65, 83.

150. Lacan, *Encore*, 104 (95).

151. Lacan, 24 (27).

152. Lacan, “L'Étourdit,” 47.

153. Lacan, *Encore*, 139 (127).

154. Lacan, “La Troisième,” 22.

155. Lacan, 20.

156. Lacan, *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant*, 48.

157. Lacan, 147.

EPILOGUE: THE DROWNING OF A FISH

1. [*Con* in French is “idiot” or “cunt”; *cierge* is a large church candle, no doubt suggestively phallic.—Trans.]

2. [Cassin's French original has “-ants” (as in *analysants*, or analysts), and “-és” (as in *analysés*, or those undergoing analysis). The closest equivalent of this contrastive ending in English is the trainer/trainee, employer/employee, etc., distinction.—Trans.]

3. [*Pierrot le fou* (1965)—literally “Pierrot the madman”—is a French film directed by Jean-Luc Godard, starring Jean-Paul Belmondo and Anna Karina.—Trans.]

4. [*Le bocal* (goldfish bowl) is also slang in French for the head (“nut”). The expression “sans cinéma” comes from the phrase *faire le cinéma*, which can mean “play-acting” or “fuss,” “histrionics.”—Trans.]
5. [In English in the original.—Trans.]
6. [Name of a fictional Catholic Breton character (literally “Madame Airs and Graces”) in the French comic, *Bécassine*, from the early twentieth century.—Trans.]

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: PERFORMING UNTRANSLATABILITY

1. [*Fixionner* in the French original.—Trans.]

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