TOWARDS A CRITICAL READING OF THE FORMULAE OF SEXUATION

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The provocative impression of Jacques Lacan's affirmation that 'there is no sexual relationship' continues to appear to many as a sort of brutal truth about sex, gaining authenticity by coming from a now famous psychoanalyst. From this to imagining that it was simply his long experience as a practitioner that led him to this harsh truth about the nature of the relations men and women have (or not) with one another is an easy step to take. And besides, do not the apparently contradictory logical formulae which soon came to support and accompany in his teaching this paradoxical statement – produced at the end of the 1960's – place 'Man'[1] on one side and 'Woman' on the other? And so it is that for more than 30 years people have been satisfied to read these formulae as a modern set of magical spells in which, through a prodigious *aggiornamento*, biblical truth has finally found the place and the function of sexual difference in the vast Freudian setting, thanks to the somersaults of this charlatan Lacan. Nothing could be further from the truth. And what follows is intended to demonstrate this using the logical argumentation that Lacan developed over many years.

Carving into segments a teaching which spanned twenty seven years undoubtedly presents as many disadvantages as advantages, but to take such a long journey as a single block also generates an optical illusion that is fatal to any reading by reducing to a system what was, as it clearly proclaims from the beginning, a progressive elaboration, with its chaotic elements and its lightening flashes, its explorations and its avoidances. If from 1953 on, Lacan produced with his *symbolic, imaginary, real* triad an apt tool for undertaking a *reading* of the Freudian text which was not a professorial commentary, it was only at the beginning of the 1960's that he launched himself into innovations whose direct equivalents in Freud one will search for in vain. In saying this, I am not indicating either an epistemological or thematic break, and we can easily find such constructions in the course of the 1950's (the metonymical

[1] In everything that follows, a capital in 'Man' or 'Woman' will designate the concept in its essence, over against 'man' or 'woman' which refer to individuals.

object, the foreclosure of the name of the father etc.); much more rather a clear decision to introduce into the Freudian field what would deserve to be called (stealing the word from the mathematicians) 'ideal elements', the type of element that must be added to a set of already given elements in order to install in it, under certain conditions, a structure of a more powerful order. When in the course of his seminar on *Identification* (1961-62) Lacan introduced his definition of the subject as *represented by a signifier for another signifier*, he was giving a place to such an entity which does not belong to the set that it regulates (the big Other, defined in this instance, as 'the treasury of signifiers'). But it was also this 'subject' which forced him to produce a quite different 'object' to that which up to then he had used under this same name of object.

TOWARDS THE OBJECT AND ITS SLIGHT RELATIONSHIP TO THE ONE

He had already some presentiment of what he was then obliged to put forward as his own conception of what is understood by 'object':

> [...] the object o, as we are trying to define it, because it has become necessary for us now to have a proper definition of the object [...] to try to see how there is ordered, and at the same time differentiated what up to the present in our experience we have rightly or wrongly begun to articulate as being the object.[2]

But for him this could only be done by right away rejecting the binary subject/ object opposition, so true is it that his triplicity *(ternarisme)*, his way of counting three in everything, constrains him on this occasion. Here the quotations could be extremely numerous; let us be satisfied with the following:

> The whole notion of object relations is impossible to manage, impossible to comprehend, impossible even to use if we do not put into it as – I will not say a *mediating* element, because this would be to take a step that we have not yet taken together – a third element which is an element, in a word, of the phallus, which I am today putting centre stage with this schema: Mother-Phallus-Child.[3]

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[2] J. Lacan, *Desire and its Interpretation*, unpublished seminar, 29 April 1959. Translated by Cormac Gallagher.

[3] J. Lacan, *Object Relations and Freudian Structures*, untranslated seminar, 28 November 1956.

How was Lacan led to take more precautions here than his colleagues, who saw no difficulty in talking about an object in the common meaning of the term? By keeping before him his own conception of such an object, full of generous promise in its beginnings, and thereafter extremely compromising if it proved to be the only one available: the specular image.

The problem is revelatory of Lacan's way of doing things, and is worthwhile taking into account when we are proposing to *read* him: when he has put forward something that has some value in his eyes...he uses it until he abandons it, or forgets it in favour of something else. In this sense, he is serious. He likes to make a series of what he is putting forward. He had thus produced, from his first steps in psychoanalysis, with his mirror stage and the most developed text that flowed from it,[4] a conception of the object on the exact model of the specular image: everything that will be brought forward in the future as 'object' will carry the trademark of this first object, this image in the mirror to which the child identifies and alienates itself in the same movement, by what Lacan called from then on the 'knot of imaginary servitude'. The expression is violent, but the idea determining it is no less so: the object, the *Gegenstand*, what confronts the subject, will never be anything other in its global make up than a duplication of this specular image, with all the properties accruing to this image. This amounts to saying that the object will always be liable to a certain type of unity which Lacan qualifies at first as imaginary, and which we know today corresponds to what he called much later 'unian'[5]: an all-encompassing unity, which possesses its own circumscription,[6] which functions as a sack, very akin to a totalising unity and its vocation to gather together in an 'all' as many elements as you wish, in this case an infinity.

This conception did not fail to give rise to a difficulty: if the object and the other emerge from the same matrix, how can they be clearly differentiated? This question remains unresolved in *The Family*. Now it had to be dealt with successfully since the object of the drive, to limit ourselves to it, must be different to the small other. Two events, one positive the other negative, but both linked to a conception of unity, were going to lead to a way out.

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[4] Namely, *The Family* (1938), unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher.
[5] In fact, in 1971 in the course of the seminar ... *ou pire*.
[6] I have tried to diversify and to explicitate this vocabulary in *Le Lasso spéculaire, une étude traversière de I 'unité imaginaire,* Paris: EPEL, 1997.

During the seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan launched (for quite different reasons) into a commentary of the Freudian *Ding* as he found it in the *Project* (as opposed to *Sache*), which allowed him to glimpse what might be involved in a *non-narcissistic* (and thus non-specular, not one?) object. Commenting on the Freudian distinction between '*Ego*-libido' and 'object-libido', he put forward the following:

> The object here, at this level, is introduced inasmuch as it is perpetually interchangeable with the love the subject has for his own image. [...] It is with this mirage-relation that the notion of object is introduced. This object is therefore not the same thing as the object aimed at on the horizon of the tendency. Between the object as structured by the narcissistic relation and *das Ding*, there is a difference...

In this term with its distinguished philosophical and Freudian pedigree, Lacan found a first prop for thinking about an object that was not caught up in this 'knot of imaginary servitude' which, at least since 1938, the specular image had been for him. A path was opened up to think of the existence of a *thing* crucial in the subjective economy which, in Freud's own expression in the *Project*, escaped from the type of unity presented by any object worthy of the name. For most of those who took the risk of thinking anything whatsoever about the object in general, Leibniz's maxim according to which 'being and the one' are equivalent was in effect the rule, and one could not posit any object without by this very fact saying that it was 'one'. *Das Ding*, with its pretension of escaping from representation, by incarnating the part of judgment that cannot be articulated, opened up a path to enable there to be sustained the existence of an object which had broken its bonds with unity.

But what unity? During these same years, as he continued his commentary on Freud, Lacan gave a quite special role to the *einziger Zug* with which Freud had constructed hysterical identification to a 'singular' feature. In translating this expression by unary trait *(trait unaire)*, Lacan chose to make of it one of the figures of the one, that in truth was indispensable for him, as he constructed his notion of 'signifier'. His supposed borrowings from Saussure in effect only offered him a differential concept of the signifier, each defined only as being different to all the others. With this notion of unary trait authorised by Freud, Lacan founded something different, a sort of atomism of the signifier which was to allow him to embody a notion of the letter that was entirely his own. We see it appearing clearly in his commentary on *The Purloined Letter*, and still more in what followed the commentary

that he gave when his *Écrits* appeared in 1966. If Lacan was able to affirm there with such assurance that a letter always arrives at its destination, it is not because there is any empirical evidence for this statement (contrary examples are only too obvious). It is an axiom which serves to define what a letter is: something indivisible at its very source because it stems from this unary trait, which is defined as possessing this type of unity which neither dissolves nor corrupts, a sort of irreducible unity of the basic element of the symbolic system.[7] Over against a Derrida who was still to come, Lacan put in place a conception of a letter that could not be disseminated, foreign to any archive, to rats and to other accidents that could chip at it, spoil it, ruin it and thus deviate it from its circuit as letter. No need here to lean towards a supposed 'nature' of what a letter truly is; we are here at the level of axiomatic statements, none is any more true than the other, we must choose the one whose consequences will assist what we want to appropriately support with it. Lacan holds that a letter should be defined by its circuit, and for that reason he needs a letter which in its functioning possesses this 'unarity' which makes of it 'the localised structure of the signifier'. With it, Lacan henceforth possesses a type of unity which corresponds to his specular unity: inasmuch as the latter corresponds to an encompassing whole, the former validates the irreducible unity of the element. With two ones of this calibre under his belt he can already go far, but he also realises…that neither is appropriate to give body and shape to an object which is, not simply different, but irreducible to the other, to this small other which, from its beginnings, provided a lodging place for all thought about the object.

Liable neither to imaginary and specular unity nor to unary: what then can be the relationships of the object still to come and the one? Thus posited, the question long in gestation in the progressive development of the seminars, could gradually hope to meet its answer – negative.

THE OBJECT DESCRIBED AS 'PART'

[7] In this, close to the phoneme attached to the linguistic concept of 'pertinence' which makes of it an undividable unity.

The seminar on *Transference* takes this problematic forward by proposing first of all, as regards this object in search of its new determinations, the notion of *agalma*. This Greek term, which Lacan said he had encountered and noted well before rediscovering it in the *Symposium*, designates of course a precious object, an ornament, an adornment, but what is most interesting to his eyes, is its *brilliant* aspect:

> What is at stake, is the brilliant meaning, the gallant meaning, because the word *galant* comes from *galer* in old French.

Because of this insistence by Lacan on this 'brilliance' which the *agalma* is, a first shift of meaning is already at work: it is no longer just any object whatsoever that falls under the concept of *agalma*, it is much more rather a *property* of the object. *Agalma*, to put it in Aristotelian terms, is not so much a being as an accident. Less a substantive than an adjective. And nevertheless Lacan brings it forward, and clearly considers it as an *object*, without for a single instant making of it a universal in the medieval mode. It is not a matter, in effect, of considering the *agalma* as 'the' brilliant, a brilliant to which one would lend an existence outside the objects on which it is brought to bear. It is an object which has not the full and stable being that one usually expects of an object, which one believes in advance to be everything at once: a substantive in language, perduring in space and time, endowed with a being that makes it participate in a natural ontology, etc. The *agalma* for its part is presented right away as out of synch as compared to this plenitude.

What is more: having barely been put forward in this way, we see this object energetically attached to the analytic notion of 'part object', but in a very curious way! Following the same thread as this idea of 'gallant', Lacan continues, immediately after the previous quotation:

> It is indeed, it must be said what we analysts have discovered under the name of part object. This function of part object is one of the greatest discoveries of analytic investigation.[8]

This long and learned development on the term *agalma* ends then with a sudden side-step: Lacan had been talking about the 'part object'! But what is this yoke which is declared to be 'one of the greatest discoveries of analytic investigation'? To understand the manoeuvre we have to forget what we

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[8] J. Lacan, *Transference*, unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher, 1 February 1961.

believe we know so well about this part object due to the later work of a certain Jacques Lacan.

On this 1 February 1961, the expression 'part object' had a familiar resonance in the ears of the listeners only because of a certain Melanie Klein who had promoted it for more than 20 years. Then it was spoken about above all in English as *part-object*. And for her, this part object had nothing to do with the *agalma* that Lacan is in the process of sketching out before his listeners. Here is a first complication that it is important to sort out.

THE FALSE FREUDIAN TRAIL

The word 'part' has undoubtedly the dignity of coming from Freud. Since the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* Freud had used it right through his description of the workings of the drive. The problem is that he *never* uses it at the level of the object of the drive, which is always said to be 'indifferent' *(quelconque)* and never 'partial'. What is described as partial, are the 'sources' of the drives, in the very precise sense that with the second pubertal instinctual surge, these sources (oral, anal) are going to have to converge towards the 'primacy of the genital'. This later convergence is what alone makes them partial during the time of infantile sexuality, this partiality remaining one of the constant components of these drives, even once there has been established (very problematically, seen from today) this genital convergence.

The first notch in this construction comes from Karl Abraham who towards the end of his long text *A Short Study of the Development of the Libido, viewed in the light of Mental Disorders* (1924), in the chapter entitled 'Origins and growth of object-love'[9] comes to forge the expression "partial love of the object", starting from which Melanie Klein is going to invent something quite different: her part object.

