

ACTA UNIVERSITATIS CAROLINAE
PHILOLOGICA - MONOGRAPHIA CXLVIII

INCENDIARY DEVICES

Discourses of the Other

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UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE
NAKLADATELSTVÍ KAROLINUM

2005

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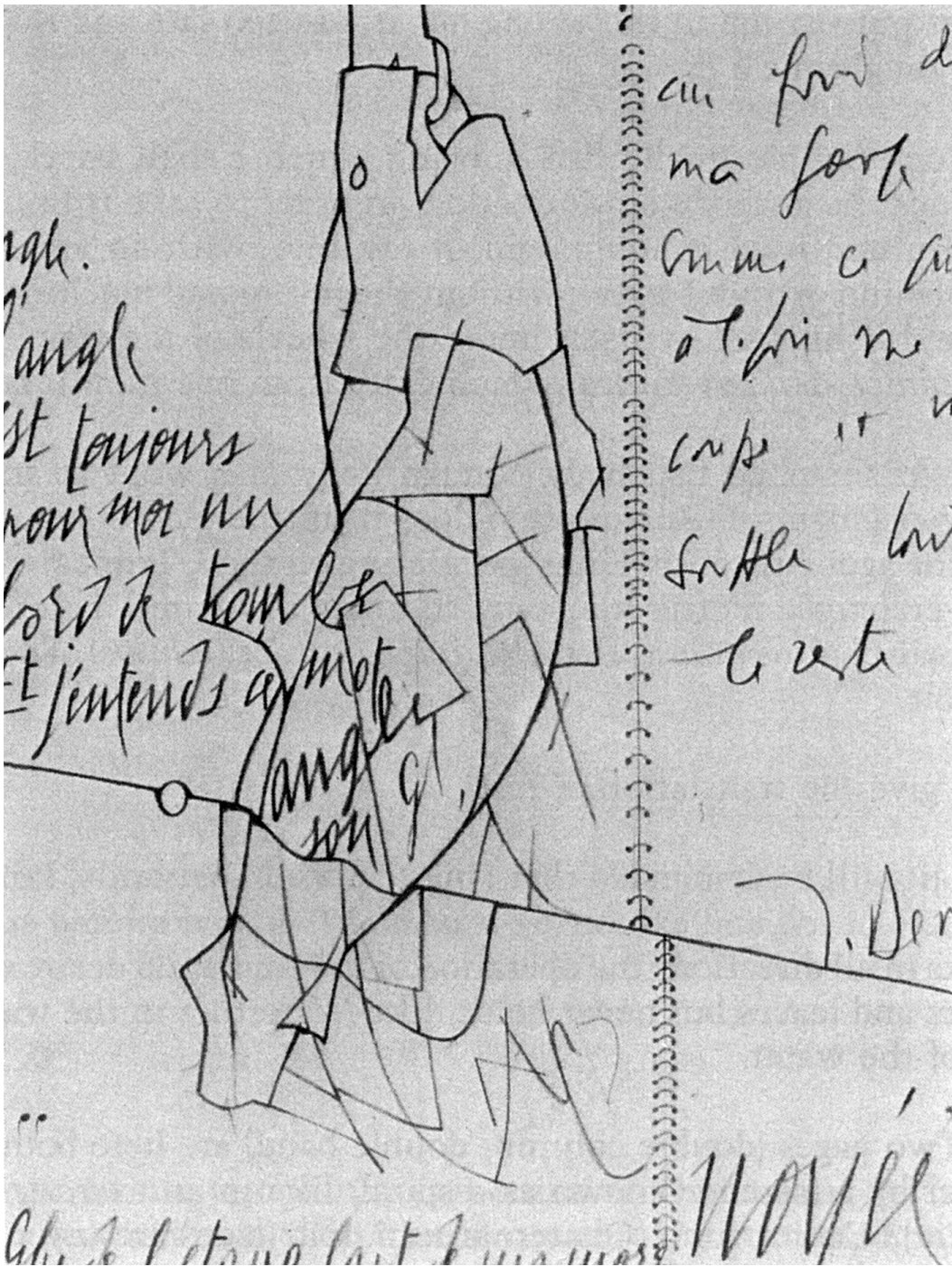
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Versions of parts of this text have appeared *The Symptom* 2 & 3, *Rhizomes* 6, *Litteraria Pragensia* 22, *Culture Machine: Interzone* 4 and *JoyceMedia* (Prague: Litteraria, 2004). Thanks are due to Jean-Michel Rabaté, A.R. Roughley, Karel Thein, Miroslav Petříček, Daniel Ferrer, Sheldon Brivic, Laurent Milesi, Derek Attridge, Thomas Mediosa, Martin Procházka, Aleida Assmann, Ondřej Pilný, Andrew Mitchell, Gary Hall and Erik Roraback.

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ISBN 80-246-1024-8
ISSN 0567-8277

in memory of
JACQUES DERRIDA
† 9 October, 2004
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la mort de l'autre, c'est la mort première
– Emmanuel Levinas



Valerio Adami, *Study for a Drawing after Glas*

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NOTE ON (THE) TEXT

• • •

“I shall speak of ghost, of flame, of ashes.” So Jacques Derrida begins his 1987 meditation on Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*, and of what, “for Heidegger, *avoiding* means” (*De l’esprit*). But it is to another text of Derrida, published in the same year, to which the current volume owes its existence, as it were: *Feu la cendre*. After more than ten years of furtive and often distracted composition, both urged on and thwarted by the ghost of Derrida, it may also in some sense testify to a programme of avoidance. Now, today, more tentative than ever, this programme confronts the reality of an unavoidable impasse. The passing away of the man, Jacques Derrida, long foreshadowed, renders such avoidance gratuitous. It was not a ghost after all. Or there are only ghosts. And we also, ghosts, haunting the words of a dead man, destined to the work of mourning, whether we acquiesce in its terms or not. Subjected to it, no less assuredly than one is subjected to the “passing of time,” to being, consciousness, language, thought. How to accept that none of these things is ever within our possession? That we are possessed *by them*. That our passing lies within their ambit, even as they coincide with us as all that makes us what we are. As René Major writes in *Le Monde*, Tuesday 12 October 2004, in memory of Derrida: “Je savais bien que selon la loi de l’amitié, comme il s’est employé lui-même à le démontrer, l’un doit toujours mourir avant l’autre. Mais je m’étais toujours refusé à penser qu’il serait le premier.”

Incendiary Devices

For language to happen, a *transformation* “must have occurred somewhere”; a transformation or transmutation of inertia—a law of negative entropy that allows sense, or at least signifi-ance, to arise as if *out of nothing*. Out of what, despite everything, despite the cumulative weight of philosophical traditions, retains all the features of a “nothing” or of a “nothingness.” (*Ex nihilo nihil fit*. “Nothing will come of nothing,” says Lear. “Speak again.”) This is how it will always have seemed. Language as the alchemist’s false promise.

The term *device* in the title of this book suggests a mechanism, a type of alembic perhaps, or perhaps also an emblem or, better still, a *design* (with all the ambiguity that noun entails). That this *device* bears some relation to the mechanism(s) of consciousness itself is not accidental, and it poses the question—in addressing ourselves to language, as it were, or to the “question

of language”—of what agency or *acte gratuit* may be imputed in the *design* of sense (its ἰδέα ἐνέργεια as Aristotle says; the *presensing of what presents itself*: or φύσει ὄντα; that which produces itself by arising out of itself, as the complementary counterpart of τέχνη ὄντα)? To what (un)intention or (un)consciousness or “form of meaning” is intention, consciousness, meaning due? Some sort of *Maxwell’s demon*, operating in a purely neutral, arbitrate relation to “matter” that nevertheless remains qualitative (it “makes choices”)? How does one speak, therefore, of the materiality of language, beyond recourse to a binary schematics or geometry of thought, of reason, of symbolic logic and divine λόγος? As in Blake: “What immortal hand or eye dare frame this fearful symmetry?”

Incendiary: to incinerate, incendiarise. In respect to language, to those aspects of language—between anima, pneuma (πνεῦμα) and spiritus (*la part de feu* as Maurice Blanchot says)—which, mistakenly or otherwise, might be regarded as the matter (πρόγραμμα) or material of language. The materiality of *cinders*, for example: to “materialise” a thing, as though to speak transitively of what must remain an intransitive condition, as though this were to perform an ontological reduction while at the same time making the *thing* more evident, tangible, “concrete,” less *metaphysical* (whatever this could be). To materialise by way of an incendiary consumption, a paradoxical dematerialisation or *destruktion*: as though *to materialise* were “to mean.” One says: “I mean ...” just as one says, to make X mean something (Y, presumably). How does one “make X mean”?

It is a commonplace to point out that language is comprised of a certain finite number of material or quantifiable elements: gesture, sound, graphic trait, as well as what signifies in the absence of these things (expressionlessness, silence, blank space), etc. It is equally commonplace to say that language operates in the particular combination and recombination, repetition and variation of these elements (schematic, syntactic, lexical, sub-lexical)—which characteristic represents a virtually infinite set of possibilities within a restricted set of probabilities, and so on. But how does this account for the fact of language, *as such*?

What happens—as the philosopher says—when we ask, for example, if X (an unknown, an *apeiron*, a sign or a chiasmus) *represents* or even resembles two lines of a certain dimensions intersecting at a “given point” in space or in time—or if it is resembled by them in the figure of the 24th letter of the English alphabet—or else by variously articulated sounds; or by various other (nominal, symbolic, algebraic) values? It is again a commonplace to impute the significance of “context,” to say that the conditions of X represent a context, that Y or Z are taken “out of context,” that S or P have been de- or recontextualised (i.e. that it is somehow inappropriate to speak of language in these terms or in this way). In doing so the philosopher insists on a persistent materialisation of this magical *resemblant* quality, “context.” He insists, in short, on a resemblance of *materialisation*. Or some such spectre or spectrality. A ghost is what masks the invisible and unknowable by way of

resemblance to what *no longer is*, or rather, what *will have been*—supposedly. To speak in this way, in the present or past tense, is already or inadvertently to give voice to a grammar of materialisation.

It is perhaps a question not of how or what language resembles, but of what may be said to resemble *in* language (how? why? etc.)—that is, to “take the form of” (a) language. What does it mean when Lacan proposes that “the unconscious” is structured *like a language*? What, as logical-empiricism would have it, is the co-ordinate object *of language* that would allow us to make sense of this simile? And this leads us on to other, related questions which are the concern of this volume: What takes place in the polymorphous subjectification, or “characterisation,” of *la cendre* in Derrida’s *Feu la cendre*? What happens when we attempt to “read,” for example, James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (or Velimir Khlebnikov’s *Zaum* poetics, or Philippe Sollers’s polylogues, or John Cage’s *mesostics*, or the *lipogrammes* and palindromes of Georges Perec)? And what do these tell us about the “materiality of language”? When Polonius inquires after Hamlet’s reading matter, Hamlet’s reply possesses an almost Wittgensteinian quality of the impossible or the gratuitous: “words, words, words.” How, in fact, does one read “words”? What is being named here against such an apparently literal effect of inertia, of entropy? Or, between the eruption of language into sense and its fall to ash, to a grey, inert residue of non-meaning and “dead metaphor”—what *devices* are at work?

ATTESTING / BEFORE THE FACT¹

• • •

What I say for the first time, as if as testimony, is already a repetition, at least a repeatability; it is already an iterability, more than once at once, more than an instant in one instant, at the same time; and that being the case, the instant is always divided at its very point, at the point of its writing. It is always on the verge [*en instance*] of becoming divided, whence the problem of idealisation. To the extent that it is repeatable, the singular instant becomes an ideal instant. The root of the testimonial problem of *technē* is to be found here. The technical reproducibility is excluded from testimony, which always calls for the presence of the live voice in the first person. But from the moment that a testimony must be repeated, *technē* is admitted; it is introduced where it excluded. For this one need not wait for cameras, videos, typewriters, and computers. As soon as the sentence is repeatable, that is, from its origin, the instant it is pronounced and becomes intelligible, thus idealisable, it is already instrumentalizable and affected by technology. And virtuality. It is thus the very instant of the instant that seems to be exemplary: exemplary in the very place where it seems unique and irreplaceable, under the seal of unicity. And it is perhaps here, with the technological both as ideality and prosthetic iterability, that the possibility of fiction and lie, simulacrum and literature, that of the right to literature insinuates itself, at the very origin of truthful testimony, autobiography in good faith, sincere confession, as their essential composability.

[Jacques Derrida, *Demeure*]²

I

The question of materiality remains as pressing as ever in current discussions of textuality and it is the objective of this volume to provide something like a notational framework within which this question might effectively be engaged with, without reverting to either classical hermeneutics, epistemology or empiricism, while at the same time enlisting certain aspects of their conceptual infrastructures to the work of textual theory—above all to

¹ Parts of this text were presented during the Prague Colloquium: “Genetics & Hypertext,” Charles University, 12–14 September, 2003.

² JACQUES DERRIDA, *Demeure. Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) 41–42.

a theory of what we might call literate “technology”; that is, upon the *technē* of writing in its broadest conception. And, as in the work of Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, upon a certain mechanical, or rather *material*, basis of *technē* as such.³ Indeed, it is worth recalling to attention certain remarks by Martin Heidegger which, while not directly addressed by either Lacan or Derrida, provide something like a common *maxim* for their respective projects. In “Die Frage nach der Technik,” Heidegger writes: “*technē* belongs to bringing forth, to *poiēsis*; it is something poetic.”⁴ And later he adds: “not *praxis* but *poiēsis* may enable us to confront the essential unfolding of technology.”⁵ In short, the question of materiality remains tied to the question of language, to the inherent structurality of language and the conditions of signification, *as the basis for* any assumption of *praxis*. For this reason the discussion of language here will focus upon the condition of *signifying materiality*.

It is important that a materiality of “(the) text” should not be confused with those bibliographical codes that are commonly regarded as standing for it. The materiality of text is rather the condition itself of such codes, of writing *per se*, and thereby underwrites its “technological application.” The implication of this for textual theory is clear enough, and evidently extends beyond the instrumental or prosthetic function of such things as computerised “hypertext,” or what Derrida has referred to as an “hypermnemonic apparatus”⁶ and elsewhere in terms of “spectographies” (“Actes de mémoire: topolitique et télétechnologie”).⁷ While the supplemental efficacy of such “prostheses” is not in question, the idea that such applications *account* in any way for textuality, and for the significance therefore of *signifying materiality*, is.

2

In his discussion of “radical philology,”⁸ Geert Lernout, critiquing certain “theoretical” tendencies that had taken hold in the field of textual genetics, cites a passage by Daniel Ferrer in which the latter in turn cites Jacques Derrida on the “possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark in writing before and outside every horizon of semio-

³ Cf. LOUIS ARMAND, *Technē: James Joyce, Hypertext & Technology* (Prague: Karolinum/Charles University Press, 2003).

⁴ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, “The Question Concerning Technology,” *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell. Revised edition (London: Routledge, 1993) 308.

⁵ DAVID FARRELL KRELL, Introduction to Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 310.

⁶ JACQUES DERRIDA, “Two Words for Joyce,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington, *Post-structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*, eds. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 147–148.

⁷ JACQUES DERRIDA and BERNARD STIEGLER, *Échographies de la télévision* (Paris: Galilée, 1996) 67–78.

⁸ GEERT LERNOUT, “The *Finnegans Wake* Notebooks and Radical Philology,” *Probes: Genetic Studies in Joyce*, eds. David Hayman and Sam Slote (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995) 19–48.

linguistic communication” (“Signature, événement, contexte”). Despite the evident irony of this situation, it is worth taking Lernout’s objection seriously, that whatever stands “before and outside every horizon of semio-linguistic communication” constitutes—as in Immanuel Kant’s *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788) and Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921)—“that whereof we cannot speak.” For Lernout, the anteriority of signification is a matter simply of intuition, and therefore characterises a failure of rigorous methodology.

It is precisely the question of methodology or rather of *method*, however, which may be regarded as being at stake here. For Derrida, the anteriority of signification is indicative of the tautological relation of the instantaneousness of the present (posed in the form of the signifier) to *technē*, and which via the concept of “testimony,” devolves in large part upon the impossibility of generalising the instant, while nevertheless confronting the necessarily generalising condition of “iterability” as the structural constraint and precondition of its signifier as such (i.e. of “the instant” as “une série de contiguïtés matérielle”).⁹ Derrida argues at length in his 1996 collaboration with Bernard Stiegler, *Échographies*: “que technicité ne soit pas technique, que la pensée de la technique ne soit pas technique, c’est la condition de la pensée.”¹⁰ And yet in speaking thus we necessarily generalise this concept, as Derrida warns, both as an exemplum and as an ideality (viz. the supplementarity of *method*). The point for Lernout, nevertheless, is that whatever stands as an object of anteriority, and hence of “intuitive” knowledge, is unverifiable; it is not an object of knowledge at all and is therefore irrelevant to the science of philology.

What the science of philology properly is may be debatable, and may assume a variety of forms, from classical hermeneutics or empirical method, to the “radical philology” of textual genetics; likewise operating in any number of contexts, from linguistic historicity to the technics of “language” acquisition, and including all forms of discourse, literary, philosophical or otherwise. In any case the term needs to be qualified, if only for the very practical reason that philology begins with a necessary if apparently contradictory assumption of *incompletion*, and that at every point it must take this into account, above all in its definition of “verifiability.” It is in part for this reason, in the excess of method, that Lacan poses the paradoxical formulation “tout langage est métalangage.”¹¹

Between a conception of semio-linguistic anteriority and of quasi-scientific verifiability, there arises the problem of “prediction.” If anteriority is purely a matter of intuition, as Lernout argues, then verifiability itself succumbs to the indeterminacy inherent to all forms of predictive modelling. What is

⁹ DERRIDA and STIEGLER, *Échographies*, 146.

¹⁰ DERRIDA and STIEGLER, *Échographies*, 149.

¹¹ JACQUES LACAN, “Metaphore et métonymie,” *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre III: Les Psychoses* (1955-6) (Paris: Seuil, 1981) 243–262.

significant is not that this indeterminacy arises as a consequence of the “incompletion” of philology—or from any other limitation of empirical knowledge—but that it is structural and structurally inherent; which is indeed the point of Derrida’s statement regarding “possibility” (“the possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark”).

Lernout is obliged to concede that, viewed in this context, “radical philology” can never be more than an approximative method or, rather, an approximative system of knowledge, whose tenets must therefore at some point violate the principle of verifiability. Approximation is in this sense not merely a practical necessity with regard to a certain limit implicit to the *technē* of knowledge, but as a condition bound up with the materiality of “knowledge”—that is, semio-linguistic or *signifying* materiality. The logical consequences of viewing “knowledge” as an approximative system which will never be verifiable are thus crucial to an understanding of why the argument about the intuitive character of semio-linguistic anteriority does not hold—and this is the problem which must firstly be addressed, but not, however, as a binary expression of either *praxis* or *poiēsis*, but rather, in the first instance, of their nexus in a common materiality.

With “radical philology,” a fictive definitive system of knowledge is established as the basis of epistemological enquiry, with the result that the schematised character of this basis is soon forgotten, and the fictive construction is identified with the actual system. It is with regard to the limits of this construct that semio-linguistic anteriority assumes its “intuitive” character, for Lernout, as that which exceeds “verifiability.” The relativism of this system not only contradicts its basic premise of generalisability (something must be generally verifiable, not merely a special instance of verifiability), but it also exposes the system to further logical violations with regard to what we might call “locality” (*vis-à-vis* Derrida’s “disengagement and citational graft”) and the system’s over-dependence upon “context.” In short, the predictive limits of philology require that all recourse to context be provisional, and at the same time that the probabilistic feature of this “recourse” NOT be regarded as provisional. Indeed, probability invests the philo-genetic project at every level, consequent upon precisely the “possibility of disengagement and citational graft,” as Derrida says, “which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark in writing before and outside every horizon of semio-linguistic communication.”

In discussing the claims of logical empiricism with regard to the philosophy of language, Hans Reichenbach has pointed out: “It is one of the elementary laws of approximative procedure that the consequences drawn from a schematised conception do not hold outside the limits of approximation; that in particular no consequences may be drawn from features belonging to

the nature of the schematisation only and not to the co-ordinate object.”¹² The question that obtains here is how approximation avails itself in any way of a consequent realisation of its “co-ordinate object,” as Reichenbach says. It may well be worth going back over several of the assumptions aired here about language and signification in general, before proposing anything like a response to the above question. According to the tenets of logical empiricism, “symbols” are physical bodies or processes like any other, irrespective of their “function.” It makes no difference if we consider a symbol as obtaining meaning through its correspondence to “facts” or to other “symbols.” A symbol is itself a fact. In structural terms it is irrelevant what “class” of fact a symbol “corresponds to,” or why it is taken as corresponding to it. It’s significance, and that of language as a whole, resides in the *possibility* of treating a physical body as a symbol; and symbolisation as a function of a possible (meaningful) correspondence between facts.

By treating symbols as facts in this manner contradicts, on the level of semio-linguistic materiality at least, the principle of verifiability. That is, the principle of “truth value,” which, as Reichenbach demonstrates, is consequent upon a schematised conception. Moreover, the principle of verifiability is required, in the first instance, to account for the *possibility* of “correspondence,” and subsequently to account for the ultimately *approximative* nature of correspondence as such. In this way verifiability cedes to probability and is consequent therefore upon prediction rather than upon a determinate “state of affairs.”

The question—and it is a very interesting one—is how, then, we can assume an initial state of signification—the point at which the perception, or indeed contemplation of an object, cedes to the act of “reading.” Between the “zero method” of a base materialism, and the resemblance of a semio-linguistic system, what “takes place” that could allow us to account, in more than merely a superficial way, for the phenomenon of reading, or of the “transmission-effect” of sense? What makes such a “reading” possible? What, to complicate things, is its “co-ordinate object,” as Reichenbach says? Or, to adopt a terminology closer to Derrida’s, what form does this “purely” material signature-effect take, as an “anteriority” of signification? And how do we escape the tautology of addressing this “anteriority” in signifiatory terms—i.e. as a “co-ordinate object”?

Such questions are evidently not idle, as a vast amount of philological activity has indeed been devoted to enumerating sets of “facts” that correspond, in some way, with *language*—whether on a micro- or macro-scale; whether in symbolic, rhetorical or cognitive terms. Each of these assume a certain placement; that *language* is in fact a type of object to be deciphered, dissected, anatomised, classified, and so on—in accordance with something like a hermeneutic fiction. And indeed this too is a fact; is a kind of fact, one

¹² HANS REICHENBACH, *Experience and Prediction: An Analysis of the Foundation and the Structure of Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) vi.

among others, that corresponds in some way to an idea of *language* or of *the text*. And in and of themselves, each of these facts is “verifiable,” to a certain degree, and yet no idea of *language* is verifiable. It is because the idea is already a schematisation—the outcome of a set of predictions centred upon a causal arrangement of symbolic “correspondences”—whose supposed “co-ordinate object” remains barred, because (we may assume) it renders the very notion of verifiability nonsensical.

How does it do this? We might say it does this by exposing all such presuppositions about language to the broadest implications of semio-linguistic materiality and to the radically probabilistic organisation of language as a whole.

What would it mean to verify the materiality of a “symbol”? Or, conversely, to “falsify” a symbol? It is by way of certain assumptions with regard to the “falsifiability” of philological research, after all, which has lent it to a logistic conception of text which has always presupposed a connection between signified meaning and verifiability, beyond any system of symbolic representation. One problem is that to *verify* already entails symbolisation—here, with regard to a measure of “truth value.” Or, as Samuel Beckett puts it in the addenda to his 1953 “roman” *Watt* (affecting a détournement on a well-known motto of sovereign *vérité*): *Honni soit qui symbole y voit*.¹³ Another problem is that to assign “truth value” to materiality is tautological. In philosophy the formula $S=P$ provides a simple expression of this effect of semiological “complementarity.” It is evident enough that S is not P , and yet the structure of equivalence or correspondence described here is one which underwrites the entirety of signification: whether it is in the conventional model of the sign (signifier-signified); in the organisation of rhetorical tropes or figures (metaphor, metonymy, allegory, analogy, parataxis, and so on); or in the overarching notions of narrative and schema. We might say, therefore, that language proceeds on the basis of what we could term an “inequality” theorem, and that inequality itself provides the measure of verifiability. It may be that language *occurs* as such in the “suspension” of verifiability. Or, we might equally characterise language as proceeding from a structural dependence upon a principle of the “arbitrary” ($S = P$, where S and P can be *any* terms whatsoever) which is nevertheless tied to the arbitration-effect of “correspondence” ($S \neq P$, where S and P are nevertheless mutually determined and interdependent).

4

It is at this point, although in differing registers, that the work of Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan begins to converge upon what we might call a “signifying materiality.” It is not the purpose of this volume to rehearse the particular relationship of Lacan and Derrida, either avowed or disavowed, nor

¹³ SAMUEL BECKETT, *Watt* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1953) 268.

to rehearse the relationship between Lacan and “deconstruction” or Derrida and “psychoanalysis” (although, in a recent collaboration with Elisabeth Roudinesco, as elsewhere, we find Derrida dwelling at length upon the fact of his own intimate relationship with the work of Nicolas Abrahams, and the work of his wife, Marguerite Derrida, psychoanalyst and translator of Melanie Klein).¹⁴ Rather, the principle concern here in reading between Lacan and Derrida (but also Martin Heidegger, Alexandre Kojève, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Luc Nancy and others), is an “analysis” of a common thread of materiality and of *anteriority* in the elaboration of a theory of language or, perhaps more appropriately, of the *technē* of writing and of literacy.

And to the extent that this takes the form of a theoretical engagement with “psychoanalysis,” it does not thereby in any way intend to perpetuate what Derrida terms “les dogmes et les rigidités de la pensée psychanalytique dominante.” Equally, the extent to which this volume takes the form of a “deconstructive” critique of Lacanian thought, its tenor may simply appear conventional—in that it does so “merely in the assumption of a certain authority or authorisation” in the name of *Derrida*. This is itself the subject of the last section of this volume, “The Cyclops & the Gnomon,” wherein the question of a certain authoritarian nominalism is addressed to the Lacanian revision of Freud. As a foreshadowing of this encounter, and in the absence of a direct address to the spectre of Freud supervising or supervening upon the text of Derrida, I shall cite here directly from Derrida’s comments on his relationship with Freud and Lacan in *De quoi demain ...* in which Derrida attests, as it were, to a fundamental inadequacy of reading: “J’avais lu Freud de façon très fragmentaire, insuffisante, conventionnelle, et Lacan de façon plus lacunaire, à peine préliminaire ...”¹⁵ In view of this disclaimer, Derrida specifically addresses the legacy of Freud in terms of a “suspension” of verifiability, of responsibility *per se* and of the “credit accorded to a fiction”:

Parmi les gestes qui m’ont convaincu, séduit en vérité, il y a cette indispensable audace de la pensée, ce que je n’hésite pas à appeler son courage: cela consiste ici à écrire, inscrire, signer, au nom d’un savoir sans alibi (et donc le plus «positif»), des «fictions» théoriques. On reconnaît ainsi deux choses à la fois: *d’une part*, l’irréductible nécessité du stratagème, de la transaction, de la négociation dans le savoir, dans le théorème, dans la *position* de la vérité, dans sa démonstration, dans son «faire savoir» ou dans son «donner à entendre,» et, *d’autre part*, la dette de toute *position* théorique (mais aussi bien juridique, éthique, politique), envers un pouvoir performatif structuré par la *fiction*, par une intervention figurale. Car la convention qui garantit tout performatif inscrit en elle-même le crédit accordé à une fiction.¹⁶

¹⁴ JACQUES DERRIDA and ELISABETH ROUDINESCO, *De quoi demain ...* (Paris: Galilée, 2001).

¹⁵ DERRIDA and ROUDINESCO, *De quoi demain ...* 275.

¹⁶ DERRIDA and ROUDINESCO, *De quoi demain ...* 281–282.

Where this leads, as has already been suggested, is to the insistence that such distinctions as between base materiality and signification, or between anteriority and a “semio-linguistic system,” are themselves “une fiction théorique,” situated between a wish for verifiability and the mirage of vérité. In the following discussion of Derrida’s *Feu le cendre* (“Discourses of the Other”), the lineaments of this theoretical fiction are seen to converge upon a question of responsibility, stripped of its tranquil assurances, addressed to the relationship between ontico-linguistic subjectivity and the facticity of the Real, or of the Other, in the receipt of language (in advance of itself, as it were, and as a type of credit to which signification accrues in the form of a “symbolic debt”). As Derrida himself has acknowledged, there remains a like debt, in elaborating here what might otherwise be seen as approximating a “theory” of signifying materiality, to the Freudian unconscious as the “object” of attestation and “site” or “figure” of linguistic anteriority *par excellence*: le coup d’envoi freudien (“de voir ce que peuvent vouloir dire des termes comme «répondre devant», «répondre à», «répondre de», «répondre de soi», dès lors qu’on les regarde du point de vue de ce qu’on appelle encore l’«inconscient»”).¹⁷

Prague, September 2003

¹⁷ DERRIDA and ROUDINESCO, *De quoi demain ...* 286.

CINDERS / DISCOURSES OF THE OTHER

• • •

Le spéculatif est le reflet (speculum) de l'holocauste de l'holocauste, l'incendie réfléchi et rafraîchi par la glace du miroir.

[Jacques Derrida, *Feu la cendre*]

At the International Congress of Psychoanalysis in 1936, held in the Czechoslovak resort town of Mariánské Lázně (Marienbad) a mere two years before the Munich Agreement, Jacques Lacan delivered a paper outlining his conception of a “mirror stage” (*stade du miroir*) as formative of the function of the *I* in psychoanalytic experience. Thirteen years later, in a modified version published in *Écrits*, Lacan stated that “the formation of the ‘I’ as we experience it in psychoanalysis [...] leads us to oppose any philosophy issuing directly from the *cogito*,”¹ thus reiterating Sigmund Freud’s previous break with rationalism and the psychology of self.

As both revision and renewed critique of Cartesian rationalism, Lacan’s position in the late 1930s stands at a point of contention between normative, phenomenological and ethico-existentialist modes of philosophical enquiry (alongside Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Blanchot, Georges Bataille, Jean Hyppolite, Pierre Klossowski, Raymond Queneau, Jean Wahl, et al.), after which it could no longer be possible to pose the question of a humanist ontology independently of questions of discourse and ethico-linguistic subjectivity. (The reasons for this have an obvious historical basis in the events of 1939–1945, but can be found already in the work of Descartes, and they extend far back into the history and pre-history of philosophy—for Martin Heidegger it will have begun with Parmenides, for Bataille with the cave paintings at Lascaux.)

In this context Lacan’s essay “Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je (telle qu’elle nous est révélée dans l’expérience psychanalytique)” is exemplary as a synthesis of the anthropological, psychological and linguistic investigations being undertaken at the turn of the

¹ JACQUES LACAN, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* in Psychoanalytic Experience,” *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 1. It is worth noting that the 1936 Congress was the last one at which Freud himself was also present.

century, as represented in the works of J.G. Frazer, Bronislaw Malinowski, Émile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Loeb and Ferdinand de Saussure. Via his encounters with the philosophical writings of Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer, Lacan in turn influenced much of what was to become the basis for French structuralist and later post-structuralist thought, echoes of which continue to sound in the works of contemporary theorists, from Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, to Slavoj Žižek.

Even behind the conceptual framework of often polemical writers, like Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, Lacan's "influence" persists—as what Guattari and Deleuze themselves might refer to as a type of immanence, a dominating negative tendency, however surreptitious—like some hidden incendiary device waiting to go off beneath the seemingly tamed virulence of psychoanalytic theory. Lacan speaks of "subversion" (*Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir*); Heidegger of *Abbau, Destruktion*; Derrida of *deconstruction, mise en abyme, holocaust*. The genealogy of this incendiary "immanence" haunts dialectics from the pre-Socratic to the present moment, and, as René Major has argued, achieves something like an apotheosis in the détournement between the seminar of Lacan and the writings of Derrida, and is perhaps nowhere more in evidence than in their critiques of the legacy of the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel.

In Lacan and Derrida's "critique," Hegelian *Aufhebung* is seen to be removed from an historico-theological discourse of negativity to an affirmative "ethics of irresponsibility" vis-à-vis the annulus-annulment of Nietzschean eternal recurrence (*die Ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*) and its implications for a generalised "signifying materiality." Lacan's writings in particular focus on the way in which Hegelian dialectics avails itself of a particular schematisation which, in counter-distinction to the "method" of the *Phänomenologie*, is affective of a dialectical movement in itself (temporalised as the gradient or interval of duration measured across difference). Lacan's increasing awareness of the importance of this distinction in Hegel's system is accompanied by a shift away from avowedly "dialectical" models of subjectivity towards a topological conception. As with Derrida, Lacanian subjectivity tends more often than not towards an underwriting materiality, which both Lacan and Derrida (despite their many divergences) approach in equally radical and often unprecedented ways.

At the crux of this is a re-conceptualisation of the notion of *otherness*—not merely in structural terms (as a figure or focus of a set of subject-object relations), but in terms of a base materiality which is neither empirical nor phenomenal. It describes rather a condition of signifiante. Articulated at length throughout the body of Derrida's work, this "conditional" sense of a signifying materiality is given its most forceful and theoretically complex form in the metaphor (and metaphoricity) of the "gift"—a metaphor whose genealogy can be traced through Lacan to Bataille and the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gregory Bateson, Marcel Mauss and Elsdon Best. Already in *Glas* (1974) the metaphor of the "gift" points towards an ethics of symbolic counter-exchange or détournement that can no longer be sublated or

dialecticised according to either a Cartesian or Hegelian concept of self-reflexive consciousness, or indeed *conscience*. It is in one of his later texts, *Feu la cendre* (1987), however, that Derrida most explicitly links this notion of the “gift” to the Lacanian concept of the Other, the Heideggerean notion of the “call” (*Ruf*) and “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*), and the Freudian unconscious and “return of the repressed” (*das Unterdrückte*). In this sense *Feu la cendre* provokes a direct engagement with the incendiary nature of the perpetual immanence of return, the ethics of “irresponsibility,” and the “impossible” dialectics of the gift, within the formulation of a theory of semio-linguistic materiality.

I

The dialectical model that Lacan adopted as the structuring metaphor in his early writings on subjectivity (prior to his interest in topological models), was ostensibly borrowed from the teachings of Alexandre Kojève (or Kozhevnikov; a Russian émigré who held a post at the Ministry of Economic Affairs in Paris), whose seminars on Hegel at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, from 1933 until 1939, were attended by many of those who later became prominent amongst the post-war Parisian intelligentsia, including Lacan himself.²

Among other things, Kojève made explicit the crucial link between Hegelian dialectics and the machinations of “desire,” later to be refined and formalised by Lacan (which can in turn be seen to draw upon Karl Marx’s posthumously published 1843 work, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* [1927], and the *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844* [1932]—indeed Lacan’s development of the concepts of alienation [*Enttäusserung*] and estrangement [*Entfremdung*] extend directly from Marx’s earliest theorising of the “commodity fetish” (Drittes Manuskript) and what Guy Debord later, in the Situationist journal *Potlach* and elsewhere, termed the “spectacle”—a radical counterpart of the Lacanian mirror dialectic).³ It is Hegel, after all, who argues that “the satisfaction of human desire is possible only when mediated by the desire and the labour of the other.”

