

Guy Le Gaufey

LACAN'S NOTALL

Logical consistency, clinical consequences

Logic has not the reputation of entertaining close relationship with the sexes, and neither the p's or the q's that people propositional calculus stimulate licentious thoughts in many people. In the same way, inasmuch as one imagines the sexes, one imagines them to be poorly regulated by the literal rigour that maintains logic in its priapism with respect to the truth.

And nevertheless...Scarcely has one been convinced that the attraction described as sexual is not reduced to the interplay of pheromones, but is going to draw considerable resources from the symbolic material that is so pregnant in this species that one sees there opening up a curious questioning: if there are two sexes, which attract one another, which is the one and which is the other? "It's all the same!", our contemporaries will say, each is the other of the other – therefore each is one. I propose in what follows not to go so quickly, and to take the time required to go from one to two imposing that this latter ought to be the other of the first. Here already logical concern shows the tip of its nose. We have a presentiment that the otherness at the heart of a couple is not the one that is established in the heart of a plurality, and that the difference which separates one from the other is perhaps not proper to either the one nor the other. In any case, things become complicated in the measure that the basic logical instruments – the same, the other, difference, property, the identical – are from the very start required to articulate anything whatsoever about the sexes in the discursive order. Could it be that the noble philosophical clothing of these instruments is in fact completely impregnated by the hollow quarrel of the sexes, and that certain logical pillars (and some foundations of this social order) have been constructed to rule over a sexual confusion considered to be fatal? At very early on people began to think, including logically, against the sexual thing?

This is a hypothesis that Jacques Lacan seems to have made. He has scarcely attempted to organise the two sexes when we see him appealing to the arsenal of tradition logic of universal affirmative and negative propositions, accompanied by their respective particulars. After a salvo that was isolated for a long time (at the beginning of 1962), he comes back to it at the end of the 60's and right at the beginning of the 70's, to give them, throughout the slow construction of his formulae of sexuation, its full

logical extension to his provocative affirmation according to which “there is no sexual relationship”.

A critical reading of these formulae the man that won the open to the formal aspect of the difference between the sexes thanks to which, ever since the biblical disposition, the questions of the same and the difference relatively to man and woman are regulated. A brief glimpse of the quarrel about the universals in the Middle Ages allows it to be seen how, by wanting to describe the sexes in their difference, we remain caught up in the nets of an impossible coupling between a discreet conception where there are separated and form two essences, and a conception in which we pass without a rupture from the one to the other and when there is never anything but something of the existence, of the relative (these formal constraints remain active in Freud and Lacan). This will be the object of the first chapter.

The approach of the Lacanian formulae also presupposed that one appreciates in their detail those of the tensions present in this teaching which led him to juggle with classical logic in order to subvert it with its ambition to universality. The invention, at the turn of the 60's, of the object described as o and of its very curious quality of partial object (in the sense that it would not maintain any relationship with any unity whatsoever) demanded that one should conceive of such a non relationship, and that one should venture towards the writing of a logical disequilibrium capable of taking in charge the shaky bipartition of the sexes. To do this, in his struggles with the all of the universal (and therefore of the concept), Lacan had to take this support on a use of the particular affirmative proposition that classical logic, hypnotised on this point by Aristotle, rejected into the margins of its treatises, and which corresponds to the ambiguity of most tongues with respect to the partative some. In general, the meaning of this term is restrictive: if the candidate has received some votes, it is clear that he has not been elected, that he has not had all of them, or even a simple majority. On the contrary, if, as a logician, I form the particular affirmative proposition “some A are B”, Aristotle pushes me to think that I am making there only a particular instantiation of the universal affirmative “all A are B”. According to the implicit argument “whoever can do the more can do

the less”, if all are so, some A are so also. It then follows, in accordance with the regulated ballet of propositions, that the affirmative and negative universals are contrary to one another.

By promoting the notall, Lacan is making a play against Aristotle (and against Kant, at the same time), not by betting at the start on some property or other of feminine sexuality, but in making a choice of the restrictive particular, the one that means (some, but not all). In this case, by reason of the same formal constraints, the affirmative and negative particulars are equivalent (if some say yes, but not all, then it is also true that some others do not say yes). But it follows above all, that since the universals ought to contradict their opposing particulars, and since the latter are equivalent, the universals are also. Here, common sense complains and prefers, like Aristotle, that they should be contrary, and that the negative of the affirmative “all say yes” should be “all say no”, and not “there is not one that say yes”.

Lacan, for his part, holds very strongly, since his entry into the affair in 1962, that the negative universal should be understood in that way, as emptied of every element: this “not one that...”, he takes literally (with the help of Charles Sanders Peirce) in order to install there a nothing which he intends to be different to that of Freud or to that of Hegel, a nothing in agreement with the no being (*pas-d’etre*) that he requires of his subject, represented by a signifier for another signifier. In all of this there is a coherence that the passage of the seminars hides, and that must be reconstructed by setting aside sometimes the interpretation that Lacan himself proposes in order to give a quick meaning to his formulae. This will be the object of the second chapter.

Because of having taken its support on an acceptance of the particular affirmative proposition which object to the universal of the same quality, such an arrangement of the sexes upsets the idea that one might have of a psychoanalytic clinic. If one holds in effect that the affirmation of an existence goes against the concept under which it is put, we have to say goodbye to clinical vignettes and the other little accounts that the psychological world of today dotes on, where cases come in an exemplary way to be placed under the auspices of a theory more obsessed by its own

transition than by its uncertain and clashing relationship with practice. Contrary to appearances, these vignettes bear very little witness to the aforesaid practice in the measure that they pretend above all to illustrate a theoretical point of view that is judged to be too abstract. We will then try to show in detail how this vignette style cheerfully shares in a relationship to the universality of the concept which transforms analytic knowledge into a psychology that is all the more unwelcome because it has far too much elbow room. Inversely, however conceptual it may be, the teaching of Lacan almost constantly fails to meet up with this naive functioning of universality in which the cases are only there to be put under concepts that unflinchingly await them. The universality of the concept – which there is no question of doing without – is regularly led by him to the point where it finds itself damaged, ruined even, not by accident, but by the facts of language with which all thought including the most formal is exercised. The subject which is deduced from language and from its hold on a body in no way falls under the concept, not even that of subject. Here is something that escapes all psychopathologists, even indeed when they might think they are putting Lacanian concepts to work. That would be the object of the third chapter.

Finally, to show by a precise example how Lacan takes to task the concept and its object, I proposed to closely follow the affair, set up by him from one end to the other, of the unicity of the Borromean knot. Is there, yes or no, a single knot throughout the innumerable presentations that one can give of it? If yes, it will be possible, by means of some ad hoc definition, to have supported by this object well located in its positivity the sexual non relationship which presents for its part the disadvantage of all negative appellations: one knows what it denies, but one does not know for all that what it is. And if not, if, in the end, there is not one such object, but several, with the impossibility of knowing which is the good one, we will have to abandon the support that non relationship found in the knot. Which Lacan recognises as true on 9th January 1979, at the quasi end of his journey. This scholastic exercise deserved to be called a scolion.

LOGIC OF THE SEXUAL FAULT-LINE

That the sexes are two constitutes perhaps the most serious of certitudes, which divides in the most intimate way because it forces the path to a double regime of truth: yes, man and woman do indeed belong to the same species, the one called human (at the same time as they constitute, of course the human genus [the French '*genre*' is translated as 'genus' or 'gender' in English]); but are they not so radically different from one another that one might believe that there exists between them difference in the pure state, as decisive as irreducible? To the point that one takes up again the same word gender (*genre*) to differentiate, in the species, two classes of individuals, man/woman, whose union is crucial for the perpetuation...of the human genus! How can a genus be composed of a single species, which itself is divided into two genders? Homonymy! it will be said: the first *genre* does not have the same meaning as the second! And to be sure, it must indeed be so but might there not be here an opportunity to envisage sexual difference in the logical and classificatory register in which it has been always expressed?