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[9] Karl Abraham, *Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis* (London: Maresfield Reprints, 1979) p. 490. Lacan gives a quite special place to the case from which Abraham constructed this notion of 'partial love of the object' during the final sessions of the seminar on *Transference,* while he is elaborating its 'specular dynamics'. The case is that of a female patient dreaming about her naked father, *without pubic hair* (so then an incomplete specular image).

This is not the place to enter into the complex relations maintained in this author between her part objects (which at the start closely copy the Freudian oral and anal sources, but multiply very quickly) and the 'total object' which certainly appears during the depressive phase, but is already found to operate in the previous schizo-paranoiac phase.[10] It would be well on the contrary to clearly appreciate *against whom* the irony that Lacan immediately deploys regarding this subject is directed:

> We ourselves have also effaced, as far as we could, what is meant by the partial object; namely, that our first effort was to interpret what had been a marvellous discovery, namely, this fundamentally partial aspect of the object in so far as it is the pivot, centre, key of human desire. This would have been worth dwelling on for a moment. But no, not at all! It was directed towards a dialectic of totalisation, namely, the only one worthy of us, the flat object, the round object, the total object, the spherical object without feet or paws, the whole of the other, the perfect genital object at which, as everyone knows, our love irresistibly comes to term.[11]

The target here is not so much Melanie Klein as the French analysts whom Lacan has so much against at this time, in general those who had just published *Psychoanalysis Today*, in first place Maurice Bouvet. In his attack against the authors who are inventing, in effect, a genital *object* (that Freud himself had not supported), Lacan passes off as a discovery of Freud's something that is nothing other than an invention of his own: the *part object* with a totally unexpected meaning, an object which does not come from any totality, does not belong to nor is not destined to any, and for which the Greek term of *agalma* comes to offer its shelter, in direct succession to the metonymical object, half-object/half-phallus/half-signifier, already squeezed between what in the signified will remain beyond signification, without for all that connecting up with the worldly opacity of the linguistic referent.[12]

This boisterous irony designates, just by itself, what is at stake in this partial, that Lacan presents as the most precious asset of the Freudian analytic tradition, even though no one before him had ever dreamt of producing, under the name of 'object', a 'part' which was not part of any whole, never called to integrate into any 'whole' whatsoever. From this 1

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[10] That the total object was only one object *among others* does not seem to have been exploited by Melanie Klein. This nevertheless appears to be a very remarkable intuition.

[11] J. Lacan, *Transference...*, 1 February 1961.

[12] Something like the obscure link proposed by Peirce in his triadic concept of the sign, between the immediate object (which belongs to the sign) and the dynamic object (which belongs to the world).

February 1961 on we can consider that the **o**-object, present for almost five years in the seminars, has broken its ties with the small other (it is said to be 'non-specular'), and has acquired the determination that leads it towards a consistency that is quite its own: this 'partial' whose status remains to be assured. This is no slight matter, and begins with a sort of brawl with Kant himself.

THE KANTIAN *NIHIL NEGATIVUM*

That Lacan was at that time clearly conscious of the new epistemological implications of his theoretical exigencies can be divined by perusing the whole of the seminar that follows *Transference*, namely, *Identification*. On 28 February 1962, for example, he states:

> It is quite clear in any case that there is no room for admitting as tenable Kant's transcendental aesthetics, despite what I called the *unsurpassable character* of the service he performs for us in his critique, and I hope to make this felt by what I am going to show is to be substituted for it.

What then is the introductory point at which Lacan appeals to Kant? It is so unclear that there is no other recourse than to follow his progress step by step. He found himself that day talking about life drive/death drive and about Freud's necessity to sustain his idea of the life drive by that of narcissism – to the point of closely studying the question of pain in 'On Narcissism: An Introduction'. He then recalls – why the devil, what had got under his skin? – that during a casual conversation a little earlier, he had pointed out to his listener that the experience of one pain blots out that of another, in short that it is difficult to suffer two pains at the same time. He continues:

> One dominates, makes you forget the other, as if the libidinal investment on your own body shows itself to be subject to the same law of *partiality* as I might call it that motivates the relation to the world of objects of desire.

So here then there are collected together, like the umbrella and the sewing machine on the dissecting table, the partiality of the object – a quite recent invention as we have seen – and the operation of the primary processes (libidinal cathexis) in its relationship to the body, when Lacan unceremoniously declares:

> And here is where, as I might say, the reference, the analogy with Kant's investigation is going to be of use to us.

Surprisingly, Lacan first sets about a kind of crude disqualification of Kantian aesthetics. 'It is absolutely not tenable', he says, 'for the simple reason that for him [Kant] it is fundamentally supported by a mathematical argumentation that stems from what one can call the geometricising epoch of mathematics'.[13] And Lacan ironises about the example that Kant gives to illustrate the last instance of his table of nothings, the *leer Gegenstand ohne Begriff*, namely, a rectilinear figure which would only have two sides. And the epicycloid, asks Lacan? Is it not in direct contradiction with such a definition, and has been known since Pascal! The rest of this session remains woolly in its relationship to the Kantian text, Lacan insisting on a certain *ens privativum*, which is enough to indicate some vacillation since Kant never employs such an expression.

In his table of four nothings that closes the 'Note to the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection',[14] Kant aligns in effect in this order *ens rationis* (the empty concept without an object, the banal 'nothing'); *ens imaginarium* (the empty intuition without an object, like time or space, the simple forms of intuition that have no right to the name of 'object'); the *nihil privativum* (the negation of something, therefore the concept of the lack of the object, like cold or shade); and finally the *nihil negativum*, the *leer Gegenstand ohne Begriff*, the empty object without a concept that Lacan had almost disqualified, in an imprecise Kantian vocabulary. The tone changes in the following session, 28 March 1962.

> Every time we analysts have to deal with this relationship of the subject to the nothing, we regularly slip between two slopes: the common slope that tends towards a nothing of destruction ... and the other which is the nihilisation that could be assimilated to Hegelian negativity.

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[13] This word *geometrisant* just by itself announces something: up to Cantor/ Dedekind, the only available continuity was *geometrical* continuity. It was by this fact the only one suitable for representing *irrational* numbers, the numbers that do not result from any *relationship* of numbers. So that $\sqrt{2}$ and all its peers belonged indeed to the geometricising epoch of mathematics. Once Cantor and Dedekind, each in his own way, founded numerical continuity, the question is presented quite differently, and this is how Lacan intends to treat it, from his first attack on Kant. Cf. *infra*, note 18.

[14] I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. N. K. Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933) pp. 295-296.

He continues in a Kantian vocabulary that this time is much more rigorous since he spells out then, in order, Kant's four nothings:

> The nothing that I am trying to get to hold together for you at this initial moment in the establishment of the subject is something else. The subject introduces the nothing as such and this nothing is to be distinguished from any classical negativity [this is the Kantian *'ens rationis'*], from any imaginary being which is that of a being whose existence is impossible [this is the Kantian *'ens imaginarium'*], the famous centaur which brings the logicians, indeed the metaphysicians to a halt at the beginning of their path towards science, which is not either the *ens privativum* [here Lacan repeats his slip from the previous session], which is properly speaking what Kant in the definition of his four nothings, admirably called the *nihil negativum*, namely, to use his own terms: *leere Gegenstand ohne Begriff*, an empty object, but let us add, without concept, without any grip on it being possible.[15]

In the space of a month, Kant has gone from what is highlighted as a zero in mathematics to an 'admirable invention' in connection with the same thing, this 'nothing, this 'empty object without a concept' which interests Lacan in his completely new approach to 'partiality' because it offers a refuge for an object which, by definition, escapes from the unity of the concept, from this minimal grasp which puts into relationship anything whatsoever with the one, when we try to think about it. What is at stake then is indeed to combat the Kant of the transcendental aesthetics, but not without borrowing from him in passing what allows there to be sustained the term 'object' by preventatively disengaging it from any relationship to the one, under the privative form of an absence of concept.

This strange recourse by Lacan to one of the most eccentric points of the great Kantian corpus is too often neglected on the pretext that he does not come back to it once he had gone past the quotations that we have just read; but this is to condemn oneself to not understanding what is at stake for him vis-à-vis unity in the course of the constitution of his partial object, from its very first steps. This object must not pass either under the Caudine Forks of specular unity, nor under those of the unary; the too welcoming inn of the concept must therefore be immediately withdrawn from it because it would bring it back, silently, under the auspices of the most classical unity. But why does Lacan on several occasions and with a gap of more than a month, while very obviously he has re-read the Kantian text very carefully, make this same slip which makes him invent an *ens privativum*?

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[15] The words between [ ] are mine. GLG.

LACAN/ FREUD: THE PRIVATIVE OBJECT

With such an expression, undeniably his own, he is holding then, against Kant, that there is here a being, and not a nothing, even though the *Critique of Pure Reason* presents it straight out as a nothing coming from a lack:

> Reality is *some thing*, negation is nothing, namely, a concept of the lack of the object, like shade or cold *(nihil privativum)*.[16]

The matter is clarified if one considers that this lack of object constitutes a quasi-definition of the Freudian object, which will never be anything other than the shadow carried over from the mythical object of the first satisfaction. This Freudian object takes on, in the eyes of Lacan, the status of lost object (and phallic lack is its flagship) *because* Freud thinks of his object under the category of *nihil privativum*, of the 'object empty of a concept', as Kant also puts it, understanding of course here a positive concept, referring to a classical object, which in this instance, is missing. Negation in this case has impacted on the positive object, and there results this *nihil privativum*, but this operation itself leaves intact the category of object and its ineradicable relationship to the one.

Here then I am making the hypothesis that the repeated slip by Lacan on this point comes from the fact that he reads 'Freud' in the word 'lack' present in Kant, and fabricates by this fact this curious *ens privativum*, this object of privation.[17] Now the nothing that he is trying to promote is differentiated from the 'Freudian lack' as well as from 'Hegelian negativity' that we have seen him denounce as being both foreign to his purposes.[18] In short, he sees himself as being alone on the side of the *nihil*; he relegates the other (Freud, Hegel, Bouvet and company), each in his own way, to the side of being, of the *ens*, at

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[16] I. Kant, op. cit., pp. 295-296.

[17] Lacan had previously defined, in a table of his own, three types of object: that of frustration, that of privation (certainly at the origin of this *ens privativum*), and that of castration which is that aimed at by this *new look* part.

[18] We can also divine from this that the 'we analysts' that curiously punctuates many of the quotations that we have just raid, designates rather...the other analysts, those whom Lacan intends to oppose with his invention, those who have understood nothing about Freud's inspired 'part', who are mistaken about the nothing, etc.

the very least to a simple syntactic negation of being, while he is striving to sustain the paradoxical *existence* of a 'nothing' cleansed of any *essence*.

TOWARDS NON-RELATIONSHIP

Pressing on now to get to what pushed Lacan, thanks to an audacious conception of non-relationship, to radicalise the wager he had inaugurated at the beginning of the 1960's, by this innovation of an unprecedented partial, I will leave here in relative shadow two dimensions which are the object of numerous sessions of the seminar between 1961 and 1967: the one that through the Fibonacci series, tries to tie together the relationships of the **o**-object and numerical unity; the other which, playing on topology, offers him a definition of specularity – the inversion of the orientation of a surface in its specular image – which allows there to be envisaged the non-specularity of this very **o**-object otherwise than in the style of the vampire (known for not having an image in the mirror).

A serious reading of these two working axes of Lacan in the 1960's would nevertheless not be superfluous. It would allow there to be better isolated the conditions encountered by Lacan in the establishing of the **o**-object as he knew he needed it, and that no other tradition, either philosophical or mathematical, offered to him on a plate. I will content myself here with a remark relative to the Fibonacci series.

This will in effect allow Lacan to indicate, thanks to a daring metaphor, the relation between signifier and **o**-object. The law of composition of the series is expressed in modern terms:

$$U_n = U_{n-1} + U_{n-2}$$

the two first terms being equal to unity. There is thus produced the following numerical series:

1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, 233, 377, 610, 987, 1597, 2584, etc.