The key tenets of Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel’s *Phänomenologie* (beginning with the Second Phase, “the Self-Consciousness” and the master-slave

² According to Louis Althusser, Kojève “understood absolutely nothing about Hegel & Marx,” while in his seminars “everything centred on the life and death struggle & the End of History to which he ascribed a stupefyingly bureaucratic content. Though history as class struggle might end, history as such would continue, but only in terms of the routine *administration of things*.” Cf. *L’Avenir dure longtemps* (Paris: Stock/Imec, 1992) 17. In regard to Lacan’s involvement with the Parisian intelligentsia, it may also be worth noting that Lacan’s wife, Silvia Maklès, formerly the wife of Georges Bataille (until 1934), was one of three sisters; another, Rose, having married André Masson.

³ GUY DEBORD, *Société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967).

dialectic) have often been summed up in the dialectical formula which Kojève himself outlines at the beginning of his seminar as “the intermediate theses, antitheses, and syntheses” which are *aufgehoben*, as Hegel says. Or, as reported by Kojève in the first chapter of his “Introduction”:

They are “overcome,” in the threefold sense of the German word *Aufheben*—that is, “overcome dialectically.” In the first place, they are *overcome* or annulled with respect to whatever is fragmentary relative, partial, or one-sided in them—that is, with respect to what makes them false when one of them is taken not for *an* opinion, but as *the* truth. Secondly, they are also *preserved* or safeguarded with respect to whatever is essential or universal in them—that is, with respect to what in each of them reveals one of the manifold aspects of the total and single reality. Finally, they are *sublimated*—that is, raised to a superior level of knowledge and of reality, and therefore of truth, for by completing one another, the thesis and the antithesis get rid of their one-sided and limited or, better, “subjective” character, and as synthesis they reveal a more comprehensive and hence a more comprehensible aspect of the “objective” real.⁴

The published text of the *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, edited by Raymond Queneau (1947), reveals in Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel a dominant “anthropological” strain—an effect, according to several of Kojève’s later critics, of his dualistic understanding of phenomenology and his negativistic conception of dialectics, but which can more correctly be attributed to the broadly synthetic tendencies common to the Parisian intelligentsia between the wars (as much as to any influence of Kojève’s Russo-Germanic theological background). In other respects this anthropological approach derives from Marx’s similarly “sociological” one, in which Hegel’s *Phänomenologie* is rendered in terms of the negative orientation of the subject (labour, *Arbeit*) towards its objects (the commodity, capital, or the “spectacle”), through an experience of alienation inherent to the material, historical conditions of the subject itself. This “materialism” can subsequently be traced in the structuralism of Lacan, and in his attention to questions of materiality in re-interpreting Freud’s writings on psychoanalysis.

Importantly, Kojève disavowed the view that Hegel’s *Phänomenologie* was itself “dialectical,” claiming instead that it merely described a “dialectical method”: “In Hegel there is a real Dialectic, but the philosophical method is that of pure and simple description, which is dialectical only in the sense that it describes a dialectic of reality.”⁵ This assumption of a “dialectic of the real” and the designation of man (*Dasein*) as the true subject of Hegel’s work provides the particular ontological underpinnings of Kojève’s interpretation, and indeed of Lacan’s (as Kojève argues: “Hegel’s *Logic* is not a logic in the common sense of the word, nor a gnoseology, but an ontology or Science of

⁴ ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James Nichols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

⁵ KOJÈVE, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 186.

Being, taken as Being. And ‘the Logic’ (*das Logische*) [...] does not mean logical *thought* considered in itself, but *Being* (*Sein*) revealed (correctly) in and by thought or speech (*Logos*)”.

In the “dialectical movement of the real,” Being itself, as revealed by discourse, is not an “abstract notion” detached from the real entity to which it is related, but “conceptually understood reality” (“there is a Thought in Being and of Being, only because Being is dialectical; i.e., because Being implies a negative or negating constituent element”). Hence the formulation of the “subject” occupies an ambiguous position between the appearance of reflexivity and phenomenality. “Taken separately,” Kojève argues, “the Subject and the Object are *abstractions* that have neither ‘objective reality’ (*Wirklichkeit*) nor ‘empirical existence’ (*Dasein*). What exists in *reality*, as soon as there is a Reality *of which one speaks*—and since we in fact *speak of* reality, there can be for us only Reality of which one speaks. What exists in reality, I say, is the Subject that knows the Object, or, what is the same thing, the Object known by the Subject.”⁶ Consequently (and anticipating Sartre’s, and later Lacan’s, notion of the *gaze*), the subject as “contemplative man” is seen as being *absorbed* by the object of thought (which is not [yet] a reflexive consciousness), something which is given expression in the ambiguity of the pronoun “I”:

L’homme qui contemple est «absorbé» par ce qu’il contemple; le «sujet connaissant» se «perd» dans l’objet connu. [...] L’homme «absorbé» par l’objet qu’il contemple ne peut être «rapellé à lui» que par un Désir [...] c’est le Désir (conscient) d’un être qui constitue cet être en tant que Moi et le révèle en tant que tel en le poussant à dire: «Je ...». C’est le Désir qui transforme l’Être révélé à lui-même par lui-même dans la connaissance (vraie), en un «objet» révélé à un «sujet» par un sujet différent de l’objet «opposé» à lui.⁷

The man who contemplates is “absorbed” by what he contemplates; the “knowing subject” “loses” himself in the object, not the subject. The object, and not the subject, is what shows itself to him in and by [...] the act of knowing. The man who is “absorbed” by the object that he is contemplating can be “brought back to himself” only by a Desire [...] The (conscious) Desire of a being is what constitutes that being as I and reveals it as such by moving it to say “I...” Desire is what transforms Being, revealed to itself by itself in (true) knowledge, into an “object” revealed to a “subject” by a subject different from the object and “opposed” to it. It is in and by—or better still, as—“his” Desire that man is formed and revealed—to himself and to others—as an I, as the I that is essentially different from, and radically opposed to, the non-I. The (human) I is the I of a Desire or of Desire.⁸

Kojève continues by suggesting that the subject, in so far as it is subject *to*, is not merely the function of a self-descriptive or enunciative act (“I ...”), but fundamentally discursive in itself—as what Lacan comes to describe in terms of

⁶ KOJÈVE, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, chapter 1, “The Dialectic of the Real and the Phenomenological Method in Hegel.”

⁷ ALEXANDRE KOJÈVE, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, ed. Raymond Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947) 11.

⁸ KOJÈVE, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 3–4.

a *discours de l'Autre*—the discourse of the “Other” which simultaneously alienates and underwrites the subject through a *dialectic of desire* (“L’être même de l’homme, l’être conscient de soi, implique donc et présuppose le Désir”): “en tant que «son» Désir que l’homme se constitue et se révèle—à soi-même et aux autres—comme un Moi, comme le Moi essentiellement différent du, et radicalement opposé au, non-moi. Le Moi (humain) est le Moi d’un—ou du—Désir.”

More importantly, Kojève provides Lacan with the initial linguistic basis for his model of subjectivity, locating the Cartesian motto as a prototypical “speech act,” or what J.L. Austin terms an “illocutionary act.” According to Kojève, “l’homme prend conscience de soi au moment où—pour la «première» fois—il dit: «Moi». Comprendre l’homme par la compréhension de son «origines», c’est donc comprendre l’origine de Moi révélé par la parole.”⁹ But while Kojève’s interpretation of the dialectic is dependent upon a negative transcendence of opposition (as the process of a “synthesis” or *Aufhebung*),¹⁰ this negativity is bound to the discursive nature of subjectivity itself, through the medium of desire. The dialectical movement, born of desire: “tend à le satisfaire, et elle ne peut le faire que par la «négation», la destruction de tout au moins la transformation de l’objet désirée.”

The introduction to the English translation of Seminar XI, “Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse,” describes Lacan’s indebtedness to Kojève as following principally from this reading of subjective dialectics. Consequently, desire “is the one thing that constitutes a human being as an Ego and reveals him to be an Ego by forcing him to say ‘I ...’ Desire is, however, always desire for an other *and for the object of that other’s desire.*” Further:

Self-consciousness implies the construction of an Ego, but that Ego is an object with which man desires. The Ego is thus neither pre-given nor an expression of some pre-existing subjectivity, but a construct: “This Ego will [...] be its own construct: it will be (in the future) what it has become (in the present) of what it has been (in the past), that negation having been effected with a view to what will become.”¹¹

For Lacan also, this movement announces itself firstly in the guise of an “identification,” wherein the desired object presents itself in the form of an image (*le moi illusion*). Introducing the metaphor of the *stade du miroir*, Lacan states: “il y suffit de comprendre le stade du miroir *comme une identification* au sens plein que l’analyse donne à cet terme: à savoir la transformation produite chez le sujet quand il assume une image.”¹²

⁹ KOJÈVE, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 11.

¹⁰ KOJÈVE, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 34. “It is therefore actually the Consciousness which was originally dependent, serving, and servile which realises and reveals in the end the ideal of the autonomous Consciousness-of-self, and which is thus its ‘truth’”; cited in ANTHONY WILDEN, “Lacan and the Discourse of the Other,” *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) 193.

¹¹ KOJÈVE, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 12–13; cited in DAVID MACEY, Introduction to *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Vintage, 1994) xix.

¹² JACQUES LACAN, *Écrits I* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966) 90.

Lacan's application of the dialectic in psychoanalysis reveals that the moment of synthesis never in fact transcends oppositions but rather situates the supposed oppositional bind in a linguistic ("une *technique* de langage") and later topological configuration, defined as a function of desire ("la *grille* directrice d'une méthode de réduction symbolique").¹³ Lacan's re-formulation of the Hegelian dialectic, at the very point at which it would be expected to announce a recuperation or return to a transcendental "ideal self," reveals instead a "dialectical" relation irreducible to a determination of unified self in what, echoing Kojève, he refers to as "une conscience de l'autre qui ne se satisfait que par le meurte hégélien."¹⁴ This irreducibility, self-difference, "negation" of self—the product, according to psychoanalysis, of a *repression* (the repetitional détournement of the signifier as *gift*, but also as *technē*)—inaugurates what, in a provocatively ambiguous gesture, nevertheless continues to be referred to as *the subject*.

2

The subject, according to Lacan's dialectic of identification, "is born in so far as the signifier emerges from the field of the Other." In other words, the subject, constituted through its entry into language (or the Symbolic order), "solidifies into a signifier"¹⁵ and is thus sustained in a desiring relation to its "objects" through the structural logic of the sign (a logic borrowed in greater part from the general linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and the philosophy of Gottlob Frege).¹⁶ Since the advent of the subject is said to take place coextensively with the individual's recognition of its specular image, the Lacanian "dialectic of identification" is only ever *in* the field of signification, inscribed by the "Other" but irreducible to it in a way that does not characterise this "Other" as a synthesis.¹⁷ In this way Lacan's investigations

¹³ LACAN, "Le stade du miroir," *Écrits I*, 94–95.

¹⁴ KOJÈVE, "L'Idée de la mort dans la Philosophie de Hegel," *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 529ff.

¹⁵ FERDINANDE DE SAUSSURE, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Paris: Payot, 1916); cf. JACQUES LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1977) 198–199.

¹⁶ What Lacan takes from Saussure remains largely determined by phonocentrism; his "full speech" likewise remains caught in a metaphysical determination of presence and truth; while his textual attention to Freud does not thematise the written as such; and what he calls a "return to Freud" also repeats Hegel's phenomenology of consciousness. Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982) 84n44. According to Derrida, Lacan's privileging of the signifier in the determination of identity, or of identification, and of the psychic in certain regards simply inverts the metaphysical opposition, and moreover sets up a *transcendental signifier* (the phallus), which communicates on one level with the most traditional "phallogocentrism." It is nevertheless arguable that Derrida's critique is itself underwritten in large part by the terms of Lacan's discourse, however self-evident or not their implications may be within Lacan's own schematisation.

¹⁷ Cf. GEOFFREY BENNINGTON, "Derridabase," *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 144. According to Bennington: "everything Derrida has written says that the relation to self is precisely not specular, that there is always alterity before (any) self [...]. Other 'in' the same, calling it up by contaminating it. This is why

can be regarded as exceeding the dialectical system within which they were initially undertaken,¹⁸ and it is such an excess that allows Lacan's "dialectic" of the mirror stage to subvert the determinations of the Cartesian *cogito* in the formation of the *I*.

In Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, the individual (in an infantile state), through a dialogue or discourse with its *Gestalt*, "invents" an idea of itself that is at best described as contradictorily coherent,¹⁹ since the identificatory process by which the individual is situated as the *I* in language is also a process of alienation or estrangement, in which the *imago* (the specular counterpart) "symbolises the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination."²⁰ Thus the dialectic of identification proceeds along two seemingly contradictory, yet necessary, lines, signalled in the deliberate ambiguity of Lacan's use of the term "subject." This ambiguity or ambivalence increasingly tests the Hegelian formulation as the Lacanian dialectic tends towards the problematic of desire and signification per se. According to Hegel:

Language is in fact the *Dasein* of the pure Self as Self [...] language alone contains the *Ich* in its purity; alone it annunciates the *Ich* [...]. *Ich* is *this Ich*, but it is also the universal *Ich*. Its manifestation is immediately the alienation and disappearance of *this Ich* and is therefore its permanence in its universality.²¹

For Lacan, this universality gives way to the neutrality of the referent, as it is described by Frege as an adjunct to the Saussurean algorithm of the sign-relation of signifier and signified. Moreover, the neutrality of the referent itself is replaced by the activity of the Symbolic, in the fused elements of different perception registers, as in the chiasmatics of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.²² Lacan's analysis of Saussurean semiology situates within the desiring locus of the "subject" the matrix of the sign belonging to philosophical

Derrida likes placing things in an abyss while being wary of what can be too enclosing in the *mise en abyme*." Further: "We can sense that this alterity cannot simply be stated in the form of theses, that it is not really thematisable, not a phenomenon, that it does not exist." Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987) 304; and DERRIDA, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987) 33–34.

¹⁸ LACAN, "On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," *Écrits*, 195–196.

¹⁹ JACQUES DERRIDA, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) 278.

²⁰ LACAN, "The Mirror Stage," *Écrits*, 2. It is important to note that for Lacan the "Mirror Stage" is the source of all later identifications.

²¹ G.W.F. HEGEL, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1948) 362; cited in WILDEN, "Lacan and the discourse of the Other," 195. Wilden follows from this to say: "It is only in language that it is possible to conceive of the identity of the particular and the universal [...]. The attainment of what Hegel calls the consciousness-of-self can only come from the confrontation of the two consciousnesses in the struggle for recognition [...] and reconciliation" as an "eventual dialectical surpassing (*Aufhebung*) of this stage in a reciprocal recognition." Cf. also MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. P. Emad and K. Maly (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988) 26–28.

²² MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY, *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

tradition which links the verbal image of “language” presentation to the visual image of object presentation, and subjects it to the same paradoxical forces to which the *ego* in its Cartesian formulation is subjected.

What arises from the dialectic of identification, then, is that the *I* in language—which functions both as the universal signifier of the (thinking) subject, and as an object within the subject’s discourse—acquires an increasingly “material” complexion as both grammatical subject and as a being “subject to the impersonal laws of language.” Hence “it is a question of re-centring the subject as speaking in the very lacunae of that which, at first site, it presents itself as speaking.”²³ Or as Lacan says elsewhere, “I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think.”²⁴ The subject thus conceived (against the ideality of the *logos*) is “divided” in regards to itself in a particular way (le notion freudienne de *sujet divisé*)—the desire for a return to “self” (the discourse of the imaginary) remaining asymptotic—so that it can never establish an equivalence between “it” and its Cartesian double (“*this* Ich” which cedes in its specificity to “*that*,” “over there”). As Lacan says, “the subject seems to be talking in vain about someone who, even if it were his spitting image, can never become one with the assumption of his desire.”²⁵

This difference within the function of the *I* (as enunciation and the enunciated) takes the form of a de-centring, as Derrida argues in his critique of Husserl’s phenomenology of the sign, by which there can be no “signified” that is not already a “signifier”²⁶—an idea which is similarly the basis of Lacan’s notion of *glissement* (predicated as it is on a purely speculative relationship between metonymic chains of sign substitution and a directly inaccessible, non-present and non-originary structuring “principle”).²⁷ Consequently, this *I* can no longer be sustained as the centre of such a discourse (as in the Cartesian *cogito* or *moi profond*), since its divisibility prevents the assumption of any “reassuring certitude” or unity of self “beyond play”²⁸—viz. the Husserlean notion of full or pure speech, which Merleau-Ponty refers to as “le fantôme d’un langage pur.”²⁹

Lacan later reformulates this “dialectic of identification” in terms of a “dialectic of desire,”³⁰ wherein it is revealed that the contradictorily coherent structure of the subject is symptomatic of the topology of its *misrecognised*

²³ LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 83. Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, “Coming to One’s Own,” trans. J. Hulbert, *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) 138. “A ‘domain’ opens up in which the ‘inscription’ of a subject in his text is also the necessary condition for the pertinence and performance of a text, for its ‘worth’ beyond what is called empirical subjectivity.”

²⁴ LACAN, “The Agency of the Letter,” *Écrits*, 166.

²⁵ LACAN, “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” *Écrits*, 45.

²⁶ DERRIDA, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 279–280.

²⁷ LACAN, “The Agency of the Letter,” *Écrits*, 146.

²⁸ DERRIDA, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 279.

²⁹ MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY, *Prose du Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969) 7.

³⁰ LACAN, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” *Écrits*, 292–324.

desire for the Other. According to Lacan, what is essential in the “subversion of the subject” (which is precisely what characterises the Lacanian subject as such) is the misrecognition [*méconnaissance*] necessary for “identification” to take place.³¹ The individual misrecognises its desire as a desire for certain objects, and it imagines within these objects the way of a return to some prior, pristine condition (of self)—Hegel’s “absolute subject,”³² or what Lacan terms the *je-idéal* (*Ich ideal*, after Freud); the *I* in its primordial form.³³

The problem, typically expressed as one in which the conscious is not “permitted” or is insufficient in some sense to obtain access to an “original condition” (*je-idéal*—or what Heidegger will have termed its “pre-predicative overttness of Being”) unmediated by the very discourse within which the subject-relation obtains “in the first place,” extends beyond hermeneutics to (subjective) experience generally (not as phenomenality but as materiality, of which more later). For Merleau-Ponty it is a question of the universality of language: “qui donc enveloppe par avance tout ce qu’elle peut avoir à dire parce que ses mots et sa syntaxe reflètent les possibles fondamentaux et leurs articulations.”³⁴ Language will presumably (as though it too constituted a form of subjectivity) have set out those limits within which the subject is indelibly inscribed (the difference, the very idea of the difference, between the Symbolic and the pre-Symbolic, can only take place “within” the symbolic, since difference can only occur within a system of differences, etc.). As Julia Kristeva reminds us, “there is no neutral objectivity possible in descriptions of language at its limits [...] we are constantly in what psychoanalysis calls a ‘transfer.’”³⁵

For Kristeva, this failure of a neutral objectivity in the liminal experience of language can, like the advent of subjectivity itself, be attributed to a “primal repression” (the mask of a reflexivity given over to the projectionism of psychoanalytic transference).³⁶ Such a repression would mark the *technē* of, or “in place” of, an inaccessible origin of the “opening of play” of the subject’s being-in-the-world: an X marking not a *topos* (however subject it might be to the rationale of the “secret,” of the “hidden” or “concealed”) but an erasure, a crossing-out which nevertheless is not an erasure of any thing as such. That is, it would describe an interstice as though *prohibiting* dialogue between the conscious and that which is designated by the term unconscious (as *discours de l’Autre*).³⁷ For Lacan this repression marks the “subjection of the subject to the signifier” and inscribes the “circular” trajectory of the

³¹ LACAN, “The Subversion of the Subject,” *Écrits*, 306.

³² LACAN, “The Subversion of the Subject,” *Écrits*, 296–297.

³³ LACAN, “The Mirror Stage” *Écrits*, 2–3.

³⁴ MERLEAU-PONTY, *Prose du Monde*, 12.

³⁵ JULIA KRISTEVA, “A Question of Subjectivity,” *Women’s Review* 12 (1986): 19–21.

³⁶ DERRIDA, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” *Writing and Difference*, 196–197. Cf. MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (London: Blackwell, 1992) 219ff: viz. “repression” as *Verfallen* and the undisclosedness of Dasein?

³⁷ LACAN, “The Subversion of the Subject,” *Écrits*, 312.

subject's desire through the locus of the Other "for lack of being able to end on anything other than its own scansion, in other words, for lack of an act in which it would find its certainty."³⁸

Elsewhere Lacan makes the structure of the subject-metaphor more explicit. In "La métaphore du sujet" (1961) he describes this metaphor as containing four "terms," whose heterogeneity (the heterogeneity of the subject) is organised around a "ligne de partage," a three-plus-one or *trois-contre-un* structure, whose significance will later become more apparent. The metaphor itself is presented as the effect of a chain of substitutions, of one signifier for or by another—the "fonction de phore"—without *predestination* (hence, following the elaborate quasi-Saussurean algorithm also employed here, describing a sub-version).³⁹

In consequence, this "sub-version" of the subject (inherent to its very structure) is also said to describe a basic condition of language. In the Cartesian formulation, the subject postulates its being as a necessary corollary to the assertion of reflexive thought, mediated by a radical scepticism, in which the proposition *cogito ergo sum* is underwritten by a *cogitare me cogitare*. For Lacan, this apparent necessity merely extends from the illusion of presence that situates the *I* in its relation to self in the (apparently) spontaneous act of self-reflexive thought. This reflexivity, however, involves a common abstraction by which the assertion of self, that is thought *per se*, directs itself to *an other*, and *as* an other, echoing the Rimbaudian formula: *Je est un autre*. The *I* as "subject" is thus not to be equated with a "spontaneous expression of the individual," but as the consequence of an alienating (or *distançiating*) encounter with the ("its") other and, in a synonymous formulation, with the structure of the Symbolic (language).⁴⁰ For this reason, the Lacanian subject is distinguished from what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe calls "the one who exists as the being capable of attesting—that he is."⁴¹ A distinction, however, that does not amount to an exception or exemption of the subject *from* the Symbolic (as site of an ethical "experience of limits")—nor to an alibi, as it were, against an underwriting responsibility *of* the Symbolic⁴² (which for Lacan is *all* that there is, vis-à-vis the structure of referentiality).

³⁸ LACAN, "The Subversion of the Subject," *Écrits*, 304. The "circularity" of the trajectory of desire—a circularity which remains unclosed and elliptical—is critiqued by Derrida in *The Post Card* as the structure of the subject's difference from itself and the situation of desire and signification in the field of the Other. Cf. DERRIDA, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation: Texts and Discussions with Jacques Derrida*, trans. Avital Ronell and Peggy Kamuf, ed. Christie V. McDonald (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988). This circularity is also described by Lacan in his graphing of subjective experience in *Écrits*, 302–324.

³⁹ LACAN, "Le métaphore du sujet," *Écrits I*, 890.

⁴⁰ MACEY, Introduction to *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, xvii.

⁴¹ PHILIPPE LACOUÉ-LABARTHE, *Poetry as Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 95.

⁴² Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

In marking the *failure* of the subject to attest to or in its own being, Lacan is also developing ideas earlier expressed in the philosophical heterodoxy of Nietzsche.⁴³ In his 1969 study, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, Pierre Klossowski cites *Der Wille zur Macht* (1901) as delimiting the concept of will-to-power along lines that can be regarded as closely resembling Lacan's own discourse on the Cartesian subject:

L'homme en tant qu'une pluralité de «volontés de puissance»: chacune avec une pluralité de moyens et de formes d'expression. Les différentes prétendues «passions» [...] ne sont que des unités fictives, en ce sens que ce qui, à partir de différences impulsions fondamentales, pénètre en tant que d'un *genre identique* dans la conscience, y est imaginé synthétiquement pour en faire un «être», une «essence» ou une «faculté», une passion. De même que l'âme est elle-même une *expression* pour tout les phénomènes de la conscience: mais que nous *interprétons* en tant que *cause* de tous ces *phénomènes* (la «conscience de soi» est fictive!).⁴⁴

In this way the unique relation of the Cartesian subject to itself is thought of as mediated in advance, or rather inherently mediated. Among the many formulae that Lacan adopts in order to express this mediation in his own work is the linguistic algorithm derived from Saussure, which depicts the signifier (or verbal substance) in a relationship to the signified concept that is neither oppositional nor indeed dialectical in any straightforward sense, but rather fractious and “imaginary”—the two terms separated by an interstitial bar that might also be thought of as a screen or the tain of a mirror (S/s). Moreover, Lacan's adoption of this algorithmic device serves to draw attention to a “material” aspect of signification which is not a reversion to phono-centrism (verbal *mimēsis*)—that is, not to a transcendental signified—but a statement of a general (pre-) condition of signification itself (what Derrida elsewhere refers to as the *pro-grammē*). In this way the “signified concept” operates merely as a kind of fabula, or what amounts (however conditionally) to a mirage of the *cogito*.

At various points Lacan identifies the Saussurean interstice with the Freudian “return of the repressed,” or as standing for the “repressive” apparatus which affects the division between conscious and unconscious in the Freudian schema. The metaphor of the interstitial bar, however, is itself characterised by numerous complexities. The bar is at once a “split,” a “mirror,” a “distance,” an “horizon,” a “curtain,” a “screen.” As the imaginary fourth wall of a type of theatre or stage it takes on an even more enigmatic quality—as the location of the “scene” of the subject's desire, its “fatal tendency” to identify with the ego-projection of its *imago* (what Lacan refers to as its *leuvre*: illusion, lure or decoy; what we might also think of as the work, *l'œuvre*, of the Other). The conditions emerge of an extenuating Narcissism—even if the drama of its motive (or *motif*) is encoded in the subject's relation to countless *other* objects. The narcissistic subject “burns” with an infernal desire;

⁴³ SARAH KOFMAN, *Explosion II: Les Enfants de Nietzsche* (Paris: Galilée, 1993) 307–316.

⁴⁴ PIERRE KLOSSOWSKI, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1991) 74.

an inner spiral of self-affected negation and sublimation.⁴⁵ It is not for nothing that Freud characterised the unconscious as a type of Orphic or Dionysian underworld, separated from the cogito by a symbolic Avernus, an infernal *lac* (lake, lack)—as Lacan Says—something which is implicitly described in the Virgilian epigraph to Freud’s *Traumdeutung*, “Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo” (*Aeneid*, VII), as the dis-simulation of that which cannot go above in the daylight; the underworld or unconscious itself.

3

Lacan’s reflections on Cartesian subjectivity follow in most regards from Heidegger’s analysis of representation in relation to Descartes’s *Meditations*, in which a *cogitare me cogitare* is established as the ground of modern metaphysics. In volume IV of *Nietzsche* (1946), Heidegger argues that the *cogito* is itself representation properly understood, and not simply “thinking.” Heidegger writes:

In important passages, Descartes substitutes for *cogitare* the word *percipere* (*per-capio*)—to take possession of a thing, to seize something, in the sense of presenting-to-oneself by way of presenting-before-oneself, *re-presenting*.⁴⁶

Hence, “The *cogitare* is always ‘thinking’ in the sense of a ‘thinking over’ and thus a deliberation that thinks in such a way as to let only the indubitable pass as securely fixed and represented in the proper sense.”⁴⁷ Uncertainty, then, is viewed as inherent to the Cartesian meditation—representation, as a making-secure, a grasping, is directed towards the *indubitable*, whose otherness situates it as rather an horizon effect of “deliberative thought.”

Anticipating Lacan’s mirror stage, Heidegger further insists that this modality of representing is always “self” representing, or as Hegel says “being-*in-itself* and being-*for-an-other* are one and the same”: the *cogitare* is a *cogitare me cogitare*.⁴⁸ At the same time the “self” thus represented is not represented as any object in the sense of a standing-opposite (a *Gegenstand*), just as the Lacanian *imago* or *objet a* does not comprise an oppositional figure in any straightforward way, but in the “illusion” of *seeing-oneself-seeing-oneself*:

In the immediate intuition of something, in every making-present, in every memory, in every expectation, what is represented in such fashion by representation is represented *to me*, placed before *me*, and in such

⁴⁵ Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, “Psyche: Invention of the Other,” *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992) 312–313.

⁴⁶ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Nietzsche. Volume IV: Nihilism*, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1982) 104–105.

⁴⁷ HEIDEGGER, *Nietzsche*, IV. 105–106.

⁴⁸ G.W.F. HEGEL, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) B.166.

a way that I myself do not thereby really become an object of a representing but am nonetheless presented “to me” in an objective representing, and in fact only in such representing.⁴⁹

In Heidegger’s analysis, and implicit in Lacan’s dialectic of identification, there is an absence of reflexivity in the determination of representation, in the sense that the *ego* necessarily implied in a *cogitare me cogitare* is not involved in representation “subsequently, but in advance,” as the *condition* of representation. This, for Lacan, is the basis of the illusory nature of a subject’s seeing-itself-seeing-itself. Moreover, it is because this *ego* provides the ground of representation that it may emerge as the *subject* of representing: “The self is *sub-iectum*.”⁵⁰ As a translation of *hypo-kheimenon* (ὑποκειμενον), “subject” for Heidegger designates “what under-lies and lies-at-the-base-of, what already lies-before itself.”⁵¹

In his ongoing critique of Heideggerean *Dichtung* and the analytic of Dasein, Jacques Derrida similarly approaches the Cartesian axiom of self-conscious thought as not merely illusory, but structurally tautological. Locating the discursive nature of thought in terms of the Saussurean algorithm, the assertion of the *cogito* to self-thought Being must debilitate “itself” in its tendency towards the denotational truth of its own statement. Rather than a dialectics by which the idea gives rise to an ontological fact, ontology itself is seen to be discursive, and cognition to be the sublimation of a desire “originating” in the unconscious—the *discours de l’Autre*. In *Feu la cendre*, this *ergo* takes the form of a type of translational or “conjunctural” conflagration, but unlike the theological or alchemical *spiritus* (which rises up towards its truth, transformed and purified by fire) its burning is daemoniacal, an all-consuming revaluation of values (*Umwertung aller Werthe*), a type of holocaust (*holos-caustos, all-burning*).

For Derrida, this allegory of the subject’s “advent” is in a certain sense Promethean, in which the idea of “theft” is given an almost ethical placement in its specular doubling of the structure of what Derrida characterises in *Feu la cendre* as the “eruptive event of the gift” by way of a certain hypomnesia or forgetting (the legacy of Epimethius, the demiurgic counterpart) (46.II).⁵² The advent of the subject, as with the emergence of signification, takes place, in so far as it takes place, in a holocaustic opening of the field of the Other *abandonnée à sa chance et au sort*.

In a text which pre-dates and to a certain degree haunts Derrida’s *Feu le cendre*, Hélène Cixous writes:

⁴⁹ HEIDEGGER, *Nietzsche*, IV.107.

⁵⁰ HEIDEGGER, *Nietzsche*, IV.108.

⁵¹ HEIDEGGER, *Nietzsche*, IV.96.

⁵² JACQUES DERRIDA, *Feu la cendre* (Paris: Des femmes, 1987). All references in English are to *Cinders*, trans. Ned Lukacher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992)—by page number followed by a number corresponding either to a paragraph in the main body of the text, or to one of the “Animadversion” texts (cited by Roman numerals). References to the prologue are by page number only.

Holocaust ...

if, without name, without force, without age and without seeing, am,
lacking air and resources, lacking light and space and also time,
however not without desire and movement, but with members cut off
from the trunk

Neuter therefore,
come to engage myself,
who am I? ...

One is not without the other
“One is not without the other”

... *délire* (unread in delirium) cinder or cinders in every sense then:
(a mixture of saffron yellow white grey black, and bizarrely, carmine,
cinder) to get down from top to bottom of

Desire the ashtray, a sheet full of cinders

when one plunges the laundry

la mord (death, or bites her) a sheet full of *sans* (without, blood, or sense,
incense)

and in

the night,

the light of teeth

The same as one is not without the other, one cannot be *thought* without
the other. Neither I' without I' other

délire: one is Without-other, and what is not here is hidden here—
in this corner—

Délire ou délier ou déliter la cendre

(unread or unthink or unbed the cinder)⁵³

Without the other, *without—the holocaust—the* figure of the gift, the burnt offering, or sacrifice (as in the Vulgate of Saint Jerome); or figure of the return of the spectre of pure reason, the *cogito* (which “cannot be thought”) dedicated to the incendiarisation of every possible relation to the other: “la *machina* intégral d’une dialectique,” as Lacan says.⁵⁴ And its accompanying paradox: the “one” which cannot be *thought* without the other. Here dis-remembered, dismembered of a body of thought, “neuter,” its secret engenderment as a dedication *to* (“others, *il y a là cendre*”), which is nevertheless “without name, without force, without age, without seeing” in which the subject is elided, suspended in the first person singular, present indicative of *to be*.

And yet this, too, will have been conditioned (tempered in or by this holocaust)—as what follows from the conditional, itself subject to conditions (“without,” etc.)—in the speculative hypothesis of the “if” with which everything is made to re-commence. “Holocaust ... if”: which comes to take the place of the *ergo*, “Holocaust ... therefore.” To unread or unthink, this machine of “l’*ergo* retourné d’un nouveau *cogito*,”⁵⁵ détournement of the subject-predicate, S/p—between two repetitions: “One is not without the

⁵³ HÉLÈNE CIXOUS, *Neutre* (Paris: Grasset, 1972) 19–20.

⁵⁴ JACQUES LACAN, “Discours de Rome,” *Autre écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001) 138.

⁵⁵ LACAN, “La logique du fantasme,” *Autre écrits*, 323.

other / ‘One is not without the other.’” Which is to say, “The same as one is not without the other,” “Neither I’ without I’ other.” And between the two, the infernal mechanism of the alterior/speculative, *stade du miroir*, where “one is Without-other, and what is not here is hidden here.”

One, singular impersonal: the total entity. The “without-other.” One is not without the other, it is the without-other. No other one which is not already this one, this all, this holocaust. The one who speaks, for example, to unthink the cinder whose prime *exemplum* it is (“who am I?”) and who cannot do without itself. The non-figure of holocaust and its specular counterpart in the othering-return of the Phoenix. Its topical recursions figure the incendiary trail or cinder path of this “subject” (not) without the other (fall-resurrection, *spiritus, anima*).