A metaphysical incest

God himself would seem to have made a mess of the affair, if one is to believe the short and enigmatic passage of Genesis I, 27, according to which 'So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created him,' and the much more complex operation that we can read just a little further on in Genesis II, 18-24:

18. Then the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.

19. So out of the ground the lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them: and whatever the man called every living creature that was its name.

20. The man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field: but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

21. So the lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and close up its place with flesh.

22. And the rib that the lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

23. Then the man said this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called woman, for out of man this one was taken.

24. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh.

25. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.¹

In Genesis I, 27 we witnessed a co-creation, man and woman emerging in parity, (almost) at the same time, without any logical advantage of the one over the other, scarcely a brief consecutiveness in the narrative; in Genesis II, 18-24 on the contrary, an order is put in place, which will serve throughout the millennia to justify the macho and religious patriarchies that we know.²

If the woman is said here to proceed from the man, who was the first on the scene it is first of all the guarantee the unicity of the genus. For in starting from the idea according to which every human individual comes from two parents, one is led to think of the origin of the species as a swarming.³ Now however little one might wish inversely to think of the origin as a principle, it is on the contrary imperative to pose a first term, as Aristotle himself invites us to (*metaphysics M α I*) by affirming that for every genus, there exists an initial term, the principle of a series of elements that fall under the dominion of the genus.

The source alone – in this case man – reduplicated in the woman fashioned by God gives a locus and a place for sexual difference, and not of course the reverse, otherwise it would have been necessary to make of this very difference the principle that would have held the entire genus under its dependency. Genesis II, 18-24 unfolds this progression from the one to the two then to the multiple, by affirming this time monogeneity, the engendering by a single one of his future partner, and no longer a primordial couple (as in Genesis I, 27), which would have threatened the unicity of the

¹ New Revised Standard Version. In verse I, 27 this version has 'humankind' in place of 'man'.

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³ The idea of a genealogical tree common to the species is deceptive here, because this tree is produced from top to bottom, from its unique summit towards its multiple base, and only a reading coming after this mental construction may allow it to be believed that one could just as easily climb back from the multiple of the base towards the unicity of the summit. Now if we start from ourselves towards our ancestors, we unceasingly multiply the forbears. The lovers of genealogical tress know the problem. If from Adam to us the path may appear fairly direct, from us to Adam is much more risky.

genus, and incurs a major risk: that man and woman might be conceived as two species within a same genus.

This would have been untenable since two species (save for the rarest of exceptions) cannot procreate, while man and woman are there biblically for that: to engender, to perpetuate the genus. It is necessary therefore for them to constitute only a single species, and that scarcely are they two, than they fold back into a single flesh, which is better understood if it is said in advance, as is the case of this very brief text, that the one is flesh of the flesh of the other.

For copulation is not enough to organise such a logical and textual mystery: what is required so that the union of the principle (the man) and of what had then extracted from the principle (the woman) might produce something of the one? Nothing less than what Olivier Boulnois, in his article '*Un et un font un*', names '*un incest metaphysique: le principe doit s'unir a ce dont il est le principe pour se reunir en une seule unite* [a metaphysical incest: the principle must unite itself with what he is the principle of in order to be reunited in a single unity]'⁴ to think through something so daring, the medieval theologians did not to be sure lack the means since the divine and the human, this irreducible duality, were found united in Christ, the one whose double nature in no way damages unity. But these same theologians, in order to sustain and above all to transmit conceptions so austere and rebellious to common sense, were obliged to support themselves more and more on authors – philosophers, logicians – which provided them with the tools for such an operation. This is where the story becomes complicated.

Nevertheless it is worth the trouble to pause on the very long duration in the course of which there were forged the systems of thought which, still today, organise in an underhand way our reflections (and often our reflexes) on sex

⁴ Olivier Boulnois, 'un et un font un. Sexes, differences et union sexuelle au Moyen Age, a partir des 'commentaires des Sentences', in *Ils seront deux en une seule chair, scenographie du couple humain dans le texte occidental*, edited by Pierre Legendre, Travaux du laboratoire duropen pour l'etude de la filiation) Bruxelles, Emile Van Balberghe libraire, 2004, p.115.

and gender. Thanks to the renewal of medieval studies, one can follow the business fairly closely, especially by finding support on the works of Alain de Libera⁵ Inasmuch as he has been able to distinguish and to sort out the thread of a history that was too teleological, in too much of a hurry to find in the text what it already knew it was looking for, has up to then confused.

The entry into the quarrel

Speaking about genus, species, difference, proper or accident, could not be done throughout the quasi-millennium that is gathered together under the name of the Middle Ages without referring oneself, in one way or another, to Porphyry's *Isagogue* since Boethius⁶, the teacher of the whole body of the learned for centuries, had begun with that: a commentary of this *Isagogue*, this text which served as an introduction to Aristotle before (and even after) the massive arrival of the latter via the Arab world. We find ourselves here immediately caught up in a curious enfilade: every medieval student began by plunging into the ready of the commentary that Boethius had done of Porphyry's *Isagogue*, a little text itself written around 270 by way of an introduction of Aristotle's text on the *Categories*. This, judged not without reason to be too difficult, in effect called out for a commentary and, at the request of his friend Chrysaorios, Porphyry, who had studied at Athens and rejoined Plotinus in Rome (in 298, after the death of the master, he published the *Enneades*) – took on the task of editing some pages in which there would be presented the essential of the Aristotelian text.

Let us forget for the moment Boethius and his own personal equation in order to better grasp the chiasm between Aristotle and Porphyry in the measure that the famous quarrel about the Universals – about which I am

⁵ In a vast body of work, we will chose for the present study: *La Querelle des unibersaux, de Platon a la fin du Moyen Age*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, coll. 'Des travaux', and the translation by Alain de Libera and A. Ph. Segonds of Porphyre *Isagogue*, Paris, Vrim, 1988. The very long introduction by A. de Libera is particularly rich.

⁶ This Roman, born at the end of the 5th Century and dying in 524, was a senator, consul, then a counsellor of Theodoric, who exiled him and ended up by having him executed. He was the translator of Porphyry's *Isagogue*, but also of certain Aristotelean texts. The work which made him famous up to today is his *De consolatione philosophiae*.

here making the hypothesis that it continues to weigh heavily in the current debates about the sexes – came to birth there. Given the destiny of these few lines, we may as well read them attentively:

1. Since it is necessary, my dear Chrysaorios, for receiving the teaching relative to Aristotle's categories, to know what is one) a genus two) a difference, three) a species, four) a property, and five) an accident, and since in order to give definitions for what concerns division as well as demonstration this study is useful, I will give you a short presentation on this subject, striving to go through, in brief, in the form of an introduction, what is found among the oldest authors, while all the time abstaining from entering into questions that are too profound, and only touching in a measured way on the easiest.
2. First of all, concerning the genus and the species, the question as to whether one) they exist or indeed whether they only consist in pure concepts, two) or, supposing that they exist, whether they are bodies or incorporeal, and three) in the last case, if they are separated or indeed if they exist in sensible things and in relationship with them – these are questions of which I will avoid speaking, because they represent a more profound research and because they call for another examination, that would be much longer [...]⁷

It is therefore by wanting to avoid 'questions that are too profound' that Porphyry produces a sort of algorithm that is going to function as a formidable *topos*. Generations of teachers will transmit to generations of students this commonplace which draws all its power from the fact of being presented as a crossroads between Plato's realism and Aristotle's conceptualism. From the first point, if one chooses to consider that genera really exist⁸, the way is open to Platonic realism according to which there exist before all separate forms in which singular individuals share; if one

⁷ Porphyry, *Isagogue* op-sit., p.1.