The arithmetical ratio of this progression, U_{n-1}/U_n proves to be equal to 0.61803989..., in other words the golden number, encountered by Euclid in

his division of the segment unity (which he calls ‘the whole’!) into ‘mean and extreme ratio’. Now this number – that Lacan is quick to name *o* – presents astonishing properties, among others it is the same whether it divides the unity or is added to it: 1/a = 1+a. One can certainly not say that it does not entertain any relationship with unity – and in this sense it is incorrect to take over the **o**-object [*l’objet (a)*] under this aspect –but at least it is the only one to propose such a bizarre relation with the one. There is that already. But there is more, and Lacan echoes it, rather tardily, at a moment when he is ready to abandon this series and its astonishing properties. On 11 June 1969, towards the end of the seminar *From an Other to the other*, he acknowledges to his listeners:

> If I am talking to you about the Fibonacci series, it is because of the following. That in the measure that the figures that represent it increase, the relationship Un-1/Un is more and more close, more and more rigorously strictly equal to what we have called, and not by chance although in another context, by the same sign that we designate the **o**- object. This little irrational **o**, equal to $\frac{1}{2}(1+\sqrt{5})$, is something that is perfectly stabilised as a relationship in the measure that there is generated the representation of the subject by a numerical signifier with regard to another numerical signifier.

This was in effect where he wanted to get to: the Fibonacci series offers us the elegant metaphor of a signifying series which is found to approximate always better in its development to the same value, which *will never belong to the series*, and maintains with unity the strange relationships that we have just seen. In short: the more the signifying series is extended, the better there is circumscribed, without ever touching it, what is at stake in the **o**-object, already defined also as ‘object cause of desire’ (to say nothing here about its other subjective uses). A whole programme for a psychoanalyst set on giving to his listeners a certain conception of analytic treatment, since the idea of an *intrinsic* end to the transferential adventure is already inscribed in such a metaphor.

If it articulates in a (little too) happy way signifying production and the constant escape of this **o**-object which has taken over from the metonymical object, the Fibonacci series remains powerless to generate any non-relationship to the one which would express the value that Lacan intends to give to his ‘part’. In this year of 1969, this series invoked here and there for almost 10 years had been squeezed dry, and must hand over to something else for there to be said what remained silent with it.

I will be still more allusive about the topological efforts of Lacan who, being helped by one of the properties of the specular image (the inversion of left/right relationships), is going to name as 'non-specular' the surfaces, well known by mathematicians at that time under the name of 'non-orientable' surfaces, which do not possess this reflexive property of inverting orientation: the Moebius strip, the Klein bottle and the cross-cap are thus going to be unfurled in the seminars of the 1960's to try to give a place to everything which, in analytic practice and the conception of the treatment, escapes from the tentacular grasp of the specular image.

Whatever may be the intrinsic merits of these numerical and topological resources, I start from the idea that none of them was able to offer to Lacan the material to sustain the intuit ion guiding him since, at least, the seminar on the *Transference* and its promotion of an unprecedented partial. That the object as we must conceive of it following the thread of Freudian experience was to be excluded from any relationship to the one, required much more than the discovery of a knowledge that was already there, ready to welcome such a thing.

This intuition of a partial ungraspable in the pincers of unity has for Lacan mathematical roots,[19] but it has also on its side a poetic and political force that it would be a pity to ignore, because this is where it derives the essential of its force, well before finding the slightest clinical relevance. Unity possesses of course at least two aspects (see *Parmenides* where Plato enumerates them, among others), those that Lacan for his part distinguishes as 'unary' and 'unian'. But here the partial that is being profiled is said to escape both from the one and the other: its obstinate quality of object allows it – we don't

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[19] It is a matter of founding a new 'ir-rational', since the word signifies precisely 'non-relationship'. Except that since the advances of Dedekind in *Numbers: What are they and what use are they?*, the irrationals are integrated, as organised 'cuts' in the body of real numbers and therefore maintain relationships of order with all the other numbers. They are no longer 'irrational' except in name, and with whole numbers and the rationals (as well as the transcendentals), they form the 'numerical continuum', which has henceforth taken over from the *geometrical* continuum. Lacan can no longer then base himself in any way on $\sqrt{2}$ and the diagonal of the square to get across the 'without-relationship' of his part. Bye-bye Meno!

really know how – not to fall under any of these ‘ones’. It presents itself then as a perfect cartoon character, a mongrel Robin Hood: liberated with its first steps from any slavery to a concept, rebellious to the ‘knot of imaginary servitude’ of the specular image, immediately linked to the drive and to desire, it is ready to gambol to left and to right, and in this very way to accomplish for its Gepetto, its inventor, multiple and varied tasks. Except that, like all these extravagant little characters, it has its own requirements: *It must be nourished in non-relationship*, since its destiny obliges it not to enter into relationship with the one (which would bring it back to the concept, like the Prodigal Son). Hence the necessity of writing such a thing, otherwise Lacan knew that he would find himself in a poetic-mystical position that, certainly he did not despise, but in which he was not decently allowed to establish himself, given his practical credos, and his concern for rationality.

THE COMING OF THE FORMULAE OF SEXUATION

Here I am not going to carry out the scrupulous textual tracking that would lead us from a first (and very risky) ‘There is no sexual act’ (since *The Logic of Phantasy)*, to ‘There is no sexual relationship’ which is spread throughout *Of a Discourse that might not be a Semblance* and *... or worse*. I will content myself with marking some key moments in this progress that will culminate in the formulae called ‘of sexuation’, because it is they that try to write what is involved in the sexual non-relationship. The business begins with *Of a Discourse that might not be a Semblance*, particularly in the session of 17 February 1971.

It is not the first time that Lacan articulates the expression according to which ‘there is no sexual relationship in the speaking being’, but that day he is going to go further into detail of the considerations that produce such a statement. He invokes the signs used by modern biology to designate the masculine and the feminine, then the Chinese Yin and Yang, and still other couples that all aspire to express a form of sexual bi-partition. But what objects to such a binary classification, what ensures that it is ‘untenable to remain in any way at this duality as sufficient’, is once again the function described as the phallus, which always acts as a hindrance to counting on the base of two:

> [...] this function of the phallus renders henceforth untenable this sexual bipolarity, and untenable in a way that literally volatilises what is involved in terms of what can be written about this relationship.[20]

If from 1956 on, this phallus sufficed, qua 'third element which is an element' (cf. above) to raise an objection to the subject/ object couple, it is no longer under the heading of 'element' that it intervenes here, but as 'function of the phallus', and soon the 'phallic function' *(fonction phallique)*. This feminising and this adjectiving are heavy with consequences, for we no longer are dealing with an object (symbolic, mythical) but indeed with a relationship since a function, in the mathematical or logical vocabulary that Lacan is so fond of (he borrows this 'function' especially from Frege), is nothing other than a putting into relationship of elements belonging to two disjoined series. The 'phallic function' is then, in principle and by definition, the writing of a relationship. That is even all it is. Nevertheless the *two series* that Lacan links or distinguishes by this function of the phallus are in no case men and women, but speaking beings on the one hand, and enjoyment on the other. This phallic function henceforth names the relationship of each speaking being, each *parlêtre*, to enjoyment. Lacan can henceforth add that the phallus understood in this way 'in no way designates the organ described as the penis with its physiology'.

'ALL THE WOMEN'

As often when he introduces something new, Lacan likes to recall that he had already said it a long time ago. Hence a reminder of 'The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of its Power', a text in which he opposed, on the exact point of the phallus in effect, the fact of 'being' it (reserved rather for women in this context), and that of 'having' it reserved rather for men (but in order to have it, one must again accept not being it – cf. a certain type of impotence, and in order to be it again one must accept not having it – cf. a certain mode of frigidity). What is now announced appears nevertheless more promising in the measure that Lacan talks here about a 'substitution for the sexual relationship of what is called the *sexual law*'. Now what do we see appearing in the minutes that follow this 'substitution'? Nothing other than the presentation of the universal and particular, affirmative and negative propositions given by Peirce (and presented by Lacan himself during the

[20] Lacan, *On a Discourse that might not be a Semblance*, 17 February 1971. Unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher.

seminar on *Identification* almost 10 years previously), which are now going to be used by him to write this 'sexual law', which aspires to articulate the relationship of each sex to enjoyment – to make then of the phallic function what will allow him to differentiate man and woman, to construct this difference, and thus to cease holding it as a primary (Biblical) given on which all the rest could be constructed. This recourse to logic is preceded by a rapid but crucial mention of *Totem and Taboo*:

> The maintaining, the maintaining in analytic discourse of this residual myth that is called the Oedipus complex, God knows why, which is in fact that of *Totem and Taboo,* in which there is inscribed this myth that is entirely invented by Freud, of the primordial father in so far as he enjoys all the women, it is all the same here that we ought to question a little further from the point of view of logic and of writing, what it means. It is a long time since I introduced here the schema of Peirce [...].[21]

Here we have pronounced, as coming from the Freud of *Totem and Taboo* who can do nothing about it,[22] an 'all the women' which is going to reveal itself to be crucial in the operations that follow inasmuch as Lacan intends to deny it energetically and to sustain that nothing of the kind exists. He can subsequently hook this assertion onto something or other about feminine enjoyment, but the starting point is Freudian: it is Jacques Lacan's way of writing the Oedipal myth. 'All the women': not there. Starting from there, he is going to be able to deploy his questioning vis-à-vis the standing of the universal.

> What the myth of the enjoyment of *all the women* designates, is that there are not *all the women*. There is no universal of the woman. Here is what is posited by a questioning of the phallus, and not of sexual relationship, as regards what is involved in feminine enjoyment. It is starting from these statements that a certain number of questions can be radically displaced.[23]

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[21] Ibid., p. 15.

[22] Twice, once in *Totem and Taboo* and again in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud uses the adjective 'all' for the women in so far as they are supposed to be the possession of the chief of the horde. But this feature in no way constitutes for him the axis of the affair, and is both times taken up in the reference to Darwin who, for his part, affirms that the chief of the horde had appropriated all the women *(sich alle Weibchen aneignete)* [S. Freud, *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistiche Religion*, *Studienausgabe* IX (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 1974) p. 575]. In *Totem and Taboo* the unique mention of this point is found in a quotation of Darwin (English: SE XIII, p. 141; German: *Studienausgabe* IX, p. 411).

[23] Ibid. Underlining mine.

A great trumpet blast, but we are still far from seeing clearly here. The immediately following passage, which deals with the fact that truth and falsity are only treatable in the dimension of the written, insists on the same point without making it any more convincing. All that we have for the moment is on the side described as 'man', a universal that one can describe as classical and on the other, on the side of 'woman', because of this very partial mention, for the moment of *Totem and Taboo*, the negation of another universal, the declaration, for the moment strange, of its inexistence.[24]

THE FIRST WAY OF WRITING THE FORMULAE

It is then, towards the end of the following session, that of 17 March 1971, that Lacan takes up again what he had brought from Peirce, about the phallus qua relationship to enjoyment, marked by the letter Φ and the 'quantors' (or quantifiers), in order to begin to write all of that with the literal equipment of modern – let us say: post-Fregean logic:

the universal affirmative: $\forall x.\, \Phi x$ (for all x, phi of x);
the particular affirmative: $\exists x.\, \Phi x$ (there exists an x such that phi of x).

Having got to the universal negative *(e)*, the first difficulty;

> $\forall x.\, \overline{\Phi x}$ I want to express that this is a negative. How can I do so? I am struck by the fact that it has never been really articulated the way I am going to do it. What you have to do is to put a bar of negation above the Φx and not at all, as is usually done above both. And here, it is on the $\exists x$ that you have to put the bar ($\overline{\exists x}$.Φ*x*, particular negative).

So then we have the series:

$$\forall x.\, \Phi x \ (a);\ \exists x.\, \Phi x \ (i);\ \forall x.\, \overline{\Phi x} \ (e);\ \ \overline{\exists x}.\, \Phi x \ (o).$$[25]

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[24] Why would there not be such an 'all the women'? Because of the Oedipus complex which places the mother under a prohibition? But the father also falls under a prohibition! Why at the point that we are at, should there be an 'all men', and not an 'all women'?

[25] In the syllogistic tradition the universal affirmative is named *a*, the particular affirmative *i*, the universal negative *e*, and the particular negative *o*. This notation will be followed in what follows.

It is with the negation of the universal that Lacan says he has invented what he almost immediately names the 'non-value of the universal negative' (we know that he has already in his mind 'there is no *all women*'), a non-value from which he draws by way of a final commentary, this assertion: 'it is here [with the universal negative as he understands it], that there functions an essential cut, well then it is even around this that there is articulated what is involved in the sexual relationship'.

We note right away – we who know what the Lacan of 17 March 1971 does not yet know – that the bar of negation does not fall on that day on the quantifier to produce the famous 'not-all' (written $\overline{\forall x}.\Phi x$), but only on the function itself, involving henceforth this $\forall x.\overline{\Phi x}$ whose existence will be short.[26] This latter writing is certainly not classical since it denies, not the entirety of the universal affirmation (to be written $\overline{\forall x.\Phi x}$) but says that for any *x*, it must be denied that Φx is the case.