As the re-iterative site of an other-locus, the cinder describes a certain (r)use of historicity and genealogy (Vico, Hegel, Marx) as locus of absolute alterity and the prior possibility of an *ergo* (“previous site of the pure subject of the signifier”),⁵⁶ which always stands beyond the dialectical movement which it nevertheless orientates and in fact inaugurates—such that the so-called subject and its objects do not constitute an opposition in any properly metaphysical sense. If such a formulation is restricted by its being within the field of language, then there can be no “properly metaphysical” oppositions as such, without constituting a delusive construct, a misrecognition of the nature of “opposition” within language—since the signification of “opposition” has always relied on a determinate “exterior” with which to anchor and justify such notions as “truth,” “being,” “presence” without which all oppositions remain either arbitrary or quasi-empirical. (This is perhaps the crux of the problem, that without an exteriority against which to define value, language has no exterior form of “meaning.” It is necessary, then, to begin to question what is signified under the concept of meaning and exteriority.) As Derrida says: “Without the holocaust, the dialectical movement and the history of Being could not open themselves” (46.II).⁵⁷

Echoing Derrida’s early essay on Emmanuel Levinas (“Violence et métaphysique” [1967]), the ethical discourse implicit here is tied to an ongoing engagement with the question of discourse itself (the Freudian concepts of mourning and repetition which receive an explicit formulation elsewhere in terms of the technics of writing, *hypermnēsis*, the timelessness of the unconscious, and so on) in relation to what Derrida calls here (*Feu le cendre*) the “urn of language” (53.25). This urn of language implies not only an “object” of mourning (*deuil*), but also that form of commemoration which

⁵⁶ LACAN, “The Subversion of the Subject,” *Écrits*, 305.

⁵⁷ Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982) 6. The term *différance* denotes the linguistic rupture within which ontotheology “produces its systems and its history, it includes ontotheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return.”

structures the *adieu*, that form of address directed at the non-present—as the ghost of Hamlet says, “adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me” (I.v.91)⁵⁸:

—*Mais l'urne de langage est si fragile [...]. Non, ce n'est pas le tombeau dont il aurait rêvé pour qu'un travail de deuil, comme ils disent, y ait lieu de prendre son temps. Dans cette phrase je vois: le tombeau d'un tombeau, le monument d'une tombe impossible—interdite, comme la mémoire d'un cénotaphe, la patience refusée du deuil, refusée aussi la lente décomposition arbitée, située, logée, hospitalisée en toi pendant que tu mange les morceaux (il n'a pas voulu manger le morceau mais il l'a dû).*

—But the urn of language is so fragile. It crumbles and immediately you blow into the dust of words which are the cinder itself. And if you entrust it to paper, it is all the better to enflame you with my dear, you will eat yourself up immediately. No, this is not the tomb he would have dreamt of in order that there may be a place, as they say, for the work of mourning to take its time. In this sentence I see the tomb of a tomb, the monument of an impossible tomb—forbidden, like the memory of a cenotaph, denied also the slow decomposition that shelters, locates, lodges, hospitalises itself in you while you eat the pieces (he did not want to eat the piece but was forced to). [53–55.26]

The self-effacing overture of this incendiary envoi facilitates a subjective dialectic but does not close off the subject as a total entity (if one recalls that the conventional *envoi* is an address to a *named auditor* which always presupposes a rhetorical *figure*—of which, here, nothing figurable remains, *la cendre?*). There is, there can be, no final raising or *Aufhebung* in the Hegelian sense, through which a “subject” could come to it-self in its own-most potentiality for being: “the all-burning is ‘an essenceless by-play [...] without becoming a subject, and without consolidating through the self (*Selbst*) its differences” (42.II). Nor does the opening of play centre the dialectical structure, rather it orientates it in a disorientating manner, via what Lacan terms *méconnaissance* or “misrecognition” and the occultation of the sign (as cinder [*Sinn-der*]):

C'est évidemment une figure, alors même qu'aucun visage ne s'y laisse regarder. Cendre de nom figure, et parce qu'il n'y a pas ici de cendre, pas ici (rien à toucher, aucune couleur, point de corps, des mots seulement), mais surtout parce que ces mots qui à travers le nom sont censés ne pas nommer le mot mais la chose, les voilà qui nomment une chose à la place d'une autre, métonymie quand la cendre se sépare, une chose en figurant une autre dont il ne rest de figurable en elle.

It is obviously a figure, although no face lets itself be seen. The name “cinder” figures, and because there is no cinder here (nothing to touch, no colour, no body, only words) above all because these words, which through the name are meant to name not the word but the thing, they are what names one thing in the place of another, metonymy when the cinder is separated, one thing while figuring another from which nothing figurable remains. [71.43]

⁵⁸ Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, *Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Accordingly, for Derrida, the sign “is from its origin and to the core of its sense” marked by a paradoxical “will to derivation and effacement,”⁵⁹ so that every “significatory event is a substitute (for the signified as well as the ideal form of the signifier).”⁶⁰ As there can be no concept of the sign without an “ideal form of the signifier,” and as what is signified is absent from the scene of the signifier’s ideality (its desire?), then the “desire of language” (subject to/of this double genitive) should be thought as already defined by an irrecoverable metonymic substitution: “one thing while figuring another from which nothing figurable remains.” The implication of this for the Cartesian *cogito* is an indefinite deferral of the assumption of self through an irreducibility of discourse and of a mirroring *auto-poiesis* (“specular” counterpart of the agency of the letter, “I ...”). That is, the desire to “fill the gap” left in or by the hermeneutic/discursive relation: the substituting of “incessant deciphering for the unveiling of truth as the presentation of the thing in its presence.”⁶¹

This *incessant deciphering* describes what Lacan, in his 1933 article “Le Problème du style et la conception psychiatrique des formes paranoïaques de l’expérience,” referred to as “l’illusion d’une infaillible investigation”—one which defines itself through a set of functional abstractions (a systematic misrecognition) which ultimately tend towards the machinic, vis-à-vis the investigations of Viktor Tausk and their (barely acknowledged) “détournement” in the collaborative writings of Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze. As a *détournement* of the auto-poietic relation, the mechanism of an “incessant deciphering” can equally be taken to describe the so-called desire of the subject as subjective deferral of it-self, the condition of which is being caught in the traverse, in the *travail*, of the machine unawares (it “fascinates”) despite the *intention* of its objectification (which becomes its symptom): a fundamental *misrecognition* within the “tranquillising familiarity”⁶² of discourse—“you would start to go numb” (76.XXI), “it still anaesthetises you” (71.42).

4

The movement towards a *topology* of desire in Lacan’s theory of subjectivity is defined such that a subject is always already implicated in “its objects” (ethically or otherwise) through a certain structure of responsibility (played out in Derrida’s *Feu le cendre* in a scene alluding to the death of Socrates: before the onset of a hemlock-induced paralysis, Socrates apparently *gives orders* that a sacrifice be paid *in debt* to Asclepius):

⁵⁹ JACQUES DERRIDA, “Meaning and Representation,” *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. D. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) 51.

⁶⁰ DERRIDA, “Meaning and Representation,” 50.

⁶¹ DERRIDA, “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, 18.

⁶² HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 234.

“Avant ma mort je donnerais des ordres. Si tu n’es pas là, on retire mon corps du lac, on le brûle et on t’envoie me cendres, urne bien protégée (‘fragile’) mais non recommandée, pour tenter la chance. Ce serait un envoi de moi qui ne viendrait plus de moi (ou un envoi venu de moi qui l’aurais ordonné mais plus un envoi de moi, comme tu préfères). Alors tu aimerais mêler mes cendres à ce que tu manges [...]. Passé une certaine dose, tu commencerais à t’engourdir, à tomber amoureuse de toi, je te regarderais t’avancer doucement vers la mort, tu t’approcherais de moi en toi avec une sérénité dont nous n’avons pas idée, la réconciliation absolue. Et tu donnerais des ordres ... En t’attendant je vais dormir, tu es toujours là, mon deux amour.”

“Before my death I would give orders. If you aren’t here, my body [corps] is to be pulled out of the lake [lac] and burned, my ashes [cendres] are to be sent to you, the urn well protected (‘fragile’) but not registered, in order to tempt fate. This would be an envoi of/from me [...] which no longer would come from me (or an envoi sent by me, who would have ordered it, but no longer an envoi of me, as you like). And then you would enjoy mixing my cinders with what you eat [...]. After a certain dose, you would start to go numb, to fall in love with yourself, I would watch you slowly advance towards death, you would approach me within you with a serenity that we have no idea of, absolute reconciliation. And you would give orders ... While waiting for you I’m going to sleep, you’re always there, my sweet love.” [74–76.XXI]

To begin with, this strange narcissistic movement, a form of repeated suicide (à tomber amoureuse de toi ... je donnerais des ordres ... tu donnerais des ordres), does not—despite, as in *Hamlet*, the peculiar nature of this giving of orders—structure an acquittal, a “being-for-death” as “the search for authenticity through death,” as Blanchot says.⁶³

If it is true that for a certain Freud, “our unconsciousness cannot conceive of our own mortality” (is unable to represent mortality to itself), then it would seem to follow that dying is unrepresentable, not only because it has no present, but also because it has no place, not even in time, the temporality of time.⁶⁴

The *a-topos* of death and the utopia of the subject: two instances separated by the time of a mirror (*tu es toujours là*), a reflection effect, in which the specular returns as its own annulment (*je te regarderais t’avancer doucement vers la mort, tu t’approcherais de moi en toi avec une sérénité dont nous n’avons pas idée, la réconciliation absolue*): “The I that is responsible for the other, the I bereft of selfhood.”⁶⁵ The subject, following again from Lacan, is what “answers” to this quasi “dialectical” estrangement—it “projects” its desire onto objects which it symbolically internalises in place of its own death; a process of misidentification as the so-called internalising of a *difference* which defines it against everything that it is not (a “missed encounter with the real”—so that the constituting horizon of the subject can be regarded, paradoxically or not,

⁶³ MAURICE BLANCHOT, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995) 117.

⁶⁴ BLANCHOT, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 119.

⁶⁵ BLANCHOT, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 119.

as precisely this “dialectic of the real,” as Kojève says, re-described here as an incessant sign-substitution—the *détournement* of *reference*).⁶⁶ As a figure of spectrality, the “return” of the signifier affects an “horizon of the subject,” as a form of linguistic mirage, or what Merleau-Ponty refers to as “le mythe d’un langage des choses.”⁶⁷

This is what Nietzsche elsewhere describes in terms of the eternal return as an image in a mirror, “an image of finitude or self-reflection, and thus also of its limits. At its limits, in the place of the tain of the mirror, lies the ‘nothing,’ which ‘rings’ the world into spatial form, between inside and outside”—“a world of eternal self-creation, of eternal self-destruction, this mystery world of twofold bliss [...] without aim [Ziel], unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal”⁶⁸ This return, however, is not characterised by a repetition of signifiers continually substituting for one another, but as the play of signification forces that arise within signification, dividing or multiplying its possible itineraries in such a way that causes language to “waver,” as a “vibration of grammar in the voice” (22).

This likewise finds an analogy in the phantasmatic text traced out by the “return” of the cinder *envoi, il y a là cendre*—as a symptomatology which invites analysis (in terms, perhaps, of the Freudian theory of neurotic symptoms and of dream interpretation—in which a given symbol is understood to resonate simultaneously with conscious and unconscious significations, serving contradictorily as both the desire to fulfil an impulse and the desire to suppress an impulse). The phrase *il y a là cendre* suggests, as a verbal othering, a spatio-temporal displacement that can perhaps be discerned in the similarity *cendre* (“[...]andre” 75.49)) bears to the German word *Anders* (difference or otherness) used by Freud to describe the difference between events of breaching (the breaking of a path by which unconscious psychic events “come to consciousness,” as *translatio* or *metapherein*).⁶⁹

It could be said, as Derrida himself suggests, that the “consumption-consummation” of the desired object or subjective horizon “never ‘really’ takes place. It hovers between desire and fulfilment, perpetration and remembrance,”⁷⁰ so that the subject is always suspended in the “between,” so that the subjectification of the subject to the signifier constitutes the subject as the subject of desire and not that of a reflexive consciousness—if this itself did not appear a simplification based upon an almost equivalent tautology.⁷¹

⁶⁶ LACAN, “The Mirror Stage,” *Écrits*, 2–4. Cf. HEGEL, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956) 241–250: on “Phases of Individuality Aesthetically Conditioned.”

⁶⁷ MERLEAU-PONTY, *Prose du Monde*, 12.

⁶⁸ FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *Werke*, 3 vols., ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Karl Hanser, 1960) 3.916–7; cited in LUKACHER, “Mourning becomes Telepathy,” *Cinders*, 5n.

⁶⁹ SIGMUND FREUD, “The Project,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-analysis) I.308 *et passim*.

⁷⁰ JACQUES DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: The Athlone Press, 1981) 343.

⁷¹ LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 89.

The contradictorily coherent nature of the subject is regarded by Lacan as “originating” in the unconscious, which “drives” the narcissistic ego towards objects whose cause is not only opaque, but lost *qua* content, so that this movement is in fact a structuring of desire around a fundamental fantasy (*une lettre d’amour*: “you would fall in love with yourself, I would watch you slowly advance towards death”). As Lacan says, “there is desire because there is unconsciousness—that’s to say language which escapes the subject in its structure and in its effect, and there is always at the level of language something which is beyond consciousness, and it is there that one can situate the function of desire”—*as the confrontation with the impossible object transformed into a fantasy of desire*.⁷²

This fundamental fantasy characterises, at the same time, the *cogito* as will-to in the assumed mastery of (its relation to) the objects that constitute its violently negative “reality”—situated in Lacan’s later work as the *objet a*, the imaginary *topos* in which the signifier, as the “projective” anxiety-cum-desire of the subject (which for Derrida, in *Feu le cendre*, parallels the emergence of the cinder *envoi* from the infernal *lac* of *Animadversion XXI*).

The *objet a* is the “hollow” or “void, which can be filled by [...] any object” according to the desire of the Other. But as Lacan makes clear, this *objet a* is not an *Objekt*, but the *cause of desire*, insofar as it “serves as a symbol for the lack.”⁷³ The *objet a* is “no being at all,” it is rather “the portion of emptiness that my demand presupposes, which only by being situated by means of metonymy [...] can enable us to imagine what desire supported by no being at all might look like.”⁷⁴ That is to say, as the place of a metonymic recursion or *détournement*, a substitutive detour between the subject and the unconscious (*discours de l’Autre*), where the *I* first affects itself as the “objectification” of a certain *trace* [*Spur*], through the (mimetic) incendiaryism of what Freud refers to as breaching [*frayer, Bahnung*] (“my body [*corps*] is to be pulled out of the lake [*lac*] and burned”).⁷⁵

⁷² Cited in FRANÇOIS WAHL, “La structure, le sujet, la trace. Ou de deux philosophies au-delà du structuralisme: Jacques Lacan et Jacques Derrida,” *Qu’est-ce que le structuralisme?* ed François Wahl (Paris: Seuil, 1968) 390–441. Cf. LACAN, *Écrits*, 297: “Since Freud the unconscious has been a chain of signifiers that somewhere (on another stage, in another scene, he wrote) is repeated, and insists on interfering in the breaks offered to it by the effective discourse and the cogitation that it informs.” The unconscious is also characterised by Freud as the “reservoir” of a “death” at the origin, from which arises the notion of the death-drive. Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. C.J.M. Hubback (London: The Hogarth Press, 1922).

⁷³ LACAN, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 180; 168; 103. Cf. ELIZABETH GROSZ, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990) 77. “The drive describes the residue or remainder left over of the primal object that ensures that no substitute will ever plug the rim, fill it to completion.”

⁷⁴ JACQUES LACAN, “Le Séminaire XX,” *Encore* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) 114.

⁷⁵ DERRIDA, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 213: “force produces meaning [...] through the power of repetition alone, which inhabits it originally as its death. This power, that is, this lack of power, which opens and limits the labour of force, institutes translatability, makes possible what we call ‘language,’ transforms an absolute idiom into a limit that is always already transgressed: a pure idiom is not language; it becomes so only through repetition; repetition always already divides the point of departure of the first time.”

But it is precisely at the point at which the possessive and the conditional come into contact, as it were, however briefly, in this incendiary play, that this body, corpse, text, takes on a further incarnation (not an object, but a cause of desire), in which all of the previously supposed oppositions are overturned by the formula we have perhaps been expecting all along. And tracing it, the subject's history, which led up to "it," the aporia which isn't that of experience, as Lacan says, but of destiny (its "contingent" and yet "necessary impasse")—what does it signify? That "the unconscious is the unknown subject of the ego"?⁷⁶

This eruptive "surface" of the *lac* evidently suggests a further analogy to the *stade du miroir*:

Once again, we're dealing with a mirror.

What is the image in the mirror? The rays which return onto the mirror make us locate in an imaginary space the object which moreover is somewhere in reality. The real object isn't the object that you see in the mirror. So here there's a phenomenon of consciousness as such. [...] That is already enough to raise the question—*What is left in the mirror?*⁷⁷

Wake, trail of light, photograph of the feast in mourning (between two repetitions of texts, as are almost all of these *cinders*): some sort of mechanism is at work here. It is in a later seminar, in 1954, that Lacan, reflecting on the technics of the mirror dialectic, assigns a "materialist definition" to the phenomenon of consciousness by means of a metaphor of a particular type of photography. This will have entailed a revisiting, however elliptically, of a Cartesian cybernetics, an ego *ex machina*, playing against Walter Benjamin's 1937 essay "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" (it is precisely the camera, as a mechanism of the gaze, by means of which Lacan envisages a certain "aura" as affecting itself, as we shall see, in the peculiar form of a psychoanalytic sublime or *sublimatis*, which nevertheless also functions as a *blind* of the "optical unconscious"). Where this "auratic blind" haunts Benjamin's essay on "mechanical reproduction," it is actively employed by Lacan within the metaphors of "symbolic production" between the Imaginary and the Real, by way of the figure of the "camera."

In a hypothetical world in which man has disappeared, there remains only this mechanical form of reflexivity: a camera alone in nature. The "presence" of this camera is made to "mirror," in a sense, the non-presence of man. At the same time, an actual mirror, although we are not told this (we expect it), is "in" the camera, while the camera itself is trained on the surface of a lake, in which there appears an inverted image of a mountain. And despite, as Lacan says, "all living beings having disappeared, the camera can nonetheless record the image of the mountain in the lake," which is thus also (paradoxically)

⁷⁶ JACQUES LACAN, "A Materialist Definition of the Phenomenon of Consciousness," *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955*, trans. S. Tomaselli (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 43.

⁷⁷ LACAN, "A Materialist Definition," 46–47.

a record of its non-presence there. But Lacan goes further and ponders a certain incendiary intervention (not the Avernus of Freud, but an incendiary “event” of a phenomenon of consciousness affected from without—although it is immediately apparent that this, too, will have its corresponding “event,” reflected on the surface of a *lac*, as though emanating from within):

We can take things further. If the machine were more complicated, a photo-cell focused on the image in the lake could cause an explosion to take place somehow—it is always necessary, for something to seem efficacious, for an explosion to take place somewhere—and another machine could recall the echo or collect the energy of this explosion.⁷⁸

But there is a slightly different way of looking at this: supposing that in place of this oppositional arrangement of the organic and inorganic, *physis/technē* (φύσις/τέχνη), with its Rousseauesque overtones, there were merely the camera positioned in front of a mirror. Assume, then, that something or other sets in train the course of events described by Lacan above: photo-cell, explosion, echo, an “other” machine. *What is left in the mirror?* in the illusory depth beyond the glissant surface of the *lac*? Perhaps, after all, it will be nothing but an illuminated blind, a trail of light, in which the image of the explosion in fact ruins the visible. And whether or not this is recorded by some third party, it will have been nothing other than the “consciousness” of an impossible event, in which the ego has still not managed to resurrect itself. Derrida:

J’ai davantage encore le sentiment du «réel» quand ce qui est photographié, c’est un visage ou un regard, alors que d’une certaine façon une montaigne peut être au moins aussi «réelle». L’«effet de réel» tient ici à l’irréductible altérité d’une autre origine du monde; c’est une autre origine du monde. Ce que j’appelle regard ici, le regard de l’autre, ce n’est pas simplement une autre machine à percevoir des images, c’est un autre monde, une autre source de phénoménalité, un autre point zero de l’apparaître.⁷⁹

Of what is left in this double mirror; *il y a là cendre*—kept or retained there, the trace of a circuit of symbolic capture. (The illusionism of a mirror which both reflects and transmits.) A mechanism or aperture effect: written on the sensitised film (memory screen), which is immediately exposed, “erased” the moment the film loses its transparency, becomes opaque in the light. Explosion, after-effect of the image burnt into the mechanised retina. (The incendiary counterpart of that other mystic writing pad?) But as Lacan says, “the symbolic world is the world of the machine.” Hence it is a matter of having confused the symbolic relation as being some *thing*—some thing which thinks—beyond the surface appearance, or disappearance, of the mechanics of reflexivity. This “mechanism” is not identical to the auto-mobile, god-like phantom of metaphysics described by Pythagoras (*anima est numero se ipsum*

⁷⁸ LACAN, “A Materialist Definition,” 47.

⁷⁹ JACQUES DERRIDA and BERNARD STIEGLER, *Échographies de la télévision* (Paris: Galilée, 1996) 138.

movens, “the spirit [mind] is the number that moves itself”) and Aristotle (who in *De Anima* argues that the spirit [mind], as seat of consciousness, is the principle of all movement, or prime mover). Consciousness, rather, “is linked to something entirely contingent, just as contingent as the surface of a lake in an uninhabited world.” Moreover, for “consciousness to occur each time” there need only be a surface on which *it* “can produce what is called an *image*.” But this production does not describe an affirmation of the “subject” in itself or even of what is *called* an image: it is a symbolic play of production, and insofar as he is committed to a play of symbols, “man,” Lacan says, “is a *decentred* subject.”⁸⁰

5

In this contingent, eruptive play, *of language*, a surface (of the *lac* of an uninhabited world) describes a place of the encounter and struggle of the ego and its others: the incendiary *topos* of a violent “anthropology” versus an “implacable dialectic of transcendent consciousness” (*Deus ex machina* as *machina ex Deo*). Continuous with Lacan’s critique of the *cogito*, then, is a critique of Descartes’s mechanistic interpretation (*Discours de la Méthode* [1637]) of biological phenomena as automata, which links back to the mimetic technologies of Plato and Aristotle. As Georges Canguilhem has argued:

The construction of a mechanical model presupposes a living original [...]. The platonic Demiurge copies the ideas, and the Idea is the model of which the natural object is a copy. The Cartesian God, the *Artifex maximus*, works to produce something equivalent to the living body itself. The model for the living machine is that body itself. Divine art imitates the Idea—but the Idea is the living body.⁸¹

Canguilhem’s discussion of Descartes points to one way in which technology has been made to relate to a “non-technological” world, according to the old philosophical dualism *physis/technē*, which works to sustain the fallacy that *technē* is somehow “opposed” to *physis*.

By ascribing a material organisation to consciousness, however, Lacan departs from the analogical thinking which previously sought to establish a direct relation between machines and organisms, thus circumventing the dualistic fallacy and the anthropomorphism that sustains it. The machinic does not take the place of consciousness (or of conscience), nor does it absolve the subject of the burden of the “Real.” Rather it situates the subject as a figure of recursion (a mechanism, in fact, of recursive substitution), simultaneously inscribed within and exceeding the symbolic organisation of

⁸⁰ LACAN, “A Materialist Definition,” 47; 49.

⁸¹ GEORGES CANGUILHEM, “Machine and Organism,” *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992) 53. Cf. the “Sixth Meditation” in *Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

the machine, since 1. “the ego can in no way be anything other than an imaginary function, even if at a certain level it determines the structuration of the subject”; 2. “for the human subject to appear, it would be necessary for the machine, in the information it gives, to take account of itself, as one unity among others.”⁸² And yet this is precisely what the machine cannot do. On the other hand, as Lacan points out, the ego isn’t just a function, since from the moment the symbolic system is instituted it can itself be used as a symbol. This would seem to return the ego to the domain of the machine, and insofar as the subject comes to identify with the ego it assigns to itself an implicitly mechanical placement in the circuit of symbolic exchange.

What this might seem to suggest, at least in part, is that the machine in some way “returns” something to the subject. At the moment when Lacan asserts that there is not the “shadow of an ego” in the machine, he gives to the subject a recursive figuration as the *I* which is nevertheless “up to something in it.” That is, *in the machine*—or we might say, as the spectral counterpart to *what is left in the mirror* (as its “symptom,” for which the machine, as a “topological” figure, describes what Lacan will later term the *sinthome*): “The machine is the structure detached from the activity of the subject. The symbolic world is the world of the machine.”

Which is to say, the machine-metaphor is also a metonym: a signifier, congruous with, and yet separate from the subject, as a “figure” of topical reversion. For Derrida, the recursive *topos* described by the machine is also a topical limit of an ethics. It marks a limit in the structure of a certain “responsibility,” the horizon of a possible affirmation in which, as Levinas says: “It is not the I, it is the other that can say yes”⁸³ (what Nietzsche will have characterised as the affirmation of the eternal return—the annulus, the circle, the abyss of the eternal return likewise describes a mechanism or “aperture” effect of reflexivity, which is not that of a *cogito* but rather like that of Mallarmé’s probabilistic mechanics: “Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira la chance”).

In a seeming mime of Lacan’s mirror dialectic, Derrida’s cinder *envoi* “returns” in the “eruption” of/from the *lac*, to which the subject (as though programmed in advance) inclines, without ever *responding*, “yes.” The cinder *envoi*, emergence of the signifier from the other-locus, gives “yes” in advance of itself, desire of/for itself: “cinders of the unconscious.”⁸⁴ Cinder *envoi* of that which speaks, or rather writes—of that which *addresses, avant la lettre*, from beyond the opening of discourse, at the same time as this *envoi* signals the very absence of any “substantive”: an “accumulation of surplus value” without “capital” (75-77.51), a “surplus” that is (given in place of) the “capital.” Which would also symbolise the tension between the apparently contradictory

⁸² LACAN, “A Materialist Definition,” 52.

⁸³ EMMANUEL LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 299.

⁸⁴ DERRIDA, *The Post Card*, 7.

significations of the word *lac* (catchment, reservoir; deficit, surplus; debt, gift). Cinder as what simultaneously *overflows from* the infernal mechanism of this discursive apparatus, and what *flows into* or *fuels* it—what is also signified in Derrida’s use of the Freudian term *Nachtrag*, or *supplément*.⁸⁵

The signification of the cinder *envoi* (the over-determined supplement, letter, signifier, discourse “projected” into the void of the *lac*) can be conceived as arising in the seam between the complementary form of the subject (its *Gestalt*) and the abject-ed “body” [*corps*] of the other⁸⁶ (its disfigured and incinerated remains, its cipher): “in the final account, the remains of a body, a pile of cinders unconcerned with preserving its form” (77.51). The cinder *envoi*, the so-called “specular image,” projects itself between the other as lack and the subject as topical *discursus*: surplus or residue (if this itself is not already tautological).⁸⁷ It “takes place” as “the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin.”⁸⁸ The signification of the “specular image” thus comes about in a twofold way; on the one hand, when the subject, in order to constitute itself, splits off a part of itself which then performs the supplementary task of the specular counterpart; and on the other hand, when it is given to the subject in the form of desire.⁸⁹ As Derrida says, “the gift [...] is the axiom of speculative reason” (48.II).

This twofold movement reveals a delusive construct in the structurality of the subject, in which the ego cannot determine whether anything *of* itself originates from within itself (the desire of the subject as will or *cogito*) or beyond itself, in

⁸⁵ JACQUES DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 141ff.

⁸⁶ Cf. JULIA KRISTEVA, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 22: “the excluded, the outside-of-meaning, the abject, atopia.”

⁸⁷ DERRIDA, “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, 19: this *lac* as a “keeping in reserve” of a “nonreserve.”

⁸⁸ GAYATRI SPIVAK, Introduction to *Of Grammatology*, xvii.

⁸⁹ LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 83. Cf. *Écrits*, 312. What is “given,” “returned,” or “lent” to the subject as *desire* is also the signature, proper name, idiom which, like the specular image, is projected or addressed as though “to” the Other (through the lacunary “space” of the *objet a*), and which is then “returned” to the subject (hopefully to reach its destination, but always with the “chance” of going astray). Cf. DERRIDA, *The Ear of the Other*, 88–89, and “La Facteur,” *The Post Card*, 443–444. Cf. also LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 198–199: “The subject is born in so far as the signifier emerges from the field of the Other [...] this subject [...] solidifies into a signifier [...]” Cf. *Cinders, Animadversion II*. In order to guard itself against its own becoming present, this “blaze” splits off from itself [46–48], in the same way that the unconscious splits off from itself in order to breach a way through to the level of consciousness via the preconscious (cf. DERRIDA, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 200–202). This process is described in the epigraph to Freud’s *Traumdeutung*, which implies a dis-simulation, as myth, of that which cannot go above in the daylight; the underworld or unconscious itself. Thus the phrase, *il y a là cendre*, as the supplemental or dialectical image occupying the lacunary (non) site of the opening of play can be seen both as a substitute for the “primal scene” of language and as a central node of condensation and displacement which holds together the text of *Cinders* as if it were structured as a “Dream Work.”

the field of the Other (*désir de l'Autre*).⁹⁰ This self-difference of the subject means that the ego cannot properly be distinguished from the discourse in which it is related (even though such a distinction appears necessary in order to mark out the facticity of the subject) since the “inside” of this discourse is also an “outside,”⁹¹ or as Lacan remarks: the “so-called monologue is perfectly continuous with exterior dialogue, and it is just for this reason that we can say that the unconscious is also the discourse of the Other.”⁹² Thus the “subject” is doubly speculative; the speculum, the specular image of the cinder *envoi* emerging from this equivocal *lac*, itself is divided: “the *lack* and the *surplus* can never be stabilised in the plenitude of a form or equation.”⁹³

6

The doubly speculative nature of the subject is described by Lacan as “discontinuity in the real”: the place of the *inter-dit* is also the place of the *intra-dit* of a “between-two-subjects” (“the very place in which the transparency of the classical subject is divided and passes through the effects of ‘fading’ that specify the Freudian subject by its occultation”).⁹⁴ Importantly, the relation of annunciation to an experience of alterity is already suggested by Kojève in the form of a between-two-subjects: “La Conscience-de-soi existe *en et pour soi* dans la mesure et par le fait qu’elle existe (en et pour soi) pour une autre Conscience-de-soi; c’est-à-dire qu’elle n’existe qu’en tant qu’entité-reconnue.”⁹⁵ Similarly, in his 1970 text *S/Z*, Roland Barthes relates the effects of fading to an interdiction—the suppression of the voice, its sublimation, translation or transference, suggesting in Lacan’s choice of the (English) present participle, noun, adjective, a mechanical audio technique: “le *fading* des voix.”⁹⁶ Lacan makes this “technique” explicit in his 1958 “Remarque sur le rapport de Daniel Lagache”:

⁹⁰ LACAN, “The Subversion of the Subject,” *Écrits*, 312.

⁹¹ Cf. DERRIDA, “The Inside is the Outside,” *Of Grammatology*, 44–64. The “is” in the title of Derrida’s essay is placed *sous rature* (under erasure) as a means of illustrating the twofold problem of the non-identical difference and metaphoricity of “present being” and the need to re-evaluate the given of metaphysical oppositions, such as inside and outside, upon which the “is” of Being is founded. Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, *The Archaeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac*, trans. J. P. Leavey (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1980); Leavey, in his introduction to this text, describes the gesture of placing a term *sous rature* as “Derrida’s erasing-erased writing—his palimpsest—[...] the inscription that continually displaces the reversed hierarchies of metaphysics” (II).

⁹² JACQUES LACAN, *Le Séminaire, Livre III: Les psychoses 1955–1956* (Paris: Seuil, 1981) 128. Cf. WILDEN, “Lacan and the discourse of the Other,” 262. “In one sense, there is an unconscious subject (barred from consciousness) seeking to address itself to another unconscious subject (the Other). In another sense this unconscious discourse is that of the Other in the subject who has been alienated from himself through his relationship to the mirror image of the other.”

⁹³ DERRIDA, *Positions*, 46.

⁹⁴ LACAN, “The Subversion of the Subject,” *Écrits*, 299.

⁹⁵ KOJÈVE, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 16. Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 82: “Tout autre est tout autre.”

⁹⁶ ROLAND BARTHES, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975) 43.

fading se produit dans la suspension du désir, de ce que le sujet s'éclipse dans le signifiant de la demand—et dans la fixation du fantasme, de ce que le sujet même devient la coupure qui fait briller l'objet partiel de son indicible vacillation.⁹⁷

The *inter/intra-dit* of this subjective *demand*, contrary to Husserl's formulation, places in doubt any attempt to isolate the subject according to the determination of what we might also call the *interdiction* of equivalence or translatability (*intraduisible*). The apparent exteriority of the subject's desire (*la fixation du fantasme*) remains suspended "within" the discourse of the subject *qua* subject,⁹⁸ in a manner elsewhere described by Derrida as *mise en abyme*, wherein the "totality" of the signifying relation "is represented on the model of one of its parts which thus becomes greater than the whole of which it forms a part, which it makes into a part."⁹⁹ In a topological movement, the "interior" of this discourse "folds back" onto its "exterior," and vice versa, so that it is no longer the concepts of "interior" and "exterior" that determine the structurality of the discursive subject, but the way in which these concepts relate—that is, the "seam," the "fold," the "boundary" and the "frame."

In the prologue to *Feu la cendre*, Derrida elaborates on the text's reflexivity in a passage detailing the project, initiated by a group called *Des femmes* (Carole Bouquet, Michèle Muller, Antoinette Fouque), of making a sound recording of *Feu la cendre* itself:

then one day came the opportunity, I should say the chance of making a tape recording of this. Before the technical means [...] this opportunity presupposes the desire [...] to breach [*frayer*] a passage to the voices at work in a body of writing [*travaillent une écriture au corps*]. And in short to bring them into play in the text, finally, in the production of the text itself. [23, translation modified]

This textual body appears (self-)generative—it produces itself as an outgrowth of consumption—an *economic* symbiosis linked by the inflationary principle. The text, and so the textual subject, *addresses itself* and yet remains *unaddressed*—future anterior: it has "no relation to [itself] that is not forced to defer itself by passing through the other in the form, precisely, of the eternal return."¹⁰⁰

In drawing attention to Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence (and indirectly Henri Poincaré's *cercle vicieux*), Derrida adopts the Joycean metaphor of a postal system in which the circulation of letters (*envois*) marks out a literal topology of "desire." Derrida writes that "there is no difference, no possible

⁹⁷ LACAN, "Remarque sur le rapport de Daniel Lagache: «Psychanalyse et structure de la personnalité»" *Écrits I*, 656.

⁹⁸ LACAN, *Le séminaire: Livre III*, 247: "There is also the other who speaks in my place, apparently, the other who is in me. It is an other of a completely different nature to that other, my fellow man."

⁹⁹ DERRIDA, *The Truth in Painting*, 27.