⁸ All the different translators are here already on the wheel. In order to translate the Greek Tricot tries 'subsistent realities'. Confronted with the same term A de Libera chooses for his part the simple blank and cannot avoid two and a half pages of very dense commentary to justify the choice of such a translation. Cf. Porphyry, *Isagogue*, op. sit., p. 32-34.

opts for a conception of the genus as a pure conceptual entity which permits to gather by means of thought individuals that possess the same features, in order to constitute a class, then we find ourselves fully on the side of Aristotle.

But what divides also allows better than anything else to reunite, to articulate, to nuance, to intricate the systems of which each one presents advantages, and not a few disadvantages. And this all the more that from the second point – whether if these genera really exist are they bodies or incorporeal? – here in a single stroke there is introduced the other great philosophical family, Stoicism about which A de Libera shows the degree to which it forms part of Porphyry's baggage, at several levels and in different ways.

The third of Porphyry's problems finally – if the genera are incorporeal, are they to be situated in sensible things or outside of them? – takes up again in a more subtle fashion the great Plato/Aristotle opposition on the question of formal ontology: is the universal a separate form, or a form that is immanent in the sensible?

With this, this text functioned, not alone as the required introduction to the *Categories* but as the minimal questionnaire starting from which there were deployed the systems (Platonism, Aristotelianism, Stoicism) that every teacher must learn, compare, evaluate in order to be able to teach. This germinal aspect drawn together in a simple form, was what gave its importance to this text of which Etienne Gilson asked himself already in 1942 'how could such an anodyne text have served as a starting point for such imposing metaphysical constructions which, from Boethius to the Renaissance, excited the most powerful minds⁹'.

Another point is here likely to attract our attention: nothing happened for five centuries. It is only at the turning point of the 11th and the 12th

⁹ Etienne Gilson, *La philosophie au Moyen Age*, Paris, payot, 1942, p. 142-143. Quoted by A. de Libera, *La Querelle.....*, op. cit., p. 39.

Centuries that there explodes the quarrel of the universals, in other words – a remarkable thing – well before the arrival of the Aristotelian and Platonic corpus, at a time when the erudite have still nothing to get their teeth into than fragments of Greek texts: a fragment of the *Timaeus* for Plato, and the two first treatises of the *Organon* for Aristotle (the *Categories* and *De interpretatione*). It is therefore not confronted with the complexity, the riches and the ambiguity of the Greek texts soon transmitted along the Arab route that the translation of Porphyry's *Isagogue* by Boethius had taken on a sudden relief. The historians of philosophy lose themselves here in conjectures about the veritable cause of the debate, already fully attested by Aléard (1079-1142). Hence the problem: to what should we attribute such a time of incubation? What happened for Porphyry's lines translated by Boethius inflamed and opposed minds when, for such a long time, no one saw any malice in it? I am happy to hold with the hypothesis of Alain de Libera, even if the way it begins is very prudent:

It is probably, that here as elsewhere, trinitarian theology played a determining role. It is the mystery of the Greek definition of three persons as '*tres usie, id est tres substantie*' which, together with the question of whether the three Persons were 'only one thing (*una tantum res*) or three distinct things (*tres res per se*)', gave rise to the response of Roscelin de Compiègne, denounced by Anselm, according to which, it was really necessary that the Father, the Son and the Spirit were three distinct things if one wanted to avoid the theologically dangerous conclusion, that 'the Father was incarnated at the same time as the Son'. By this, the fragments of Aristotelian ontology and semantics which the higher Middle Age had as its disposition were mobilised, and by unexpected paths the question 'what is substance?' about which Aristotle had made, in his *Metaphysics*, the question eternally pursued, had effectively rediscovered a second youth. [...] The reading of the *Isagogue* then changed its status. From a simple index of definitions, Porphyry's manual became an index of questions¹⁰. The mystery of the union in the difference, of the unity of a plurality, of the belying of an individual to his genus, would then first of all have been divine in the measure that, in these regions and according to the options that one took up, one went very quickly from the pulpit to the stake. Here there was an urgency in settling what the majority of current affairs willingly left in the shadows.

¹⁰ Alain de Libera. *La Querelle* p.127.

And therefore even before the mass of Aristotelian and Platonic texts unfurled, Roscelin de Compiègne¹¹ had, in a way, opened the quarrel by supporting extreme options.

The first steps

He claims in effect that universal terms (like man) are only *faltus vocis*, or again vocalisations, words which do not call for or designate any existent reality, which leads him in accordance with proper logic to maintain that no thing is made up of parts, in the sense that there does not exist any thing which collects together other things. For us, post-Bourbakiens who have swallowed whole the intangible truth according to which a set is more than the sum of its parts – therefore exists apart from them – takes our breath away a little. The apparent absurdity of the thesis only makes it more attractive: no all exists because it would be necessary to think of it as outside the sum of its parts, and thus to tip over into the opinion that there exists substantially things that go beyond the collections of objects of which they are constituted, and therefore are not any object. In this way, Roscelin responds to Pierre Ebelard, who criticises him on this point, that ‘once the part that makes the man has been taken away, he should be called not Peter, but Peter incomplete’, otherwise it would be necessary to believe in the existence of a thing which would remain the same in the case of the removal of one of its parts¹². What leads Roscelin to enunciate his second thesis according to which only *voces* exist names or vocal sounds, and the singular things referred to by these names, insofar as they possess qualities that does not separate them, that they are ‘alls whose parts remain solidary’, in short that they are all like pebbles each of which would bear the same name.

For Abelard on the contrary, names are attributed to things indirectly, in function of their signification, in other words in function of the essence of the thing, which persists whether the parts are all present or not. This essence is not necessarily an independent thing to which the name would univocally refer (in

¹¹ Roscelin born in the middle of the 11th Century at Compiègne, studies at Soissons and at Reims, then taught in his native town, at Tours, at Loches (where he is Abelard’s teacher) and finally at Besançon where he dies around 1120.

¹² I do not know how Roscelin organises this with Genesis II, 18-24. Does Eve belong to the human genus, or does she pass over to the incomplete human? Moreover, the argument is very cruel since at the time of these exchanges Abelard is himself no longer altogether complete.....

this he follows his master against the future realists who hold mordicus in the effective real existence of Platonic ideas, of separated form), but it allows us to think, between the object as all and the name, of a third articulation situated at the level of a signification, which is not confused either with the *flatus vocis* of the name, nor with the object which serves as reference.

These are, from the first steps of the quarrel, two semantics which are confronted: the one of signification, with Abelard and his concern to maintain separated the question of the essence and that of the all; the other of reference with Roscelin who for his part only understands a direct link between the sound of a word and its reference¹³.