Here there is situated already the uncoupling which, on this 17 March, still remains to be correctly written. At this point, Lacan remembers Peirce, even as he is proposing to rewrite Aristotle (but we will soon see what in Aristotle) with the function and the quantification invented by Frege. At that moment, he again makes a big deal of what he says he owes to this same Peirce, namely, that the absence of any stroke (the universal negative) confirms the universal affirmative: every stroke is vertical.[27] He omits, remarkably, to note that the absence of any stroke does not verify only the universal affirmative, but anything and everything since, as the mathematicians know, if there is no *x*, if $x \in \varnothing$, *x* verifies any property whatsoever. The point that Lacan wants to underline, on the contrary, is that the quantifier of the universal, $\forall$, does not involve any necessity as regards existence, over against the quantifier rightly described as 'existential', $\exists$, which for its part implies the existence of what he will soon name elsewhere in his teaching as the 'at-least-one' *(au-moins-un)* indeed *hommoinzun*.

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[26] This 'wavering' of the Lacanian formulae is precious, not for itself (the aesthetics of erudition), but for the liberty it gives with respect to written texts, that too quickly become canonical. Translation (Freud) and transcription (Lacan) often allow there to be found this wavering which authorises the question: 'Why did he say it like that rather than otherwise? How did he get to there?'.

[27] In other words he already conceives as compatible (and not contradictory) the universal affirmative and the universal negative. This must soon be remembered when we enter into the logical square of the 'maximal' particular according to Brunschwig.

∀ AND THE QUESTION OF BELONGING

So then when we say (but more again when we write) 'for all men', this 'all men' which does not imply any existence, shows a quite singular status since we are going to predicate certain things about this being. Where is it? What is it? 'When it is subject', says Lacan on 19 May 1971, 'it implies a function of the universal which only gives it as support very specifically its symbolic status'. Here then is posited the question of belonging, in so far as it is not enough to settle the question of existence.

The operator 'for all' (∀) only has meaning in effect by referring the letter that follows it to an individual by which it is then written that it 'belongs' to a determined set. It is not 'indifferent' in itself, as Frege had already pointed out,[28] it results from any designation whatsoever in the set to which it belongs, which poses in a decisive way the question of the set in question. To employ this quantifier, is ipso facto to make the hypothesis that this set – that Frege called the 'range of values' of the variable – well and truly exists, and that it is therefore permitted to take from it one element or another provided one has the right pincers (the right function, the one it satisfies). By showing that such sets do not always exist (to the great surprise of Frege), Bertrand Russell raised in a decisive fashion the question of paradoxes,[29] and Hilbert himself, in the program that he subsequently elaborated to settle the question of the foundations of mathematics, had taken the initial decision to get rid of this quantifier and the domain that it silently covers since both, in their way, reintroduced the question of the infinite by the fact of the belonging of the element thus isolated to an infinite set.[30]

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[28] "Certainly there is indeed a reason to speak about indetermination, but 'indeterminate' is not a descriptive epitaph of 'number', it is rather an adverb modifying 'indicate'. We will not say that *n* designates an indeterminate number, but that it indicates numbers in an indeterminate manner" ("What is a function?" in *Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege* [Oxford, Blackwell, 1993] p. 110).

[29] Which Lacan was very fond of redoing on his own account because he also has in hand a domain peopled by individuals (the x of the formulae on the right) whom he claims, against the received opinion, escape from any collectivisation, any putting into a set that could be covered by an operator of the type ∀ exactly on the model of the famous 'sets that do not belong to themselves'.

[30] On all of these points, G. Le Gaufey, *L'incomplétude du symbolique* (Paris: EPEL, 1991) pp. 61-120.

I have tried to show that the subjective note of the universal stems, for each one, from the mystery of his strange assent to the idea that one day he will die.[31] On the one hand narcissism has a fundamental incapacity to envisage such a thing, and on the other there is an unqualified certainty. If, instead of being left in the dark by such a split, we approach the certitude at stake in this instance, we see that the 'all' that it is a question of joining up with in recognising the absolute absence of exception to this rule of the species, is equivalent to eliminating oneself mentally from belonging to the order of the living, and thus a fortiori from the *species* that belongs to it. 'All men are mortal' only has meaning from the moment when one who says "I" accepts belonging to this set which says, for his part, in his quasi definition, that he is ridding himself of himself since to belong to it amounts to accepting to abstract himself from it. 'All men', far from empirically collecting the living in order to assemble them into an 'all' into which one would only have to go and be inscribed, is only obtained by *liquidating the narcissistic exception that I am* in the question of this 'all'. Induction here only succeeds in the measure that it manages to swallow up its inductor, and every man consents, from his deliberate start in this matter, to his full and entire belonging to the species being, in its essence, a thought event by which he absents himself in advance from the all to which he aspires to belong. I only arrive as 'all men' in the measure that this any man that I am, that I want to be, is capable of drawing a line over his existence, while he is alive.

On 19 May 1971, Lacan, in order to make himself understood on this point, does not launch himself into such aporias. He uses the roots of second degree equations, which do not all belong to real numbers (since some, the roots of negative numbers, belong to imaginary numbers), in order to make it understood that one can meet cases in which the particular affirmative and the particular negative, far from excluding one another, are in agreement (we will soon see all the importance of this nuance). It nevertheless remains that, in every case, when we write that any element whatsoever 'belongs' to a determined set, we posit such a set as existing. No $\forall$ without the set that it is supposed to cover. And if no set...

Starting from the negation brought to bear on 'all women', Lacan concludes to the inexistence of 'The woman' as a strictly symbolic entity, and

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[31] G. Le Gaufey, "Mourir pour que 'tous' tienne", *Les Lettres de la SPF*, no. 9 (SPF-Campagne-Premiere, 2003) pp. 135-146.

by that alone there vanishes the possibility of writing a relationship between an entity possessing a set of values to be covered (men) and another which does not possess such a ‘range of Fregean values’ (women). Because there is no set of all women (in a way that is basically homogenous to the fact that there is ‘no set of all the sets that do not belong to themselves’), there cannot be ‘any woman’ (any one at all in so far as she is supposed to belong to the set ‘Women’), and so then there is no ‘The’ woman. QED (all of this under the starting condition – which for its part is enigmatic – that ‘there is no all women’).

THE MIGRATION OF NEGATION: DISCORDANCE AND FORECLOSURE

From this there derives the importance of the operator of negation in Lacan’s eyes, to the point that he does not manage all that quickly to situate it correctly with regard to his own requirements. By first denying the function and not the quantifier (March 1971), he was still searching, as he acknowledges in all simplicity on 19 May 1971:

> [...] I slipped quite naturally, by trusting the memory of what it is a matter of re-articulating, I slipped over to writing, namely, that the function, with its little bar above, symbolised something completely inept with respect to what I had effectively to say. You have perhaps noticed that, it never entered my head, at least up to the present, nor yours either, to think that the bar of negation perhaps had something to do, to say, not in the right-hand column but in the left. Let us try. What advantage can we draw from it?

And here then is a negation that falls no longer on a proposition, namely, on a quantified function, but sometimes on a quantifier (producing the particular negative), sometimes on the function (producing the universal negative), in a way that is inverted as compared to the first writings of 17 March. Lacan (following here Robert Blanché or his own inspiration) writes then:

$$\overline{\forall x}.\,\Phi x \quad \text{and} \quad \exists x.\,\overline{\Phi x}$$

> There is a world, Lacan continues, between the two negations, the one which ensures that I do not write it, that I exclude it, and, as someone who was a rather subtle grammarian formerly expressed it, it is *forclusive*. The function will not be written. *I want to know nothing about it*. The other is *discordant*.

We might hesitate a little as regards knowing how to distribute the adjectives, but on 8 December 1971, right at the beginning of *...or worse*,

Lacan could not be clearer: ‘Our *not-all* is discordance’. How to understand these grammarian details in such a setting?

Rather simply: the discordant, as its name indicates rather well, and for once Damourette and Pichon do not have recourse to their learned farrago, is what introduces discord, discordance, disagreement It is a way, not yet of denying (this will be the work of foreclosure), but to mark a separation, a distance introduced by the word *ne*. Damourette and Pichon read its finest and most expressive nuance in the occasional use of this *ne* after the expression *avant que* (before) a turn of phrase, they say, that was gaining ground in the French of their time:

> *Il sera parti avant que tu arrives*; *II sera parti avant que tu n’arrives* [Both translate as ‘He will be gone before you come’].

The first use signals the brute fact of coming; the second reinforces the subjunctive called for in French by the expression *avant que*, thus underlining the possibility of the fact, more than the fact itself.

Foreclosure, for its part, comes in these indispensable complements of negation such as: *pas*, *rien*, *jamais*, *aucun*, *personne*, *plus*, *guère*, *mie*, *goutte*, etc. [no, nothing, never, any, no one, anymore, scarcely, at all, anything, etc.]. They apply, Damourette and Pichon continue, ‘to facts that the speaker does not envisage as forming part of reality’.[32] In strong opposition then to the discordant which for its part envisages very well that what it is brought to bear on forms part of reality, while introducing into it decisive nuances: *pastout* (not all) does not say that there is nothing, but that what there is does not give form to any whole.

These grammatical details are not enough, to my way of thinking, to give all its clarity to what Lacan then undertakes in order to subvert the meaning and the import of the universal negative. They nevertheless allow it to be seen right away that it is no longer a matter of producing a couple in opposition of the true/false type, but that the universal affirmative and the universal negative henceforth maintain a sort of commerce, just as, in the same way, discordance and foreclosure are at the basis of the riches of

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[32] Damourette et Pichon, *Des mots à la pensée*. Tome I (Paris: Ed. D’Artrey) p. 138, section 115. Lacan had already given a substantial commentary on this around the sentence *Je crains qu’il ne vienne* (I am afraid that he will come), to the point of making of this *ne* the sign closest to the stating subject. Cf. 17 January 1962 in *Identification*.

negation in French inasmuch as they situate different postures in the rejection and the exclusion of an action, posited in another way in the proposition.

The *'pas-tout'* (not-all) is original in that it affirms setting aside the 'all', in other words the 'anyone' *(quelconque)* which, for its part, implied nothing as regards the existence of the element that it served to highlight. This 'not-all', henceforth written in a stable way as $\overline{\forall x}.\Phi x$, introduces then a remarkable uncertainty into the direct and simple opposition between existence and inexistence because it writes a discordance between existence and universal. Such a 'not-all' presents itself as a sort of intermediary link between the universal affirmative $\forall x.\Phi x$, which opens up the field of existence without for all that predicating it, and the particular affirmative as Lacan henceforth writes it since, in the same way as he tipped over the stroke of negation onto the quantifier to produce the 'not-all', he has at the same time tipped over the stroke of negation onto the function to write the particular affirmative in the form: $\exists x.\overline{\Phi x}$: there is one (at least one) to say no to the phallic function.[33]

We thus progress with Lacan, through what he calls (8 December 1971) 'two quite different forms of negation', from a stated distance with regard to a function (through which there is discordance) to his entire rejection, his 'foreclosure', reinforced by the fact that there does indeed exist one who sustains this extreme of negation, which is henceforth brought to bear, no longer on the proposition (which would then be written $\overline{\exists x}.\overline{\Phi x}$) but on the function: $\exists x.\overline{\Phi x}$.

On 3 March 1972 in the course of *The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst*, Lacan again gives some details about the value to be accorded to his formulae:

> It is clear that it is not because I used a formulation derived from the irruption of mathematics into logic that I use it in quite the same way. [...]

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[33] It should be underlined here that before taking on some totemic father or other, this writing of the particular affirmative, because of the negation brought to bear on the function, respects the consistency of the logical square of the maximal particular as Blanché, for his part, had written it (without worrying in the slightest about *Totem and Taboo*): *not-universally not-p*. Lacan, in a decisive movement, replaces *not-universally* by *there exists*, while still maintaining the negation on the function. The particular affirmative thus enters, as it ought, into the frame of the *maximal* particular, in contradiction with the universal affirmative, and this not just because of a strange property of the 'phallic function' or the avatars of 'castration' in human beings *(les trumains)*.

> the way I make use of it is such that it is in no way expressible in terms of the logic of propositions.