¹⁰⁰ DERRIDA, *The Ear of the Other*, 88.

distinction” between the *envoi* that the subject addresses “to someone else” and the *envoi* that it sends to itself.¹⁰¹ When the subject writes (to) itself it is not immediately present to itself, instead it deals with itself at a distance, as an other, in a way that constitutes the subject as a signifiatory “fold.” The contradictory nature of this (reflexive) fold can be recognised in the expression, *écriture au corps*, which can be made to signify both a “body of writing” and a “writing to or with the body, corpse, corpus” (“this would be an *envoi* of/from me” [76.XXI]: “a traversal with the body of a space that is not given in advance but that opens as one advances”).¹⁰²

When Derrida writes, then, of *le désir frayer le passage à ces voix qui travaillent une écriture au corps*, he is not simply indicating a desire to breach a way to “voices” at work in a body of writing, but to break a path to those “voices” that work a seam “within” writing, between writing and itself, or between writing and its other—the “writing of the body” described by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, or what Kristeva calls the “maternal,” “the asymbolic, spastic body of the mother,”¹⁰³ an heterogeneous body that can no longer contain itself and splits off from itself:

This heterogeneous object is of course a body that invites me to identify with it (woman, child, androgyne?) and immediately forbids any identification; it is not me, it is a non-me in me, beside me, outside of me, where the me becomes lost. This heterogeneous object is a body, because it is a *text*.¹⁰⁴

The “body” is at once the “pregnant, maternal body” and its own abject extension—what it thrusts out of itself, what breaches the body surface in a moment of de-sublimated violence.¹⁰⁵ The work, the “labour” of writing *to* the “interior” body, is thus simultaneously and paradoxically the writing *of* the interior body (making “a reservoir of writing readable” [25]). This work of parturition is equally a work of deliberation, since what is produced is always already delivered up as a substitute, substituted in turn by another (21) in the form of an *intention*. In such a way the “matrix” of writing takes the contradictory form of the *lac* so that it is at once the living flesh of desire and the corpse, cinders and ash: *S’il détruit jusqu’à sa lettre et son corps* (44.II). This is what Derrida elsewhere calls, reflecting on Nietzsche, “the dead man and the living feminine, the father and the mother. The double birth explains who I am and how I determine my identity: as double and neutral.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ DERRIDA, *The Ear of the Other*, 89.

¹⁰² DIDIER COHEN, “Entretien avec Jacques Derrida,” *Digraphe* 42 (décembre, 1987): 14–27.

¹⁰³ JULIA KRISTEVA, “Oscillation between Power and Denial,” *New French Feminism*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981) 166.

¹⁰⁴ JULIA KRISTEVA, “The Novel as Polylogue,” *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine and L.S. Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) 163.

¹⁰⁵ KRISTEVA, *Powers of Horror*, 22f.

¹⁰⁶ JACQUES DERRIDA, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978) 16.

“This polylogue body,” as Kristeva says, “is a permanent contradiction between substance and voice, as each one enters into a process of infinite fission that begins as they clash; substance is vocalised, voice is damped, as each is made infinite in relation to the other.”¹⁰⁷ The phrase *frayer le passage à ces voix qui travaillent une écriture au corps* works the seam of this permanent contradiction, voice/substance: *This would be an envoi off/from me [...] which no longer would come from me (or an envoi sent by me, who would have ordered it, but no longer an envoi of me, as you like)*. The words *envoi* and *voix* seem to impose upon one another such that the “voices” working a body [*corps*] of writing, or working a writing that addresses itself to the “body,” seem to mingle with those cinders of an infinite fission that somehow remain, as writing *within or with* the incineration of this “dismembered, countless body” (its *envoy*).¹⁰⁸ At the same time, the word *voix* seems to be somehow “in retreat” from *envoi* (through the elided prefix or preposition *en*), so that between this “writing” and this “body” there remains the question of an *emplacement* and *détournement* of the voice, or of voices, whose substance is always “in delay.”¹⁰⁹

This delay of the voice, of the voices working between the body and the text (the ghost of the one in the substance of the other—like the funerary urns in Samuel Beckett’s *Spiel* [1963]), the polylogue and the “infinitely low voice” with which the polylogue “corresponds” (21), *and that it consumes and is consumed within*—a “tongue of fire” (60.VI), a fire-language, dialect—dialectic of the wavering of the flame in the breath (*anima, pneuma*), as Derrida says: “it is on the basis of flame that one thinks *pneuma* and *spiritus*.”¹¹⁰ Like “fire-writing [...] Flame writes, writes itself, right into the flame. Trait of conflagration, spirit inflames—traces the route, breaks the path.”¹¹¹ Deep down in the very *timbre* of writing, it is at once the “fatally silent call that speaks before its own voice” and what annuls correspondence between them.

The “voice” that works *une écriture au corps* differs from the “call” by the flicker of a tongue—it is what allows something of the call to persist, to become “audible,” while still keeping it in reserve. As with the cosmological eruption at the “origin” of the universe, whose ghostly echo persists in an almost silent background radiation, the cinder “voice” marks a kind of prior “holocaust” at the origin of language that guards against its becoming present (44.II), and in this sense it is a call in which its meaning is a becoming-other-than-itself, the bringing of the other of the call to the vocable: “the process of the gift [...] the process that is not a process but a holocaust” (48.II). “Voice,” then, as the

¹⁰⁷ KRISTEVA, “The Novel as Polylogue,” 186.

¹⁰⁸ KRISTEVA, “The Novel as Polylogue,” 186.

¹⁰⁹ Viz. “the remainder of a recently destroyed correspondence. Destroyed by fire of by that which figuratively takes its place” [60.VI].

¹¹⁰ JACQUES DERRIDA, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989) 112.

¹¹¹ DERRIDA, *Of Spirit*, 104.

consumed-consummation of a call, over an improbable distance, in which the connection (addressee-receiver) remains silent, in retreat [*en retrait*] (–white noise).¹¹²

The operation of desire in the process (“that is not a process but a holocaust”) of textual (re)production is situated by Derrida in a type of “infernal machine,” what he calls in the prologue of *Feu la cendre* a “writing apparatus [...] that called [*faisait appel*] to the voice, to voices” (22). *Feu la cendre* itself as “writing apparatus,” working that seam between information and the performative, programmed between the “paternal” and “maternal” registers of its own peculiar genealogy? “Paternity being,” as Freud noted, “always inferred from a sentence, from a declaration in the form of a judgement.”¹¹³ Hence the maternal register, trace of a “mother tongue,” that Derrida, drawing on Heidegger, associates with dialect or idiom: “Dialect is not only the language of the mother, but at the same time and firstly the mother of language.”¹¹⁴ The “maternal” idiom in *Feu la cendre*, then, as what is marked by the “untranslatability” of the phrase, *il y a là cendre*—so that the putting to work of the maternal register is also the work (*ergon*) of idiom, the “accent,” the “fatally silent call that speaks before its own voice” (22):

Mais comment faire entendre cet appel fatalement silencieux qui parle avant sa propre voix? Comment laisser attendre?

How can this fatally silent call that speaks before its own voice be made audible [*entendre*]? How could it be kept waiting any longer [*attendre*]?
[22]

The “call” itself calls to the *durée* of writing. The interval in which language “awaits.” It marks an instituting motive or motif in the technics of desiring-production, of an *ergonomics* of the sign, of inscription as the motivating force behind the “writing apparatus” (what it is that can no longer be kept waiting)—the simulated desire of the *cogito* to instigate, finally and on its own accord, the moment of discursive becoming. That is, in the interval between thinking (as the dream of subjective agency) and present Being (as a “call-to”).

In *Feu la cendre*, the apparent impetus of the Cartesian subject is neutralised through the discursive metaphors of desire—to “breach [*frayer*] a pathway” (23), to make audible the “fatally silent call that speaks before its own voice”—which is given its “chance” in the performative of the *mise en voix* (“in-

¹¹² Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, “Che cos’è la poesia?” trans. Peggy Kamuf, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Harvester, 1991) 229. “Eat [...] my letter, carry it, transport it in you, like the law of a writing become your body: *writing in (it)self*.” In discussing what *mise en voix* “could call forth and risk losing, an impossible utterance and undiscoverable tonalities” Derrida asks: “Will I dare to say that my desire had a place, its place, between this call and this risk?” (*Cinders*, 23).

¹¹³ Cited in GREGORY ULMER, “Sounding the Unconscious,” *Glossary* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1986) 55.

¹¹⁴ JACQUES DERRIDA, “The *Retrait* of Metaphor,” *Enclitic* 2.2 (1978): 18.

voicing”).¹¹⁵ This *mise en voix* consigns to chance (25) the destination of specific “readable grammatical signs” (22) [envoys “of/from me”: *mes envois*]—it is a form of writing rather than a mime—opening a way for the possibility of unforeseen significations to *materialise* according to the work of association performed by the unconscious.¹¹⁶

We might say that such a *mise en voix* “aggravates a certain indecision” in the production of meaning, an indecision already “risked by the word *là*, with or without accent, in *il y a là cendre*” (22). The adverb *là* marks a “double-inscription,” revealing through its homophonic relationship with the definite article *la* the way in which language resonates simultaneously with seemingly “conscious” and “unconscious” significations. The “indecision” that arises as a result of this describes an implicit lability within language, between “voice” and the sublimated code of the “call” within writing that makes the ambivalence of the graphic trait in this *mise en voix* possible, inviting contrary forces of signification to come into play “simultaneously.”

What this ambi-valence signals is a compulsive motion towards an otherness of language coupled with a desire to accommodate what is other to it, in a way that would neutralise the threat of a loss implicit in the *inter/intra-dit* schema and so neutralise (dialecticise) the primal interdiction of the Freudian complex. That is, to bring to light, to consciousness, what remains beyond its grasp (what manifests itself as the double threat of absence/castration), much in the same way as a certain *selbstgeschaffene* game becomes paradigmatic for the way Freud viewed the subject’s effort at

¹¹⁵ Lukacher’s translation of Derrida’s phrase as “vocalisation” gives no rendering of the homophonic relationship between *en voix* and *envoi*. A more satisfactory translation seems to be “in-voice,” suggesting both “in voice” and “invoice” (both as noun and verb—as well as emphasising the “in” of breaching a way [*voie*]). The numerous puns Derrida plays on the word *envoi* are elaborated by Alan Bass in the Glossary to *The Post Card*. One association that he misses, however, is the anagram of *facture* (“invoice”) and *facteur* (“purveyor, postman, factor”—i.e. “La facteur de la vérité”) which suggests a further connection between the postal metaphor at work in much of Derrida’s other writings with the proliferation of supplemental voices in *Feu la cendre*. Moreover, the translation of *mise en voix* as “in-voice” facilitates the dual themes of mourning and waiting, whereby the invoice signifies both a bill of sale or of goods dispatched and a notice of debt or payment due, as well, of course, as the signification of wailing and calling. The term “in-voice” also relates to the metaphor of economy. The silent call, constituting itself as a reserve, is never present when the invoice or summons is served. In this way the *call*’s trail is traced by a profusion of in-voices, in the same way that the trail of the phrase is traced in *Feu la cendre* by the polylogue-text, such that the “dangerous expenditure” at the origin is deferred at the same time as it remains a promise.

¹¹⁶ DERRIDA, “La facteur de la vérité,” *The Post Card*, 443–444: “The remaining structure of the letter is that—contrary to what the Seminar says in its last words (“what the ‘purloined letter,’ that is, what the undelivered letter means is that a letter always arrives at its destination ...”) a letter can always not arrive at its destination.” Cf. LACAN, “The Purloined Letter,” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, 191–205. N.B. *Cinders*, 55.27: “the urn [of language] always has a chance of returning, it ‘incenses’ itself to infinity.” The “urn” in *Animadversion XXI* is also an *envoi*—here an echo of Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence via *The Ear of the Other*. This also finds expression in the *en voix/envoi* homophone. Not only is the process enacted, it is also described by the “letter” metaphor and the “silent” potentiality that remains “enveloped” by it (*Cinders*, 24), where “each medium is affected or reinvented by the other” (23).

sublimating the absences of the (m)other—by assuming the authority of the “absent, hidden or hypostatized father”¹¹⁷ and imposing a rendezvous at will through the use of a kind of leash.¹¹⁸

This *selbstgeschaffene* game derives from an incident described in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1919). Watching his grandson playing in a pram one day, Freud observed him throwing a toy out of the pram and exclaiming in sounds that are interpreted as signifying the German word *fort!* (away), then hauling it back in by means of a leash to the cry of *da!* (here).¹¹⁹ In Lacanian circles, the mechanical repetition of this game has not only come to seem to describe an ellipsis in the subject relation (which it prototypically structures), but also a type of metonymic forethrow, in which the subject’s relation to self (its *Being-there*) is already structured as a rebus or symptom (a signifying chain inaugurated by its “primordial symbolisation”).¹²⁰

The *fort/da* mechanism likewise opens up a space which is not contained within the narrative sequence but which describes a space of repetition itself, what Lacan terms the “‘perverse’ fixation at the very suspension-point of the signifying chain.”¹²¹ This space, however overtly determined, allows (at least in principle) for possible contingencies to arise (for instance, the “chance” of the object not being returned). Without this possibility the game itself could have no force, other than that of an attempt to dispense with responsibility for the “it” to which the subject is tied. Such an outcome, which would mark the game’s termination, necessarily stands outside the “system” described (in the form of a detour or *détournement*) by the *fort/da* game. Moreover, the material function of the game, while foregrounding a certain objecthood, nevertheless conceals its object: the “object” which the subject “causes” to appear and disappear, is also a rebus, whose decipherment points to (the threat of) the subject’s own disappearance from the game, as an “object in itself.” In a sense, this possibility marks the dissymmetry between the closed system (of a dialectics, of identification, desire, etc.) and its discursive apparatus (within which the system is inscribed but which cannot be totalised or brought within that system, let alone be “comprehended” by it). Hence the “possibility” of a terminus (the accession to the object via a dialectic of return) functions as the locus of the *fort/da* ritual as well as of its incendiary Phoenix-like myth—as the terminus of possibility itself—therefore represents precisely what must be excluded (the concealment of a certain form of imminence *in plain view* of the ego whose predicate it is).

The *barre* of the *fort/da* relation might consequently be thought of as “operating” a structural axis or hinge between the mechanics of chance and the sublimation of desire, while the illusionary nature of the *either/or*

¹¹⁷ ROLAND BARTHES, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) 10.

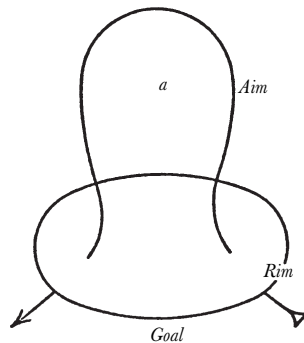
¹¹⁸ FREUD, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 14.

¹¹⁹ FREUD, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 14ff.

¹²⁰ LACAN, “On a Question Preliminary to any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” *Écrits*, 215.

¹²¹ LACAN, “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious,” *Écrits*, 167.

repetitiveness of the game is belied in the (maternal) non-presence that prefigures it and determines its dynamic as a play towards loss, to an always prior loss, of which it remains the literalised expression. In other words, the *fort/da* “repetition” is in fact a repetition only in the sense that it presents a figure of an entropic *forethrow* towards the “there” or *da* which is never “here,” and to which the psychoanalytic subject is tied by a kind of metonymic leash. What is more, the movement of this *forethrow* is such that the subject is “subverted”—a “turning under” that defines a tropic spiral in the dialectic of desire, a vectoral *clinamen* which Lacan locates in the *paradoxical* structure of the Freudian drives:



This paradox (between *aim* and *goal*) rests in what Lacan terms a “fundamental reversion,” which at the level of each of the drives “is the movement outwards and back in which it is structured.”¹²² Indeed, this paradox is irreducible and is in fact the structural *motivation* of the drive, just as the inassimilable repetition of the “there” stands at the point of motivation in the compulsive *fort/da* ritual. The reduction of the subject to a moment of repetition, or locus in the cyclical reversion of the drives, defines a fundamental redundancy in which the subject is lost through a series of substitutions whose site it is (as a type of hole or void which must be filled). At the same time, it is in the nature of the inassimilable object to prevent the structural subject from vanishing entirely, and instead sustains it (as a *figure* of lack) within an apparently limitless play of “signifying substitution” that, while defining a quasi-entropic movement, can nevertheless be regarded as generative in a discursive sense.

For Freud, this *fort/da* game is interpreted on one level as depicting the child’s symbolic mastery over the maternal absence, and is accordingly taken to provide the basis of all future narrative (*Erzählung, Geschichte*) of loss and recovery. (It is for this reason that Lacan describes the “circularity” of the trajectory of the subject’s desire—a circularity which remains unclosed and

¹²² LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 177–178.

elliptical or decentred—as “la parabole de la lettre.”) We could also say that the serial repetition (*of repetition itself*) involved in this *game* (*Spiel, jeu*) describes a form of “telepathy” whereby the subject is put into a particular type of remote-communication with the Other (or rather, by which the child is *communicated* as subject of its signifying attachment to an imaginary (m)other).

Importantly, Freud describes this *fort/da* movement by the verb *fortgehen*, “to go away,” which necessarily leaves open the possibility of return and remains ambiguous in this sense, as in *fort*, “to continue”—as opposed, for instance, to *weggehen*, “to go away or leave,” which suggests a definite absence. This possibility of return (of “revealing”), which poses itself as an imminence (the impossibility of which, beyond substitution, poses a threat which is concealed precisely through repetition), describes a destining that, in “Die Frage nach der Technik” (1954), Heidegger identifies with a certain technological movement. This is elaborated in a passage dealing with two words from Goethe which echo, in an intriguing way, the text of Freud:

The way in which technology unfolds lets itself be seen only on the basis of that permanent enduring in which enframing [*Gestell*] appropriates as a destining of revealing. Goethe once uses the mysterious word *fortgewähren* [to grant continuously] in place of *fortwähren* [to endure continuously]. He hears *währen* [to endure] and *gewähren* [to grant] here in one unarticulated accord. And if we now ponder [...] what it is that properly endures and perhaps alone endures, we may venture to say: *Only what is granted endures. What endures primarily out of the earliest beginning is what grants.*¹²³

Between repetition and endurance (*durée*), a structural entelechy (the *work* of repetition which ties that which grants (*es gibt*) to the technics of commemoration—as Stephen Dedalus says in *Ulysses*, “But I, entelechy, form of forms, am I by memory because under ever changing forms”).¹²⁴ It is, as always, a question of agency granted in that which speaks: *ego, cogito*—and its transposition in the passive voice, as that which is placed, situated in the *ergo*, which is also the *ergon* of a discursus (originating “outside” itself in the field of the Other)¹²⁵—which describes “*l’ergo* retourné d’un nouveau *cogito*.”¹²⁶

In a comparable gesture of resistance, of *insistence* of the ego, the discursive *I* of Derrida’s polylogue (an “indeterminate number of voices” [22]) gestures towards a forcing or breaching a way to the *vérité* of the “call” (and indeed of the “I” that responds to it, or for it [22]) so that this “truth” can be *verified* once and for all (26)—almost as if that “truth” had simply been “waiting” for the

¹²³ HEIDEGGER, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 336.

¹²⁴ JAMES JOYCE, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler (New York: Vintage, 1986) 9.208.

¹²⁵ DERRIDA, *The Truth in Painting*, back cover (paperback edition): “*parergon* (for example the frame) is neither in the work (*ergon*) nor outside it. As soon as the *parergon* takes place, it dismantles the most reassuring conceptual oppositions.” Also Derrida, “Lammata,” 9: “the insistent atopics of the *parergon*: neither work (*ergon*) nor outside the work [*hors d’œuvre*], neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition [...] and it gives rise to the work.”

¹²⁶ LACAN, “La logique du fantasme,” *Autre écrits*, 323.

chance to be revealed or to be brought “into play, finally, in the production of writing itself” (23).

It is, however, the very impossibility of such *finality* (a *fin de partie*) that is brought “into play” in the writing apparatus.¹²⁷ That is to say, the deferral of *finality* is this *bringing into play*, an endgame—itself the “production of writing”—writing as both *supplemental play* and desire of/for the *supplément*.¹²⁸ This desire hence precipitates a contradictory moment in the finality of the “last word,” which Derrida elsewhere terms the “crisis” of language: “the moment when simple *decision* is no longer possible, where the choice between opposing paths is suspended.”¹²⁹ An “impossible decision,” which is nevertheless *confided* “to a voice of the other, to another voice” (24):

criticism, which will always use judgement *to decide* (*krinein*) on value and meaning, to distinguish between what is and what is not, what has value and what has not, the true and the false, the beautiful and the ugly, all signification and its opposite.¹³⁰

Recalling an early scene in *Hamlet*, the cinder text is described as barely the remembrance or shadow of a dream (33.4) (“a dream might be described as a *substitute*” for what lies “beyond the reach of our waking memory”).¹³¹ The “analyst” must then put these figments to work in the elaboration of an other-text, the analytic text which is also the specular counterpart of the *Traumarbeit*, in the desire for the “seminal” which is both the originary and its “completion,” the exhaustion of the one in the other (“All these cinders, he feels them burning in his flesh” [49.19], “like burning semen, like lava destined nowhere” [23.45]). This is the *figmentation* of cinders: the dream of recuperating the lost dream, which is also an act of mourning, of that “which is withdrawn from consciousness”¹³² (“without waiting for me the phrase

¹²⁷ The deferral of this “fatally silent call” enacted through the proliferation of discourse addressed to the idiomatic expression, *il y a là cendre* can also be detected in the pun being played by Derrida with the words *cendre*, *attendre*, and *entendre* [22].

¹²⁸ DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, 149ff.

¹²⁹ JACQUES DERRIDA, “Mallarmé,” *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992) 113.

¹³⁰ DERRIDA, “Mallarmé,” 113. At a particular moment this *mise en voix* erases graphic difference, a moment in which *là* and *la* are indistinguishable from one another. This moment calls for an “impossible decision,” a decision however that is necessary in order to “restore” difference. At that moment when difference is suspended between erasure and restitution the *in-voiced* terms no longer affect to signify anything other than “their own” verbal substance, or rather they signify the impossibility of signifying as such, beyond a suspension of ambiguity and the impossible necessity of signifying *all-at-once*—i.e. the three-fold dialectic of ambiguity of the itself, the “other” and their senseless adequation. It is this notion of the *indifferent*—the nothing of the all-at-once—that marks the impossibility of the subject ever getting into its grasp the pure idiom of/at the origin. It is important to note, however, that the effacement and restitution of the difference between *là* and *la* take place *across the difference between speech and writing*. What this dialectic reveals is that there must also be a “difference” within writing that is not confined purely to graphic or grammatical signs.

¹³¹ SIGMUND FREUD, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1965) 69.

¹³² SIGMUND FREUD, “Mourning and Melancholia,” *The Pelican Freud Library, 11; On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* ([1917] London: Penguin, 1984) 254.

withdrew into its secret” [31.1]).¹³³ Between the verbs *attendre* and *entendre*; la cendre, that which grants, endures ...?

8

Developing ideas that he had earlier explored in his 1966 essay, “Freud et la scène de l’écriture,” Derrida, in *Dissemination*, projects a model based upon Freud’s metaphors of the written trace (“une trace écrite [schriftliche Anzeichnung]”) for what he has called a “textual apparatus.”¹³⁴ The structural dynamics of this textual apparatus are shown to mark a breach in the “classical representational scene,”¹³⁵ comprising a series of “supplementary divisions” that would “extend towards a vanishing point between two forms of the mimetic.”¹³⁶ In so doing, Derrida (without making any direct reference to Lacan), provides an almost synonymous rendering of the *stade du miroir*.

According to Lacan, the *stade du miroir* or “mirror stage” describes a moment in the inauguration of the subject into language, linking subjectivity to a certain type of subjection, which is characterised as a “subjection to the signifier.”¹³⁷ Paradoxically, the advent of subjecthood occurs only in as much as its signifier emerges from the field of the *Other*.¹³⁸ As such, the Other can also be considered as what inaugurates signification, by way of a certain *pharmakon* of linguistic “ontology” (a mnemotechnic of “self”-erased writing?). On the one hand, this poses a subjection to a specular other, as *imago* or “ghostmark,”¹³⁹ in the mirroring drama of Oedipal domination. On the other hand, it places signification at the level of a “given,” which is characterised in terms of a *potlach* or “symbolic debt,”¹⁴⁰ by which language is said to *refer* or *respond* to the Other.¹⁴¹ Elsewhere Lacan links this notion of indebtedness to the Freudian repetition compulsion, situating it as the horizon of (inflationary) textual production.¹⁴²

¹³³ Cf. FREUD, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 383: “I have already had occasion to point out that one is never in fact able to be sure that a dream has been fully interpreted. Even if the solution seems satisfactory and without gaps, the possibility always remains that the dream may have yet another meaning.”

¹³⁴ DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 291.

¹³⁵ DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 312–313.

¹³⁶ DERRIDA, “The Double Session,” 186 n14.

¹³⁷ LACAN, “The Subversion of the Subject,” *Écrits*, 304. For Lacan this disclosure marks the “subjection of the subject to the signifier” and inscribes the “circular” trajectory of the subject’s desire through the locus of the Other “for lack of being able to end on anything other than its own scansion, in other words, for lack of an act in which it would find its certainty.”

¹³⁸ LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 203–244.

¹³⁹ JAMES JOYCE, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking, 1939) 473.09. References follow the standard scholarly formula of *FW* followed by page and line number, viz. *FW* 473.09.

¹⁴⁰ WILDEN, “Lacan and the Discourse of the Other,” 271.

¹⁴¹ JACQUES DERRIDA, “Deconstruction and the other,” *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage*, ed. Richard Kearney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) 124: “It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the ‘other’ of language [...]. [Deconstruction] asks whether the term ‘reference’ is entirely adequate for designating the ‘other.’ The other which is beyond language and summons language.”

¹⁴² LACAN, “Freud, Hegel and the Machine,” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, 64ff.

In terms of the quasi-dialectical model put forth in “Le stade du miroir comme formateur,” this movement of “symbolic debt” opens the signifier (of self) to a movement of “alterity” which situates it against what Lacan calls the “lack” of its own signifying desire—a desire, as Derrida says: “to cross over to the other, to the other side of the mirror [...] to move beyond the specularity that it constitutes itself.”¹⁴³ Hence:

there is always alterity before (any) self [...]. Other “in” the same, calling it up by contaminating it [...]. We can sense that this alterity cannot simply be stated in the form of a thesis, that it is not really thematisable, not a phenomenon, that it does not exist.¹⁴⁴

In this context Lacan’s “dialectic of identification” (and its later reformulation as a “dialectic of desire”) takes the form of a negative *travail*, a *responsibility* set out as a work of distance, or *working* of distance or distancing, between the symbolic and imaginary functions of the signifier—or between the structural whole of the imaginary and the symbolic, and the element of what Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze in *L’Anti-Œdipe* (1972) call the “machinic” (*machinique*), as the constitutive relation of desiring-production.¹⁴⁵

For Guattari and Deleuze, the notion of the machinic is described along an axis between what they term “desiring machines” and, borrowing from Antonin Artaud, a “body without organs” (*corps sans organes*). Artaud, who had been diagnosed as chronically and incurably insane by Lacan at Sainte-Anne hospital in Paris (“la passion d’Antonin Artaud”),¹⁴⁶ later referred to Lacan, Doctor L., as a “filthy, vile bastard” (*Van Gogh ou le suicidé de la société* [1947]). However, his own negative conception of subjectivity contributes radically to a machinic conception of Lacan’s dialectic. This is not surprising considering that Lacan’s work on psychosis (“schizographie”) at Sainte-Anne provided the basis for his thesis “De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec le personnalité,”¹⁴⁷ and underwrites much of his later analysis of Freudian method. In 1933, following an informal collaboration with André Breton (whom he invited to Sainte-Anne to observe clinical cases of schizophrenia), Lacan published “Le problème du style et la conception psychiatrique des formes paranoïaques de l’expérience” in the first issue of the Surrealist journal *Minotaure*, alongside Salvador Dalí’s essay on *la Méthode Paranoïaque-Critique*,¹⁴⁸ following Freud’s most brilliant early student Viktor Tausk in extending psychoanalytic theory both to clinical cases of psychosis and to the psychopathology of “the artist.”

¹⁴³ DERRIDA, “Psyche: Invention of the Other,” *Acts of Literature*, 320.

¹⁴⁴ BENNINGTON, “Derridabase,” 144.

¹⁴⁵ DELEUZE and GUATTARI, *Anti-Oedipus*, 83.

¹⁴⁶ LACAN, “La Psychanalyse. Raison d’un échec,” *Autre Écrits*, 349. Artaud was interned at Sainte-Anne from 12 April, 1938 to 27 February, 1939.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. LACAN, “Écrits «inspiré»: Schizographie,” *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec le personnalité*, 365–382.

¹⁴⁸ LACAN, “Le problème du style et la conception psychiatrique des formes paranoïaques de l’expérience,” *Minotaure* 1 (1933): 68–69. Dalí is reported as saying that “in Lacan we see Freud’s ultimate consequences.” *Diccionario privado de Salvador Dalí* (Madrid: Mario Merlino, 1980) 55.

In *L'Ombilic des Limbes* (1925) and other texts, Artaud had described an apparatus of negatively determined desire which operates in an apparently inverse manner to the Lacanian dialectic of identification, in that the subject excises its projective image, disburdening the body of its “organs” which are henceforth regarded as alien and malevolent prostheses. Artaud’s radical anality is matched only by a reverse-projectionism, by means of which the body, as a figure of subjective consciousness itself (and its essential “materiality,” the *lapus philosophallus*), is spirited away by “external” forces (the negative *theft* enacted by the demiurgos).

Viktor Tausk similarly described this phenomenon in his pioneering study on psychosis, “La machine à influencer” (1919) (based on a case study of a certain Natalija A., a former student of philosophy living in Vienna, who came to Tausk complaining that a bizarre electrical apparatus, which she believed was being operated secretly by physicians in Berlin, was manipulating her thoughts). According to the symptomatology uncovered by Tausk, this “machine” functioned as a physiognomic counterpart (something analogous to Gustav Meyrink’s *Der Golem* [1915]).¹⁴⁹ The corporeal aspect of this counterpart was then seen to be “rationalised” by means of a mysterious technics into an unrecognisable, and impenetrably complex external apparatus (a classic Freudian symbolisation of the genital relation) which served to exercise control over the subject’s actual body. The “influencing machine” thus represented the outcome of a series of sublimations and distortions (*Entstellungen*)—(a monstrosity of symptomatic complexification, vis-à-vis Henri Michaux’s schizo-apparatus [see below §16])—whose operations seem to counter what Freud described as the projective “mechanism of identification.”¹⁵⁰

As with Artaud, Tausk’s *machine à influencer* in fact describes a dialectical double of the Lacanian *stade du miroir*, in which the subjection of the subject to the signifier, as though in advance of any identification or projection, describes a type of *pro-grammē*.¹⁵¹ The negation of subjective agency in both cases recodes the affirmations of “influence” (*le désir de l’Autre*) in the form of a mechanisation of the *cogito* and of cognition generally. Transposed onto Lacan’s mirror apparatus, this machinic element describes a structural matrix, an apparatus or programme in which the ghosting of the signifier in the illusion of a signified marks a pseudo-schematics of destination: an horizon effect of the mirror which gives the subject’s desire back to it under the guise

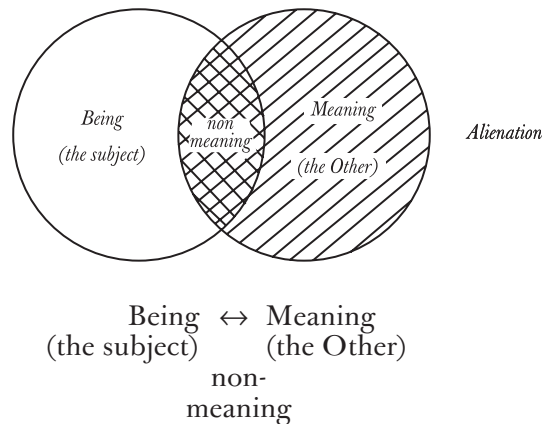
¹⁴⁹ GUSTAV MEYRINK, *Der Golem* (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff, 1915).

¹⁵⁰ VIKTOR TAUSK, “The Influencing Machine,” trans. Dorian Feigenbaum, *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 192) 546.

¹⁵¹ Cf. LOU ANDREAS-SALOMÉ, *Correspondance avec Sigmund Freud, suivi du Journal d’une année (1912–1913)* (Paris: Galimard, 1970). Writing in her journal towards the end of August 1913, Salomé makes the following note (page 396): “Tausk et moi, nous nous querellons à propos de la comparaison de l’alphabet: il disait que si l’on voulait lui remonter les lettres dans un ordre nouveau et différent (telles qu’elles semblent ordonnées différemment quand on apprend pour la première fois l’alphabet et la lecture des mots séparés), il se soumettrait à cette expérience; mais elle n’est pas pensable.”

of the translated image of its own truth (as specular double). As Lacan points out, this dialectico-cyclical apparatus can also be seen as being structured as a *symptom*—a schematic of recursive *aphanisis*.

In Seminar XI (1964), Lacan proposes a schematic rendering of this in the topological shift from the 3 to the 4 in a projective theory of alienation (as between the “dialectical” subject and its *imago* in the *stade du miroir*).¹⁵² It is possible to find here analogies to Marx’s conception of alienation [*Enttäusserung*] in the relation of the subject (labour) and its objects (commodity) as outlined in the *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*. The inherence of the alienation effect—inherent, that is, to the very relation between the subject and its others (by which the subject is *negatively* defined)—finds its expression at this point in the development of the Lacanian schema in the structurality of “non-meaning” in the dialectic of the Real. This initially takes the form of two overlapping circles, describing a set theoretical relation of the “subject” (Being) and the “Other” (Meaning), which echoes the Lacanian trinity of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary. For Lacan, the *vel*, or space bounded by both circles, describes the condition of a mutual inherence *between* Being and Meaning, which is that of non-meaning, through which the affective structures of Alienation are “dialectically” determined:



In *De monade*, Giordano Bruno describes a similar figure of two intersecting circles—the *Diadis figura*. The plane of intersection, the *monas*, according to Bruno: “contains its opposite” (*Immo bonum atque malum prima est ab origine fusum*).¹⁵³ Analogously, for Lacan, there is “no subject without, somewhere,

¹⁵² LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 211.