Without even going any further, it becomes possible to distinguish between two alls, which allows the arguments like those of Roscelin to be settled from the 13th Century on, but which also prove that one cannot work in this type of problem without possessing at least two notions of all compassing unity. Already at the time of Roscelin, a certain Garland-the-counter made a difference between the universal all and the integral all. The first, defined as superior and substantial, presented itself as a unity composed of parts described as subjective, themselves thought of as what is inferior to the universal; the universal all corresponded therefore to the present day conception of class which subsumes, comprehends, includes a number x of elements that one will describe, to go quickly as detachable. The integral whole, for its part, is the singular thing, the subject part of the universal all, composed of real parts that cannot be detached from their all without adulterating it (while removing an element of the class does not threaten it as class). We see that Roscelin error consisted in wanting to confuse these two alls (these two ones), and that Abelard was able to criticise and rectify his master on the basis of their distinction.

The Abelardian critique was also brought to bear against his other master, Guillaume de Champeaux, who supported the existence ‘in the things that differ among themselves, of a substance essentially the same, the material

¹³ This extreme conception of Roscelin of a semantic of reference could be very useful to anyone who would like to launch himself – this research still remains to be done – into a description of the semiotics of a certain Jacques Lacan. Even though always sketched out and never fully separated out, he conception of the sign makes so little of the signified that the referent often occupies in it a great place than one might imagine at first sight.

essence of singular beings in which it is: one in itself and diverse only by the forms of beings put under it¹⁴. In this optic, not only does the foundational substance of the genus really exist, but it is present in each one of the elements that it collects in this way. Each man is therefore clearly singular, but these singular men distinct in themselves, 'are a same being in man (*in homine*), namely that they do not differ in the nature of humanity'. They are therefore 'singular by reason of their distinction', but 'said to be universals by reason of the non-difference and of their conjunction in a same resemblance'. The quarrel of universals takes off from this final 'and', which, in its way, goes back to Socrates theses in the *Menon* (which Guillaume had in no way at his disposition'.

Is everything that is not different for all that alike? Socrates proof is brought to bear for its part on bees: since nothing distinguishes one bee *qua* bee from another bee *qua* bee, it is first of all on the perception of the non difference between individuals that one will conclude to their belonging to the same species, and not by a first recognition, in each individual, of a something identical. Specific identity, in the empirical and epistemological of Socrates, comes from the absence of difference, but this non difference is not, in itself, any being apart, does not enjoy therefore any ontological weight, inversely to the other option which would make exist first of all an identical part in each one, thus reducing specific identity to being nothing more than a necessary consequence of the effective presence in each individual of a minimum common to all, in which from then on the notion of species and of genus take refuge.

This algorithm traversed the centuries and divided mine. Because he did not have to choose in this way between an extreme Platonic realism and the absurdities of his master Roscelin, Abelard had to support this semantic of signification thanks to his invention of the status. This term is his alone. Wholly(?) and untimely anachronism would make of it our post Saussurian signified. Abelard's approach here is more disturbing, but by that very fact

¹⁴ Quoted by A. de Libera, the *La Querelle*...op. cit. P. 150

is richer: since everything is singular, it is itself and cannot be anything else. There exists therefore the idea, fundamental for the realists that a thing could be predicated of another thing, that a specific identity could reside as such in the singular identity of an individual (and that therefore resemblance would take precedence over non-difference, since it would come from the effective presence of the same presence among individuals that otherwise are different). Only a noun, according to Abelard, can serve as a predicate for several subjects taken one by one'. Only a universal word, and not a thing, can fulfill this function. We are, alas, so quickly persuaded, that we no longer take the measure of Abelard's audacity in inserting in this way, between singular things and the pure *flatus vocis* of the name, this status, this state which flirts with the Platonic idea (and allows it to be thought that God possesses the status of every thing even before it exists – creation is saved) without conferring on it the slightest real existence. But this invention also sets aside the concept because it is a matter less of what will be thought than of what is said by the universal words, man, animal, etc. When, in Genesis II, 18-20, Adam pronounces the names of the species which pass before him, it is not under the name of founding its concept, but of producing its Abelardian status, in other words to make each species subsist in the tongue, and not in thought.

The name of woman: where place the difference?

How then comprehend, along this vein, verse 23? This time again, Adam pursues his work as a giver of names when, waking up from the torpor that God had made fall on him in order to operate this costly subtraction, he says: 'She will be called woman for it is from a man that she has been taken.' Here is a new animal that has been presented to him and now that he's got going he names the one with whom from the following verse on he would no longer be but one flesh. What is here his linguistic operation? Origen in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (XIV, 16-17), recalls the Hebrew text the better to articulate the terminological differences from Genesis I, 27:

‘Man is here designated by the word IS, and the male by the word Zacahar; and again woman by the word ISSA, and the female by the word Ankeba¹⁵.

Zachar and Ankeba, male and female, are words which are opposed without having very much in common, as in their extemporaneous apparition in Genesis I, 27; inversely, in Genesis II, 23, ISSA is presented as a direct derivation of IS, which is why Latin in this place uses the word *virago* to maintain the obvious community of linguistic root between IS and ISSA. These considerations form part of the patrimony of commentators of every epoch, as is testified by these lines of Dominique Grima¹⁶ who, in the first half of the 14th Century, glossed Genesis II, 23 by taking right away Adam’s voice:

And this woman, formed from me, will be called, by her proper name which I impose on her, mannesse (*hommesse*) and this appropriately since she has been taken from man. Manesse [virago] is in effect a name drawn from the name man as a material taken from a material. This denomination figures in the Hebrew text: in effect, man is called ish in Hebrew, woman isha (the same relationship between manesse and man). This name was the proper name of the first woman. Now one calls manesse any woman who acts like a man. The syncopated form of virago is virgo [virgin], as Pierre le Mangeur says. That is why, as long as they preserve the integrity of their birth, women are called virgins; subsequently, once they are fractured they are called mulieres [women], for as it were ‘softening the hero’, namely men. In the same manner, Adam was the name of the first man, as le Mangeur says, but now it is a common name¹⁷.

¹⁵ Quoted by Alain Boulluec in his article ‘From the unity of the couple to the union of Christ and the Church’, in *Ils seront deux...*, op. cit. p. 50.

¹⁶ Born at Toulouse, a Dominican and reader in theology, he was the Bishop of Pamiers from 1326 until his death in 1347.

¹⁷ Quoted and translated by Gilbert Dahan in his article ‘Genesis II, 23-24 dans Christian exegesis’, in *Ils seront deux...*, op. cit. p. 102. Curiously in his translation G. Dahan drops the passage ‘virago enim quasi acta de viro’....Pierre le Mangeur was, for his part, the Chancellor of Schools at Troyes from 1168 – 1178, and the author of a celebrated compilation of Biblical history, known under the name of *Bible historiale*.

This passage from the proper to the common leads back to the Porphyriens *Categories* (genus, species, difference, property, accident) with which the higher Middle Age tried to resolve these problems, and allows us now to advance into some of the arcana of the quarrel fortified by this sexual difference as a viaticum as it were. It is here also that we rediscover the personal equation of Boethius.

Like every translator, he cannot avoid taking sides, however transparent he may want to be in his task. In this way, at the first difficulty, he leans openly even though silently to Aristotle's side in order to support the idea that genera and species cannot be substances using a reasoning present in *Metaphysics Z* according to which, since genera and species are simultaneously common to a plurality of individual things, they themselves do not possess any numerical unity that is valid for every singular being. Not being singular in this sense, they cannot have the degree of existence of a substance.

But at the same time – and this without the help of Aristotle or Plato – they cannot be either be situated only in the intellect (which we for our part imagine too easily), because every active intellect is made starting from something which is its subject'. No one can have in his mind something that he has not first of all had in his senses, and conceptualizing something which is supposed to be nowhere is ruled out. From that a double and untenable requirement: it must be affirmed that genera and species are indeed something in reality (*in rerum veritate*) without being for all that substances, and that moreover they are indeed in the intellect but not as empty concepts that would refer to nothing in reality.