Having thus arranged his formulae:

$$\exists x.\overline{\Phi x} \qquad \overline{\exists x}.\overline{\Phi x}$$
$$\forall x.\Phi x \qquad \overline{\forall x}.\Phi x$$

he continues:

> [...] in the two cases, at these two levels (the 'lower' and the 'upper') which are as such independent, and it is not at all a matter of making one the negation of the other, but on the contrary of one an obstacle to the other. [...] Far from one opposing the other as its negation, it is quite the contrary from their subsistence, here very precisely as negated, that there is an *x* that can be sustained in this beyond of the phallic function, and on the other side, there is not one for the simple reason that a woman cannot be castrated [...]. Far then from the relation of negation forcing us to choose, it is on the contrary that far from having to choose we have to divide up, that the two sides are legitimately opposed to one another.

THE ARTICLE BY BRUNSCHWIG: MAXIMAL PARTICULAR AND MINIMAL PARTICULAR

So now we have been warned about how futile it would be to make these formulae function as opposing couples which would *ipso facto* bring back again the original duality from which we are trying to escape. Lacan does not use any microscope to approach masculine and feminine enjoyment in order to write their differential formulae; on the contrary he attempts to put in peril the (negative) universal which he has been drumming in for a long time as not being suitable to capture in its nets the phallic function as he has fabricated it. We would only have then a partial view of the global operation that he is attempting at the level of this universal if we were not to enquire in the text that played here, in an undeniable way, the role of source, namely the article by Jacques Brunschwig published in 1969 in No. 10 of the *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, an article entitled 'The Particular Proposition and

the Proofs of Non-Conclusiveness in Aristotle'.[34] Lacan gives the reference, but in going through the sessions where he treats this theme, we see that his debt to Brunschwig is obvious (his references to certain writings of Aristotle in Greek all come from the article).

Brunschwig right away draws attention to the problem linked to the particular proposition in Aristotle: in the natural tongue, it could in effect be understood in two different senses, one described as *maximal*, and the other *minimal*, a double meaning that Aristotle notes in his quest aimed at differentiating the forms of syllogism which allow a conclusion to be drawn in every case, and those that prohibit, just as formally, any valid conclusion whatsoever. How separate them out from one another? Aristotle works on many occasions, either by the 'proof by contrasting instances' or the 'proof by the indeterminate'.

The two meanings, 'maximal' and 'minimal', are woven into a different relationship of the particular to the universal. When in effect I affirm that 'some A belong to B' two possibilities remain open: either all the A belong to B, in which case it is also true, a fortiori, about some; or 'not-all the A belong to B' and in this case only some belong to it, the others do not belong to it, setting aside with this the truth of the universal affirmative. The first meaning of the particular, which is in agreement with the universal of the same order (affirmative or negative), is said by Brunschwig to be minimal; the second, which excludes the truth of the universal of the same meaning is said to be *maximal*. If, in the *minimal* meaning of the particular, I affirm that 'some A belong to B', then all do; if on the contrary I affirm the particular in its *maximal* meaning, 'some A belong to B', I rule out by this step that 'all' belong to it, only 'not-all' do so (this was the case of the roots of second degree equations mentioned by Lacan on 19 May 1971).

In following Brunschwig, we see Aristotle getting entangled in the difficulties of his research into procedures which would allow there to be isolated with some certainty the forms of conclusive syllogisms independently of the concepts applied to them, and so then in a sense that we would call today strictly formal. The whole article comes down to showing how, in the course of his work, Aristotle never stopped excluding the maximal meaning of the particular, understanding that this meaning

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[34] Jacques Brunschwig, *La proposition particulière et les preuves de non-concluance chez Aristote, Cahiers pour L'analyse* 10. Travaux du Cercle d'Epistemologie de l'ENS (Paris: Le Seuil, 1969) pp. 3-26.

generated by itself most of the difficulties that he encountered in his efforts on this point. Brunschwig concludes his demonstrative movement on this point by these lines:

> This clarification of the situation corresponds to a now total liquidation of the maximal connotations of the particular. The logical particular [the one then at which Aristotle ended up] had some trouble in killing off the 'natural' particular [that of the natural tongue, which leaves open the two meanings of the particular]; but it ended up by getting there.

The matter is still clearer a little later, when Brunschwig goes into the details of the proof described as 'by indetermination', in which Aristotle makes the indetermination of the particular, its double maximal/minimal operate in order to manage to settle the doubtful cases of non-conclusiveness. Brunschwig writes, to finish with this matter:

> One is then logically led to suppose that Aristotle must have sometimes used the indetermination of the particular *without explicitly saying so*; this way of doing things, if it were verified, would allow it to be said this time that the maximal particular is not simply dead, but well and truly buried.[35]

The very technical lines that follow verify this hypothesis and we then understand that Lacan is striving to pick up the challenge of what Aristotle, according to Brunschwig, had to drop in order to make his proofs of non-conclusiveness consistent. Over against the Stagyrite, he finds in effect in this 'maximal particular', the instrument which, instead of giving access to a universal 'all' which embarrasses him in more ways than one, opens up for him the path of a plurality without closure, and thus *of an existence without essence* – the very one that he wants to validate on the woman side.[36]

LACAN AND HIS MAXIMAL PARTICULAR: THE NOT-ALL

Lacan thus privileges this *maximal* form of particular which objects to the universal while affirming at the same time that if some *x*'s possess the property, one would be wrong to conclude from this that, consequently, they all do. Quite the contrary: *not-all* possess it. It is with respect to this that we must again make an effort of comprehension: classically, if not-all possess it, and at the same time some others do not possess it, the

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[35] Jacques Brunschwig, op. cit., p. 22.

[36] It will be remembered that the **o**-object is for its part also stripped in principle of all essence, otherwise it would naturally fall under the concept.

conjunction then of the elements that possess it and of those that do not possess it brings back the whole of the universal. It is here that Lacan intervenes anew to consolidate his not-all with its critical value with respect to the universal. He writes that at the same time, in the right-hand formulae, if not-all possess it, there are none that do not possess it:

$$\text{if } \overline{\forall x}.\Phi x \quad \text{then} \quad \overline{\exists x}.\overline{\Phi x}$$

Here the not-all reigns in the sense that there is in this respect no *x* that does not satisfy the function Φ, and that nevertheless those who do satisfy it do not constitute the *totality* of elements that satisfy it. Here is the difficulty[37]: to think that there is no exception ($\overline{\exists x}.\overline{\Phi x}$), that there are none to say no, and that nevertheless the collection of those which satisfy, which say yes, does not reunite under the aegis of some universal or other from which one could draw, in an 'indeterminate' way, an element that one could then inscribe in the particular of the same order. To exemplify by a verb: if not-all say yes, there are none to say no, and of course, there is no question of saying anything other than yes or no,[38] silence here is not an option.

Lacan ends up then at this paradox that his universal negative is henceforth written with the help of the negation of the existential quantifier ($\overline{\exists x}$), while his particular negative, strictly 'maximal', is written for its part with the help of the negation of the universal quantifier ($\overline{\forall x}$). A way of signifying that the 'not-all' does not allow any 'some' that would contradict it to overlap. The absence of exception that the universal negative affirms in a movement of double negation – at once on the existential quantifier and on the function – is offered as the indispensable complement of a maximal particular, since it contradicts the opposite universal: if 'not-all' say yes, it is ruled out that all should do so, or that there should be one who does not do so – because the universal negative, affirms it on its side: not one who does not.

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[37] In a very Russellian style: the sets that do not belong to themselves exist (they are legion) but that does not allow it to be thought for all that that they are grouped together, on the basis of this common feature, in a set of which each one would be an element.

[38] Here one must get rid of the idea that they would not 'entirely' satisfy it (i.e. that a woman would never, as such, be 'entirely taken up into the phallic function', etc. etc.) and that this would be the reason why Lacan would mark them with his 'not-all'.

HOW NOT TO FALL BACK INTO THE BINARY

The core of the operation, both on the left-hand side and the right-hand side (to stop conferring values that are too imaginary by already naming them 'man' and 'woman') is nothing other than the conception of the exception. It is obvious on one side ($\exists x. \overline{\Phi x}$); it is denied on the other ($\overline{\exists x}. \overline{\Phi x}$). Jean-Claude Milner, in his brief commentary on the matter,[39] makes great play of this opposition, without paying too much attention to the fact that just by itself, it reduces the reading of these formulae to a strict binarity, namely, what Lacan is trying to take his distance from.

It is certainly sensible to distinguish as he does the infinite, potentially present in the 'whole', and the unlimited, which possesses a quite different make-up: the surface of a sphere is a finite 'whole', and nevertheless unlimited (without any point or series of points that create a limit); the fragment of a real straight line [0, 1] is a limited whole (a bounded one) and is nevertheless infinite. If Milner had not tried to highlight only this opposite couple for the needs of his argument, the most obscure manual of topology would have furnished him with apt examples. Why then go looking for the Lacan of the formulae of sexuation, if it is only to return to a couple of opposites founded on the presence/absence of a pertinent feature: limited versus unlimited? The linguist will perhaps find himself at ease here, but the serious reader of the formulae much less so since he will find himself stuck on a binarity which it was a question of getting rid of.

Goodbye, in that case, to discordance and foreclosure and to the perfectly logical correction of the square produced by Lacan on the basis of Brunschwig's maximal particular! With all the clarity of his relevant feature, Milner rashes towards a suggestion of the same Lacan that we will study much more closely in what follows, namely, that the exception might function as 'limit'. This conceptual reduction (exception = limit) suggested by Lacan, just like the example, added on by Milner, of scholastic logic distinguishing between dividable terms and transcendent terms (which do not divide) allows him to give as ultimate *reason* for this attack on the univocal nature of the universal...a bi-partition which brings back again the universal in all its unbroken splendour. The attack on the universal, to believe him, was only then a strategic ruse, designed to spare a step for local demonstrative ends

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[39] J.-C. Milner, *Les penchants criminels de I 'Europe démocratique* (Verdier, 2003) pp. 17-20.

(to distinguish two *alls* with a different make-up), without putting in question the sway of the universal.

On the contrary, we have seen that Lacan insists on the fact that it is not a matter of opposing but of 'creating an obstacle' by one to the other, to make them 'subsist' by one another,[40] just as in an Aristotelian logical square the four propositions *a*, *e*, *i*, *o* are sustained together, in an interplay of mutual relations, certainly regulated by dual oppositions and nevertheless irreducible to these latter. It would be well then to approach differently the global consistency of the set of these four formulae if one wants to avoid the trap of reading them as formulae that are fundamentally dualist, right away ready to take on board, under the henceforth impressive colours of logic, the most retrograde opinions about...what made them man and woman.

Inversely, I am sustaining that before looking for the pertinent feature that would differentiate man and woman, Lacan picks out, in Brunschwig's article, what the latter signals as having been rejected by Aristotle, in other words the maximal particular. He signals this, in his own way and much later, during the first session of the seminar...or *worse*: '[...] the not-all which is precisely and very curiously what Aristotelian logic eluded [...]'.[41] Nevertheless to sustain such a rapprochement, it is not enough to be satisfied with just the support taken from the appellation 'not-all' that Brunschwig finds in Aristotle. To convince oneself that what is at stake here is a conceptual and not simply a nominal borrowing, it is necessary to study the logical squares of these two elements: the maximal particular in Aristotle and the final writing of the formulae of sexuation in Lacan. I am helped by the fact that Brunschwig, also careful to give a logical consistency to his remarks, offers to differentiate the minimal and the maximal for us by their profoundly different logical squares (he even offers himself the luxury of constructing a third, 'for recreational purposes').

THE LOGICAL SQUARE OF THE MAXIMAL PARTICULAR

The 'logical square', in studies on Aristotle, comes down to writing the relations that are woven between the universal affirmative *(a)*, the particular

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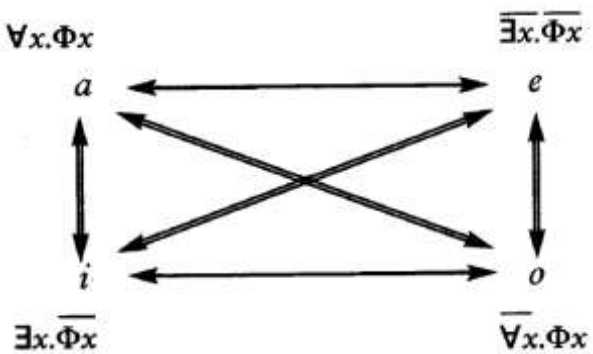
[40] 'It is not at all a matter of making one the negation of the other, but on the contrary the obstacle to the other'.