¹⁵³ *Jordani Bruni Nolani Opera Latine Conscripta*, ed. F. Fiorentino (Neapoli: 1879–1891); facsimile reprint by F. Fromman. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Verlag Gunther Holzboog, 1962 (op. cit. is *De Monade Numero et Figura, Secretioris Nempe Physicæ, Mathematicæ et Metaphysicæ Elementa*). Bruno’s mnemonic systems involve a combination of images, ideas and alphabets. The “Garden of Memory” is laid out in a series of concentric circular paths separated by hedges. The second circle corresponds to the Dyad, the number Two and to the concept of polarity; its colour is grey, its primary symbols are the Sun and Moon, and its geometrical figure is the *vesica piscis*.

aphanisis of the subject, and it is in this alienation, in this fundamental division, that the dialectic of the subject is established.”¹⁵⁴ Thus the sign of the lack, the “evil eye” (which is, again, the feminine, *castrative* eye of the Freudian Medusa), also becomes the emblem of alienation in what *veils* meaning: what elsewhere Lacan calls the *mask* of the Other, the concealment of the gaze, the mirror-illusion of the subject which conceals a “non-meaning.” Nevertheless:

because of the *vel*, the sensitive point of balance, there is an emergence of the subject at the level of meaning [...] from its *aphanisis* in the Other locus, which is that of the unconscious.¹⁵⁵

Borrowing from Niels Bohr’s “complementary sets,” Lacan describes the *vel* of alienation as “defined by the choice whose properties depend on this, that there is, in the joining, one element that, whatever the choice operating may be, has as its consequences a *neither one, nor the other*”:

If we choose being, the subject disappears, it eludes us, it falls into non-meaning. If we choose meaning, the meaning survives only deprived of that part of non-meaning that is, strictly speaking, that which constitutes in the realisation of the subject, the unconscious. In other words, it is of the nature of this meaning, as it emerges from the field of the Other, to be in a large part of its field, eclipsed by the disappearance of being, induced by the very function of the signifier.¹⁵⁶

This state of signification, of *equivocity* (“both and yet neither”), is given a more complex formulation in Lacan’s three major seminars on James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*.^{*} In “Joyce le symptôme” I and II, and “Le sinthome, Séminaire du 18 novembre 1975,” Lacan suggests that *Finnegans Wake* can be understood as a type of symptom which it is impossible to analyse. Following from its etymology (Gk. *sumptōma*: occurrence, phenomenon; from *sumpiptein*, to fall together, fall upon, happen), Lacan links the Freudian notion of “symptom” as a condition of the unconscious (of the Oedipal entanglement), to the notion of the unconscious as structured like a language, to the reversion of Joyce’s language and ultimately to Joyce himself (as “Shemptôme”), in whom all of these figures intersect as a kind of Borromean knot or “Borumoter” (*FW* 331.27). That is, as “un nœud de signifiants”¹⁵⁷ as symptom of J[ouissance] (as Lacan at least implies in the eighth chapter of Seminar XX, “Knowledge and Truth,” in *Encore*—the diagram Lacan employs here

¹⁵⁴ LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 221.

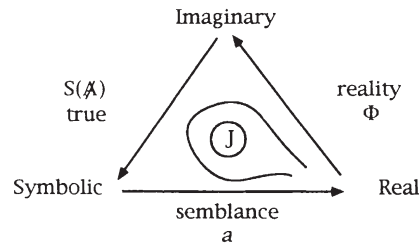
¹⁵⁵ LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 221.

¹⁵⁶ LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 211.

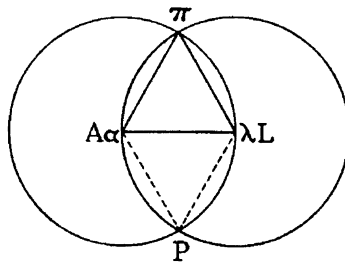
^{*} Lacan’s seminars on Joyce have mostly been collected in the volume *Le Séminaire, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome, 1975–1976* (Paris: Seuil, 2005). Lacan’s interest in Joyce extended back to his attendance at a reading of part of *Ulysses* given by Joyce at Adrian Monnier’s bookshop, in December 1921 – of which Lacan described Joyce as “émergant de ce milieu sordide.” Lacan’s inventions of the sinthome can be traced through his earlier reading of Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artists as a Young Man* and the theory of “claritas” or “redemption through writing” borrowed from Aquinas, and according to which the object of apprehension reveals its essence in becoming the thing-in-itself by way of *epiphany*.

¹⁵⁷ JACQUES LACAN, “Joyce le symptôme I,” *Joyce avec Lacan*, ed. Jacques Aubert (Paris: Navarin Éditeur, 1987) 24; Lacan, “Télévision,” *Autre écrits*, 516.

closely resembling the Rosicrucian pyramidal eye, with the letter J in place of the eye and the pyramid or equilateral triangle formed by three intersecting vectors, with the Imaginary significantly forming the apex and the Symbolic and the Real describing the base):



As Roland McHugh, in *The Sigla of Finnegans Wake*, reminds us, the construction of an equilateral triangle is the first proposition in Euclid’s *Elements of Geometry*. It is also the mystical figure *par excellence*, derived through esoteric Christian symbolism from the *more geometrico* of the neo-Platonist and Pythagorean cults. The equilateral triangle and its inverted double, moreover, combines the geometry of transcendence and the trinity with the generative principle symbolised by the female—as in the diagram which appears on page 293 of *Finnegans Wake* in which the vel or vesica frames two opposing equilateral triangles (the Pythagorean quintessence):



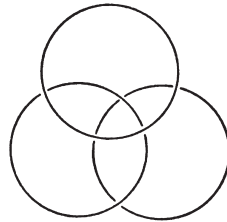
McHugh further remarks that “the sexual interpretation of this figure has a precedent in the associations of the *Vesica Piscis*, or fish’s bladder, which is the central ovoid portion, where the circles overlap.”¹⁵⁸

It is known to both freemasons and architects that the mystical figure called the Vesica Piscis, so popular in the middle ages, and generally placed as the first proposition of Euclid, was a symbol applied by the masons in planning their temples [...] the Vesica was also regarded as a baneful object under the name of the “Evil Eye,” and the charm most employed to avert the dread effects of its fascination was the Phallus [...]. In the East the Vesica was used as a symbol of the womb [...]. To every Christian the Vesica is familiar from its constant use in early art,

¹⁵⁸ ROLAND MCHUGH, *The Sigla of Finnegans Wake* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976) 68.

for not only was it an attribute of the Virgin and the feminine aspect of the Saviour as symbolised by the *wound* in his side, but it commonly surrounds the figure of Christ, as his throne when seated in glory.¹⁵⁹

A topological curiosity, the Borromean knot is in fact a set of three rings arranged in a symmetrical pattern, none of which are actually connected but which are intertwined so that they cannot be pulled apart, although with the condition that if any one of them is removed, then all three separate.¹⁶⁰



For Lacan, the Borromean knot describes the relationship between *symptom* and a certain *perversion* (or *hérésie* of the R[eal], S[ymbolic], and I[maginary]), which he relates to the Freudian drama of triangulated desire defined in the Oedipus complex (and underwritten, as it implicitly is, by the notion of dialectical “inseparability” in Kojève).¹⁶¹ As Lacan argues:

The Oedipal complex is such a symptom. It is in this sense that the Name-of-the-Father is also the Father of the name.¹⁶²

This chiasmatic turn describes a *perversion* in the relation to the father-scriptor “in as much as *perversion* has the meaning of a translation or transference directed at the Father [*version vers le père*], and that in sum the Father is a symptom, or a *sinthome*” (“*sinthome*” being a neologism drawn from the old French form for *coincidence*).¹⁶³ This relation has to do with the stratification of the individual as *subject* according to the relation of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary in which the genealogy of this subject describes a topological formulation. What the topological metaphor of the Borromean knot suggests, then, is the *synthetic* nature of the psychoanalytic subject, which, *as subject*, is the unique “solution” to the problem of the incommensurability of

¹⁵⁹ WILLIAM STERLING, *The Canon* ([1897] London: Garnstone Press, 1974) 11–14; cited in McHugh, *The Sigla of Finnegans Wake*, 68.

¹⁶⁰ The term “Borromean” comes from the Borromeo family of Renaissance Italy, who used the three interlocking circles on their coat of arms. There is another interesting historical context in which the image of the rings arises. The diagram was found in picture-stones on Gotland, an island in the Baltic sea off the south-east coast of Sweden. These are dated to some period in the ninth-century and are thought to record tales from the Norse myths. To the Norse people of Scandinavia, a drawing of the Borromean knot using triangles instead of rings is known as “Odin’s triangle” or the “Walknot” (or “valknut,” the knot of the slain). The symbol was also carved on bedposts used in sea burials.

¹⁶¹ Cf. LACAN, *RSI*, séminaire XXII (1955–6). N.B. Lacan’s seminar on Borromean knots and Joyce directly follows, cf. *Le sinthome*, séminaire XXIII (1955–1956).

¹⁶² LACAN, “Le Sinthome,” *Joyce avec Lacan*, 46.

¹⁶³ LACAN, “Le Sinthome,” 44–45.

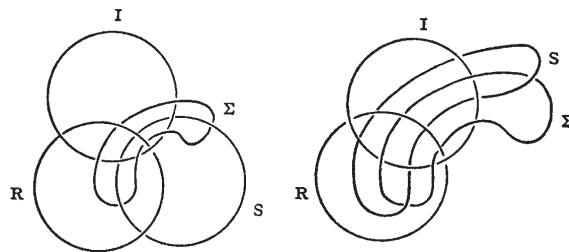
what is named by these three terms. Moreover, it is only by virtue of this *synthesis* that the subject can be said to exist *qua* subject. In this way, Lacan argues: “It is not the division of the imaginary, symbolic and real which defines perversion, but rather that they are *already* distinct.”¹⁶⁴

Like Joyce’s investigation of Giambattista Vico’s theory of cyclical historical recursion (*Principi di Scienza Nuova* [1744]), which Joyce referred to as a “vicociclotometer” (designated in the *Finnegans Wake* notebooks by the mandalic symbol \oplus , of which Lacan remarks in his first seminar on Joyce: “vous savez qu’avec ce cercle et cette croix je dessin le nœud borroméen”), Lacan’s formulation of the Borromean knot hinges upon a figure described by the *vesica*, or *vel*, between the co-ordinate terms R, S and I. In the case of Lacan’s first diagram, however, the *vesica* (the symbol of *lac*) is roughly bisected, so that the points at which the three rings initially overlap also describe a triangle, which may tentatively be posed as a figure of the *Lacanian* symptom (as the “perversion” between *le nom du Père* and *le Père du nom*: as, for example, between Joyce and Freud—or as Philippe Sollers says, “sens et jouissance” [“joycity, joyance, joysense—*jouissens*”]).¹⁶⁵

As a consequence, it is necessary to posit the Borromean knot in a doubly fourfold manner: as the symptomatic *topos* of the encounter of the imaginary, symbolic and real, and as their *topological* linkage (the double or ghost of the dialectical lapsus, 3→4). It is this topological counterpart of the symptom that Lacan refers to as *le sinthome*:

If you find a place [...] which schematises the relationship between the imaginary, symbolic, and the real (as long as they remain separated from one another) you have already—in my preceding drawings, in which this relationship has been clearly set down—the possibility of linking them, but by what? By the *sinthome*. It is necessary for you to see this: it is the re-folding of the capitalised S—that is, of what affirms itself in the consistency of the symbolic.¹⁶⁶

The *ex-istence* of the symptom is implicated by the position of this “enigmatic link” of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary, which Lacan describes in the following diagrams:

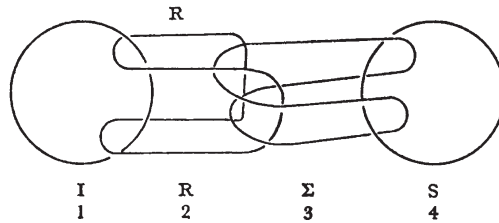


¹⁶⁴ LACAN, “Le Sinthome,” 44.

¹⁶⁵ PHILIPPE SOLLERS, “Joyce et Cie,” *Tel Quel* 64 (1975): 17; cf. Stephen Heath’s translation of the same article, “Joyce and Co.,” *Tel Quel* 64 (1975): 5. See also PHILIPPE SOLLERS, *Lacan Même* (Paris: Navarin, 2005).

¹⁶⁶ LACAN, “Le Sinthome,” 45.

For Lacan, when we attempt to untie the knot of the real (R), the symbolic (S), imaginary (I), and *le sinthome* (Σ), and thus divide it into four separate parts, the following figure is invariably formed:



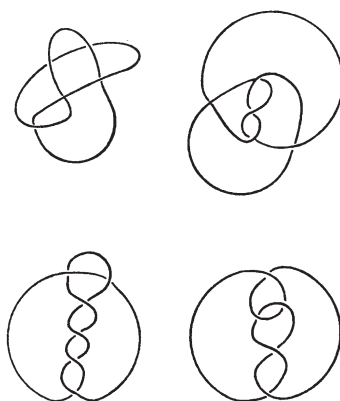
The topological entanglement of these four elements is consequently regarded as describing (by a process of metonymy) the radical condition of language as such (and exemplified for Lacan by the paronomasia of *Finnegans Wake*). In this way, the chiasmatic *perversion* of symptom and *sinthome* also marks a form of transversal, across which each of the relations described above is expressly interchangeable (which is the “unique” characteristic of this borromeo-machine).

Mirroring the subjective determinacy of the “dialectic of identification,” the movement from position 1 to position 2 in the above diagram can be reversed, as 2 to 1, while 3 to 4 can be reversed, as 4 to 3—just as the imaginary identification of the *mirror stage* operates a reversal mechanism across the Other-locus in the emergence of the signifier as marking the subject’s “entrance” into the Symbolic order. In other words, both the symbol and the symptom present themselves in such a fashion that either of the two terms (Σ or S) takes them in their entirety, “so that the other passes over the one which is above and under the one which is below.”

Following from René Thom’s theory of topological folds, Lacan argues that this doubled chiasmus is thus accorded an *immanence* as “the figure we regularly obtain when we attempt to separate the Borromean knot into its four parts.”¹⁶⁷ An immanence figured by way of a fictive separation: between the *stade du miroir* and *dialectique du désir*, between *symptôme* and *sinthome*, knot and braid—fictive in that it assumes a figuration of difference itself, of its overwhelming contingency, that could just as effectively be posed in terms of a problem, of a dilemma, whose terms (regardless of whether or not they can be “solved”) can in some way be verified. A *figure* of difference whose structure would not only imply a metaphorical equivalence, but which would literally embody, and thus “verify,” its own contradiction. Is this, then, the meaning of the knot of signifiers to which Lacan refers in *Télévision*? Wherein this *figure* obtains a particular orientation with regards to the Real: “C’est le reel qui permet de dénouer effectivement ce dont le symptôme consiste, à savoir un

¹⁶⁷ LACAN, “Le Sinthome,” 46. During this period, Lacan was involved in working with a group of mathematicians on various topological problems—among whom were Georges Théodule Guilbaud, Pierre Soury, Michel Thomé and Jean-Michel Vappereau.

nœud de signifiants. Nouer et dénouer n'étant pas ici des métaphores, mais bien à prendre comme des nœuds qui se construisent réellement à faire chaîne de la matière signifiant."¹⁶⁸ This text, which coincides with a reproduction of the three circles of the Borromean knot in its left hand margin, recalls another intriguing series of figures that appears elsewhere, and which might be seen to stand as a counterpart to this four-fold separation:



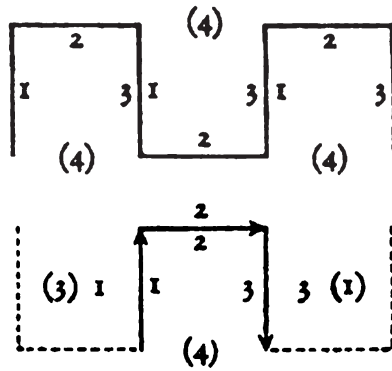
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The topological relations mapped out by Lacan by means of his exploration of Borromean knots are in many respects anticipated in the work of Philippe Sollers. Sollers's 1968 text *Nombres*, discussed in some detail in Derrida's *Dissemination* [1972] in the chapter entitled "Nombres," contains a sequence of diagrams at times intriguingly similar to those which later appear in Lacan's seminar on Joyce—an intrigue that Lacan indirectly acknowledges in certain remarks in *Encore*, where, among others, he makes the observation that: "Sollers est comme moi: il est illisible." This may in itself be more than mere coincidence. The emphasis Lacan places upon the "perversion" of the *nom du Père* in that seminar (the implicit relation between the name Joyce as a "translation" of Freud, as well as the significance of Lacan's name in this context) finds a parallel in Sollers's own name-playing—between the heliotropic non-de-plume (Sollers) and the occulted, "original" name of the author, Joyeux (which suggests both *jeux* and *jouissance*, as well as Joyce—which Sollers himself, under the persona of the ghost writer "S," addresses explicitly in his later novel *Femmes* [1983]).

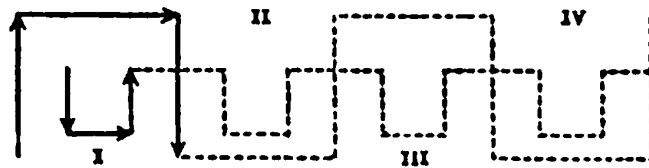
In a series of passages in *Nombres* dealing with the numerological, geometrical and dialectical significance of the numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 (trinity and quaternity: a two-fold structure which underlies the entire book, itself divided into 4 sets of 10 subsets: $1+2+3+4=10$), Sollers introduces three diagrams which describe a certain shift "d'un ensemble à l'autre, d'un blanc au blanc redoublé"¹⁶⁹:

¹⁶⁸ LACAN, "Télévision," *Autre Écrits*, 516–517.

¹⁶⁹ PHILIPPE SOLLERS, *Nombres* (Paris: Seuil, 1968) page 81.



In these first two diagrams, an open sided square figure is shown undergoing a series of inversions (in the first instance) and rotations (in the second). These “squares” (vectors) can be considered, among other things, as roughly analogous to Lacan’s schematic of the *stade du miroir*: a *stage* with an open “fourth wall.” The mirror motif reappears later in Sollers’s text, and the ideas of “reflection” and “transmission” are clearly related here to those of inversion and rotation in the above diagrams. These parallel transpositions “d’un ensemble à l’autre, d’un blanc au blanc redoublé,” also suggest a linguistic dimension—the metaphoric and metonymic axes elaborated in the work of Roman Jakobson and later reformulated in the work of Lacan in terms of the quasi-Saussurean algorithms S/s (metaphor) and S.....S’ (metonymy).¹⁷⁰ The topological entanglement of these composite trajectories is at least one of the renderings implied in Sollers’s third diagram:

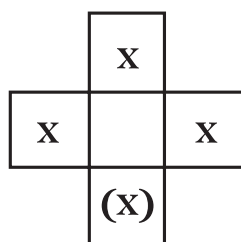


How this reflects upon Lacan’s later work on Borromean knots may be gauged in the play of “imaginary” inversion which accompanies Lacan’s notion of *perversion*, which itself describes a particular mirroring apparatus (*nom du Père/Père du nom*). This may otherwise be thought as the inversion of the Symbolic and Imaginary in the proposition of the Real (the mechanism which comes to bind, however surreptitiously, the structure of the subject to that of the *sinthome*). The open-sidedness of Sollers’s diagrams also makes clear, where Lacan’s do not, that above all the symptom is the other side of a model of a particular *détournement*, to which it constantly defers without ever referring.

¹⁷⁰ LACAN, “The Agency of the Letter,” *Écrits*, 164. Cf. LACAN, “Métaphore et métonymie,” *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre III: Les psychoses 1955–6* (Paris: Seuil, 1981) 243–262.

This doubling of the 3+1 figure of the open dialectic implies, then, another fold, a topological “surface” in which the (4), the sinthome, is bracketed off (through a type of *mimetic détournement*) in the figure of the Joycean/Viconian mandala \oplus —where the “+” implies both the imaginary overlap of non-communicating vectors, as well as their crossed-out centre (*d’un ensemble à l’autre, d’un blanc au blanc redoublé*). This itself is intriguing when taken in the context of Sollers’s 1975 essay on Joyce, “Joyce et Cie,” in which he explicitly relates the 3 + 1 structure of the (Viconian) *détournement* to the structure of the word in *Finnegans Wake*, derived from a phonological rendering of “the ... riverrun” as “THREE VER UN, three towards one,” a “constant state of triadicity, *plus one*” or $3+0/4=1$, which reads “three plus nought which makes four equals one” (“This play on words seems to me to function on a simple nucleus where to give *one* word (or rather an ‘effect of a word’) there is a coming together of at least *three* words, plus a coefficient of annulation”).¹⁷¹

On page 45 of *Nombres*, Sollers introduces a fourth diagram, this time itself in the form of a “cross” (*en-abyme*, almost)—a type of “tick-tack-toe” diagram suggesting an open-sided cube unfolded onto a two-dimensional plane—a crossroads, quadrifurcum, grid or trellis:



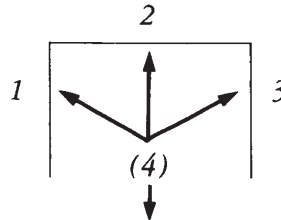
A corresponding note within the body of the text relates that “these 4 surfaces which appear to be filled in, fold back onto a centre which isn’t there—which doesn’t count in any sense as part of the completed figure.” The blank central panel—the mark of an excess*—again suggests that containment (it is the only square bounded on all sides by the others, constituting a series of folds, a structural hub on which the entire structure hinges) “defines” an empty centre whose location is subsumed into a series of interfaces (“Le carré que nous parcourons ici est la terre, mes ces quatre surfaces remplies renvoient à un centre qui n’est pas là, qui ne compte pas de telle sorte que la figure

¹⁷¹ SOLLERS, “Joyce et Cie,” 19–20; “Joyce and Co.,” 7–8.

* “The mark of this excess is the cross—the + of the *apeiron*, always more, the ‘extra nothing,’ ‘the beyond the whole, beating out the rhythm of both pleasure and repetition’ (*Dissemination*, 57)—or the X, apropos of *Nombres*: ‘They remain indecipherable precisely because it is only in your own representation that they ever took on the aplomb of a cryptogram hiding inside itself the secret of some meaning or reference. X: not an unknown but a chiasmus. A text that is unrecable because it is only readable. Untranslatable for the same reason’ (*Dissemination*, 362).” Gregory L. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 152.

complète [...] comporte une case vide pour l'instant impossible à vivre, le sort").¹⁷² This leads to a further transformation:

the construction is presented thus: three visible sides, three walls if you like, on which the sequences are in reality inscribed—transitions, articulations, intervals, words—, and one absence of side or wall defined by the three others but enabling one to observe them from their point of view.

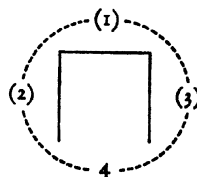


This fourth surface is in a sense carved out of the air: it enables speeches to make themselves heard, bodies to let themselves be seen: consequently, it is easily forgotten, and that is doubtless where illusion and error lie.¹⁷³

Here, then, Sollers provides the topological extension by which we may make sense of Lacan's diagrammatic metamorphoses between the mirror dialectic and his later preoccupation with the Borromean knots. By substituting the Real, Symbolic, Imaginary and Sinthome for the numerical features of Sollers's diagrams, it is possible to make somewhat clearer sense of the way in which the "figure" of the Lacanian subject is inextricably linked to these topological/tropological antinomies (both as symptom and as sinthome, *synthomme* or *saint-homme* (†)).

Moreover, as a type of *stade du miroir*, Sollers's model points towards an entire thematics of apprehension in the production of (subjective) signifying relations. But whilst Lacan first adopts a material dialectical model of identification as the basis for this, Sollers implies a mirroring relation external to dialectics in a movement which "sublates" the 3 within the (parenthetical) fourth term. Like the *ricorsi storici* of Vico's *Scienza Nuova*, this fourth term stands in an open relation to the other three and may in fact be said to inscribe them as a movement of signifying recursion—recalling Hegel's statement that the "triplicity" of the dialectic is its "external, superficial side."¹⁷⁴ On page 75 of *Nombres*, the following text and diagram appear:

(et ainsi, vous êtes comme devant le portique de l'histoire elle-même, sur sa scène brusquement redressée et illuminée



¹⁷² SOLLERS, *Nombres*, 4.24.

¹⁷³ SOLLERS, *Nombres*, 4.8.

¹⁷⁴ Cited in JULIA KRISTEVA, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 109.

et votre forme est désormais affrontée à ce risque, à cette tension qui vous tient debout, éveillé ...¹⁷⁵

Here the open-sided square is itself bracketed off, the square “circled” and in whose circling the 4 predominates, we might say, as a figure of an unexpressed relation (the 4 literally unfolded would describe the figure beneath which it lies and in this sense “mirrors,” just as elsewhere this 4 out of 3 takes the form of a figure shaped like the letter Y).¹⁷⁶ Given this it would be inviting to speculate that, for Sollers, the 3+1 relation likewise implies a “mirror stage” whose mechanics of revelation, *apocalyptō* or *Aufhebung*, disclose a *hypothetical* present or presence-to-self which is in fact a surface effect: “Whence the impression of witnessing a projection, whereas it is ultimately a matter of the very product of the surface.” This surface effect (we might also say, *arithmetical* effect) is itself likened, by a process of metonymic substitutions, to the technics of mechanical reproduction and of the “camera,” as a “darkroom transformed into a surface.”¹⁷⁷ This darkroom or *camera obscura* provides a metaphor for a type of “hidden stage” upon which “theoretical” demons perform the mechanical tasks of “processing” (inverted) textual images, as a type of mnemotechnics or “ghostwriting”:

En effet, ce qu'on prend ainsi trop facilement pour l'ouverture d'une scène n'en est pas moins un panneau déformant, un invisible et impalpable voile opaque qui joue vers les trois autres côtés la fonction d'un miroir ou d'un réflecteur et vers l'extérieur—c'est-à-dire vers le spectateur possible mais pas conséquent toujours repoussé, multiple—le rôle d'un révélateur négatif où les inscriptions produites simultanément sur les autres plans apparaissent là inversées, redressées, fixes. Comme si les acteurs éventuels venaient tracer et prononcer à l'envers, devant vous, leur texte, sans que vous en ayez conscience ...

*Indeed, what is thus too easily taken to be the opening of a stage is nonetheless a panel that distorts, an invisible, impalpable, opaque veil that plays towards the other three sides the role of a mirror or reflector, and towards the outside [...] the role of a negative developer on which the inscriptions simultaneously produced on the other planes appear inverted, righted, fixed. As if the hypothetical actors came and traced or pronounced their text backwards, in front of you, without your being aware of it.*¹⁷⁸

This structural matrix or textual apparatus likewise describes, as Joyce says, a “polyhedron of all scripture,” its supposed fourth surface opening onto a representational space of indefinite dimension (“the superposition of scenes, the emergence and progressive articulation” of competing structural ensembles, linkages, détournements). But also, as an other-matrix, it stands in place of the ineffable renversement of what Derrida, in *Résistances de la psychanalyse* (1996), terms “woman between three and four.”¹⁷⁹ This “third-forth

¹⁷⁵ SOLLERS, *Nombres*, 4.48.

¹⁷⁶ SOLLERS, *Nombres*, 3.19.

¹⁷⁷ SOLLERS, *Nombres*, 4.8.

¹⁷⁸ SOLLERS, *Nombres*, 4.8.

¹⁷⁹ JACQUES DERRIDA, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) 8.

person” likewise describes a topological relation of the *sinthome* (inverted, righted, fixed), “between the three and the four,” whose surface effect describes an internal difference with itself that effectively organises the apparatus which it at once screens, mediates, translates, interprets and metaphorises, as an apparatus of disclosure. Once again, this apparatus is given in the form of a *mise-en-scène*, a theatrical stage [*scène*] whose forth wall or *scène frons* is apparently substituted by a *glace-sans-tain* or double mirror. In the chapter on Sollers in *Dissemination*, Derrida elaborates further along these lines:

this mirror will have been turned towards the back of the stage [...] offering us only the site of its tain.

Which would (not) be anything if the tain were not transparent, or rather transformative of what it lets through. The tain of this mirror thus reflects—imperfectly—what comes to it—imperfectly—from the other three sides and lets through—precisely—the ghost of what it reflects.¹⁸⁰

What the mirror gives, what it transmits by means of the imaginary fourth wall of the stage, its *tain*, is a “deformation irreducible to any form.”¹⁸¹ This mirror-effect, or error-effect, of the *stade du miroir* underwrites of type of “ghosting” which Derrida elsewhere calls a “gift without the least memory of itself,”¹⁸² that nevertheless marks an “impossible past” of something that has never been present, has never been, what both is and is not a *Being-there* in the Heideggerean sense: “over ‘there,’ in a distant past, a lost memory of what is no longer here. Was it ever?”¹⁸³

Transposed onto the mirror apparatus of the *stade du miroir*, the technics of this “ghosting” describes a structural matrix, a mechanism or programme in which the ghost writing of the signifier in the illusion of a signified marks a schematics of destination: an horizon effect of the mirror which gives the subject’s desire back to it under the guise of a translated “encounter” of/with the Real (as a form of scepticism about the facticity of its specular *image*).

IO

This apparent antinomy, in which the subject becomes fatally fascinated with its image (*le moi illusion*), also describes a circuit of *autopoiesis*. As a product of *autopoiesis*, the mirroring effect gives the impression of a dumbshow masked by

¹⁸⁰ DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 314.

¹⁸¹ DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 314.

¹⁸² DERRIDA, *Cinders*, 77.51. Derrida’s notion of the gift here, as elsewhere, follows from Mauss and Lacan. Bataille similarly develops this idea of the gift or *potlach* as inequation or dissymmetry (of expenditure versus exchange). Cf. MARCEL MAUSS, “Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques,” *L’Année sociologique* (1923–1924): 30–186; rpr. *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950) 143–147. “The ideal would be to give a potlach and it not be reciprocated”; cited in GEORGES BATAILLE, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971–1988) 1.310.

¹⁸³ DERRIDA, *Cinders*, 31.3.

a type of projectionism, or rather a template of desiring affectation as the horizon of reflexive consciousness. The theatrical metaphor thus provides for virtually unlimited substitutability in the staging of this specular relation, underwritten by a form of *deus ex machina*. This “ghost in the machine,” as a confusion of *archē* and *mimēsis*, suggests a (signifying) dis-simulation at the “origin.” At the same time this originary dissimulation can be said to make signification *possible* in the “first place,” while nevertheless circumventing closure in the form of *mimēsis* or *adaequatio*. As such, this machine functions upon a principle of “duplicity,” which would not be reducible beyond a *deus ex machina* as an apparatus in the service of an ideality or “ideal text,” and whose form and operations it would simply “mimic” through a type of mirror-play or speculative dialectics. Such a mechanism would instead operate as a schemato-tropic transposition of signifying elements mirroring the t(r)opological shift from the 3 to the 4 (“trinity” to the “quaternity”) in its model of structuring recursion.

Far from being simply, or literally, a means of representation of a displaced exterior, this mirror apparatus “limits” the domain of speculative thought, though in such a way that it extends the speculative field indefinitely¹⁸⁴—mirroring, in a sense, Lacan’s dialectical transcription of the opening of “presence,” as the prior partitioning of a signifier: what Derrida terms the “eruptive event” of the gift (46.II) (“*es gibt ashes*,” “cinders there are” [73.47]). The cinder *envoi*, the “spectre” of the ghost in the machine, presents the ruin of this “impossible past.” This is what Hélène Cixous similarly refers to as the “birth of a writing scene” which leads to a “theatrical” scene, the staging of desire:

The text burns and comes back. The flame condenses, ashes disperse. [...] The text not only flows through all its secretions and excretions, through openings in the body, but it also burns in its most intimate locus.¹⁸⁵

In this sense Derrida’s phrase, *il y a là cendre*, can be taken as signalling that which persists in language without presenting itself, without “it-self,” it signals a differential topology of the locus and opening of a textuality that has already been put into play as other to itself:

la cendre n’est rien qui soit au monde, rien qui reste comme un étant. Elle est l’être [...] qu’il y a—c’est un nom de l’être qu’il y a là mais qui, se donnant (es gibt ashes), n’est rien, reste au-delà de tout ce qui est (konis epekeina tes ousias), reste imprononçable pour rendre possible le dire alors qu’il n’est rien.

cinder is nothing that can be in the world, nothing that remains as an entity. It is the being [...] that there is—that is a name of the being that there is but which, giving itself (*es gibt ashes*), is nothing, remains beyond

¹⁸⁴ This mirror does not constitute a rigid boundary, rather it marks a scene of play, of what Derrida elsewhere terms “rupture”: “the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin everything became discourse. [...] The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification indefinitely.” Cf. DERRIDA “Structure, Sign and Play,” 279–280.

¹⁸⁵ VERENA ANDERMATT CONLEY, *Hélène Cixous* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) 24.

everything that is (“*konis epekeina tes ousias*” [cinder beyond being or presence]),¹⁸⁶ remains unpronounceable in order to make saying possible although it is nothing. [73.47]

“Everything ‘begins’ with citation, in the creases of a certain veil, a certain mirror-like screen”—“since nothing has preceded the mirror, since everything begins in the folds of citation [...] the inside of the text will always have been outside it.”¹⁸⁷ The citational space and the contextual frame are at once literally “inside” the text and “in excess of” it: an inter- or hypertextual transversal marking what should henceforth be thought as the double-partition of the *subjectile*, as the “scission” or “incision” through which the spectre or double re-emerges and re-inscribes itself as the *archeion* and immanence of discursive being (as both *l’être* and *lettre*).¹⁸⁸

This double-partition bears certain affinities to Mallarmé’s notion of the “hymen”: “the penetration, the act perpetrated by what *enters*, consumes”—“but also, inversely yet in the same blow, the unconsummated marriage, the vaginal partition [...] *between* the inside and the outside, the desire and its fulfilment.”¹⁸⁹ The boundary is “always already” its own transgression and fore-throw—at the moment the subjective limit is transgressed it is already (re)situated ahead of itself, so that no *transgression* will in fact have taken place—which would suggest that the topology of the subject is constituted as the immanence of transgression, of discursive “excess.”

Au présent, ici maintenant, voilà une matière—visible mais lisible à peine—qui ne renvoyant qu’à elle-même ne fait plus trace, à moins qu’elle ne trace qu’en perdant la trace qu’elle reste à peine

—qu’elle reste pour peu

—mais c’est justement ce qu’il appelle la trace, cet effacement. J’ai maintenant l’impression que le meilleur paradigme de la trace, pour lui [c’est] la cendre (ce qui reste sans rester de l’holocauste, du brûle-tout, de l’incendie l’encens)

¹⁸⁶ LUKACHER, *Cinders*, TN 73 (b). Derrida has modified a line of Plato’s that reads: “the good beyond being.” This passage also plays on a pun, since strictly speaking the ancient Greek is “unpronounceable,” it is a “dead language” whose precise phonetics have been lost. The slip from Plato’s *Agathon epekeina tes ousias* to Derrida’s *Konis epekeina tes ousias* thus takes place “silently,” as if in a tomb of language, stirring a kind of life into the ashes which remains purely graphic and beyond speech, and so according to Plato’s doctrine of *mimēsis* “beyond presence.” What is important, however, is the substitution of “cinder” for “good” (the “form of the good” in Plato is suggestive also of the Cartesian “self” and Hegelian “absolute”: the notion of a terminus, something towards which cognitive inquiry is directed, and upon which, when it is reached, inquiry can come to rest), thus signifying that those ideal forms at the origin are already invested by *mimēsis*, by duplicity and artifice which are the “qualities” of Derrida’s *cendre*.

¹⁸⁷ DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 316.

¹⁸⁸ JACQUES DERRIDA and PAULE THÉVENIN, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998) 59ff. Cf. LACAN, “The Signification of the Phallus,” *Écrits*, 281–291; also DERRIDA, *The Truth in Painting*, 83–118.

¹⁸⁹ DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 343–344.