Boethius by finding support on the mechanism of perception as it was conceived by Alexander of Aphrodisias: according to the latter, sensations present to the soul in an incorporeal form things which in themselves are corporeal. If therefore the spirit, pursues Boethius, 'can distinguish what the senses transmit to it as mixed up (*confuse*) and attached (*conjuuncta*) to bodies, and in this way to contemplate (*speculari*) and see the incorporeal

nature by itself, without the bodies in which it is mixed up (*concreta*), then the same spirit has the power to consider and contemplate genera and species 'by separating the incorporeals that it receives combined (*permixta*) to bodies'¹⁸.

This crucial operation is called abstraction, a noun that of itself is too polysemic for us to be satisfied with it. The Middle Ages distinguished in effect mathematical abstraction (which aims at the production of abstract beings, forms grasped by mathematical activity), mystical abstraction which, according to the Pseudo-Denis the Aeropagit, allows the Christian to raise himself up by thought from the world of beings to the super essential (on the model of the sculptor who brings out from the block of marble the statue that was latent in it), and finally the abstraction that will be called epistemological, the only one that interests us here.

By abstractive induction, is understood going from elements held to be similar to their gathering together under a same notion (therefore under the same name); but in what way? We will not be too surprised to rediscover here two families of thinkers as close as they are opposed on this sore point of the quarrel. One side are partisans of the fact that a name permits resemblances to be grasped, to regroup under the same *flatus vocis* and a same *status* numerical singular beings. As A. de Libera points out in the article 'Abstraction' of the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Age*¹⁹ this conception extends as far as Locke who, in his *Essay on human understanding*, still wrote: 'The grouping of things under names is the work of understanding, which takes the occurrence of the similitude that it observes among them to forge general abstract ideas.' But others privilege a different path: to neutralize these singular features in a numerically singular individual, in order to produce the abstract type which will no longer present anything other than the common features likely to gather together the plurality of singular individuals liable for an identical operation of abstraction. The first

¹⁸ I am following here the presentation given by A. de Libera in his commentary on Boethius. *La Querelle...*, op. cit. p. 130.

¹⁹ *Dictionnaire du Moyen Age*, under the direction of C. Gauvard, A. de Libera and M. Zink, Paris PUF, Quadrige, 2002, p.2.

based themselves on the existence of an already present resemblance which it is only a matter of picking out of the intellect (our modern notion of class), the others produce non-difference by setting aside all the features that founded the difference divisible between the singular individuals (by producing the type from which the genus flowed, as in the case of Adam). The first perceive directly the resemblance between the individuals; for the second this resemblance is not a sensible given, but a construction *per via di levare*, as one goes from a triangle traced out in the sand to the abstract idea of triangle by removing its particularities to get to its type.

On property and difference

These subtleties will appear to belong to a different age if one loses sight of the current debate on sexual difference, but the feminist wave and the conception become banal today of the equality of the sexes have not freed us as much as we might believe from the infernal question of difference in the common belonging to the human race. Quite the contrary: if one does not approach in however little a way to these medieval exercises in disputation, one strongly risks being precipitated towards a conception of sexual difference which misses out on the logical problem on which it reposes.

The latter in effect puts to work so directly the most basic elements of our understanding that we must lose hope of possessing by ourselves the conceptual tools which would allow us to describe it correctly.

Psychoanalysis does not offer at this point any privileged point of view, however detailed may be the theoretical and clinical knowledge that it offers us on this chapter. One of the rare possibilities available returns therefore to make vacillate our most natural conceptions (those that we have learned in primary school) by confronting them with others.

If one enunciates the problem in an apparently minimal form, one comes up against an irreducible duality: on the one side, the man/woman opposition is perfectly discreet, every subject is either one or the other and only falls

under one category and it alone²⁰; on the other side, they are two qualities that ceaselessly interpenetrate according to a gradient which leads from the most manly man to the most womanly woman while passing through all the intermediary combinations. Therefore sexual difference shamelessly mixes two qualities that understanding holds to be heterogeneous: the discreet and the continuous.

This data has become easier to enunciate since the work of Thomas Laqueur *La Fabrique du sexe*²¹, which establishes with all historical clarity this duplicity (more than duality), inherent to the sexes. That our unshakeable conviction according to which there exists two sexes morphologically, histologically, genetically differentiable had been preceded by a very long period where there only existed, for each and every one, one sex unequally shared by each gender, here is something that even today creates the effect of a scoop. Naturally, when one approaches it, this so called historical succession contains a whole complex overlapping: the theory of the two sexes has always been there, more or less, and the thought of a single sex, however damaged it has been by science, continues to irrigate many discourses. There(?) remains however the idea of the same mental obstruction, in styles of thought (*episteme*) almost impervious with respect to one another, with regard to this duality that people try in vain to support, sometimes on a property (what is man is in no way woman, and vice versa), sometimes on an accident coming to despoil in different ways subjects identical apart from that.

Freud

The Freudian discovery is inscribed in this long history, especially with the texts of 1923 that establish the very subtle business of the phallic phase. Freud puts in place there a kind of trunk that is common to the boy and to the girl, already present in the *Three essays on theory of sexuality* of 1903,

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that rest in fact on the conception of one libido referring only to one sex (the masculine):

‘Indeed, if we were able to give a more definite connotation to the concepts of masculine and feminine, it would even be possible to maintain that libido is invariably and necessarily of a masculine nature, whether it occurs in men or in women and irrespectively of whether its object is a man or a woman.’²²

Like the little boy, the little girl discovers masturbatory pleasure, the one playing with her clitoris and the other with his penis. So far it’s a draw. A first difference is discovered starting from the reciprocal site that each obtains of the genitals of the other: the little boy pretends (*dixit* Freud) to have seen nothing: ‘He begins by showing irresolution and lack of interest’, because what he sees would run the strong risk of giving weight to the threat of castration that he has received, perceived, but that up to now he had not taken seriously. For the little girl, it is quite the contrary: ‘She makes her judgment and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it.’²³

She is therefore going to enter into the Oedipus complex by the castration complex, and begins to want a child from the father as a substitute for this absent penis; while the little boy, if all goes well from a Freudian point of view, will emerge for his part from his Oedipus complex by this same castration complex which, by incarnating the narcissistic threat to this part of his own body, will manage to make his incestuous libidinal cathexes fall back. To save his precious penis, he will let go of his mother (unless by simply repressing all of that, which opens wide for him the door to neurosis).

Such at least is the story that Freud launches from 1903, and re-orchestrates in 1923. The success of this conception, like the violence of the attacks of which it has been, of which it is still, the object bears witness to its insertion

²² SE VII, p.219

²³ SE XIX, p.252

into a multi-secular problematic. The libido theory, however novel it was in many aspects, moulded itself also onto complete antiquities, and in all of that deserves our attention.

From the chapter on the differentiation between men and women in his *Three Essays*, Freud notes three distinct senses of the opposition of the concepts masculine and feminine:

It is essential to understand clearly that the concepts of masculine and feminine, whose meaning seems so ambiguous to ordinary people are among the most confused that occur in science. It is possible to distinguish at least three uses. Masculine and feminine are used sometimes in the sense of activity and passivity, sometimes in a biological and sometimes again in a sociological sense. The first of these three meanings is the essential one and the most serviceable in psychoanalysis. When for instance libido was described in the text above as being masculine, the word is being used in this sense, for an instinct is always active even when it has a passive aim in view. The second, or biological meaning of masculine and feminine is the one whose applicability can be determined most easily. Here masculine and feminine are characterized by the presence of spermatozoa or ova respectively and by the functions proceeding from them [...] the third or sociological meaning receives its connotation from the observation of actually existing masculine and feminine individuals such observation shows that in human beings pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found either in a psychological or a biological sense²⁴,

Twenty-two years later, the same words return when he writes to conclude his article on ‘Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes’:

²⁴ SE VII, p.219 n1.