[41] J. Lacan, *...or worse*, 8 December, 1971.

affirmative *(i)*, the universal negative *(e)*, and the particular negative *(o)*, by utilising only the four following relations: contradiction (two arrowed strokes), contrariety (one non-arrowed stroke), implication (an arrowed stroke), and compatibility (a dotted stroke without an arrow). This structure allows there to be analysed and compared these universal and particular propositions but also the modalities (necessary, contingent, impossible and possible). In these conditions, what about the square proposed by Lacan, even if he does not take the trouble to construct it as such? It can be depicted as follows:



As this writing makes visible, *a* enters into contradiction both with *i* and with *o* (if all say yes, then it is false both that one says no and that not all say yes); in the same way *e* enters into contradiction with *i* and *o* (if there are none to say no, then it is false both that there is one who says no, and that not-all say yes – even though here, the still rather obscure meaning of the negation of 'not-all' removes the obviousness that the formulations of the other relationships of this square develop.) Moreover, the two universals imply one another since, if all say yes, this in no way enters into contradiction, or even contrariety, with the fact that none says no. In the same way, the two particulars are implied by one another: that there should be some who say no remains congruent with the fact that not-all say yes.

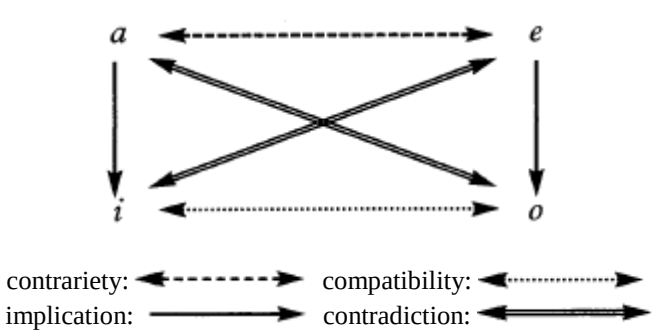
This construction for the moment has only one interest: to bring out that this logical square is the one that Brunchwig constructs to explicitate the maximal particular.[42] In effect he writes in this connection:

[42] Contrary to the minimal particular, which develops the following logical square:

> The two particulars are implied by one another, if one wants the couples *a-o* and *e-i* to remain contradictory, one is paradoxically led to admit that each of the particulars, on the one hand exclude the universal of the same quality, and is excluded by it, on the other hand continues to exclude the universal of the opposite quality and to be excluded by it; in effect, each of the universals cannot contradict one particular without contradicting the other, which is equivalent to it. It follows moreover that the two universals are now equivalent, because they contradict two equivalent propositions.[43]

What is at stake then is indeed the same lay-out as in the logical square of the formulae of sexuation. With this concordance, we have the proof that the rapprochement between what was scrapped by Aristotle and discovered by Lacan is valid. And nevertheless, what Lacan was trying to make of it is not so easily deduced; this cocking a snook at Aristotle, this explicit wish to bring out the 'problem' linked to the universal, certainly originates in this decision to take up the challenge of the maximal particular, but just as much in the fact of being willing to fight for something that goes well beyond the sparring of logicians.

Why cannot Lacan be satisfied by the simple maximal particular so well isolated by Brunschwig? If such had been the case, it would have been enough to refer to it! Now the reasons he has to go looking on this side of things – namely, to make the meaning of the universal negative vacillate to stop having to deal with 'all men' versus 'all women' – push him a little further. It is clear in effect that if the maximal particular poses for Aristotle problems of logical consistency in his proofs of non-conclusiveness, it does not lead just by itself to a new status of the universal negative – which Lacan always wants to put in place. How?



[43] J. Brunschwig, op. cit., p. 7.

To understand him, we must now become attentive to the *movement of the writing* of the four formulae that compose his logical square. Lacan starts, like everybody else, from the universal affirmative which he writes then: $\forall x. \Phi x$. His choice of the maximal particular, and his concern to produce the three other formulae with the simple operator of a redoubled negation (like Blanché) leads him at first to affirm the particular negative by sustaining the existence of 'not-all', in other words, already, to write a particular that denies the universal operator: $\overline{\forall x}. \Phi x$.

But since we are in the framework of a maximal particular, if the particular negative affirms that not-all do so, there is an obligation for the particular affirmative to say, on its side that there are some who do not do so. Lacan should then in this respect (as Blanché suggests) write: $\overline{\forall x}. \overline{\Phi x}$. For reasons that will appear later (with the word 'exception'), Lacan transforms what is called the weak negation of the universal quantifier ($\overline{\forall x}$), into an existential quantifier ($\exists x$), thus producing for the writing of the particular affirmative $\exists x. \overline{\Phi x}$. In this substitution, 'not all' is held to be equivalent to 'some', and with that the particular affirmative unveils something of the regular handling of writing by Lacan: it first writes the *maximal* meaning by affirming, not that there are some to illustrate the universal affirmative (which would remain ambiguous), but that there are some who *do not* illustrate it, because of *not* going in its direction. This decision – inconceivable in Brunschwig/Aristotle for whom the maximal particular, and the 'some, but not all', is *read* in the relations of the logical square, but *is not written at its place* – is going to shift everything.

There remains in effect the thorny problem of the writing of the universal negative. According to Blanché, it should be written *universally not-p*, in other words: $\forall x. \overline{\Phi x}$. Now this does not at all suit Lacan, who is trying to evacuate the whole dimension of universality in his writings on the right (that began right away with the 'not-all'[44] of the particular negative). He applies then the inverse solution to the one that has just allowed him to write a particular (negative) with the negation of the universal quantifier; he is now going to write a universal quantifier by denying an existential quantifier. Instead of $\forall x$, he writes: $\overline{\exists x}$.

[44] *Pas tous* (not all) and *pas tout* (not any) are equivalent here in the measure that when there is a regularly formed *tous*, in other words a set in due and proper form, it is always possible to grasp any element whatsoever of it and to consider that 'for any' element, etc. etc.

Are these inversions between quantifiers legitimate? Can we go from the one to the other by simple negation?

Logically, there is room to doubt it. That the negation of universality should produce existence is already questionable: if 'not-all', then 'some', certainly, but I can just as well sustain: 'if not-all, then none'. And in the same way, if I affirm: 'not some', I can just as well conclude 'then all' as 'then none'. An essential ambiguity is here renewed in this writing operation, which has nothing anodyne about it.

Now this ambiguity is what Lacan has been aiming at for more than ten years already, since the session of the seminar *Identification* in the course of which he saluted Peirce's intuition according to which the universal negative can be conceived, not simply as the set of elements which do not satisfy the function, but also as the locus where no element is met with. The 'not some' ($\overline{\exists x}$) is to be read as 'none', even while it is taking the place of an 'all'. This indeed is the step that Lacan takes with his writing of the universal negative: $\overline{\exists x}.\ \overline{\Phi x}$: there are none who say no.

Here undeniably, is situated the high point of his invention, much more than on the side of the 'not-all' (Aristotle, relayed by Brunschwig, had already proposed it), or of the apparent contradiction between the universal and particular affirmative (which only stems from the maximal meaning of the particular proposition). For in deciding to write the universal negative by the negation of an existential quantifier, Lacan rejoins the intuition of Peirce to better anchor his subject, which, we have seen him argue, maintains a very special relationship with the 'nothing', a nothing different to that of Freud or Hegel.[45] But above all, with this writing he secures a sort of bolting down of his battery of formulae which, otherwise, would go down the tubes.

In effect the 'not-all' of the particular negative should not be read as 'some', as a partitive which would allow us to think that, if some say yes (just as on the left, some say no), the others say no (as on the left the others, those of the all which are not the some, say yes). Here, Lacan only wants to break the symmetry, and he does it with his writing of the universal negative which affirms that none say no, there where, precisely, 'not all' say yes. The fact is that here, on the right, the 'not all' should not be understood as a partitive, but

[45] 'The nothing that I am trying to get to hold up at this initial moment for you in the establishment of the subject is something different'. Cf. above, pp. 6-7.

as the affirmation that the elements present on this side are each subject to the same regime, without nevertheless being the elements of some 'all'.[46] Their existence under this regime of the phallic function does not lead them to make a set, leaves them loose, in an existence unattached to any essence within which these elements would be subsumed: that is what had to be put down in black and white, to be produced in its logical consistency, ever since the singular reading of the myth of the women in *Totem and Taboo*.

The logical square developed by Lacan is then indeed that of the maximal particular, but it is written in such a way, with this inversion of universal and existential quantifiers, that it presents in the writing of each proposition the logical fault *(faille)* that the particular in the Brunschwig style did not allow to be read except in the unfolding of relations internal to the logical square. By reason of these writings, he ensures that the left side and the right side do not present a mirror consistency, can no longer be opposed in a perfect symmetry, but contribute reciprocally to one another obstacle and support. By doing this, Lacan shows that he is aware of the fact that if one wants to undermine the dualities Man/Woman, Yin/Yang, XX/XY, penised/ un-penised etc., one must not hesitate to damage their logical underpinnings, since he is sure that logic, in its own foundation, is much more 'gendered' (because of its fundamental binarity) than 'sexed'. It is important to be convinced of this point, otherwise one will miss the intuition that pushes him to bring together 'logical fault' and 'sexual fault'. For him sex touches on logic, but logic touches just as much on sex. So that reconnecting them with one another illuminates the one and the other, the one by the other, while the couples of opposites sustain logics of the kind (man/woman, active/passive, etc.) which, for their part seek to articulate themselves without fault, and without remainder.

It is no longer very difficult, starting from this reading, to locate the connecting point by which Lacan assumes the authority to join together logic and sex in a sort of fault that if not common, is at least close. The attentive reader of the seminar *From an Other to the other* will know that what Lacan retains in Russell's paradox, is the inexistence of a set which, at first sight appears to be just as well made as any other: the set of all the sets that do not belong to themselves. Through this fault that he found in

[46] Hence the derived statements: 'THE woman does not exist'; 'The woman is not all', etc., all formulations that gloss each in its own way the fact that the elements on the right do not form any set, any 'whole' from which one could pick out some one or other.

Frege's *Foundations of Arithmetic*, Russell had opened up the crisis about foundations in mathematics. What Lacan is attempting on the right side of the formulae is of the same order. He no more denies the existence of each woman than Russell (or anyone else), would have the notion of denying that there exist sets that do not belong to themselves. The problem is that no set collectivises them. It is not a matter then, at the point to which Lacan is trying to bring his listeners of that time, of finding THE pertinent feature that would allow Man and Woman to be correctly ranked in their respective sets – since then it would be really child's play to write their relationship – but to make appear between them an irreducible asymmetry *which does not depend on any feature given from elsewhere*.[47] This alone will offer its chance to non-relationship.

Milner's approach in his latest work is therefore not destined to have a great future for anyone who is trying to *read* these formulae of sexuation, for the good and simple reason that he only reads there what is important to him: to distinguish two 'alls'. If what differentiates on the side of man and on the side of women these formulae of sexuation proved to be only the presence/absence of a relevant feature (limited versus unlimited), then our customary bipartitions would continue to distribute their places in function of our prejudices about having/not having, castrated/not castrated, active/passive, etc.[48] The most 'natural' psychology would come then to range itself under the sophisticated banner of these logical writings, in order to predicate anew essences that their very differences would put 'into relationship' with one another.

ESSENCE VERSUS EXISTENCE

In cursorily reading the seminars that hash and rehash the formulae of sexuation, we see Lacan returning on several occasions to a distinction that he

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[47] 'That there is no metalanguage' is in this respect a harsh law, and if one still distinguishes something in it, it is those who momentarily forget this statement, and who want clarity above all (since they are ready to pay from a cosmic viewpoint from which there is stated the last distribution that they are aware of), and those who respect it, at the price of rather quickly losing their way in it having wanted to remain faithful to the swirling function of the word.

[48] Derrida used them no differently in his *Facteur de la vérité* when he remarked that the letter, the object of so many sophisticated considerations on the part of Lacan, was found ...between the legs of the chimney-piece (follow his look!).

is fond of: being (essence) *versus* existence. The inexistence of the sexual relationship stems first of all from the fact of deconstructing essences, of recognising that it is not possible to produce symbols at the same level on the side of man and on the side of woman (except by considering both one and the other as essences each developed by a consistent universal, which he wants to deny). Because for him as for everyone, the 'for-all', the ∀ of modern logic, is directed at being and essence: once I say, and especially when I write 'all men', I produce one of these 'semi-twilight entities', (as W.V.O. Quine called them), a pure symbol whose denotation is waiting to be effectuated, and which by this fact does not establish any existence, but produces a being that can be qualified and thus an essence. Inversely, the 'there exists' (∃) shows its hand since it says what it is doing: it right away asserts the existence of the element that it writes. The problem for Lacan, is that without taking extra precautions, this existence right away goes along with an essence, always finds itself related to the supposition of the being of the universal, which is illustrated by the minimal particular to which Aristotle retreats since, with it, existence is never anything but the singular actualisation of a being always universal in its category. Here is what Lacan, for multiple reasons that in part go beyond the business of the sexual relationship, rejects, to the extent of sometimes speaking about what Aristotle missed by operating in this way (that Brunschwig has suggested to him). Now, an existence without essence, or which at least is posited outside any necessity of an essence of its own, is what Lacan has been on the trail of since he put the part of the **o**-object into orbit, and which has continued in the epic of 'There is no sexual relationship'.[49]

3 MARCH 1972: THE EXCEPTION PROVES THE RULE

On this point we must now closely follow the sharp turn that he initiates on 3 March 1972, a session to be marked in red for what we are concerned with here in the measure that it is, by far, one of the richest on the subject. He is conscious of this:

> Here I am bringing forward a glimpse that is lacking to the function, to the notion of species and of class. It is in this sense that it is not by chance that this whole dialectic was missed out in the Aristotelian forms.