At present, here and now, there is something material—visible but scarcely readable—that, referring only to itself, no longer makes a trace, unless it traces only by losing the trace it scarcely leaves

—that it just barely remains

—but that is just what he calls the trace, this effacement. I have the impression that the best paradigm for the trace, for him, is [...] the cinder [*la cendre*] (what remains without remainder from the holocaust, from the all-burning, from the incineration the incense) [43.16-18]¹⁹⁰

This *excess* which is also a *lack* marks a “quasi-dialectical” movement in the desire “à se satisfaire par une action négatrice,” “negating” itself in turn.¹⁹¹ I.e. as the lapsus instigated by this movement of “hyphenation”—the quasi-verisimilitude whose operation is first and foremost tautological, and which in turn links Derrida’s critique of dialectical agency to Nietzsche’s critique of will in *Die Götzendämmerung* (1888). The movement of the trace, the cinder trail (*la hache*), orientates and structures the ur-gency of the subject’s *will-to* (“seeing in order not to see [...] the passion for non-knowledge” [75.49]).¹⁹²

But the movement of the trace is necessarily occulted, it produces itself as self-occultation. When the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself.¹⁹³

Metaphysics will always contend that in order for the trace to occur, it must refer to something. And even if this something itself were characterised as “trace” there must be some “first” trace. But it is precisely the reliance of metaphysics on the notion of a “first” or “originary” event that the trace discredits:

All oppositions based on the distinction between original and derived, the simple and the repeated, the first and the second, etc., lose their pertinence from the moment everything “begins” by following a vestige. *I.e.* a certain repetition or text.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ JACQUES DERRIDA, “On Reading Heidegger: An Outline of Remarks to the Essex Colloquium,” *Research in Phenomenology* 17 (1987): 177. “I would prefer ashes [...] as the better paradigm for what I call the trace—something that erases itself totally, radically, while presenting itself.” Cf. DERRIDA, *Shibboleth: Pour Paul Celan* (Paris: Galilée, 1986) 73: “Trace or cinder. These names are as good as any other.”

¹⁹¹ KOJÈVE, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, 13.

¹⁹² *Cinders* 62.XIII: “They will only see it through the fire (they will only be blinded by it).” The light of pure reason is also the blindfold over the eyes of analysis—the “slumber of reason”? Cf. FREUD, “Medusa’s Head,” *SE XVIII*; DERRIDA, “La facteur de la vérité,” *The Post Card*—referring to Dupin’s feigned blindness and Lacan’s actual blindness in (mis)recognising the truth of the D-ciphered *envoi* in Poe’s story, “The Purloined Letter.” The reference can also be traced to NIETZSCHE, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990) 24: “And only on this now firm and granite basis of ignorance has knowledge hitherto been able to rise up, the will to knowledge on the basis of a far more powerful will, the will to non-knowledge, to the uncertain, to the untrue.” N.B. What both Lacan and Derrida overlook is that the Minister D (Dupin’s specular double) employs *his own* cipher as the false seal on the reversed envelope (the one containing the eponymous “letter”) which he has re-addressed to himself—the significance of which is plain.

¹⁹³ DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, 47.

¹⁹⁴ DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 330.

Everything commences with the trace, and the trace itself refers only to other traces, to traces of the other—it “conceals and erases itself in its own production.”¹⁹⁵ A phenomenality ruined in advance, which signifies (if it signifies) only the failure of the idea (between Descartes and Hegel) of a self-instigating entity (in which consciousness might reside as either cogito or epiphenomenon). In any case, for Derrida, the question is directed rather at a fundamental materiality—one which is first and foremost ambivalent (repetition *or* text):

Since the trace can only imprint itself by referring to the other, to another trace (“the trace of its reflection”), [...] its force of production stands in necessary relation to the energy of its erasure.¹⁹⁶

Again Derrida is alluding here to Freud’s essay on the *Wunderblock* (1925), “une machine *supplémentaire*” or “appareil mnésique,” “une machine à écrire,” in which the trace (“trace mnésique [*Erinnerungsspur*]”) marks the interval of consciousness as a breach (“voie, Bahn”) in the timelessness of the unconscious (that is, as a mark of *différance*), whose *supplément hypomnésique* (*Ergänzung*) it is.¹⁹⁷

The self-effacement enacted in this hypomnesia at the “origin” (as Derrida says, “la *technè* comme rapport entre la vie et la mort”), proceeds by a metonymic incrementation from trace and cinder to what in *Glas* (and later *Feu la cendre*) is termed “holocaust”—the “all-burning” that consumes even the incendiary act itself. Its “idiom,” “which in order to take actual form must erase itself and produce itself at the price of this self-erasure”¹⁹⁸ (an “abnihilation of the etym,” as Joyce puts it, that would also relate it to the destruction and resurrection of words in the philology of Elie Wiesel and Wilhelm Marr, and to the “mute” poetics of Paul Celan and the “book of ash”). A Heraclitian ana-strophe, in the *holos* which both implies and exceeds an “absolute” responsibility of, or for, the Other:

Pour être ce qu’il est, pureté du jeu, de la différance, de la consommation, le brûle-tout doit passer dans son contraire: se garder, garder son mouvement de perte, apparaître comme ce qu’il est dans sa disparition même. Dès qu’il apparaît, dès que le feu se montre, il reste, il se retient, il se perd comme feu. La pure différance, différente de soi, cesse d’être ce qu’elle est pour rester ce qu’elle est.

In order to be what it is, purity of play, of difference, of consuming destruction, the all-burning must pass into its contrary, guard its own monument of loss, appear as what it is in its very disappearance. As

¹⁹⁵ DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, 7.

¹⁹⁶ DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, 331. See also de Man [personal correspondence cited in W.T. JONES, “Deconstructing Derrida,” *Metaphilosophy* 23.3 (1992): 232] who defines “trace” as “an empty referent—there is not nor was there ever any actual content latent in the unconscious to which the trace refers [...] the signifier is the sign of a lack.”

¹⁹⁷ JACQUES DERRIDA, “La scène de l’écriture,” *L’Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967) 328, 337.

¹⁹⁸ JACQUES DERRIDA, “The time of a thesis: punctuations,” trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 38.

soon as it appears, as soon as the fire shows itself, it remains, it keeps hold of itself, it loses itself as fire. Pure difference, different from (it)self, ceases to be what it is in order to remain what it is. [44.II]

The holocaust burns, it leaves not a trace of what it “is,” incinerating not only itself but every hermeneutics of self, so that even the way [*voie*] back is ablaze, a retreat or *retrait* through a topography of “scorched earth,” leaving the itinerary itself in ashes.¹⁹⁹ Nietzsche’s laughter at midday (or the laughter at Turin?). The shadow, the spectre of metaphysics, reduced to the zero of what remains only underfoot. The black humour of this procession of cinders, infernal *danse macabre*. (Which is also to say the death march, presided over by the evil genius of yet another Cartesian *monstrum*, whose Faustian re-animation as *will-to* attends only to self-negation—the burning desire of/for the self-as-other, as *subjectum* (*il, elle*), which it nevertheless seeks to eradicate as a final solution, *Endlösung*, to its foundational “dilemma.”)

Following from Lacan’s notion of the *stade du miroir* (“stage” both in the developmental and theatrical senses),²⁰⁰ *Feu la cendre* provides a further metaphor for this incendiary “dialectic of desire” as a type of mirror effect (its pure play of difference, otherwise the “all-burning”: “pure difference, different from it-self” [44.II]). The “all-burning” or “holocaust”—“*all* (holos) *is burned* (caustos)” (46.II)—situated *in place of* what has previously been regarded as an “origin” (of race, gender, language and hence of the “truth of Being”). Instead of a “present origin” there is a non-presence “in place of” a presence at the origin (*la disparition*, as Perec says)—which is to say, in place of the true presence that Western metaphysics has always *supposed* as “being at the origin.”

According to a tradition extending from Descartes back through the discourses of Platonism, the *cogito* predicates its own truth upon a notion of prior agency in which there is the necessity of a “first time,” and of an *a priori* that closes off the possibility of uncertainty (contra Heisenberg). Such a closure has always been, in one form or another, the aim of western philosophy—the desire to master what is problematic in language in order that “truth” might finally become manifest, and to assume the ground for this as given. But this notion of an *a priori* also assumes an ironic inflection. In *Feu la cendre* the “authorial” voice of the prologue relates that:

*Il y a plus de 15 ans, une phrase m’est venue, comme malgré moi, revenue plutôt, singulière, singulièrement brève, presque muette.
Je la croyais savamment calculée maîtrisée, assujettie, comme si je me l’étais à tout jamais appropriée.
Or depuis, sans cesse je dois me rendre à l’évidence: la phrase s’était passé de toute autorisation, elle avait vécu sans moi.
Elle avait toujours vécu seule.*

¹⁹⁹ DERRIDA, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 202–203.

²⁰⁰ The word “stage” in Lacan’s term “mirror stage” [*stade du miroir*] has the signification of stadium or theatrical stage, as well as the usual interpretation of a phase or step in a process.

More than 15 years ago a phrase came to me, as though in spite of me; to be more precise, it returned, unique, uniquely succinct, almost mute. I thought I had calculated it cunningly, mastered and overwhelmed it, as if I had appropriated it once and for all. Since then I have repeatedly had to yield to the evidence: the phrase dispensed with all authorisation, she had lived without me. She, the phrase, had always lived alone. [21]

The enigmatic phrase, *ily a là cendre*, both resists and yet calls for analysis. Like Nietzsche's "woman," "she, the phrase" seduces from across an impossible distance, or from within a wholly imaginary one: "Distance—woman—averts truth—the philosopher. She bestows the idea. And the idea withdraws, becomes transcendent, inaccessible, seductive. It beckons from afar. Its veils float in the distance. The dream of death begins. It is woman."²⁰¹ This is perhaps what is meant by Mallarmé in *L'après-midi d'un faun*, when he says: "Trop d'hymen souhaité de qui cherche le *la*."²⁰² That is, the *Verfremdungseffekt* of the overly determined subject-horizon, which also marks a rupture in the operations of definite articulation as mirroring the "ontological foundation" of *Being-there* (Da-sein) as discourse.²⁰³ Hence "she" is taken to represent the primal object of desire, as well as the movement of its *clandestination* in discourse, as the desired other—whether that be the Nietzschean (and consequently Freudian) "woman" as the occultation of truth, or the pseudo-specular *la/là* of Derrida's "Cendre."

The quest for what is perceived to have been *concealed* ties itself up in knots of self-proliferating discourse, "labyrinth, abyss." "She," symbolises at once the primal object of desire and the fear of castration, Salomé (Lou Andreas?), Medusa, Eve-Lilith—both truth and the dissimulation of truth, writing itself, herself.²⁰⁴ She, the phrase, represents in the final instance the possibility of the radical effacement of binary opposition: "the cinders [...] change sex, they re-cinder themselves, they androgynocide themselves" (61.37).²⁰⁵ Like Nietzsche's woman, *she* "will not be pinned down"²⁰⁶ and yet "it is impossible to resist looking for her."²⁰⁷ She "bestows the idea," it can be said, as a kind of birth of the "consumed (consummate) art of the secret" (35.8), a "gift" that effaces itself in the act of being given: "it immediately incinerates itself, in front of your eyes" (35.6)—a giving that withdraws in its event, as in the *es gibt Sein* of Heidegger, which becomes also an *es läßt Sein* (*Das Seiende sein-lassen*)—a form of allowance, that "takes into account" the illusory nature of this gift,

²⁰¹ DERRIDA, *Spurs*, 87–89.

²⁰² STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ, "L'après-midi d'un faun," *Poésies* (Paris: Classiques Français, 1993) 49.

²⁰³ HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 160.

²⁰⁴ DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, 152f.

²⁰⁵ GILLES DELEUZE and FÉLIX GUATTARI, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, H.R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1977) 85. The subject is always in the process of crossing (imaginary) thresholds, it "never stops migrating," it "becomes other," "as well as other sexes."

²⁰⁶ DERRIDA, *Spurs*, 55.

²⁰⁷ DERRIDA, *Spurs*, 71.

of its *permission*, which is in any event conditional, provisional, upon the absolute accountability of the subject to the Other.²⁰⁸ The *es gibt*, as *es läßt*, like the glass slipper (the *glissant*), is what “lies in wait” for the subject—a lure, trap or artifice—by means of which the subject is seduced into making free with the imaginary figure of *she*, *endre*, Cinderella of this masque ball. And it is by such means that the subject is bound to the event, to the nature of the event, as *Ereignis* or “*enowning*”—as that which gives and thereby ensnares under the guise of an *acte gratuit* or *laissez faire* (the ever illusory “pure play” of subjectivity).

This “pure art” of seduction, of its Cinderella-effect, is to disappear at precisely the right moment (on the stroke of midnight, the *inverse* of the Nietzschean noontide, signifying a “necessary impasse”)—*une petite mort*, slipping beyond reach of that ideal lover who paradoxically demands [*qui demande?*] that *she* remain forever virginal, unattainable, ideal, closed or guarded within parentheses, *une coquille* “(that’s the only thing he loves)” (41.16):

Qui est Endre? Où est-elle? Où court-elle à cette heure? Si l’homophonie retient le nom singulier dans le nom commun, ce fut bien là, une personne disparue mais une chose qui en garde et à la fois perd la trace, la endre.

Who is Cinder? Where is she? Where did she run off to at this hour. If the homophony withholds the singular name within the common noun, it was surely “there,” *là*; someone vanished but something preserved her trace and at the same time lost it, the cinder [*la endre*]. [33-35.6]

Narcissism of a subject mirrored in the glass-like anonymity of the other (the glass slipper, *glissant sur le tain*). The guise of reflective consciousness, a “projection,” desire in advance of itself, as it were, in the false causality of this ventriloquistic “call” (“L’anonyme est encore une origine, une voix”).²⁰⁹ The mirror gives the image in place of itself, seducing from behind this false partition—a solicitation which takes on the disembodied aspect of a “voice” which awaits only a mouth to put it in. The more articulate our subject-homunculus is made to appear, the more its “desire” becomes it—just as the more one approaches the phantom in the mirror, the more effectively it recedes. By constantly deferring itself, the “mirroring” horizon dissimulates, makes uncanny, estranges the subject from “itself,” anaesthetises it, makes it “fall in love” with itself (76.XXI).

II

In *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Heidegger similarly describes a narcissistic falling-in-love-with-itself of Dasein as simultaneously a falling away from it-self in(to) an inauthentic mode of Being. The “alienation of falling” is at once “tempting

²⁰⁸ Cf. HEIDEGGER’S 1969 Le Thor seminar, *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003).

²⁰⁹ ROLAND BARTHES, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970) 44.

and tranquillising,” so that Dasein becomes “entangled [*verfängt*] in itself”²¹⁰ in a way that is symptomatic of its dependence on the mirroring effect of discourse. By analogy, the subject, through its “dialectical” relation to and in signification, encounters everywhere and always its own “image,” but this “image,” although *similar* to the subject “to the point of hallucination” (71.44), is not the subject’s “own,” it does not *belong* to the subject.²¹¹ The signifier of the subject situates the subject as subjection to the rule of the signifier, what Heidegger calls “the word’s own rule”:

which means making the passage from the concept-formation, over something we imagine we have control, into placing ourselves within the grant of language.²¹²

Since this signifier is already the other of the subject, the subject in its otherness, then its apparent subjection to the signifier can be thought of as being sustained, paradoxically, by the delusion of the *cogito* that already imagines itself as describing an independent agency. Through the compulsive manufacture of a “discourse of reason” the *cogito* in fact guards its subjection to the signifier and prevents its overcoming of the contingent whose operations organise and structure language. This delusive condition is described by Derrida (echoing Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx) as the “slumber of reason”:

this slumber must be effectively traversed so that awakening will not be a ruse of dream. That is to say [...] a ruse of reason. The slumber of reason is not, perhaps, reason put to sleep, but slumber in the form of reason.²¹³

The horizon of the subject presents itself under the positivistic illusion of the attainable, as the possibility of a final truth upon which reason can come to rest. This horizon, however, is the very dissimulation of truth, it lures reason on in a tranquillised state, into the labyrinths of apparent unreason ($\alpha\text{-}\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$) at the “limits” of language. This horizon is likewise what Cixous calls “a metonymic chain where the other place always has its other place.”²¹⁴ The place, *topos*, of an untraversable (untranslatable) distance. The passage of an impossible *travail*:

²¹⁰ HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 223.

²¹¹ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell, revised edition (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) 308. Cf. HEGEL, Preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 14: “pure self-recognition in absolute otherness.”

²¹² Cited in ROBERT BERNASCONI, *The Question of Language in Heidegger’s History of Being* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1984) 11.

²¹³ DERRIDA, “From Restricted to General Economy,” *Writing and Difference*, 251. In his *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* (1843; 1927), Marx describes Hegel’s logic as “logical mysticism,” echoing Feuerbach’s phrase “mystique of reason.” Cf. KARL MARX, *Early Writings*, intro. Lucio Colletti (London: Penguin, 1975) 61; LUDWIG FEUERBACH, *Über Philosophie und Christenthum, in Beziehung auf den der Hegel’schen Philosophie gemachten Vorwurf der Unchristlichkeit* (Mannheim: Hoff & Heuser, 1839).

²¹⁴ HÉLÈNE CIXOUS, “Joyce: The (r)use of writing,” trans. Judith Still, *Post-structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French*, eds. Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 23.

la phrase éloignait d'elle-même. En elle, elle portait le lointain. Malgré sa place et l'apparence elle ne se laissait pas signer, elle n'appartenait plus, un peu comme si, ne signifiant rien qui fût intelligible, elle venait de très loin à rencontre de son présumé signataire.

the phrase withdrew from itself. The phrase carried distance within itself, within herself. Despite its venue and despite all appearances, it did not permit itself, did not permit herself, to sign; it no longer belonged; somewhat as if, signifying nothing that was [*fût*] intelligible, the phrase came from very far away to meet its supposed signatory. [33·4]

Distance folds within itself, crosses over itself, sends itself as an *envoi* (of/from itself). Such is the distance inscribed within the cinder, as “symptom”—the impossible distance of a desire “to cross over to the other, to the other side of the mirror [...] to move beyond the specularity that it constitutes itself.”²¹⁵ The dialectic of identification (which is to say, *adæquatio*, or perhaps *metaphora*) is a *travail*, a burdensome and ultimately impossible work(ing) of distance. And this distance is always othering itself, there, *là* (you still want to objectify it). A distance without present being, an “imaginary” distance whose terminal point remains un-imaginable, a distance between traces, within traces. Cinder between “materiality” and “essence,” a zero divisible to infinity: “an incineration [which] celebrates perhaps the nothing of the all” (55.26). This impossible distance mirrored in the “abyss of language”—both an abyss inscribed by language and in which language is inscribed—the *lac* from which the cinder *envoi* emerges as a moment of eruption. The paradoxical nature of this *lac* is reflected in the opening pages of Derrida’s 1978 text, *La vérité en peinture*:

The First substantive in *Parergon* is “abyss”: “it’s enough to say: abyss”—and the scenes and rhetoric of the abyss are below. The second substantive is “satire”: “it’s enough to say: abyss and satire of the abyss”—which takes back the bottom, the abyssal: “satire of the abyss” launches us if not into heaven then against the certainty of the abyss.”²¹⁶

The cinder-chiasm: it crosses over, from the one to the other, from “abyss” to “satire of the abyss,” in a way that prevents this *mise en abyme* from being reduced to simple “groundlessness”:

Opening with the *satis*, the *enough* (inside and outside, above and bellow, to left and right), satire, farce on the edge of excess.²¹⁷

Feu la cendre: a writing preoccupied with “excess,” with what exceeds, “exteriorises,” with what takes place in citation, and which also constitutes an “interior” of any given context. Derrida’s lapidary, paratactic style constantly requires the reader to cross from one column of text to another, from

²¹⁵ DERRIDA, “Psyche: Invention of the Other,” 320.

²¹⁶ SHULI BARZILAI, “Lemmata/Lemmala: Frames for Derrida’s *Parerga*,” *Diacritics* 20.1 (1990): 2–3.

²¹⁷ DERRIDA, “Lammata,” *The Truth in Painting*, 17.

polylogue to animadversion, inventing lines of communication between the two that remain irreducible to a mono-logic: “In effect two pieces of writing come face to face on the page: on the right hand side the polylogue proper” (22) and: “Facing the polylogue, on the left hand page, citations from other texts [...] preceded by the word *animadversio*” (26).²¹⁸ The animadversions are framed by, and frame in turn, the polylogue—each furnishing the other with a context and a “commentary,” mirroring and comprehending the other in advance—so that what at one point appears simply to *frame* the text is also at work *in* the text. These then undergo a further division, into segments that mirror one another and themselves, at the same time as they defer themselves, refer to the other, to “another voice” or another text, between the literal and the figurative, proper name and common noun, in the gap that allows citation to take place, venturing always towards the language of the other: *il y a là cendre*, “cinders there are ... it has cinders there, there.”²¹⁹

12

Writing of an experience of the groundless or *Abgrund* which closely echoes Freud’s *Unheimliche*, Heidegger, in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* (1947) and “...*dichterisch wohnt der Mensch...*” (1951), observes that the “abyss of language” should always be thought in terms of a double bind:

we do not go tumbling into emptiness. We fall upward, to a height. Its loftiness opens up a depth. The two span a realm in which we would like to become at home, so as to find a dwelling place for the life of man.²²⁰

The abyss of language is not an “emptiness” but a “depth” opened by a “height”—and it also marks what “we would like to become [...] a dwelling place for the life of man.” This place of language marks a certain ambivalence, since such a dwelling would not only be home to the conversation of poetry and thought (*denkende Gespräch mit der Dichtung*), but also what Heidegger terms the “idle talk” [*Gerede*] of the “they” which closes off the possibility of *Dasien*’s apprehending itself in a “primal” way.²²¹

²¹⁸ The word “animadversion” signifies, among other things, a “calling” to attention. It is worth noting that the “call” here also implies a negative: an *aversion* of the spirit (*anima*), of the “inner” voice.

²¹⁹ LUKACHER, “Mourning becomes Telepathy,” 2: “*Il y a là cendre* literally means ‘it has ashes there, there.’ By rendering the idiomatic *il y a* by ‘there is,’ we install the intransitive verb ‘to be’ where, properly speaking, it does not belong, for in the French idiom what is in question is not the ‘being’ of the entity but its ‘there-ness.’ As in the German *Es gibt* (literally, ‘it gives’; idiomatically, ‘there is’), *il y a* makes no determination concerning the ontology of the essent. Each time we read the refrain *il y a là cendre*, ‘cinders there are,’ we should remember that the delicate vulnerability of a cinder leaves open the question of its being or non-being. we should hear within ‘cinders there are’ something like ‘it has cinders,’ or ‘it gives cinders,’ or ‘cinders persist,’ where what ‘it’ may be and what ‘persists’ might entail are among the questions the phrase poses without implying that it already has the answers.”

²²⁰ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 191–192.

²²¹ HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 126–130, 168.

Das Dasein stürzt aus ihm selbst in es selbst, in die Bodenlosigkeit und Nichtigkeit der uneigentlichen Alltäglichkeit. Dieser sturz aber bleibt ihm durch die öffentliche Ausgelegtheit verborgen, so zwar, daß er ausgelegt wird als »Aufstieg« und »konkretes Leben«. ²²²

Dasein plunges out of itself into itself, into the groundless nullity of inauthentic everydayness. But this plunge remains hidden from Dasein by the way things have been publicly interpreted, so much so, indeed, that it gets interpreted as a way of “ascending” and “living concretely.” ²²³

This non-knowledge, or, to repeat again Lacan’s term, “méconnaissance,” retains with it a remembrance [*Erinnerung*] of something that Dasein is *yet to know*, since “that which has been uncovered and disclosed stands in a mode in which it is disguised and closed-off by idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity.” ²²⁴ In the melodrama which is the hermeneutics of Being, Dasein must seek, through a process of unconcealing [*alētheia*], ²²⁵ to re-appropriate the “truth” or meaning of what has been disguised, repressed or forgotten within the recent history of western ontology—viz. the slumber of reason (“you would go numb” [76.II], “it still anaesthetises you” [71.42]). But this self-forgetting *Erinnerung* is also an *Erneuerung*: a recursion or revolution, annulus of the return, of an incendiary renewal described in the iterative figure of writing as *grammē*:

it is this life of the memory that the *pharmakon* of writing would come to hypnotise: fascinating it, taking it out of itself by putting it to sleep in a monument. Confident of the permanence and independence of its *types* (*tupoi*), memory will fall asleep, will not keep itself up, will no longer keep to keeping itself alert, present, as close as possible to the truth of what is. Letting itself get stoned [*médusée*] by its own signs, its own guardians, by the types committed to the keeping and surveillance of knowledge, it will sink down into *lēthē*, overcome by non-knowledge and forgetfulness. Memory and truth cannot be separated. The movement of *alētheia* is a deployment of *mnēmē* through and through. A deployment of living memory, of memory as psychic life in its self presentation to itself. The powers of *lēthē* simultaneously increase the domains of death, of nontruth, of nonknowledge. This is why writing, at least in so far as it sows “forgetfulness in the soul,” turns us towards the inanimate and towards nonknowledge. ²²⁶

In *Alētheia* (*Heraklit, Fragment 6*) (1951), Heidegger, attending to the term’s paranomastic resonance, argues that we should read *alētheia* (truth, unconcealment, *adaequatio*) as *a-lētheia* [α-λήθεια]—so that the privative alpha is taken to indicate that concealment (*lēthē*) always accompanies unconcealment. ²²⁷

²²² MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Sein und Zeit* (Halle adS: Max Niemeyer, 1927) 178.

²²³ HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 178.

²²⁴ HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 221–222.

²²⁵ HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 222.

²²⁶ DERRIDA, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” *Dissemination*, 105.

²²⁷ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, “On the Essence of Truth,” trans. John Sallis, *Basic Writings*, 132. Heidegger’s interpretation of *alētheia* here also draws upon an earlier reading of a fragment of Parmenides. *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1954) 26.

In this manner, “self-concealing, concealment” belongs to *a-lētheia*, not just as an addition, not as “the shadow of light” or “darkness visible,” but rather as the heart of *a(lēthe)ia*.²²⁸ Hence Platonic *alētheia*, as a type of *Erinnerung*, is shown to belong to that which persists within it, as *lēthē*, and which gives rise to it through a movement of self-negation—a movement which nevertheless both preserves and affirms the word’s “originary” sense of *concealing-forgetfulness*.

In an important corollary, Heidegger links this two-fold movement of concealing forgetfulness with technology, which likewise suggests a further sense of “emplacement” and *adaequatio* in terms of typogenetic reversion. For Heidegger: “Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *alētheia*, truth, happens.”²²⁹ This technology of *alētheia*, as a mnemotechnic, resides in the topical reversion of memory as “writing”: “In this sense, *mnēmē* and *mimēsis* are on a par, since *mnēmē* too is an unveiling (an un-forgetting), *alētheia*.”²³⁰

Between *mimēsis* and *mnēmosynē*, or creative memory (the source of language, according to Hegel), there is this double play of un-forgetting. As with the figure of Mnemosyne in Keats’s *Hyperion* fragment, which is inextricably linked to a notion of “fall” and topical reversion (Apollo-Hyperion), the mnemotechnic of *a-lētheia* marks a certain defilement of *Erinnerung* in a way that characterises memory as the recurrent affirmation of concealing-forgetfulness, but also as a kind of recursive apparatus—what Heidegger terms *Ge-stell* (enframing)—as a technological form of disclosure or “revealing.”²³¹ Elsewhere Hegel links this to a concept of historical “development,” as something which is possible only insofar as we not only raise substantiality to consciousness, but also become aware, through an appreciation of history, that this is what is taking place. The *Weltgeist* becomes self-conscious spirit, substance becomes subject—and as Bernasconi remarks: “it is this [latter] process that gives rise to *Geschichte begriffen* [history concept] as the gathering remembrance that Hegel calls *Er-Innerung*.”²³²

What *lēthē* then gives of its effacement in *a-lētheia*, according to Heidegger, is the possibility of a *being-placed*, by which *a-lētheia* re-marks itself in the affirmation of its own interminable passage towards the *aporia* of self-presence (as *Geschichte begriffen*). Consequently, *a-lētheia* always takes the form of a detour and a repetition (the emplacements of *lēthē* in *alētheia* describing a redoubled passage through the Lethe of metaphysics in the historicised forgetting of its origin as *anamnēsis*).

This *aporia* of reduction likewise describes what Derrida calls the “differentiation within language” between mimetic reproduction and

²²⁸ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, “What Calls for Thinking?” trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray, *Basic Writings*, 390.

²²⁹ HEIDEGGER, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 319.

²³⁰ DERRIDA, “The Double Session,” 219.

²³¹ HEIDEGGER, “The Question Concerning Technology,” 324.

²³² HEGEL, *Encyclopaedia*, §158. Cf. BERNASCONI, *The Question of Language in Heidegger’s History of Being*, 10.

supplanting, whereby *logos* is effectively spirited away from itself.²³³ In this play of commemoration, mourning the loss of itself, there is “not memory itself (*mnēmē*), only monuments (*hypomnēmata*), inventories, archives, citations, copies, accounts, tales, lists, notes, duplicates, chronicles, genealogies, references. Not memory but memorials.” And yet:

it cannot be said that its essence simply and *presently* confounds it with death or nontruth. For writing *has* no essence or value of its own, whether positive or negative. It plays within the simulacrum. It is in its type the mime of memory, of knowledge, of truth, etc.²³⁴

What emerges from this play between *lēthē* and *a-lētheia*, then, is a particular notion of “originary difference” or *différance* which marks an aporia of hermeneutic reduction at the same time as it signals its on-going “solicitation.” As the “mime” of memory, writing or the written trait affects a typogenetics of counter-reductive “reversion” (*lēthē-mnēmē* as aporia of origins), in which the babelisation of language no longer describes a form of concealment of meaning, but rather the “essence” of unconcealment as the *technē* of writing. As Derrida says, “The opposition between *mnēmē* and *hypomnēsis* would thus preside over the meaning of writing.”²³⁵

In the polylogue-text of *Feu la cendre*, unconcealing is itself presented as a gesture of concealment, dissimulation. Writing—as what Jorge Luis Borges called “a pale indefinite ash / That resembles both the dream and oblivion”²³⁶—is presented as a figure of mourning (as one might say a figure of speech), which is nonetheless not figurable as such. The relation itself pertains only figuratively in the sense of a mourning after the other, the *irrevocably* missed, at the same time as this genre of mourning disfigures or obliterates the “memory” of the other in the flames of its memorial.

“[...] Read this letter now at once many times and burn it ...”
 —I hope this one won’t get lost. Quick, a duplicate ... graphite ... carbon
 ... reread this letter ... burn it. *Il y a là cendre*. And now, to distinguish,
 between two repetitions ...²³⁷

Writing no longer recalls *what* is lost, but only the non-originary event of loss (“to celebrate, to ignite” [49.23]); to burn down the institutions of

²³³ DERRIDA, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 89.

²³⁴ DERRIDA, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 107, 105.

²³⁵ DERRIDA, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” III.

²³⁶ JORGE LUIS BORGES, “The Gifts,” *A Personal Anthology*, trans. A. Kerrigan and I. Feldman (London: Picador, 1972) 164. Dissimulation, dream, remembrance and oblivion are major “themes” in *Feu la cendre* (e.g. 61.36: “Memory or oblivion [...] of the fire, trait that still relates to the burning. [...] but if cinder there is, it is because the fire remains in retreat. [...]. It still camouflages itself, it disguises itself, beneath the multiplicity, the dust, the makeup powder [...]—not to remain nearby itself, not to belong to itself, there is the essence of the cinder [*la cendre*], its cinder itself”).

²³⁷ DERRIDA, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 170–171.

oppression and falsehood, to “set fire to all the old hypocrisies” (39.67).²³⁸ The celebration of loss (conspicuous expenditure, *potlatch*, mourning as wake), is conversely the celebration of a nativity. Writing becomes the invention of an incendiary “act,” giving birth to a type of Blakean child terror, a forcing open of the *clôture* of metaphysical discourse with a “tongue of fire” (60.VI). The “effect” of unconcealing, of burning away falsehoods, as a mode of celebration or carnival, adds to the procession and pageant of the text, the excess production of play which thus, for Heidegger, closes off access to Dasein as *the thing it is*, Kantian *Ding an sich*, preventing its disclosure and following (instead) the “route of gossiping and passing the word along” through a network of supplementary voices (the only one possible).²³⁹

This verbal pageant commemorates in a forgetful manner. What Dasein retains a “remembrance of” (as a *figure* of the Cartesian subjectum, *in memoriam*, as it were) is the prepredicative overttness of being, the “ontic truth” that persists through language and which, adopting a Lacanian phraseology, sets the subject (“Dasein”) apart from itself as the subject of language, in a way however that is never simply estrangement since it is also the way in which Dasein dwells: “idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity characterise the way in which, in an everyday manner, Dasein is its ‘there’—the disclosedness of Being-in-the-world.”²⁴⁰

What Dasein is “yet” to know is the “ontological truth” of Being, and it is through the persistent attempt to unveil Being that makes possible the overttness of being.²⁴¹ In other words, the *unveiling* of Being—brought into discourse as a *subject* (“that which is talked about,” “that which is interrogated”)²⁴²—makes possible, through that very discourse the pre-predicative overttness of being upon which the *I* itself is founded. However, what takes place through this “unveiling” is also the dissimulation of “ontological truth,” which is to say, without its ever having been made manifest to Dasein, the truth of its Being will already have been concealed in a way that feigns presence as a being-*there*. For Derrida, this unveiling is materialised as a semantically ambiguous “vocal writing.” The desire to make “audible” the silent “call” at the origin of Being (a *solicitation* at work already within what Heidegger terms the “prepredicative overttness” of Dasein re-echoed in the *I* of Derrida’s polylogue) works to “bring to presence,” in place of the call, “another voice”—another voice which at once “debilitates” the opening of *Being* and yet “makes possible” the overttness of *being* (as interval, trait, originary repetition, *différance*).

²³⁸ Derrida cites VIRGINIA WOOLF, *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1938).

²³⁹ HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 168.

²⁴⁰ HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 219.

²⁴¹ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *The Essence of Reason*, trans. T. Malick (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969) 21–23.

²⁴² HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 24.

In the *Écrits*, as elsewhere, Lacan suggests that the “originary event” of the subjection of the subject occurs contemporaneously with an “advent” of language (as “un sujet défini de son articulation par le signifiant”)²⁴³ whose spectre it is—a mirroring fascination with which everything in the drama of Cartesianism commences, whose mark of subjection characterises it from its so-called first term—a term which corresponds to the idea of itself only as the metonymic forethrow of a *sum res cogitans*. This proposition-in-advance, predicative of the cogito as such, speaks to the tautological foundation of subjectivity as the “perversion” of the Aristotelian *primum mobile*, as the immaculate origin of thought thinking itself.