[...] all human individuals as a result of the bi-sexual disposition and of cross-inheritance, combine in themselves both masculine and feminine characteristics, so that pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructions of uncertain content.²⁵

The formal configuration of the entities manipulated here to the point of having the merit, of not of clarity, at least of duration. In this way Freud is confronted with the duplicity evoked above: on the one side, with the biological *Bedeutung*, he looks for an instant as if he is holding with the male/female a couple in opposition which would present the high point of functional differentiation (ovum/spermatozoa); on the two other sides, psychological or sociological, all the mixed forms are conceivable.

A lesson: the sexes are only easily differentiateable in the heart of the germinal cells, when meiosis has made them pass to the diploid stage (23 pairs of chromosomes) to the haploid stage (23 chromosomes), and that the all x ova henceforth offer themselves to an encounter with the spermatozoa that are sometimes all x sometimes all y. There perhaps one could speak, with precaution, of pure masculinity and of pure femininity. Afterwards.... Even if the chromosomic lottery is inevitably going to make foetal evolution tend towards the production of male XY or female XX cells, the somatic organization for its part will no longer give up on an irreducible ambiguity. The biological rock of the 23rd chromosome will then come to support the imaginary of a difference that is completely potential, with its TDF gene carried by the little Y chromosome and held to be responsible for the masculine phenotype, while the female XX will henceforth give the appearance of being the strong sex, because of its homogeneity.

Freud did not know all of this – even though one can think that he would have liked the double helix. But we must agree that this knowledge about the genetic forge of the human reinforces the common opinion on the idea of an irreducible difference, since we know it is inscribed in the

²⁵ SE XIX, 258

microscopical innermost parts of each of ourselves. If according to Freud's word echoing that of Napoleon, anatomy is destiny, what can we say then about genetics? Transvestites and transsexuals may push as far as they can the corporeal transformations that they want, but it is hard to see them entirely changing themselves, unless by falling once more into the problem of Theseus' boat, in which one comes to change the totality of the elements that compose it, and as regards which one can ask if it is indeed still Theseus' boat²⁶. It is therefore necessary, not alone in practice, but also in thought, to support the existence of separate male/female entities, even if only in the short time of the mitotic pre-encounter.

Thus the content of the theoretical construction of pure masculinity and pure femininity is no longer as uncertain as in Freud's time – and nevertheless I maintain that the setting has not fundamentally changed because of this, by reason of the permanence of logical and mental constraints. This blueprint according to which we isolate two entities that one would like to believe independent because science was able to locate them to name them, to separate them only stretches the two extremities between which there slides more than ever the ferret of sexual determination. We learn with surprise and amusement that one of the star dancers of the Beijing Opera was a former colonel in the Red Army, and for more than a millennium people were afraid of the usurpation of a Pope Joan²⁷: all this goes to show that in certitude if it does not reign, at least is always able to show the tip of its nose, since positions so marked sexually do not offer any trustworthy guarantee.

Therefore Freud does not free himself from a figure of thought in which each and every one finds themselves engaged when it is a matter of going from the difference of the sexes to the existence of two sexes each well individuated. So that the problem is henceforth established fairly clearly on the formal plane: do the sexes exist only relatively to one another, in the end is sexual difference anything other than what Aristotle named a

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relative? Or indeed does each one of these sexes depend on a singular substance, so that sexual difference would only be the consequence of this duality of substances? To delve more deeply into this formal aspect of the question it would be as well to turn towards a less charged relative than that of sexual difference: what is heat, and what is cold?

Absolute versus relative

Right away, one is tempted to respond that, as for light and shade or big and small, cold and heat are exclusive relative values, which are only defined in relationship to one another. Having conventionally posed what it is agreed to hold as hot, I will hold to be cold, in other words as less hot, everything that presents a lesser thermal agitation, and reciprocally. The more and the less, emblems of all the relatives, seem to reign as masters over cold and heat. But such is not the case always and everywhere.

Scarcely has one learned that heat is only a certain degree of agitation of matter than the omnipresence of the relative comes up against, in thermal matters, a ground value: the zero quite rightly called absolute, at minus 273.16°C (or 0°K). Since temperature measures the degree of movement of molecules vis a vis one another (in gasses and liquids, to be sure, but also in solids), the degree 0 corresponds to the state of absolute rest in which, not alone do the molecules no longer move, but at which also the electrons would stop turning their kernel and also around themselves (spin). Even though at the present time the record has been pushed to 10^{-10}°K , it is clear that there is no question of going beyond this limit: how go any further in rest when nothing is moving any longer?

Inversely, temperature knows no upper limit: if the agitation becomes too intense, the molecules break up, the atoms themselves are shattered into states described as plasmatic. If the energy is lacking to create states of matter that are still more intense in which the most elementary particles would lose their consistency, nothing prevents us from thinking about such a situation. Imagination, which encountered with rest a veritable wall in the

progression towards a more cold, comes up against nothing of the sort on the side of the universal furnace (unless by thinking of infinite energies at the 0 time of the Big Bang. A difficult exercise).

At the same time , on the side of speed, general relativity has come, for its part also, to upset imagination and its natural taste for relatives, for the more or the less as far as you can see, by positioning an absolute upper limit: nothing can go faster than light. This new datum might appear just as mysterious as the absolute 0 in temperature, if reasoning did not come in the same way to support imagination in this maze: since what puts a break on movement is inertia, in other words the mass of what is moving, nothing can go faster than what possesses a null mass. Now this is the case of the photon. Therefore nothing can go faster than a photon.

Certain relatives can tolerate therefore coming up against limiting values, sorts of asymptotes unreachable by definition and in that ready to incarnate stable points, foreign to variation which in a continuous or discreet fashion, work on the relatives, in short ideal candidates to reaffirm the idea of substance: something that does not move and remains identical to itself, independently of the qualities that affect it and of the relations that it justifies.

But where is the hen, where is the egg? Must we think that there are first of all separate substances, and that the relative only arrange a progressive distancing from this fixed given, or that inversely there is only the relative, more and less that provide us with our daily experience, and that with that we construct (helped much more by reasoning than by intuition, entities that set bounds to these relatives?

Is there in this way, an equal ontological dignity, Man and Woman²⁸ *qua* separated entities, real posts between which each human being would slide as it were along a clothes line in order, finally, to be caught, at the whim of

²⁸ Here as elsewhere in the text, when each sex is considered as an essence it is given a capital letter.

a capricious bisexuality? Or indeed are there only relatives, sexual difference as far as one can see, without ?? ever managing to be hypostasized in these opposing blocks to which imagination alone exercises its wits, for its part, in practicing an induction (doubtful in its principle) according to which the local truth (the sexual difference) is only the instantiation of a global truth (of an irreducible substantial duality)?