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[49] His insistence on existence places him moreover – with all due respect to the habit that ranks him with the structuralists – in the ranks of the existentialists, not in the style of Sartre or Mounier, but in the line of descent, which from Pascal to Kierkegaard passing by Maine de Biran, wants in different ways to make existence prevail over essence, in a tenacious struggle against the dominant philosophical tradition which is, always, that of the concept first.

Since what is at stake is to make the universal vacillate, to disconnect it from its adherence to an all into which one would only have to dip to obtain any element whatsoever, Lacan is going to have to do double work in the measure that he is going to have to produce, in each deixis,[50] an element capable of contravening Aristotle's way of tying things up by trying to derive existence from essence. This 3 March, he begins with the man side:

> Where finally does there function this $\exists x.\overline{\Phi x}$, this 'there-exists-at-least-one' who is not the slave of the phallic function? It is only from a requisite, I would say of a type that is despairing from the point of view of something that is not even supported by a universal definition. But on the contrary note that with regard to the Universal marked by $\forall x.\Phi x$, every male is a slave of the phallic function. What is meant then by the 'at least one' as functioning to escape from it? I would say that it is the exception. It is indeed the occasion when what is said, without knowing what it says, the proverb that 'the exception proves the rule', is there to support us. It is curious that it is only with the analytic discourse that a Universal can find, in the existence of the exception, its true foundation which ensures that undoubtedly we can in any case distinguish the Universal thus grounded from any use rendered commonplace by the philosophical tradition of the aforesaid Universal.[51]

Here then we have henceforth acknowledged Lacan's ambition in logic: *to found a new universal on the exception that opposes it*. We begin to guess here the benefit he has gained by first of all splitting the bar of negation and by ensuring that the two particulars, the 'positive' and the 'negative', both enter into contradiction with each universal (in this case equivalent, as we have just seen). This clearly signifies that if the particulars are true (Lacan is going to make sure that the balance tips to this side), the universals are necessarily false, and one must be able to tolerate working within a permanent contradiction.

In the measure nevertheless that the famous proverb which would make of the exception the confirmation of the universal does not throw any light likely to instruct us in the matter, we must indeed accept, at the point that we are at in it, that this support for the universal by the exception remains mysterious – this

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[50] Deixis is the name in the logical square for the elements that are ranked on the same side, what Lacan names then 'man' and 'woman'.

[51] J. Lacan, *The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst*. Unpublished translation by Cormac Gallagher, 3 March 1972.

is the reason why we will soon enquire about the state of exception[52] to glean some light with respect to this, because what Lacan is able at this time to articulate about the opposition man/woman is not going to illuminate us on the relevance of his formal effort to damage the universal as all.

The important thing for the moment, in the obscurity in which we find ourselves as regards the meaning to give to this unusual value (in logic) of the exception, is to see in detail how Lacan argues his point in the other deixis, on the right-hand side. In effect he takes care – it is one of the two formulae – to write in black and white that here there is no exception: $\overline{\exists x}.\ \overline{\Phi x}$.

> This is something that has no parallel, symmetry with the requirement that I called earlier 'despairing' of the 'at least one'. [...] The fact that there is no exception does not any more assure the Universal that is already so badly established by reason of the fact that it is discordant, does not assure anymore the Universal of the woman. The 'without exception', far from giving to some 'All' a consistency, naturally gives still less to what is defined as 'not all'.

This 'naturally' is just as valid as the *'natürlich'* that we find here and there in Freud: it signals a real embarrassment, and in fact in reading these seminars, the dominant impression with respect to the junction of the 'not-all' to the woman results more from a repetition than from a clarification. What emerges on the contrary from this half-darkness, is the fact that where no exception is conceived of, the all is nonetheless denied by the quantifier 'not-all'.

The only possible way of comprehending this sort of passionate and tautological affirmation of Lacan in this respect is once again mathematical and logical: there is a decisive difference between a set of individuals and the domain that they constitute. In the first, they make a 'set'. They are taken up into a unity of which they are the elements. In this respect, either they belong to, or are included in the aforesaid set. The domain would be something like the same, but not collectivized, which would neither belong to nor be included in any 'set' whatsoever.[53] This is what Lacan aspires to write with a domain of individuals whose existence one affirms at the same time (thanks to the negation of the universal quantifier, $\overline{\forall x}$, valid here as an

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[52] This study will form the object of a wider publication, which will take up in part the present text while offering extensions that go beyond the framework of a journal article. To be published in EPEL in 2006.

[53] In this sense, there is indeed *a set* of sets that belong to themselves but there is only *a domain* of sets that do not belong to themselves.

existential quantifier), but that one refuses to collectivize since the exclusion of the exception amounts to affirming that there is not, on this side, any who escape the 'not-all', *without this absence of exception bringing about a closure for all that.* With these two contradictory writings, conjoined in the same deixis, Lacan posits a domain of individuals escaping any collectivization that would produce an essence of them, as well as the definite article which, in French, is the sign of it. Hence the famous 'The woman does not exist', a provocative residual statement from this search for the missing universal in the speaking being.

Let us summarise so as to be able to render simultaneously present to our minds the irreducibly plural elements of the kind of bifidic point on which Lacan's logical square rests: *inasmuch as there is an all, it is founded on the existence of the exception of at least one (therefore possibly several), and inasmuch as there is no exception, the several that exist do not form any all*. In both cases, the universal no longer holds up as collecting, without exception, all the elements which, through belonging or through inclusion, would give rise to a compact and homogenous unity. It is always the same attack by Lacan against the encompassing all which he had, from his first seminars, hooked onto the specular image, and which he rediscovers here under the form of the universal. The 'partiality' of the object, as quite clearly seen since *Transference* and *Identification*, claims its due here by requiring that something exists that cannot be brought back to belonging to or inclusion in a universal.

We will not ask here whether this logical equilibrium is congruent or not with the difference of the sexes or the impossibility of the sexual relationship. We will be content to remark that the universal (that there is no question of doing without, it is what allows us to write with complete security) maintains with the exception a relationship that Lacan to my mind, does not manage to clarify in the course of these two seminars, *Of a Discourse that might not be a Semblance* and *…or worse*. To stick to the formulae in their final state, far from rushing to split them into two sides (whatever name one bestowed on them) to better charge each one with 'its' own contradiction, it is better to try to hold them together, it is only from this angle that we manage to make ourselves sensitive to the repetition of the contradiction without which Lacan's whole effort is there and then brought back to ancestral and ideologically weighty truths concerning the difference between the genders (let us no longer even talk about sex in this climb-down to the bipolar). On the left in effect, the particular objects to its

universal, just the same as on the right; but each side also objects to the other in that one affirms the existence of the exception, while the other denies it. So then it is, to end, the fragile status of this contradiction with regard to the exception that we have to settle, in one way or another, since it is offered as the key-stone of this little pyramid which consists only in producing *two types* of contradiction (one proper to each deixis, the other between the deixes).

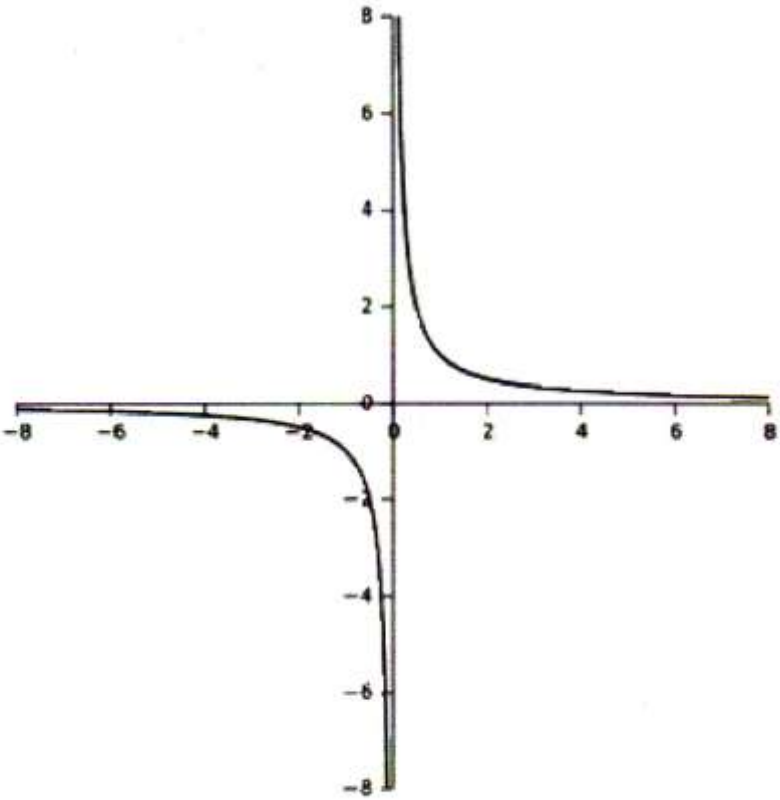
ON THE EXCEPTION CONCEIVED OF AS LIMIT

The only effective help that Lacan brings us in this maze is to be found, not in the seminars, but in the text published in *Scilicet*, then *Autres écrits*, in which he argues:

> The second, [we are dealing with the 'second writing' with respect to the $\forall x.\Phi x$, in other words the $\exists x.\overline{\Phi x}$], there is exceptionally the case, familiar in mathematics, (the argument $x = 0$ n the hyperbolic function l/x), the case where there exists an x for which Φx, the function is not satisfied, namely, since it does not function, is de facto excluded.[54]

A hyperbolic function of the kind 1/x is presented as follows:

[54] J. Lacan, *L'Étourdit* in *Scilicet* No. 4 (Paris: Seuil, 1973) p. 15, or *Autres écrits* (Paris, Seuil, 2000) p. 458. I am giving here a triply corrected text. For the problem of establishing this passage, see the *Addendum* at the end of the article.



The value 0 creates a 'limit'[55] for it in the sense that the function tends towards the infinite while the *x* tends towards zero (and tends towards zero when *x* tends towards infinity), but no longer presents any value if $x = 0$ since the operation of division can in no way be sustained if one wants to divide any number whatsoever by 0. Lacan therefore situates his $\exists x.\overline{\Phi x}$ at the locus and the place of zero in the hyperbolic function, which underpins very well on the visual plane, his idea that the universal, the for all *('pourtout')* should take its support on the exception, which, far from contradicting it, offers it a foundation. The trouble in this example is the profound disparity between the curve and the co-ordinate axes, the perfect

[55] 'I am combining [these two formulae] because the *there exists one* in question, by creating a limit to the for all, is what affirms it or confirms it (which a proverb already objects to Aristotle's contradictory)'.

exteriority, in principle, between the co-ordinate axes and a curve, whatever it may be.

Here again we are brought to a halt on the point of the question posed by Lacan with his formulae: is the limit to be included in the set, as can be the case in a topological figure which includes its edge, or is it to be excluded from the set, as is suggested (a little too strongly) by the example of the hyperbola in which the value $x = 0$, in other words the y axis, does not belong at any point to the curve $y = 1/x$?

In a certain way we have the answer, even though Lacan does not articulate it in any way, to the best of my knowledge, in the course of the seminars that we have been focusing on. We have the answer because, if the limit should be thought of as exterior to the series (which, then, the $y = 1/x$ suggests), it would risk very quickly becoming transcendent Since St. Anselm (and even St. Augustine), there have been no lack of attempts to position God as the superior element, exterior to the worldly series. Where in effect must one place oneself to see both the series and its limit, if the latter is to be thought of as exterior to the series, if not in the position of the believer whose faith authorises him to make the most of a revelation? Religion is never very far from this intellectual elegance which wants to arrange with equal certainty both its knowledge and what constitutes its limit.