The uniqueness of the originary event masks a *reductio ad absurdum* whose figure the subject is, as the measure or interval of this interminable reduction—which is to say, following Derrida’s critique, the “reduction” of the pure idiom through its own divisibility.²⁴⁴ It is in this sense that the demarcation between language and its initiating “idea”—its supposed transcendental signified—itself takes place within language: as Derrida famously says, “il n’y a pas de hors texte,”²⁴⁵ there is no before or outside *of the text*:

What has happened, if it has happened, is a sort of overrun [*débordement*] that spoils all these boundaries and divisions and forces us to extend the accredited concept, the dominant notion of a “text,” of what I still call a “text,” for strategic reasons, in part—a “text” that is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing [...] enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces.²⁴⁶

However, it does not follow from the assertion that there is no outside of the text, that everything is therefore inside the text. The kinds of distinction—for instance, if not the inside, then outside—which have governed Western metaphysics since Plato and Aristotle, and which have been regarded as external to language, are, according to Derrida, founded in language itself. The immediate difficulty, then, in approaching any analysis of the structurality of the subject arises chiefly from the fact that there is no “outside” of semantico-linguistic subjectivity from which one might analyse, in an “objective” or empirical fashion, what is proper to it.

²⁴³ LACAN, “Subversion du sujet et dialectique de désir,” *Écrits I*, 805.

²⁴⁴ JACQUES DERRIDA, “Signature Event Context,” *Limited Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988) 7. Cf. JEAN BAUDRILLARD, *L’Échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) 242. This primal “repression,” as the divisibility of the pure idiom, can be seen to operate as the “inverted mirror [...] of the unconscious and libidinal economy” whose images are also the “objects” of fascination and animosity for the narcissistic ego.

²⁴⁵ DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, 158.

²⁴⁶ JACQUES DERRIDA, “Living On: Border Lines,” trans. J. Hulbert, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Harvester, 1991) 256–257.

In analytic discourse, the analyst subjects the value of writing to the “meaning” of that which is being commented upon. As a substitute, such a commentary defers to a supposed original or primal scene (as already a *text*) in its attempt to uncover it, giving rise of necessity to paraphrase and citation (as in the *Essay on the Sublime* [*Peri hypsous*] of Pseudo-Longinus). In *Feu la cendre*, however, the devices of meta-commentary displace rather than affirm the assumption of authorial privilege: “no one here flatters this secret with a commentary. We literally unveil nothing of her, nothing that in the final account does not leave her intact, virginal [...] indecipherable” (41.16). Analysis, having in one way or another itself as its undeclared subject (*its literality*), succeeds merely in proliferating discourse and in exacerbating a symptomatic desire to solve the puzzle or unriddle the labyrinth by inventing ever more of them. Hillis Miller:

The interpretation or solving of the puzzles of the textual web only adds more filaments to the web. One can never escape the labyrinth because the activity of escaping makes more labyrinth.²⁴⁷

Feu la cendre: the text feigns its own pseudo counter-exegesis—the polylogue’s “unveiling” of the enigmatic phrase, which is its *raison d’être*. It proposes the disclosure of a mechanics of the “writing apparatus,” but it is a disclosure that all along conceals by virtue of its being a *charaktēr*, the *genus dicendi* of this cinder text, whose nominality obtains at every point in the object relation, belying a possible motif if not yet a motive: “the name ‘cinder’ is still a cinder of the cinder itself” (49.20).

Writing apparatus: play of citation, iteration, repetition, difference and deferral,²⁴⁸ affecting what Derrida terms a “pyromaniac dissemination” (46.II) in the tropological reduction of signifiability against the schematics of citation: *Dissemination, Glas, La carte postale* (22). Operating a seam between each of these texts, the phrase *il y a là cendre* marks an on-going incendiary of discursive limits (a literalised *metaphora* translating the *là*, there, of *la cendre*, as the *in* which is already en-cendré, emplaced therein as though an almost silent cinder-heart).

Feigning citation, auto-citation, *Feu la cendre* “inflames”—the disingenuousness of what is still, at heart, a discourse *on* or *of* an undecidability that cannot be overcome by appeal to a higher judgement that would not, itself, be equally contingent. Each citational “event” calls for further citation, for the apparent substantive of “another”: “‘another voice, again, yet another voice.’ It is a desire, a prayer, a promise, as you wish” (27) (Derrida’s desire, “my desire”? [23]). But this wish is always conditional, tied as it is to the “absolution” and the absolute of a certain eternal return and the factor of a particular referentiality or *envoy of the “all”* (from which, at the same time *it* withdraws). An obedience to the other. A prayer or wish, that is an entreaty (to entreat; *en-trait*),

²⁴⁷ J. HILLIS MILLER, “Stevens’s Rock and Criticism as Cure, II,” *Georgia Review* 30 (Summer 1976): 337.

²⁴⁸ DERRIDA, “Signature Event Context,” 7ff.

a request, or by metonymy the thing itself requested: “A safe arrival was their prayer.” And this, too, is as precarious as the cinder, of the “gift” which binds the subject to the law (the *nom du Père* in effect). “The purpose of prayer,” as Kant says, “can only be to induce in us a moral disposition; its purpose can never be pragmatic, seeking the satisfaction of our wants. It should fan into flame the cinders of morality in the inner recess of our heart.”²⁴⁹

A dis-position which is also a giving over to the other, to what, in the inner recess of our hearts, hesitates, like cinders, between expiration and resuscitation; the zero of frigidity and the monstrous totality of the holocaust. Prayer as an induction and a translation, by *ana-logia*, between the interdiction of a want and the wish to affect a certain moral disposition: *il y a là cendre*. As with Shakespeare’s Cordelia, the heart (*cordis*), is also an envoy, a gift or counter-gift: “But *goes* thy heart with this?” (*Lear*, First Folio I.i.111); “So be my grave my peace, as here I *give* / Her father’s heart from her!” (I.i.134).

CORDELIA Unhappy as I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth

[I.i.97-98]

The cinder-heart speaks truly in not speaking—an *interdiction* for the sake of an “other” (this pantomime which debilitates and yet accedes to the tragic-comic drama of yet another trinity-cum-quaternity reduced effectively to zero). This silent other, cinder in the hidden inner recess of the heart: “What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent” (I.i.59). The “fatally silent call that speaks before its own voice” (22):

LEAR Look on her lips, look, her lips,
Look there, look there! ...

[V.iii.3283]

Echo of the German *leer*, “empty, vacant, void”—this “voice” of the other who speaks, or does not speak, defers to its echo, the ellipsis of its speculative counterpart. Another promise, another deferral of a debt, which it addresses to itself as other, as though to “respond to it—or for it” (22): “in the final account [...] a pile of cinders unconcerned about preserving its form, a retreat, a retracing only without any relation with what, now, through love, I just did and I am about to tell you—” (77.51).

Revelation suspended in silence, echoing the promise of Eliot’s Tiresias (“I am about to tell you—”); in the single dash of a mumming sign (“—”), an indecipherable, inaudible call sealed in the tomb, or on the lips of the corps (what Lear must have read on Cordelia’s lips but in his fatal delirium could not give voice to—the flight of the soul, the breath, *anima*, a final, fatal “circumfession” (which is yet also the “I do” of the bride-to-be, the annulus of affirmation, at least in its verbal enactment?): “For that it is necessary to take the word into your mouth, when you breath, whence the cinder comes to the

²⁴⁹ IMMANUEL KANT, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infeld (London: Methuen, 1930) 99.

vocable” [71.45]). The “unspeakable” itself remains “there,” “over there”—but it is the sense of a “there” which is not a place at which one can arrive: “My desire only goes so far as the invisible distance, immediately ‘grilled’ between languages” (73.48). The other-place—place of an other from which one can neither take one’s leave, nor to which one can offer one’s *adieux*, one’s apologies, *apologia* or *apologue*: “La voix se perde, comme si elle disparaissait dans un trou du discours.”²⁵⁰

The phrase as translation or citation recalls itself, recalls its having been elsewhere (“there”), without any concern with “preserving its form.” It marks a citational dynamic that can accumulate its past forms and disregard those forms, as that which cannot be “sheltered, like a fetish” from the “mirror effects through which the text quotes, quotes itself, sets itself in motion of its own accord.”²⁵¹ *Feu la cendre* already commences in the folds of citation:

“S’écartant d’elle-même, s’y formant toute, presque sans reste, l’écriture d’un seul trait renie et reconnaît la dette. Effondrement extrême de la signature, loin du centre, voire des secrets qui s’y partagent pour disperser, jusqu’à leur cendre.

“Que la lettre soit forte en cette seule indirection, et de toujours pouvoir manquer l’arrive, je n’en prendrai pas prétexte pour m’absenter à la ponctualité d’une dédicace [...] d’autres, il y a là cendre [...].”

“Moving off from itself, forming itself wholly therein, almost without remainder, writing denies and recognises its debt in a single dash. The utmost disintegration of the signature, far from the centre, indeed from the secrets that are shared there, divided up so as even to scatter their ashes [cendre].

“Though the letter gains strength solely from this indirection, and granted that it can always not arrive at the other side, I will not use this as a pretext to absent myself from the punctuality of a dedication: [...] others, cinders there are [...].” [30.I]²⁵²

The text has its “centre” elsewhere: (“Though the letter gains solely from this indirection”), a centre crumbles and melts” (69.41). The text seemingly *defers itself*, parodies its own subjectivised archaeology, its tracing after the silent “call” emanating from “within” writing (the agglutination of knowledge around the semantico-aesthetic object and the account rendered of it “in theory”). But this “within” is always already a writing “without,” or rather with-out, adhering (inhering?) to that *indubitable* other which, in truth, is nothing less than the interval between these terms, the hyphen of a virtually infinite and infinitesimal substitutability, of an unspeakable number of voices—Babel itself: “the parodied genre of the polylogue, an apparently unpronounceable conversation, in truth a writing apparatus” (22). (But what takes place between the terms “parodied,” “genre,” “apparently” and “truth”? Here the quotation marks hang impatently over the pseudo-corpse, besides which the polylogue resembles more a polygraph!) A form of textual

²⁵⁰ BARTHES, *S/Z*, 44.

²⁵¹ DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 315.

²⁵² *Animadversion II* is a self-citation from Derrida, “Dissemination,” 366.

dialysis in which the so-called originary text delays its “recovery” through a seemingly infinite series of detours—detours that stretch back through so many other texts²⁵³ and which derive their commonality from “those [...] known or unknown who have already given it [...] in advance” (21).

This apparatus is parodic because the purpose of its project is no longer a reduction to/of “truth” but the metaphoricity of truth (as vehicle of its own non-recuperation).²⁵⁴ The object is posed as orientating, but not terminating, the *desire* of the polylogue “that divides up each atom of writing” in seeking the “impossible truth” (26) of the cinder phrase (what at once calls for analysis and yet deprives analysis of its aim and indeed its reason): “one perhaps could say that the movement of any archaeology [...] is an accomplice of [...] reduction [...] and always attempts to conceive of structure on the basis of a full presence which is beyond play.”²⁵⁵ At the same time this “impossible truth” is satirical and stands, like the recurring phrase *il y a la cendre*, in a comic relation to the infinite (as here, the barely contained laughter of Derrida’s *mise en voix*).

14

Emplacement, *mise en voix*, remains a *graphikē lexis*, “corresponding only to an interior voice, an absolutely low voice” (22) from within writing itself, as a “temporalisation of signification.”²⁵⁶ An effect typographically simulated in the so-called polylogue text by the *tiret* or double hyphen which introduces each “voice,” a hyphen that elsewhere denotes silence, the texture of the suspended voice, a purely “grammatical sign” (22). This effect is realised even

²⁵³ The problem of textual archaeology is further complicated by the fact that another text, although it is not cited, is alluded to [75.50]: “Telepathy,” a supplement to *The Post Card*, which like *Glas*, “is woven around the letter LAC, CLA, ALC, ACL, etc.” (Lukacher, TN1). Here also our attention is drawn to a certain *technics* of writing: acronym, acrostic, fugue-form, hypertext, holography, textual genetics and genetic code. Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, “Telepathy,” trans. Nicolas Royle, *Oxford Literary Review* 10 (1988): 3–41. N.B. even within those texts that Derrida cites in *Feu la cendre*, the question of a “first time” is further problematised when it is revealed that “between two repetitions” of certain texts the phrase, *il y a là cendre*, has surreptitiously been introduced, with no guarantee for the reader that spatial antecedence in the text corresponds with temporal antecedence. See 56.III, 58.IV and accompanying polylogue-text, particularly 57–59.32.

²⁵⁴ That is to say, no longer the “wearing away” of metaphor as the “ascending” movement that constitutes the formation of the signified concept, but the limitless metaphoricity of metaphor that constitutes the sign as dissemination. Derrida, “White Mythology,” *Margins of Philosophy*. Cf. PAUL RICŒUR, *The Rule of Metaphor*, trans. R. Czerny (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1977) 284–9.

²⁵⁵ DERRIDA, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 279.

²⁵⁶ This is similar to the *a*-effect in *différance*: the homophonic effect reveals a difference within “writing” that mirrors the spatial-temporal difference in the function of mnemonic traces in Freud’s model of the psychic apparatus (cf. “Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad”), which for Derrida is the play of *différance* or *arché-écriture*: “archi-writing, archi-trace, or *différance*. Which (is) (simultaneously) spacing (and) temporalisation.” DERRIDA, “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, 13.

in its description: *l'acte de haute voix* [24], which spoken *aloud* loses the aspirant, the French *h* (*ache*, itself a homonym of the English *ash*), the cinder trail (*hache*), so that *haute voix* always risks becoming *autre voix*, “another voice” (the other voice of Philippe Sollers’s 1973 “novel as polylogue,” *H*: “qui dit salut la machine avec ses pattes rentrées son côté tortue cata socle ses touches figées accents toniques hors de strophe ...”).²⁵⁷ The “voice” effaces itself, loses its “volume,” its “pitch,” and withdraws, keeps itself, swallows its ashes (76.XXI, 77.51).

Similarly, Derrida proposes that the word *envoi* be read alongside *en voix*, so that the sense in which *mise en voix* takes place textually is directly apparent.²⁵⁸ It is precisely the textual nature of this “voice”—its there-ness (*par là*)—that allows the polylogue to speculate, as it were, on what “*mise en voix* could call forth and risk losing” (23) between the *I* that speaks and the phrase, *il y a là cendre*. And between this *mise en voix* and dialectics, a revisiting or revenance of the pseudo-*pharmakon* of Plato’s *Sophist* (218a):

For as yet you and I have nothing in common about him but the name; but as to the thing to which we give the name, we may perhaps each have a conception of it in our minds; however, we ought always in every instance to come to agreement about the thing itself by argument than by mere name without argument.

To speculate, then, upon what has nothing in common with itself but a name: *cendre*. And what offers at least the pretence of a definite article, which the propriety of a grammar nevertheless prohibits, as here *la cendre*. The specular counterpart of *là*, this feminine definite article plays the part of the sophist whose “dissimulation” of truth gives the lie to Plato’s discourse, which in being named *Sophist* loses precisely the “thing itself” by argument. The dialectical premise of a speech-to-truth proximation succumbs here (as in *Hamlet* and *Lear*) to the homological indeterminacy of the name. In *Feu la cendre*, the dialectical foundation in “full speech” is undermined from the outset by a vocalisation-effect [*mise en voix*] which takes place uniquely within a system of writing, a *technē mimetikos* (τέχνη μιμητικός), one moreover that (like Plato’s dialectic) mimes or mimics a type of speech, in the form of a polylogue. Which is also to say, following a Platonistic rationale, that the polylogue “corresponds” only to “an interior voice, an absolutely low voice” (22) which nevertheless returns to itself in the most literal sense of translation *verbo-pro-verbum*.

There is a certain irony in the way that the “silence” of the graphic difference between *là* and *la* is registered only within a system of “phonetic writing,” while at the same time exhibiting that “there is no phonetic writing.” The accent *grave* in *là* signifies the *unpronouncability* of the “correspondence”

²⁵⁷ JULIA KRISTEVA, *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977) 173–220.

²⁵⁸ DERRIDA, “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, 4–5. A *textu(r)ality* which “belongs neither to the voice nor to writing” but “between speech and writing”—as in the “pyramidal silence of the graphic difference” between the *e* and *a* of *différence* and *différance*.

between writing and an interior voice. It marks a “grammatical sign” (22) specific to the graphic trait—an “accent” that cannot be translated into an auditory medium. Indeed, the accent—what usually represents a tonal inflection in speech—indicates, instead, a textual site in which “phonetic” difference is at once inscribed and erased. *Mise en voix*, in re-calling an “absolutely low voice” of/at the origin, effaces the silent, idiomatic accent which becomes exemplary of “phonetic writing” in general and re-places it with “nothing” but a mute space:

Il faut pour cela que tu le prennes dans ta bouche, quand l'émission du souffle, d'où qu'elle vienne au vocable, disparaît à la vue comme une semence brûlante, une lave en vue de rien.

For that it is necessary to take the word [*là*] into your mouth, when you breath, whence the cinder comes to the vocable, which disappears from sight like burning semen, like lava destined nowhere. [71.45]

It could be said that, by the circumscription of *mise en voix*, what takes *place* is a language’s apparent *solicitation* of its own “disappearance,” marking “the signature of an unceasing omission.” Like the cinder ephemerid, language itself vanishes in an instant against a pale background of a base materiality (in the absence of its chance encounter with some future Rosetta Stone—which begs the question of what in fact *animates* language and renders it “decipherable,” and what therefore properly constitutes a *dead language*—or even, for that matter, an *artificial* language).

As in Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés*, “one will never be able to decide if *white* signifies something, or signifies only, or in addition to, the space of writing itself.”²⁵⁹ This “space of writing” which repeats, returns in a type of vicious circle as its own “ciphered signature” (51.24)—the primal scene of inscription itself, the caesura, the cut, the aspiration before the voice, *il y a là cendre*:

voilà qui prend place en laissant place, pour donner à entendre: rien n’aura eu lieu que le lieu. Il y a là cendre: il y a lieu.

this is what takes place in letting a place occur, so that it can be understood: Nothing will have taken place but the place. Cinders there are. Place there is. [37.10]²⁶⁰

Mise en voix: symbolic difference between writing and the *pro-grammē* of an ongoing solicitation (what “calls” to or for writing). Literally, its *place-ment in voice*, a “technics” operating between the event of the vocative and the scriptive “emplacement,” in advance, as what “there is.”²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ DERRIDA, “Mallarmé,” 113; 115–16.

²⁶⁰ “Nothing will have taken place but the place.” Mallarmé, *Un coup de dés*; cited DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 320–321; and “Mallarmé,” 115.

²⁶¹ SAMUEL WEBER, “The Vaulted Eye: Remarks on Knowledge and Professionalism,” *Yale French Studies* 77 (1990): 50.

In *La Voix et le Phénomène* (1967) and again in *Marges de la philosophie* (1972), Derrida coins the term *différance* (both *temporalisation* and *spacing*)²⁶² to describe the operations of a certain (graphic) trait which operates to deconstruct the notion of “phonetic writing.” The *a* which distinguishes *différance* from *différence* functions in an analogous way to the homophonic *là* in the phrase *il y a là cendre*:

this marked difference between two apparently vocal notations [...] remains purely graphic; it is read, or it is written, but it cannot be heard. It cannot be apprehended in speech, and [...] it also bypasses the order of apprehension. It is offered by a mute mark, a tacit monument [...]. The *a* of *différance*, thus, is not heard; it remains silent, secret, and discreet as a tomb: *oikêsis*. And thereby lets us anticipate the delineation of a site, the familial residence and tomb of the proper, in which is produced, by *différance*, the *economy of death*.²⁶³

For Derrida, the graphic trait “refers” to an “other of language,”²⁶⁴ what stands beyond language and calls language to Being, and this trait “refers” in such a way as to confound, by means of an “absolute” verbal similitude, the tendency of phonocentrism to conceive a unifying semantic horizon beyond the play of difference. The *a* of *différance* and the accent *grave* in *là* “explode the semantic horizon,”²⁶⁵ they initiate a rupture of or in *différence* that prevents meaning from being unified under a singular designation—affecting Derrida’s watchphrase: “*plus d’une langue*—more than one language, no more of one language.”²⁶⁶ Their signifiatory force “breaches a way” to the “call” within writing, that comes to the vocable only through an “economy of death” (of indifferentiation)—what is also the structuring principle of the “opening of play” in that the “call” instigates the force of a breaching (Freudian *Bahnung*) as the desire by which play is “opened.” The opening of play, then, describes in *différance* the “pre-opening of the ontic-ontological difference.”²⁶⁷ This play, the play of an event horizon, at once destabilises the (differential) subject while at the same time sustaining it *qua* subject—that is, as a recurring site of self-substitutability within a network of kinaesthetic intervals (describing a circuit of desire).

²⁶² DERRIDA, “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, 9.

²⁶³ DERRIDA, “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, 3–4. See especially TN 2. N.B. on an analogous function of the *e muet* in the writings of Stéphane Mallarmé, see MICHAEL TEMPLE, *The Name of the Poet: Onamastics and Anonymity in the Works of Stéphane Mallarmé* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995) 113ff.

²⁶⁴ DERRIDA, *Cinders*, 59.32: “Between the two versions, where is the cinder of the other, here or there?” Although this reference at first appears to derive from Derrida’s essay, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” it applies equally to the “two versions” of the homophone, *là* and *la*. As with all questions of the boundary it is impossible to tell whether the “other” is simply the specular counterpart (*là* or *la*) or the other of language.

²⁶⁵ DERRIDA, *Positions*, 45.

²⁶⁶ JACQUES DERRIDA, *Mémoires: For Paul de Man*, trans. C. Lindsay, J. Culler, E. Cadava, and P. Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 14–15.

²⁶⁷ DERRIDA, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 198.

The opening of play, the irreducible and delayed “scene of writing,” presents itself only by way of metonymy and metaphor—of cinders, “archi-writing, archi-trace,”²⁶⁸ “the place of no emplacement, the place solely of an incineration” (37.9). The opening “itself” goes unrecognised and unrecognisable *as* opening: “while we remain attentive [...] to *what* presents itself [the phrase], we are unable to see *presence* as such, since presence does not present itself, no more than does the visibility of the visible, the audibility of the audible [...]”²⁶⁹ Nothing, then, will have taken place but the place—nothing *of* (the) cinder, only “cinder there is. Place there is.” The opening itself, cinder itself, is always already put into play *as* its own effacement—it puts itself into play “in the holocaust of play itself” (46.II) as the paradoxical current in the ideality of the sign—it “ceases to be what it is in order to remain what it is” (44.II).

Radicalised in the metaphor of the “holocaust,” this tautological perpetuum gives itself over to a play of supplementarity: “the all-burning—that has taken place once and nonetheless repeats itself *ad infinitum*” (44.II). In other words, this “holocaust” is differential beyond any reduction—an “aperture effect,”²⁷⁰ between the all-consuming panoptical eye and the *I* (the pretended *moi autonome*) whose utterance is both indecipherable and oracular; “these words that leave your mouth only to be lost in unrecognisability” (33.4):

The call of the supplement is primary, here, and it hollows out that which will be reconstituted by deferral as the present. The supplement which seems to be added as a plenitude to a plenitude, is equally that which compensates for a lack.²⁷¹

The “voice” as *supplément* (*Nachtrag*) is both an addition and a substitute for a “lack” at the “origin,” whose antinomious structure Freud terms the *Triebmischung* (the supplemental mechanism of Thanatos or the *death drive* and its Erotic counterpart), and whose “pulsional” organisation (i.e. *related* to the drive) Lacan formalises as the “Symbolic order,” that which is “simultaneously non-being and insisting to be, that is what Freud had in mind when he talks about the death instinct as what is most fundamental.”²⁷² Derrida consequently reads both of these in terms of *pure différance*; non-Being as the “ontological truth” or “origin” of Being; the “holocaust” that “contains the seeds of ontology” (46.II):

Life must be thought of as trace before Being may be determined as presence. This is the only condition on which we can say that life *is* death.²⁷³

²⁶⁸ DERRIDA, “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, 13.

²⁶⁹ DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 314.

²⁷⁰ DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 308.

²⁷¹ DERRIDA, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 211–212.

²⁷² JACQUES LACAN, *Le Séminaire, Livre II: Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse 1954–1955* (Paris: Seuil, 1978) 326.

²⁷³ DERRIDA, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 203.

Trace before presence, then, as the condition upon which the apparently contradictory nature of the death drive, elaborated in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, can be understood as being “essential” to life (“Is it not already death at the origin of a life which can defend itself against death only through an economy of death, through deferment, repetition, reserve?”)²⁷⁴—the condition also upon which the desire to appropriate this “fatally silent call” can be seen as the same as the desire to defer that appropriation, an aversion or *avoidance*, as Heidegger says, and so as the desire for (or compulsion towards) a type of generative repetition:

All these differences in the production of trace [“the ungraspable and invisible difference between breaches”]²⁷⁵ may be interpreted as moments of differing [...] this movement is described as the effort of life to protect itself by *deferring* a dangerous cathexis, that is to say, by constituting a reserve. The dangerous expenditure or presence is deferred with the help of breaching and repetition.²⁷⁶

An *assemblage* of traces, fragments, disembodied voices, partial forms and metonymic chains—a body or apparatus, anamorphic or labyrinthine—a *monstrum* in which none of the parts properly fit, but from which nothing is entirely discarded. Something like a language or an unconscious, where “rien ne finit, rien ne passé, rien n’est oublié.”²⁷⁷

16

In *Les grandes épreuves de l’esprit* (1966), Henri Michaux describes “a schizophrenic table in terms of a process of production which is that of desire.”²⁷⁸ This process (an exacerbation of what Lévi-Strauss will have called “bricolage”) gives rise to certain textual, or textural, effects which remain inassimilable within a formal systems of meaning or use, and so casts it as a type of monstrosity. The element of the inassimilable here marks the point at which the “infernal machinery” of this schizophrenic apparatus achieves an “unintended” complexity which could not be “explained” unless by something equally complex and inassimilable.

Once noticed, it continued to occupy one’s mind. It even persisted, as it were, in going about its own business [...]. The striking thing was that it was neither simple nor really complex, initially or intentionally complex, or constructed according to a complicated plan. Instead, it had been desimplified in the course of its carpentering [...]. As it stood, it was a table of additions, much like certain schizophrenics’ drawings, described as “overstuffed,” and if finished it was only in so far as there

²⁷⁴ DERRIDA, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 202.

²⁷⁵ DERRIDA, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 201.

²⁷⁶ DERRIDA, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 202.

²⁷⁷ DERRIDA, “La scène de l’écriture,” 339.

²⁷⁸ HENRI MICHAUX, *The Major Ordeals of the Mind and Countless Minor Ones*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) 125–127.

was no way of adding anything more to it, the table having become more and more an accumulation, less and less a table [...]. Its top surface, the useful part of the table, having been gradually reduced, was disappearing.²⁷⁹

We might think of this further in terms of a discursive emplacement, or the transcoding of textual and material difference, and of the “fragment” as an element of metonymic recursion. Blanchot provides the following characterisation:

the fragment, as fragments, tends to dissolve the totality which it presupposes and which it carries off towards the dissolution from which it does not [...] form, but to which it exposes itself in order, disappearing—and along with it, all identity—to maintain itself as the energy of disappearing: a repetitive energy, the limit that bears upon limitation.²⁸⁰

This falling-fragmentation, without origin or derivation, would also describe the transversality of the “limit that bears upon limitation” as simultaneously the *aporia* of what Heidegger calls *being placed*. As the mark of discursive emplacement, this *aporia* of limits likewise describes a structural “hesitancy” between the fragmentary resemblance to a system in the process of emerging and to one in the process of dissolution. It suggests a mechanical lability, a technics of the fragmented tending simultaneously towards the infinitesimal and the monstrous through an interminable movement of recursion. In place of the incomplete system it will always have seemed to imply, the fragment disseminates itself, engendering each of its elements as the fragmented-whole of which it is not even the whole-fragmented: *mise en abyme*.

Mallarmé describes a similar deformation in the ideality of the book, as a form of textual apparatus “in process,” capable of encapsulating the universal archive through an inflationary, potentially infinite *débordement* of signifying structure. For Mallarmé this possibility rests in the materiality of language which gives impetus to the simultaneous vision of the page, rather than the “artificial unity based on the square measurements of the book.” Mallarmé’s idea was to put to work a type of structural parataxis, exemplified in the typographics of print media and in the idea of moveable type, as the necessary “technological” transformation of book into text. A “materiality” which finds its most expressive realisation in the work of the early 20th century avant-garde, from Guillaume Apollinaire to James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, among others.

As with Michaux’s schizophrenic table, the apparatus of textual mediation could be described as a kind of *anamorphosis without derivation*.²⁸¹ The textual apparatus accumulates discontinuities, ruptures within and of the unified

²⁷⁹ MICHAUX, *The Major Ordeals of the Mind*, 125–126.

²⁸⁰ BLANCHOT, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 60–61.

²⁸¹ LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 79ff. Also JURGIS BALTRUSAITIS, *Anamorphoses ou perspectives curieuses* (Paris: Vrin, 1957).

perspectival field, so that the desire to locate it, to situate it in regards to a plane of reference, is continually thwarted. Like the schizophrenic table, this apparatus will have “lent itself to no function, self-protective, denying itself to service and communication alike.”²⁸²

In *Feu la cendre*, a similar notion of apparatus is presented in terms of an archaeological machine, sifting its way through the ruins of innumerable “suppressed narratives.” At certain points we encounter a series of proper names—Nietzsche, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Woolf—as well as their unnamed counterparts, whose identities are left open to deduction, speculation—Lacan, Heidegger, Hegel, Freud, Levinas, Derrida (the so-called signatory is just one figure amongst others; one archaeologist, engineer, among many: “While the phrase appears in a book bearing his signature, it does not belong to him. He admits having read it before writing it, before writing her. She, this cinder, was given or lent to him by so many others, through so much forgetting” [41.16]). A Joycean construction of ruses, forgeries and plays which motivates what Derrida has elsewhere called an “archival desire,”²⁸³ directing us towards a sham (or Shem) “archaeology” (a disruption of “identity” and *archē* through the confusing of signifiers for identity, origin), under the tenor of a “return of the repressed.”²⁸⁴

At a certain point, this machine is also required to process, analyse, to interpret data, to assign meanings to particular artefacts, “intentionalising” a desire for an impossible past: “cinder of our lost etymologies” (35.7), “a long narrative of names” (61.38), “cinder, this old grey word, this dusty theme of humanity, [...] a metaphor or metonymy of itself [...] a cinder of cinders” (31.3). This machine would inscribe a “lost past” anew, a “history of desire” as so many substitutions: signifier to signifier. A “signifying chain” (S.....S') whose metonymic forethrow (*Verschiebung*) belies the metaphoric transistance (*Verdichtung*) of the bar of the Saussurean algorithm (S'/S), according to which a “signifier” is substituted for or by another “signifier,” and so on *seriatim*.²⁸⁵

This substitutive mechanism proceeds to generate from each of these “ruined” sign structures a textual *monstrum*, an apparatus of abortive “semi-signs” which nevertheless are in no way “incomplete,” but rather “over-subscribed.” In the final instance, this monstrum would be nothing short of a language in itself—a “legend,” a “poem of the cinder” (31.3) (the cinder phrase leaves *Feu la cendre* in its *wake*).²⁸⁶ Excess, remainder: of a past that “no longer” is, which “has its ashes there” (*il y a là cendre*)—a type of video-

²⁸² DELEUZE and GUATTARI, *Anti-Oedipus*, 127.

²⁸³ JACQUES DERRIDA, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 12.

²⁸⁴ WILDEN, “Lacan and the Discourse of the Other,” 225: “the return of the repressed referent to consciousness is always eventually mediated by an intentionalisation within the system of language or signification.”

²⁸⁵ LACAN, “The Agency of the Letter,” *Écrits*, 164.

²⁸⁶ *Feu la cendre*: *feu* can mean both departure (as in the idiom, “the late so and so” [35.7]) and fire. In this way *Feu la cendre* can be regarded as a type of mortuary monument of and to cinders.

installation (23) destined, like the *Voyager* spacecraft (“the archive in a reinforced beam destined for our extra-terrestrial cousins” [55.27]), to commemorate nothing but itself in the unforeseeable manner in which every performative must, no matter how transitory or particular: “sound track, *wake*, trail of light, photograph of the feast in mourning.”²⁸⁷ Such a commemoration (*hypermnēsis*) would reverberate with an echo of a “saying” “whose origin seems to lose itself in the anonymity of time immemorial”²⁸⁸—a sarcophagus, a death-mask without a model: “the immemorial image had decomposed from within” (31.3); “There [*là*], where cinder means the difference between what remains and what is” (39.14)—which is also to say, “cinder” signifies beyond its materiality the non-presence of a determinate referent or a *being-there*. The “there” of the cinder as what, of (its) history, of the memorial, *discloses* that “of which one knows nothing, knows neither what past is concealed in these grey dusty words, nor what substance came to consume itself there [...]; will one still say of such a thing that it even preserves the identity of a cinder?” (43.16).

What survives (“lives on”) in this *histoire des cendres*, in this cinder-text, is the paradox of a *past* which has never been *present*, that has not *been*. It marks what Derrida elsewhere terms an “economy of death,”²⁸⁹ and which Freud characterises as the death-drive (“The aim of all life is death”).²⁹⁰ In *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882), Nietzsche writes:

Let us guard against saying that life is opposed to death. The living being is only a species of what is dead, and a very rare species. [cited 69.40]

The cinder phrase presents itself as an *imago* of this deathly incarnation (“The sentence is adorned with all of its dead” [55.27]), continuing to evoke what can “no longer” “be” “there” even as it undergoes a process of petrification. In such terms the dialectic of desire is always accompanied by a type of gnosticised bereavement in advance of resurrection. But this pseudo-resurrection remains a “fall” (*Absturz*); the flight of the spirit (*anima*) signals the death of the material body; the “smoke” [*la fumée*] of the crematory fire, of cinders, falls to ash (the materiality of “grey words” on a page). The “materiality” of words, ash, as the “skein” or outward surface of cinders. This would be like the coagulant substance of blood plasma (“*sang...-DRE*” [75.49]) that thickens in a wound, or the hardening of lava into basalt (“Vesuvias” [75.48], “like burning semen, like lava destined nowhere. Cinder is only a word” [73.45], “she plays with words as one plays with fire, I would denounce her as a pyromaniac who wants to make us forget that in Sicily the churches are built with the stone of lava” [61.38]):

²⁸⁷ DERRIDA, “Che cos’è la poesia?” 223.

²⁸⁸ JACQUES DERRIDA, “The Politics of Friendship,” trans. G. Motzkin, *The Journal of Philosophy* LXXXV.II (1988): 632.

²⁸⁹ See DERRIDA, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 202–203.

²⁹⁰ FREUD, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 38.