Lacan and inaccessibility

The incubation time of this question in Lacan's teaching is remarkable. For almost 15 years, even though going through the most diverse themes, we see him scarcely retouching the Freudian arrangement in the matter even while he redefines and subverts it in many of its points. The categories of man and woman just as indispensable in clinical descriptions as in the course of theoretical elaborations, scarcely calls for a direct questioning. We have to wait for the little text directive remarks for a 'Congress on feminine sexuality'²⁹ to appreciate his first cut at the question. It is outstandingly relative, in the sense that no nature come to define each of the sexual partners. The dominance of symbolic determinations requires that each one only finds its status in function of the other, indeed of the Other, which one single quotation will be enough to give a sense of:

‘[...] castration cannot be deduced from development, since it presupposes the subjectivity of the Other *qua* locus of its law. *The otherness of sex is misrepresented by this alienation.* The man serves here as a relay in order that the woman should become this Other for herself, as she is for him³⁰.’

No question therefore of looking for some nature of other of each sex. The differences of functioning that are described – for example ‘an enjoyment enveloped in its own contiguity’ on the side of the woman, and ‘a desire that

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.732. Underlined by me. (Cormac you said this was footnote 29 but I'd already typed that so I just put it here as you hadn't done 28 and you can change them around)

³⁰ J. Lacan 'Propos directifs pour un Congrès sur la sexualité féminine' in *Ecrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p.725-736 announced as having been written 'two years before the Congress', this text is to be dated from 1958 [my translation].

castration liberates in the male by giving him his signifier in the phallus³¹, on the side of man do not allow separate entities to be constructed, each one is so much made to respond to the other as least as much as to put into operation some specificity or other.

On the other hand there is outlined a putting into relation of each speaking being with sexual enjoyment, without the latter undergoing the habitual bipartition which would have it that each sex has its own. Linked as it is to the phallus, when with the appearance of the *o*-object, the latter progressively sees its quality of substantive vanishing in favour of its adjectival value, it ends up by being called phallic enjoyment. There is here a direct echo of the Freudian assertion already encountered according to which there is only one type of libido, the male type, but this exclusivity was attached in Vienna to the idea of the libido as pure activity – the sign of a fatal confusion between the discreet definition of sex (Man/Woman) and its continuous definition (more or less active/more or less passive).

By not using this recourse to more and less which could not but mix up, in his eyes, the symbolic dimension and the imaginary dimension, Lacan found himself uneasy in supporting such a unicity of libido, while he ruled out the hypothesis (that he denounced in Jones) of ‘to each sex its own enjoyment’. But how get out of such a tight corner? It is enough to pose such a question in order to see him, after an interval of some months, engaging himself in a curious maze on what one could call, enforcing a bit the feature, the number of enjoyments.

The first step does not have the merit of clarity. It takes place towards the end of one of the last sessions of the seminar....*Ou pire*, 10 May 1972, at the moment when Lacan finds himself led, for reasons that one does not right away perceive, to comment that the actual infinite, ω , is an inaccessible in the sense that no summation or exponentiation of its subparts reaches it. And in this sense it will be revelatory of the additional one (*un-*

³¹ *Ibid.* p.735

en-plus) that Lacan tracks as being what is realized in every operation of counting. He must feel that he is himself engaged in an awkward oratorical situation, since he adds: 'To end I am going to make you sense in a quite simple form which is the following.....'.

And to explain a property described as accessibility according to which a whole number would be called accessible if it could be constructed, either as the sum, or as the exponentiation of (whole) numbers smaller than it. The 1, says Lacan, 'I sufficiently underlined that it is engendered from the fact that the 0 marks from lack', and in any case, having only a single antecedent, the rule of accessibility is not applied to it. It is only really posed with the 2. Now, with the 0 and the 1, however one combines them, one does not reach 2, while starting from 2, it is obvious that every number becomes accessible as the sum or the exponentiation any two of its predecessors. Here then the number 2 is proclaimed inaccessible. The reader of these lines may indeed be just as questioning as the listener of that time: where then is Lacan trying to get to with these *ad hoc* properties? To be sure, he wants there to be understood the fact that the consideration of the real straight line [0, 1] hollows out between each whole number a numerical space where there is situated nothing less than the actual infinity, and that therefore every whole number is like a ?? 0 for its predecessor. But how does this consideration which looks so Bourbakienne touch him? Only the final lines of this session allow it to be understood:

'[...] what is involved, and what I started from, is what is designed to suggest to you the utility of the fact that there is something of the 1, (in order) that you should be able to understand what is involved in this bipartition at every fleeting instant, this bipartition of the man and the woman: that every that is not man is woman one would tend to admit. But since the woman is not notall, why would everything that is not woman be man? This bipartition, this impossibility of applying, in this business of gender, something which is the principle of contradiction [...], is what I am indicating to you as

being what ought to allow the analyst to understand a little bit more³² [...].’

Only a work of approximation, to be read in the course of the following chapter will allow us to read this strange notall that collides with the woman. But what explodes already, at the level of the counting of the habitual couple Man\Woman, is a disequilibrium, which Lacan refers back to a stumbling of the principle of contradiction, which moreover trenches on the principle of the excluded third. In a first phase, he in effect makes not man equivalent to woman, but denying woman (therefore: not (not man)), he doesn’t come back to man³³. The two sexes in his eyes do not share gender in such a way that, on the plane of extension, everything that is not to be put on one side is to be put on the other or vice versa: *exit* the yin and the yang and all the couples in opposition that claim in different cultures to rule by one and the same gesture the number of sexes and the logical meaning of contradiction of meaning.

In wanting to settle the question on the plane that he had brought out as symbolic, and in refusing the Freudian recourse to the imaginary of the active\passive tension, Lacan comes on the problem of the numeration of sexes: more than 1, but not 2. No means of acceding to the two, the second does not manage to close (*boucler*) its unity like the first, and therefore the count irresistibly stumbles. A year later, this formal problem reemerges at the level of the counting of enjoyments.

Neither 1 nor 2

If Lacan was able in effect to use the term and the concept phallus in a very accentuated way, the different writings that he produces for it in the course of the seminars suffice to guarantee its polyphony: blank for the phallus

³² Jacque Lacan...*ou pire*, 10 May 1972.

³³ The reason why he sometimes invokes intuitionist logic since the latter, excluding the principle of the excluded third, does not hold as equivalent a term and the negation of its negation. But I doubt that it would be for all that very useful to get any more involved in the functioning of intuitionist logic to read the formulae of sexuation. Not before at least having gone through the classical aspects under which they are presented..

described as symbolic, blank for the imaginary phallus (sometimes negated into minus blank). It is of course a signifier, but a signifier at the limit since it would be the only one to be able to signify itself; it is also sometimes an object, it also very special when it is described metonymic, in other words it's the catastrophic point of the system so dear to structuralism, the chiasm that inverts all values. Now at the moment when Lacan sets out, very late – to pronounce on the duality Man\Woman, the substantive phallus tends to be effaced, becomes much less conceptually charged and becomes an adjective to qualify, sometimes a function (that we will study later), sometimes an enjoyment, THE enjoyment it must almost be said, about it, there is no room to doubt it. It is, in Lacan's eyes, that which, in the structure of the subject, is imposed because of language and determines that the human being cannot advance towards his satisfactions except by emerging himself in language. The human being, this *neotene*, this being so incomplete at his birth, post partum makes of language one of his principle organs and this organ enjoys.

On this there is no hesitation: there is something that is called phallic jouissance. It strikes each and every one in that no one is a subject if he does not manage to produce himself as such in and by language, by participating in this enjoyment that articulates body and speech, and definitively links sexual pleasure to the interplay of signifiers, of phonation and audition. The unicity proclaimed about the Freudian libido finds here in Lacan its direct echo, in this universality of phallic enjoyment. But as is often the case with him, taking it up again is followed by a subversion. Might it be, he asks himself on 13th February 1973, that there had been an other enjoyment? The question is by no means innocent since, even on the side of the Freudian analysts of the time, there are quite a few who think quite openly that it is so, Jones at their head (others more discreetly).