Another argument: where the exception is excluded, on the right hand side of the formulae, the all does not manage to be founded, which retroacts on each element by spoiling its unity since it proves to be only an existence without essence. The right thing to do is then to think of the absence of exception without taking, here either, the point of view from which it would become possible to see the series, and then something that does not belong to the series, in order to subsequently pronounce on the fact that this series, decidedly, does possess a limit or does not.

To set off to advantage – as Lacan sustains – existence over essence, is to prohibit for oneself any cosmic viewpoint at any given time. To be coherent with what leads him to support the non-relationship, we must then try to think of the exception as *starting from the series* (this does not mean that it belongs to it) and not in a space that would include both the series and its exception/limit. The little word ‘despairing’ that Lacan used to indicate from where might come such a *petitio principii*, suitable for positing the

existence of an exception, said clearly, in its way, a little psychologically, that it is the 'all *x*' that envisage the exception, and not some demiurge fashioning from the mud the humanity that he wants to fabricate, or some totemic father choosing at will from his fish pond of women. Except that if we remain with this, the exception is no longer anything but a wish, religious in style, clearly worthy of this hope for an eternal life that we must sometimes be prepared to hear about at funerals: since this exception-in-chief Jesus rose from the dead, all (his faithful), one by one, will have a right to do so. The exception, in this perspective, is no longer anything but the matter of a common future. I strongly doubt that Lacan meant it in this way, so that his 'despairing', which refers back to his reading of *Totem and Taboo*, is not something on which one can take support for long to receive the status of exception that he proposes with his formulae of sexuation, which alone sustain with some rigour the sexual non-relationship which for the moment we are concerned with.

To attempt to respond to this difficulty that Lacan situates by his formulae, but leaves in the shadows with just this notion of 'limit', we must part company with him for the moment, and see what happens in other forms of knowledge *(savoirs)* when they find themselves confronted with this same question – which is not proper to the sexes and their difference, but also traverses certain fields of knowledge when they are led to think about what would be radically Other for them. Thus, towards the end of the 19th Century, the German scholar Dubois-Reymond wanted to take account of the fact that something always escapes scientific knowledge, and had in consequence launched his celebrated *'Ignorabimus'*. To which David Hilbert had replied, from the heights of his all-conquering rationalism: 'There is no *ignorabimus*', counting at that time on a demonstration of the noncontradiction of arithmetic which was supposed to guarantee the coherence of scientific thought – nothing less. Gödel's theorem which contradicts him on this crucial point, did not nevertheless in any way justify Dubois-Reymond, but demonstrated an entirely new fact: the internal limitation of formalisms. Because the fields of knowledge that progress by themselves in a rather tentacular fashion, only see their consistency specified by the study of their conditions at the limits, as is said about physical systems.[56]

[56] About these complicated matters, see G. Le Gaufey, *L'incomplétude du symbolique*, Paris: EPEL, 1991.

THE RETURN TO NON-RELATIONSHIP

That the exception exists *and* does not exist, that there is a universal *and* there is not one, that they can be called 'man' *and* 'woman' in so far as both are ruled by the same function called phallic, all of this is only thinkable in the idea, the perspective, the suspicion of non-relationship. Naturally, to think, to speak, to write, is to indefinitely create relationships. And if the order of reasons is shown to be rather parsimonious, indeed fussy for whoever would be more demanding, the signifying relationship, as Lacan had unleashed it by his definition of the subject, is, for its part omni-directional. There is no internal limitation to specify in advance what signifiers represent the subject for what other signifiers. This restriction would not in truth have any meaning since the definition proposes, among other things, to welcome the 'all' with open arms: any signifier whatsoever is fine for it, it will not quibble. It is far from the idea so dear to the clinician, of generating contraindications, and producing a subclass of signifiers which, for their part, would not have the vocation of representing the subject for others. *"Cuentame tu vida"* says a psychoanalytic Argentinean tango; but the definition of the Lacanian subject, which comes to grips directly with the fundamental Freudian rule, immediately goes well beyond life, biography and its avatars. Only the unrealisable 'say whatever occurs to you' would be equal to such a definition.

In such a setting, non-relationship is the white blackbird, the 'radical unthought' as it would have been called in an epoch which is growing distant to the point of being today almost past. And the least troubling is not that Lacan had conceived it in his way very early on, from the end of the 1950's, during the elaboration of his 'graph of desire'. In effect we see appearing there the notation S(Ø) commented on as 'the signifier lacking to the Other'. How can a signifier be lacking to the Other, unequivocally defined at that time, as 'the treasury of signifiers'? Might there not be here something like the beginnings of the exception that we find much later in the form of $\exists x.\overline{\Phi x}$? A question that finds the beginning of an answer in the very notation of the subject: $\not{S}$, which is read as the bar falling on the letter S, up to then appointed to designate the signifier. The subject is not then a signifier but, yes, is indeed what is lacking to the Other, where all the signifiers are gathered. The attentive reader of Lacan also knows that this Other, so decisive in the whole theoretical construction 'does not exist', something which cannot be said (by saying it, I *ipso facto* make it exist), but on the other hand can be written: Ø. All these bars brought to bear on letters thus participate in the same movement:

One affirms the universal (O: one cannot do better), then one denies it: $\emptyset$. Why this passion for erasing?

Because two things must be sustained at once, if not at the same time nor under the same relationship: that the indefiniteness of putting into relationship does not broach anything about an abrupt absence of relationship, an absence already highlighted, in a timid and elliptical fashion, by the *leer Gegenstand ohne Begriff*, the empty object without a concept – an object of which I can certainly forge for myself a generic concept (Kant offers it to me ready for use), but under which no worldly object will come to shelter. This rose from no bouquet has the vocation of hollowing out the signifying circuit, without ever appearing in it as such. We are no longer too surprised then, to see this contradiction installed at the centre of the writing of the phantasy, in this stamp which at the same time unites (alienation) and disunites (separation) the subject $\$$ conceived of as universal (it is the exception, the $\exists x.\overline{\Phi x}$ able to sustain, like Epimenides that, yes, $\forall x.\Phi x$) and the **o**-object as that with which...there is no relationship. The sexes come to re-mark this fault, without us knowing too well whether it is because of them, or they because of it.

ADDENDUM

The text you have just read takes up again, from the seminars, the elements that Lacan gathered together in his ultra-cryptic *écrit* published in number 4 of his review *Scilicet* under the title of *L'Etourdit*. This to say that the reader is invited to read and reread these extremely dense lines with the tone of a last will and testament But where? Today two publications are offered in the French tongue (we do not dare to invoke the existing translations, given the

nature of the source text): the original in *Scilicet*, faulty at least in the quantifiers since, instead of $\forall$ and $\exists$ we find, for some mentions of the formulae, A and E, which makes reading it awkward; or the more recent, published in 2000 by Seuil under the general tide of *Autres écrits*. Let us choose newness, and focus first on this latest publication.

The authority of the printed word having its effect, everything seems to go well... until the arrival of the formulae. The bottom of p. 458 lets us know in effect about the existence of $\mathrm{V}x.\Phi x$ and $\exists x.\overline{\Phi x}$. We might regret our refusal to forgive the editor for this V instead of $\forall$, if the following sentence did not introduce a real difficulty for the novice reader of Lacanisms:

> The first [i.e. the first formula, that written V*x*. Φ*x*], for all x, Φx is satisfied, which can be expressed by a V noting the truth value . . .

Despite this sentence, the V, the classical anagram for the truth value [T in English] is in no way to be confused with the quantifier 'for all', $\forall$, and it would have been better to follow *Scilicet* which contents itself with writing: $\forall x.\Phi x$. That Lacan is happy here to bring $\forall$ and V close together is not an index of any confusion on his part. A little irritated at this benign error, we are startled when, a few lines further on (top of p. 459), we read the following:

> I combine them because the *There exists one* in question, by creating a limit for the *pourtant* is what affirms or confirms it.

It is a matter no doubt of creating a limit for the 'for any' *(pourtout)* and not for the 'nevertheless' *(pourtant)*. What good are the italics that incite the reader to focus his attention a little, if the editor himself doesn't pay any attention to them? A little after the middle of this same p. 459, we read:

> It is then correct to write as I do: $\exists x.\Phi x$.

Surprise! Lacan almost never uses this formula, but indeed the one that we have encountered on occasions, that is: $\exists x.\overline{\Phi x}$. Does the published text signal a switch as compared to the seminars? The following sentence:

> The one that exists is the subject supposed because the phallic function is missing here *(y fasse forfait)*.

The simple word *forfait* removes the hesitation since this formula of the particular affirmative reposes on a type of negation which we have seen

Lacan placed on the side of ‘foreclosure’. He remembers it here with this *forfait*. This forgetting forces the reader then to insert, on his own authority, the bar of negation over Φx. Otherwise, he (the reader) goes off into speculations which, with regard to such a complex text, will rapidly lead him into quick-sand. P. 465, again a surprise. We read:

> That the subject can here propose itself to be called woman depends on two modes. Here they are:
>
> $$\overline{\mathrm{E}x}\,.\,\overline{\Phi x} \quad \text{and} \quad \overline{\mathrm{A}x}.\ \Phi x$$
>
> Their inscription is not used in mathematics. To deny, as the bar placed above the quantifier marks, to deny that there *exists one* is not done, and still less that *forall* gives fornotall *(pourtout se pourpastoute)*.

Why then have the letters previously used for quantifiers disappeared to give place to the capitals E and A which already adorned the pages of *Scilicet* at this place? Has Lacan innovated once again without warning us? Or perhaps he has warned us in his own way in the intervening pages, and it went over our heads? How can we know? But no, in carefully rereading, it seems that nothing of the kind has changed.

Almost all the errors mentioned above fall within the competence of a professional proof reader. Why should Jacques Lacan, as an author, not have a right to the usual regime?

And when much further on (at the bottom of p. 481), already habituated to this borderline in French, stuffed with neologisms, with learned and precious turns of phrase, one stumbles on the sentence:

> It is nevertheless progress that must be retrained here, since I am not losing sight of the regret that corresponds to it, namely, that the true opinion that Plato makes sense of in *Meno*, only has for pure us *(pur nous)* ab-sense of signification, which is confirmed by referring it to that of <u>our</u> right-thinking people.

We are ready to pass without protest over this *pur nous*, that one might believe to be in the vein of the Jacques Lacan writing these lines. And nevertheless so. Which is proved moreover by *Scilicet* (cf. p. 38)! Lacan had really meant to write: ‘[…] only has *for us* ab-sense of signification […].’ It was already so complicated that one catches oneself imagining some later

zealot basing on this faulty passage ‘the concept of *nous* that Lacan was able to bring to its *‘é-pur’* [blue-print?] in *L’Etourdit*…

But the worst had happened many pages earlier, p. 458. When J.C. Milner wants to refer to this passage of *L’Etourdit*, in his work on *The Criminal Leanings of Democratic Europe*, here is how he is obliged to mention his reference: ‘(an example of Lacan’s, *Autres écrits*, p. 458, to be corrected in the light *of Scilicet*, p. 15)’. Milner is very kind (even though not to his reader), because the version in *Scilicet* is itself faulty. What does it say?

> [...] there is by exception the case, familiar in mathematics (the argument $x = 0$ in the exponential function 1/□), the case where there exists an x for which Φx, the function, is not satisfied, namely not functioning, is de facto excluded.

Where does this □ come from? Is it Cantor’s aleph? But in that case, such writing indexes a number and in no case a function! Can it be said that aleph is only a rather special writing of x? But then where does there stop the gentle distortion of letters that are supposed to guarantee rigour in calculation? In any case, there is an error, and *Autres écrits*, conscious of the problem, sets out to remedy it. So then it offers the reader the following:

> [...] (the argument $x = 0$ in the exponential function x/ χ [...]

We immediately feel that if there is progress, it is in the dimension of error, for it is certain that the value $x = 0$ satisfies the function and does not act as a limit to anything, since 0 in the numerator is always acceptable, whatever is in the denominator (except 0).

This little procession of errors – those of *Scilicet*, those of *Autres écrits* which adds a very elementary mathematical ineptitude – allows there to be glimpsed still another error, imputable for its part to none other than Jacques Lacan: why does he here name ‘exponential’ what is a hyperbolic function? An exponential function, which is written e^x, will take on for the value $x = 0$ (like every number that is raised to the power of 0) the value of 1, without encountering here any limit or exception. By taking a slightly critical look, we would have realised what Lacan was alluding to here, and have found (as Milner does on his own account), the writing $1/x$ which, in effect, allows there to be brought together exception and limit for $x = 0$.