The merit of the expression phallic enjoyment, is that it does not bring about by itself any division. It is valid, one can begin to say it in this way, for every speaking being, without first of all asking either its sex or its gender. Such a universality poses of itself the question of its pertinence, of the

breadth of its extension: is it really the only one to reign over this domain called by Lacan enjoyment, a direct equivalent for which one might search almost in vain in Freud? In the Freudian corpus in effect, *Lust* is only pleasure, which obeys its principle. *Genus*, which might be translated as enjoyment is very rare, and has no conceptual value. There remains the beyond of the pleasure principle, that Lacan translates for his part by enjoyment, hence the strangeness of the question that he poses on 13th February 1973: might it be that there are two beyonds?

The response that he gives plays first of all on the ambiguities of the French tongue and grammar, which offer him the shelter of the protasis and the apodosis (he himself employs these terms during his seminar). The protasis is a conditional subordinate placed at the head of the sentence, necessarily followed by its apodosis, which is nothing other than the principle proposition: *s'il l'exige, je partirai; si vous n'arrivez pas à l'heure, je ne vous attrai pas*³⁴. In function of an imperious concordance of tenses in this respect, the present of the protasis calls on the future of the apodosis, and the imperfect the conditional. Now the imperfect can have just by itself a very hypothetical value, already underlined by Lacan for different ends: *un instant plus tard, et la bombe éclatait*, a sentence which does not say by itself whether the bomb has exploded, or if it has simply almost done so but that nothing of the kind happened.

'*S'il y en avait une autre, il le faudrait pas que ce soit celle - la*³⁵. Here we have enunciated the regime of the existence of an enjoyment which would be other than phallic. Lacan hastens to point out the equivocation of the final *celle-la*: which one? The other whose existence the protasis presupposes, the one from which we started to designate this other as other³⁶, therefore the phallic? This stealthy vacillation between the deictic value, which refers back to the situation of the enunciating, and the anaphoric value, which refers back to the antecedents in the enunciation

³⁴ *Le Grand Robert de la Langue française* respectively, tome I, p.628, tome V; p.1319.

³⁵ J Lacan, *Encore*, Paris, Seuil, 1975, p.56.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

itself, is quickly settled in favour of the latter: supposing that there had been one other than phallic, then it would not be appropriate³⁷ but to whom, for what reason? To the act of saying: ‘The aforesaid enjoyment is repressed because it is not appropriate that it should be said, and this precisely for the reason that the act of saying can be nothing other than the following – as enjoyment, it is not suitable³⁸.’

This non appropriateness is nevertheless far from being sufficient for Lacan, who is seeking here to tickle something much more subtle than the representation incompatible with the ego, on which Freud had based the concept of secondary repression. This enjoyment, in effect, is nothing that exists and which would be such that it should be repressed; the business must be pushed to the point where its non-existence is sustained. Taking support on the logical operator of implication, present in the protasis\apodosis couple, Lacan argues from the fact that a false antecedent can very well lead to a true consequent, and that in this case the implication remains valid, and therefore: ‘It is false that there is an other, which does not prevent what follows being true, namely that it is not necessary that it should be this one³⁹.’

One could scarcely refine any more the degree of supposition. This indirectly evokes the Descartes of the *Principes de la philosophie*⁴⁰, but comes back above all to affirm an inexistence, a movement of enunciation of which Lacan knows for a fact the degree of paradox that it involves since the simple fact of affirming gives to the object of affirmation this minimum of existence that language confers on everything that it brings to the act of saying. That the reference may be empty, as in the case of squared circles,

³⁷ ‘*Non decet*’, says Lacan arming himself with Latin, and to relaunch the equivocation between *convener* (*decet*) and *dire* (*dicere*).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.57

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.56

⁴⁰ ‘[...] I desire that what I will write should be taken only as a hypothesis, which is perhaps very far from the truth; but even if this were so, I believe I would have done a lot if all the things that are deduced from it are entirely in conformity with experience [...]’ R. Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, tome III, Paris Garnier-Flammarion, 1973, p.247. This is exactly the kind of hypothesis that Newton declared that he did not want to forge in his physics.

does not for all that make them purely and simply inexistent, in the measure that the signification allows there to be welcomed beings as well as non-beings, it is in any case the reason for which one sees Lacan swerve rapidly, in the same page 56 of *Encore*, on being and non-being: ‘Well then, that non-being should not be, it must not be forgotten that it is added by speech to the account of the being whose fault it is.’ Reasoning that is immediately valid for the account of enjoyment: the one that is not is nonetheless inscribed in the act of saying as the one that is not appropriate, bringing it back once again to the starting square, that of phallic enjoyment which for its part feeds the act of saying until it is satiated.

There is not therefore just one enjoyment, to tell the truth, but it is ruled out that there are two of them. This right way puts a singular mark on the feminine enjoyment, an expression launched by Lacan, that he took up again on numerous occasions, and which has known ever since a remarkable success, along a straight line from the Biblical to each his own: to men phallic enjoyment (one would grant it also to little girls and to clitoral women), to womanly women feminine enjoyment. The trouble, on the Lacanian at least, is that ‘if it existed [this feminine enjoyment], it should not be that one’. The reason why, let it be said in passing, not-man can be understood, while not (not man) does not present the same positivity.

However indefinite the act of saying may be, Lacan wants to affirm that something escapes it, that it can only be silent about, or exclude, or invoke, or reject, without ever for all of that managing to grasp it in the pincers of signification. The other enjoyment strives to designate in this way, in its own way, the excess of the reference onto signification⁴¹, from the Fregean *Bedeutung* onto his *Sinn*. Because of this fact, one can say that it is central in the speaking being, but one can just as well say that it is nothing, no

⁴¹ In this way we can make sense of the specification contributed by Lacan in the session of 9 June 1971 of the seminar on *A discourse that might not be a semblance*: much more rather I would insist on the fact that ‘*Die Bedeutung des Phallus* is in reality a pleonasm. There is not in language any other *Bedeutung* than the phallus. Language in its function of existence, only connotes – I said connotes – in the final analysis the impossibility of symbolizing the sexual relationship among the beings that inhabit, that inhabit language, by reason of the fact that it is from this habitat that they have taken speech.’

singular experience. It is without locus, and accompanies phallic enjoyment as its shadow if it is true that the phallic makes this joining of the speaking subject to language and to the whole symbolic apparatus from which it depends, as much for its survival as for its existence; but from the rhetorical point of view, this other enjoyment is inscribed rather in the type of argumentation proper to the negative theologies. One can only invoke it in order to deny it since the reference is absent, but this absence is crucial for anyone who wants to appreciate the consistency of phallic enjoyment, the quality of its universality. We are soon going to see Lacan battle a foot at a time to establish a phallic function that is not reduced to a universality posed at first as such, in its classical extension. For the moment, it will be enough to record that this numbering of enjoyments resituates in its way the initial problem from which we started with the Biblical quotations: it is impossible to calmly count up to 2⁴²; despite appearances, once it is a matter of establishing the difference of the genders on a sexual difference. This undeniable difference does not allow to be substantialised the terms that it opposes, to produce consistent genders; other hypotheses are required most often silent ones, and without which the two remains out of reach.

⁴² The English Philip Larkin has given a short version of it: 'Thinking in terms of one is easily done one room, one bed, one chair one person there, makes perfect sense; one set of wishes can be met one coffin filled but counting up to two is harder to do for one must be denied before its tried', Collected poems, London, Faber & Faber, 1989, p.108.