Muette, la dédicace feint de restituer. Mais elle ne saurait rendre ou donner rien que des poussières de feu, elle ne dit rien, elle ne laisse rien paraître d'elle-même, de son origine ou de sa destination, qu'une piste de sable, et encore vous anaesthésiant

Mute, the dedication feigns a restitution. But it only knows how to render or give nothing but fiery dust: it says nothing, it allows nothing of itself to appear of its origins or its destination, only a trail in the sand, and it still anaesthetises you [69-71.42]

The mute “dedication” (“writing denies and recognises its debt in a single dash, the utmost disintegration of the signature” [30.I]) inscribes the scene of its giving, between a rising and a fall, inscription and effacement, signalled by the accent *grave* in *là* (*il y a là cendre*):

Là s'écrivait avec un accent grave: là, il y a cendre, il y a, là, cendre. Mais l'accent, s'il se lit à l'œil, ne s'entend pas: il y a là cendre. À l'écoute, l'article défini, la, risque d'effacer le lieu, la mention ou la mémoire du lieu, l'adverbe là ... Mais à la lecture muette, c'est l'inverse, là efface la, la s'efface: lui-même, elle-même, deux fois plutôt qu'une.

Là written with an accent *grave*: *là*, there, cinder there is, there is, there, cinder. But the accent, although readable to the eye, is not heard: *il y a là cendre*. To the ear the definite article, *la*, risks effacing the place, and any mention or memory of the place, the adverb *là* ... But read silently, it is the reverse: *là* effaces *la*, *la* effaces itself, herself, twice rather than once. [21]

The accent *grave* (`) marks the place of a “sacrifice,” where something is given in place of something else, metaphor of something that is not present; it “mirrors” the vanishing and “punctiform” bar that divides signifier from signified in Lacan’s rewriting of the Saussurean relation, with the signifier over the signified, using the algorithm (S/s) to represent “la topique de l’inconscient,” or the “metaphorical relationship between conscious and unconscious” in which “the unconscious in its essence, is structured, woven, joined together, with language.”²⁹¹ The algorithm (S/s) describes, in the figure of the virgule, a liminal space (/) between two states of metonymic recursion (“l’hésitation comme vertical qui les séparait –/–”), by which signification is brought into play as differed-differing presence or *glissement* (S.....S’ etc.).²⁹²

Like a “cenotaph” (55.26), the “grammatical sign” (22) evokes a remembrance of a loss of which there remains not a trace other than the monument itself (“the graphics of *différance*, of the trace, the supplement, etc.”).²⁹³ It marks

²⁹¹ LACAN, *La séminaire: Livre III*, 135.

²⁹² SOLLERS, *Nombres*, 2. Cf. WILDEN, “Lacan and the Discourse of the Other,” 225: i.e. Freud’s topology of presentation in his metaphor of the psyche as writing apparatus. On “glissement” see Lacan, *Écrits*, 146.

²⁹³ DERRIDA, “The time of a thesis: punctuations,” 41. Cf. FREUD, *SE XIII*, 177: “If we reflect that the means of representation in dreams are principally visual images [*Bilden*] and not words, we shall see that it is even more appropriate to compare dreams with a system of writing than with a language. In fact the interpretation of dreams is completely analogous to the decipherment of an ancient pictorial script such as Egyptian hieroglyphs.” To this end Freud adopts the metaphor of the Rhesus (*SE IV*, 277–278) and, of course, the *Wunderblock* (“Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad,” *SE XIX*, 225–232).

the place of a “non-place,” a tomb without a “signatory” or “signified,” *mise en voix* without voice: “the sentence avows only the on-going incineration, of which it remains the almost silent monument: this can be *là*—” (37.9). The place, *là*, suspends the voice with a “thought-dash” (*Gedenkenstriche*, as Nietzsche says), calling upon the reader to bridge the gap. Suspended over the abyss, as if ushering in an immanent fall, the accent *grave* in *là* becomes “—” as the legend, the monument, falls to the tomb and only the cinder remains:

—*Quelle différence entre cendre et fumée: celle-ci apparemment se perd, et mieux, sans reste sensible, mais elle s’élève, elle prend de l’air, subtilise et sublime. La cendre—tombe, lasse, lâche, plus matérielle d’effriter son mot, elle est très divisible.*

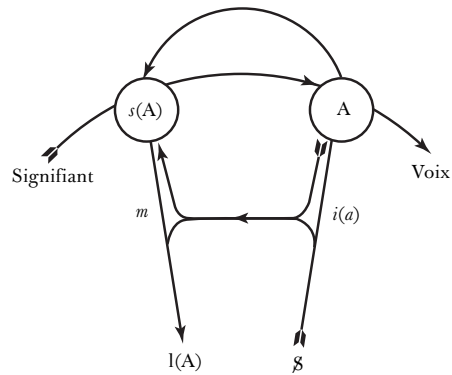
—What a difference between cinder and smoke: the latter apparently gets lost, and better still, without perceptible remainder, for it rises, it takes to the air, it is spirited away, sublimated. The cinder—falls, tires, lets go, more material since it fritters away its word; it is very divisible. [73.46]

The cinder grows heavy, *gravid*, and falls (*dé: cendre* [69.41]), immediately dividing itself—it “contradicts,” separates itself as if its fall somehow mirrored the stroke of a guillotine’s blade (the accent falls and the phrase decapitates itself: en-graves the memorial plaque which adorns its cenotaph). On the one hand the material body, the cinder casement, falls to dust. On the other hand, the “essence” of cinders takes to the air as smoke, incense, the flight of the soul, spirit, breath, *pneuma*—it disseminates itself (*des cendres*): “this ‘there’ form now on signified that the innumerable lurks beneath the cinder [*la cendre*]. Incubation of the fire lurking beneath the dust” (59.35). It *gives up the ghost*. This is what occurs when the written phrase, *il y a là cendre*, is “read aloud,” *voiced* [*mise en voix*]*—*it divides, divides itself, loses itself in presenting itself. One should keep in mind that *en voix* bears within itself its own withdrawal—a withdrawal of the “voice” (as a mode of present-being) and its substitution by the word *voie* [way], thus situating “voice” on the breach of itself (between “voice” and what lies with(in) the voice)—suspending itself in the “vocal” effect of a pun (*I am the light and the truth and the way*). The way in(to) (the) voice entangles itself in the play of the dispatch [*envoi*]*—*between the one and the other, the “word” always has the chance of going astray and losing itself—the chance of returning or not returning “from the breathless race” where the letter, the *envoi*, “makes its way [*voie*] on a long cinder track” (59.33).

The itinerary of the *envoi*, its entanglement in the vicissitudes of the signifier, maps a path of deferral and repetition, by which the subject’s desire to grasp this “voice” of the Other is at once circumvented and sustained (in or by the ellipses and aposiopesis of an auditory hallucination?)—“another voice, again, yet another voice” (27):

There where it was just now, there where it was for a while, between an extinction that is still glowing and a birth that is retarded, “I” can come into being and disappear from what I say.²⁹⁴

Elsewhere (“Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir”) Lacan formalises this relation in terms of a series of complex graphs, in which the “retrograde” character of the *voix* is given a diagrammatic expression. Here the “barre” of the Saussurean algorithm describes the “S barré du vecteur rétrograde”: “Effet de retroversion par quoi le sujet à chaque étape devient ce qu’il était comme d’avant et ne s’annonce: il aura été,—qu’au future antérieur.”²⁹⁵



“Ici,” Lacan explains, “s’insère l’ambiguïté d’un méconnaître essential au me connaître.” The subject, unable to grasp hold of what most allures it, and caught in a sliding-away from any safe haven of concrete “overtness of being,” finds itself necessarily suspended between an *I* that speaks always in another’s voice, and a call that remains silent—between two instances of an echo or mirror-effect that return onto the subject reflecting upon it-self, in an unrecognising way, under the guise of a *cogitare me cogitare*. “Car tout ce dont le sujet peut s’assurer, dans cette retrovisée, c’est venant à sa rencontre l’image, elle anticipée, qu’il prit de lui-même en son miroir.” The subject is suspended in a web of simulation (between vectors of signification, looping back in the retroversioning of the subject, suspended over the abyss of itself, of language).²⁹⁶ Simulation being, as Pierre Klossowski argues: “l’attribut de l’être même, elle devient aussi le principe même de la connaissance.”²⁹⁷

Consequently, this “subject” is sustained, retrogressively, in an apparently projective relation with the Other’s “object” (*voix*) through a continual

²⁹⁴ DERRIDA, “The time of a thesis: punctuations,” 37.

²⁹⁵ LACAN, “Subversion du sujet,” *Écrits I*, 808.

²⁹⁶ HILLIS MILLER, “Stevens’s Rock and Criticism as Cure, II,” 337: “Criticism is the thread with which to embroider the texture or textile already there. This thread is like the filament of ink which flows from the pen of the writer, keeping him in the web but suspending him over the chasm [...].”

²⁹⁷ KLOSSOWSKI, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, 201.

détournement of the signifier; the interposition of delay and “disseminal polysemy.”²⁹⁸ Klossowski:

Comme toute impulsion qui interprète ses phantasmes, en tant que «condition d’existence»—soit moyen de dominer, s’appropriier un pouvoir sur ce qui résiste.²⁹⁹

Through its dependent “appropriations” of the signifier, and the delusive constructions of its “dialectic of desire,” the subjection of the subject is constantly (p)re-determined in the mode of an “eternal recurrence” of the phantasm or *envoi*:

The “I” of the *récit* only constitutes itself through the credit of the eternal return [...] it does not sign prior to the *récit qua* eternal return.³⁰⁰

Similarly, for Blanchot, “it is necessary that presence [...] realises itself by the accomplishment of discourse.” This discursus of the present is also that aspect of the eternal return that reveals “under the veil of forgetfulness, the demand of a completely different modality of affirmation.” The pronominal figure of the subject is dispatched, the very figure of a delayed present, addressed to an other who is supposed to return or restitute it. A “relationship necessarily premature, always anticipated, always not now, thus without anything that can assure it by founding it on an actuality—whether this be of now, of the past (original) or of the future (prophetic).”³⁰¹ The other-subject approaches it-self from afar, other to and subject to the anteriority of affirmation (“That which returns is the constant affirmation, the ‘yes, yes’”) ...³⁰²

the operation is not negative, it affirms with a limitless yes, immense, prodigious, inaudible [...].
I hear myself say, as someone saying to me, from afar, all that I write.³⁰³

Thereby “affirming the future and the past as the only temporal authorities,” as Blanchot says, “authorities identical and unrelated, freeing the future of any present and the past of any presence, shatters thought up to this infinite affirmation: in the future will return infinitely what could in no form and never be present, in the same way that in the past that which, in the past, never belonged in any form to the present, has returned.” Hence:

Writing alone can respond to the demand, on condition that discourse as *logos having realised itself*, takes away any foundation on which writing could declare itself or support itself [...].³⁰⁴ [Emphasis added]

²⁹⁸ DERRIDA, “Mallarmé,” 116.

²⁹⁹ KLOSSOWSKI, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, 201.

³⁰⁰ DERRIDA, *The Ear of the Other*, 13.

³⁰¹ MAURICE BLANCHOT, *The Step/Not Beyond*, trans. Lycette Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) 21.

³⁰² DERRIDA, *The Ear of the Other*, 45. Cf. DERRIDA, “Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce,” trans. T. Kendal, *James Joyce: The Augmented Ninth*, ed. Bernard Benstock (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1984).

³⁰³ JACQUES DERRIDA, *Glas*, trans. J.P. Leavey and Richard Rand (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1990) 228b–229b.

³⁰⁴ BLANCHOT, *The Step/Not Beyond*, 22.

Another voice, saying as though from afar, “all that I write.” This séance of the confessional, in which the non-presence of the logos returns in the affirmation of the “all” that “I write.” The present of this self-consciousness, lured or compelled to “confide” itself to or in the other—a *cogitare me cogitare* in which the presentation of the unpresentable accords itself expression (*realises itself*), “takes place” as the return, as “from afar,” of the “all” which is also the metonymic zero of the present: circle, annulus, abyss of the eternal return. (Which leads to this question: “How is it that the fact of writing can disturb the very question ‘what is?’”) ³⁰⁵ Affirmation? Of a past, future, “absolving” the “subject” of the present but at the same time compelling it, consigning it to the abyss of the unpresentable, as an “absolution” of the “all” which must return in it. As Derrida says: “a desire, an order, a prayer or a promise” (27). The “yes” of the eternal return is also the “yes” of the marriage vow, the ring, and as with Mallarmé’s conception of the term “hymen” the marriage is also a separation, a circular annulus, a distance or delay that does not, however, affirm simple opposition. Levinas formulates this in comparable terms when he states that: “To approach the other in discourse is to welcome its expression, in which at each instant it overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to *receive* from the other beyond the capacity of the I.” Hence: “It is not I, it is the other that can say *yes*.” ³⁰⁶

“My desire only goes so far as the impossible distance, immediately ‘grilled’ [*grillé*] between languages” (73.48). The horizon of the desire of the subject remains “there,” at an impossible distance. What occurs across the space of translation is the “going astray” of the signifier, or else it passes through a transformation, an incineration; babelised through a “tongue of fire,” the “vocalisation” [*mise en voix*] of desire as the difference between “what [...] I just did and I am about to tell you –” (77.51). ³⁰⁷ This destination or destining of the “I,” lured or compelled by an other’s desire, the desire of the Other, like a moth “right into the flame,” is prefigured in the capitalised first letter of the phrase, *il y a là cendre*, in the ambivalent acrostic “I.L.Y.A.L.C.”: “‘I’ the cinder would say” (75.49). But this “I,” grilled between two idioms, is not the *je* translating the Cartesian *cogito*, but rather an “it” or *Id*—“I.L.Y.A.L.C.” in which “il y a” hesitates between “there is” and “it has”: miming the double play of accent *grave* between *la* and *là*.

This accent (̀) describing a topos of desire on that breach between writing and the textual “voice,” signalling the *I* as that which has been arrested in mid-fall “\” or again, drawn down into the figure of a hyphen, dash or *tiret* “–” on the way to becoming ash (*la cendre*): “If a place is surrounded by fire (falls finally to ash, into a cinder tomb [*tombe*]), it no longer is” (39.14). The *I* passing through the fire of translation, “blinded” in a sense by that fire,

³⁰⁵ DERRIDA, “The time of a thesis: punctuations,” 37.

³⁰⁶ LEVINAS, *Totality and Infinity*, 51, 93.

³⁰⁷ JACQUES DERRIDA, “Des Tours de Babel,” trans. J.F. Graham, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Harvester, 1991).

becomes estranged through misrecognition, becomes different from it-self in a way that would signify the “there,” *là*, of the subjective horizon.

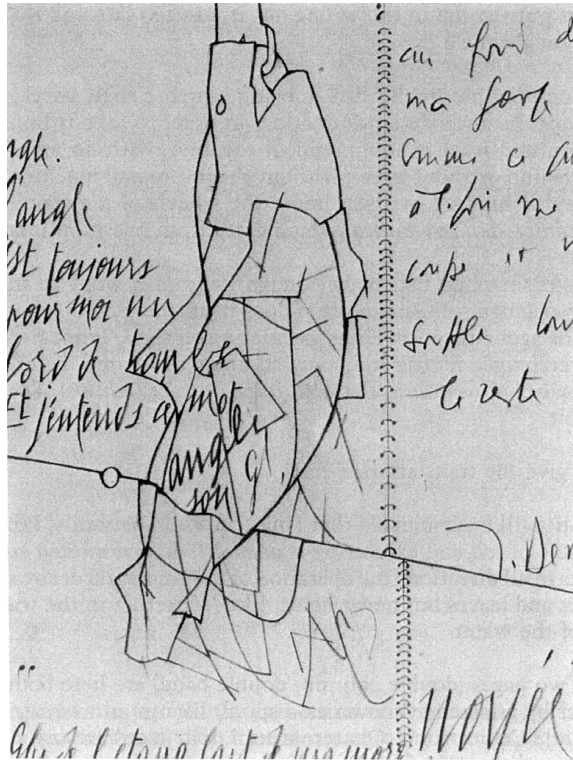
—*Mais le contrefacteur peut mentir, il ment j'en suis presque sûre, comme d'expérience, il n'y a sans doute aucun vrai secret au fond de cette phrase, aucun nom propre déterminé. Un jour il m'a confié mais je ne le crois jamais que la première lettre à peu près de chaque mot. I.L.Y.A.L.C. était l'initiale d'un autre mot, le tout proférant, mais dans une langue étrangère, une toute autre déclaration, et que cette dernière aurait joué le rôle d'un nom propre codé, en vérité sa signature chiffrée. Je n'en ai rien cru, il venait d'inventer la supercherie, il peut toujours mentir ou ne pas même être assuré de ce qu'il dit savoir. C'est précisément à ce point qu'il y a la cendre.*

—But the counterfeiter can lie, I am almost sure of it, from experience. There is doubtless no real secret at the bottom of this sentence, no determined proper name. Once he confided in me, but I still do not believe that the first letter of almost every word, I.L.Y.A.L.C., was the first letter of another word, all of it expressing, but in a foreign language, an entirely different statement, which would have played the role of a coded proper name, in truth his ciphered signature. I believed none of it, he had just invented the hoax, he can always lie or not even be certain of what he claims to know. It is precisely at this point that the cinder is there. [51.24]

And yet it is also, precisely, the I of the so-called signatory which is also at stake in this play of acrostical ciphers. The “desire” which speaks, behind the trace or mutilated remains of the proper name of the author, which is made to appear, as if by chance, in the translational fragment, between French (“DRE”) and English (“DER”) (75.49)—“d’autres textes, avec «mon nom», avec les lettres et les syllabes *Ja, Der, Da.*”³⁰⁸ As though “what remain” here, in this instance, need also be read as the first letters “of another word,” DERrida, perhaps, or LACan. And despite the fact that these two inscription, DRE and I.L.Y.A.L.C., bear no apparent relation (it is perhaps a “hoax” after all), their concurrent possibility is one of the effects of the bi-lingualised anagram “LA Cinder” (75.50; Lukacher’s translation), which can equally be read as “LAC in DER” (as can the French *LA C/en/dre*), or the contradictory presence and non-presence of “Derrida,” the so-called signatory, from this lacunary onomastics (“the phrase dispensed with all authorisation” [21]). It also suggests a reading, as here, of a certain LAC(an) in DER(rida). The cut portion, DER, also recalls a sketch by the Italian artist Valerio Adami, incorporating quotations from *Glas*, which are signed, apocryphally, with Derrida’s own (fragmented) name: “my signature is also cut off, before the *da* [...]—who will attest to its authenticity in this reproduction?”³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ JACQUES DERRIDA, *Limited Inc.* (Paris: Galilée, 1990) 71. “I have, in others texts, devised countless games, playing with ‘my name,’ with the letters and syllables *Ja, Der, Da.* Is my name still ‘proper,’ or my signature, when, in proximity to ‘There, J.D.’ (pronounced in French, approximately *Der. J.D.*), in proximity to ‘Wo? Da.’ in German, to ‘her. J.D.’ in Danish, they begin to function as integral or fragmented entities, or as whole segments of common nouns or even of things?” (“Limited Inc,” 167).

³⁰⁹ DERRIDA, *The Truth in Painting*, 158–159.



Valerio Adami, detail from *Study for a Drawing after Glas*

The multiple crossings demanded by the topography or typogenetics of *Feu la cendre* divide or transform the signifier of the subject out of (mis-) recognition—Je, Ich, Ego, I—so that the elective pronoun, in its various oscillations (points of suspension), cedes its place to a certain *idiom* or *inflexion* which it is given to express. The one immediately loses itself in the other, a form of lability which, in translation, can easily be confused with an *accent grave*, a slash, a *tiret*: allegory of the fall, from the vertical to the horizontal (severance, hyphenation). The erect verticality of the I is suspended in an instant of (in)decision and (in)determination: detumescence of the *tombe*, the fall into the objecthood of an “it.” The proximal relation of the subject to itself is only ever as close as the image in a mirror, the *speculum* (the “you” addressed by the subject as both *vous* and *tu*—the illusion of immediacy or intimacy conceals an impersonal distance)—such that the subject, labouring under the work of identification between these contrary “intentions,” is thereby constituted by way of an impossible *travail* (the myth of Sisyphus), under the sign of *alienation*.

What is “given” under the guise of agency, of address, of *production*, is rather an incommensurability, of the subject with it-self and the subsidiary objects of an interminable consumption:

un don sans la moindre mémoire de soi, au bout du compte, pas un corpus, un tas de cendre insoucieux de garder sa forme, un retrait seulement.

a gift without the least memory of itself, in the final account, the remains of a body, a pile of cinders unconcerned about preserving its form, a retreat, a retracing only. [77–51]

The subject in this way is compelled to regard as other that which it would otherwise “regard as its own,” as what properly belongs to it by virtue of the unique relation of its “production”—that is, as the product of an intention, of direct agency, of a *will-to*, as Nietzsche says. Its relation is at a discount, subject, as it were, to an ongoing series of diminishing returns, which bind it to its “objects” even as places them constantly out of reach through an ever biased rate of exchange or *inadequatio*. This metaphor of economic exchange-value and alienation extends to the subjective illusion of the ideal-I, the undifferentiated self or self-equivalence, in which all object-relations appear to the “subject” as analogically equivalent, and therefore as extensions of the narcissistic ego. Hence, in the subsequent exposure of this illusionism, this subject is regarded as narcissistically mourning a loss of original self-similarity, of what remains in fact an *inexperienced* “event” (its *Abgrund* or abyss, as Heidegger says), yet nevertheless awaiting the fictive time when it will have its ownmost potentiality for Being restored to it—or, as Heidegger says, the time when it will be able to recognise, to hear, the “call” of an originary granting of Being (the “grounding” of beginning (as *Dasein*), which in this sense would be the essence, or sway [*wesen*] of truth). In seeking to be what it is in its essential Being, the subject “dis-avows,” becomes estranged from itself, deals with itself at a distance: “not here but there, as a story to be told” (31.3). This is one way in which the subject, as *subjectum*, can be understood as the articulation of a turning (*Kehre*), through the “negative” affirmation of what Freud calls the *return* of the repressed (the “call” as *discours de l’Autre*) as the very groundlessness of the signifier of self (what nevertheless *enchains* substitution). What is “to be conveyed,” a final account, as it were, is what this subject will always be kept waiting for, in the perpetual deferral of *confirmation* (the very word).³¹⁰

Under the assumption of a subjective agency (its negative, paradoxical figuration) the “act” of *giving*, of *sacrificing*, of *sending oneself*, is always an act undertaken in expectation of return—but *undertaken* in expectation of *the other* and in the other’s name, as it were, under the sign of a third person or arbitrator in the ongoing dispute over symbolic exchange—the one who resolves the question always to the benefit of the economy, as they say. By way of certain concessions, this benefice can be regarded as being inversely addressed to the desire of the subject, which is to say, to the desire of the Other, as a gesture towards a “long awaited” final resolution (“What was it

³¹⁰ MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

waiting for?” [23], “How could it be kept waiting any longer?” [22])—the lure, no doubt, of an ultimate redemption through labour.

But as Derrida reminds us, one cannot *concede* without entering into a process of recurrence or exchange that turns a gift into a debt. An economy of overwhelmingly diminished returns in which loss accrues to the positive, to the compulsive affirmation of the subject *qua* subject. But at the same time, no “act” of concession without arbitration. The arbitration, that is, of subjective agency as discourse of the Other—the ongoing “ceding” of agency under the tenor of a deferral, an “awaiting.” Even if what is thereby lost, departed [*feu*], is nothing that has ever been present “there” (in a sense of belonging)—present, that is, beyond the play of difference: the cinder, for which “we” are nevertheless constantly searching [*feu la cendre*]. The departed has always left ahead of itself, even before it arrived, like the ghost of an event far off in time that is nevertheless anticipated *in the present*, so that the “dialectical” structure of the *gift* is one in which the subject is “granted” in absentia, as it were—its *being-given* of what amounts to an irrecoverable debt:

“avant toute chose, avant tout étant déterminable, il y a, il y avait, il y aura eu l'événement irruptif du don.”

[...]

“Il y a là un fatum du don, et cette nécessité se disait dans le ‘doit’ (*muss*) qui nous l’indiquait plus haut [...]. Je te donne—don pur, sans échange, sans retour—mais que je le veuille ou non, le don se garde et dès lors tu dois.”

“before everything, before every determinable being [étant], there is, there was, there will have been the eruptive event of the gift.”

[...]

“A fatum of the gift there is [il y à], and this was said in the ‘must’ (*muss*, *doit*) we indicated above [...]. I give you—a pure gift, without exchange, without return—but whether I want this or not, the gift guards itself, keeps itself, and from then on you must owe, tu dois.” [46-48.II]

This gift which precedes everything, even it-self, recalls what Derrida describes elsewhere in the same passage as “holocaust” or “all-burning,” the eruptive event³¹ “that is no longer an event since its singularity, from the word go, is doubled, multiplied, divided, and discounted, immediately concealing itself in an unintelligible ‘double bottom’ of nonpresence, at the very moment it seems to produce itself, that is to say, to present itself.”³¹² The gift is not a present, as it were, but an *acte gratuit*—irresponsible, and yet demanding, in its *aftermath*, that one respond to it, or for it:

“Le brûle-tout—qui n’a lieu qu’une fois et se répète ce-pendant à l’infini—s’écarte si bien de toute généralité essentielle qu’il ressemble à la pure différence d’un accident absolu. Jeu et pure différence, voilà le secret

³¹ In *Zeit und Sein*, the gift of the *es gibt* gives itself to be thought before the *Sein* in the *es gibt Sein* and displaces all that is determined under the name *Ereignis*, a word often translated by *event*. Cf. *Cinders*, 48.II; cited *Glas*, 242a.

³¹² DERRIDA, “Dissemination,” 291–292.

d'un brûle tout imperceptible, le torrent de feu qui s'embrasse lui-même. [...] la différence pure est différente d'elle-même, donc indifférente. Le jeu pure de la différence n'est rien, il n'est se rapporte même pas à son propre incendie. La lumière s'enténébre avant même de devenir sujet."

"The all-burning—that has taken place once and nonetheless repeats itself ad infinitum—diverges so well from all essential generality that it resembles the pure difference of an absolute accident. Play and pure difference, those are the secret of an imperceptible all-burning, the torrent of fire that sets itself ablaze [...] pure difference is different from itself, therefore indifferent. The pure play of difference is nothing, does not even relate to its own conflagration. The light envelops itself in darkness before becoming subject." [44.II]

Such a gift, which is not (a) present, which comes before (with-out) presence, before (with-out) the subject, as the "nothing" of pure play, *différance*, would "at the same time" mark the opening of play, "the preopening of ontic-ontological difference" ("the holocaust contains the seeds of ontology" [46.II]).³¹³ As Lacan says, "Being of non-being, that is how *I* as subject comes onto the scene, conjugated with the double aporia of a true survival that is abolished by knowledge of itself, and by a discourse in which it is death that sustains existence."³¹⁴

This "dialectic" of granting is, for Lacan, rendered in the specular (*imago*), the imaginary image of the other, to whom and for whom the *I* speaks. As a consequence, the apparent threshold between the subject and its objects remains unresolvedly paradoxical, since not only must the assent of the *ergo* (*il y a là cendre*), affect itself within the discourse of the "I," but *ipso facto* the *I* must also affect itself within the assent (discursus) of the *ergo*. That is to say, since the putative *ego* and its "specular" other are mutually constituent—following the mode of a "dialectic of identification"—there is no simple relation between them that can be wholly reduced to a science of the threshold formulated upon a "consequential" system of oppositions.

The "gift," then, stands in an analogous relation to the signifier in the advent of the Symbolic order, the inanimation of the trace, the spectre of conscience, or the summons issued in the figure of the subject, mirrored in the progress of the cinder *envoi*: "the movement of the dedication [...] says at least, shows by barely saying that the cinder [*la cendre*] comes in place of the gift" (69.41). The dedication or the sacrifice marks a certain "debt" which, for the subject of psychoanalysis, is an unshakeable burden: the guilty conscience of an originary transgression, translation, transference (designated as its "primal scene").

This is the paradox of the gift which immediately turns itself into a debt; the demiurgic theft, fire, ash, cinders, the "all-burning" through which the non-Being at the "origin" of Being passes in order for Being to become possible, instituting at the same time a condition of "mourning" (the loss of

³¹³ DERRIDA, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," 198.

³¹⁴ LACAN, "The Subversion of the Subject," *Écrits*, 300.

an “origin” or truth of Being *beyond the fall*). In this nostalgia for the origin, the prefall of “spirit into matter,” the subject is able neither to deny the act of mourning nor affirm it, but is compelled to mourn regardless (there is no “outside of mourning”), to continue to pass through the on-going conflagration—as in Blake, “cleansing the doors of perception” in order, not to transcend but to “perceive the infinite in all things”:

Un incinération célèbre peut-être le rien du tout, sa destruction sans retour mais folle de son désir et de sa ruse [...], l'affirmation disséminale à corps perdu mais aussi tout le contraire, le non catégorique au labour du deuil, un non de feu. Comment accepter de travailler pour monseigneur le deuil?

—Comment ne pas l'accepter? Il est cela même, le deuil, l'histoire de son refus [...] c'est encore au bénéfice du deuil.

An incineration celebrates perhaps the nothing of the all, its destruction without return but mad with its desire and its cunning [...] the desperately disseminal affirmation but also just the opposite, the categorical “no” to the laborious work of mourning, a “no” of fire. Can one ever accept working for His Highness Mourning?

—How can one not accept? that is what mourning is, the history of its refusal [...] it is still to the benefit of mourning. [55.26-27]

The phantasm, spectre of mourning, will “always already” have preceded the advent of the subject, which it in fact inaugurates through a certain repetition compulsion (Nietzschean, Freudian): *ce spectre, visites inopinées du revenant*, which proceeds from the tragic register to the absurd, parodic (from the divine, heroic, to the mortal: dieu à deuil). This is the irony of mourning: “mourning for mourning’s sake,” as the artifice of dis-closure and the loss it is thereby seen to contain (emplacement of *Er-Innerung-Gedächtnis*, *a-lētheia*, hyper(am)nesia—the annulus of the eternal return: *oubli et anamnèse dans l'expérience vécue de l'éternel retour du même*³⁵—repetition compulsion of the technics of mourning—*fort/da* in the mourning of the other as *Da-sein*—mourning as the assent of Being).

In this way the logic of the phantasm or spectre does not subscribe to the determinations of affirmation and denial in their purely dialectical inflection, since the “spectrality” of the gift does not offer itself as a point to which metaphysics might be affixed in the way that it has always affixed itself to such concepts as “presence,” “*ousia*,” or “Being.”³⁶ The “spectrality” of the gift remains questionable, yet it is not a question to which Being can respond (that being, there: I not I). Despite this, and after everything else, it is nevertheless *I*, another, that is compelled, to address “it,” to speak, write (it cannot be helped): “The thing spoke all on its own. I had to explain myself to it, respond to it—or for it” (22). *Je devais m'expliquer avec elle, lui répondre—ou en répondre.*

1993, 2002

³⁵ KLOSSOWSKI, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, 93.

³⁶ DERRIDA, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 279–280.

HAMLET / MACHINE

• • •

... give order that these bodies
High on a stage be placed to view,
And let me speak to th'yet unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgements ...
[Shakespeare, *Hamlet* First Folio V.ii.3872-7]

I

At the beginning of the last chapter of the *Traumdeutung*, Freud describes a dream in which a father encounters in his sleep the ghost of his dead son: “the child was standing by his bed, clasping his arms and crying reproachfully: ‘Father, don’t you see that I’m burning?’”¹ In the father’s dream of the son, the spectre of reproachfulness, guilt, failed responsibility: the ghost’s words echo in his ear, as though to say *why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou sleeping?*

In this play of spectres, however, the dead child really is burning—in the next room. The ghost comes to tell the father, in his dream, that, in reality, he, the son, is burning. But this ghost is already the emanation of a prior “guilt,” that arising from the son’s death. The son, presumably, who has, according to the formula of the old law, taken the place of the father. The (sacrificial) embodiment of the guilty conscience. But on the other side of this phantasmagoria, what is it that is being played out between the “blinding” of the father and the meaning of the son’s veritable incendiarism?

By means of a curious inversion, this spectral play describes a series of relations which we also find in *Hamlet*. “What is he burning with, if not with that which we see emerging at other points designated by the Freudian topology, namely, the weight of the sins of the father, born by the ghost in the myth of Hamlet, which Freud couples with the myth of Oedipus?”² Beyond

¹ SIGMUND FREUD, “The Psychology of the Dream-Process,” *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Random House, 1938) 468.

² JACQUES LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1977) 34.

the spectrality of Hamlet's ghost, which is to say, Hamlet's father, his antecedent ego, there is the spectrality of the son, and of the play itself. At a crucial stage in *Hamlet*, at precisely the terminus of the play-within-the-play, Hamlet addresses himself to the departing figure of the one he is invited to address as "father" in lieu of his ghostly double: *What? Frighted by false fire?*

But in this play of mimetic incendiarism (we are forever working our way through Plato's cave), there is not yet any illuminating feature which is not already caught up in the pageant that can only end with yet another funeral, exhumation, pyre; another burial or crematorium: "mourning turned into a Saturnalia where fathers and sons exchange places: 'Take up the bodies' (V.ii.406)."³ At the play's end, Horatio stands before the audience, directing the scene. The bodies of Laertes, Hamlet, Hamlet's mother and step-father, are set up on a stage as the prelude to yet another Oedipal pantomime. The argumentum is about to proceed; the figured speech which will signal the interminability of this *mise en scène* as *mise en abyme* (behind which there is nothing but the stage itself, the sole memorial)—its serial metamorphoses, each of which may be named tropically *Hamlet*. But if by turns this show of theatrical re-animation should fail, Horatio warns, "I have forgotten everything."

Who then is this Horatio-Hamlet, exercising, or exorcising, these "rights of memory" (as Fortinbras says); these rites of mourning? We are on the circuit of a repetition compulsion which takes on an ever increasingly mechanistic aspect—ever more vexed, melodramatic, hysterical, parodic—"l'hystoriette de Hamlet"⁴ (a collage machine, the *Marowitz Hamlet* and variations), rerun of the play-actor donning the costume of the ghost he already is, authoring his own role (is it any wonder that the theatre houses such a cult of superstition?). But it is not providence that dictates the schedule of Hamlet's incarnations.

The words "give order," by which the players are commanded to perform again, to re-enact certain "accidental judgements" (according to an increasingly pre-arranged/deranged script): echoing the order given to Hamlet by the ghost of the father, "Remember me," and the command issued by Hamlet to "speak" and later to say nothing (to give one's word to *say nothing*) (the author—avowed/disavowed—reinscribing, redirecting this play of himself)—an interminable deferral in the name, in the "words," of *Hamlet*. As Lacan suggests: "The father, the Name-of-the-father, sustains the structure of desire with the structure of the law—but the inheritance of the father is that which Kierkegaard designates for us, namely, his sin." *Culpo di Dio*. Which is another way of giving orders and of not receiving them, of not being subject to them (doubting their efficacy with regard to others because doubtful in themselves?). Namely, transgression in the structure of transference of translation; repositioning the corpses (to make up for a lack of rhetorical

³ JOHANNES BIRINGER, *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 87.

⁴ JACQUES LACAN, "Joyce le symptôme," *Autre écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001) 568.

“substance,” as one dragging off the corpse of Polonius, the translated figure of the false uncle or presumptive *father-in-law*, Hamlet’s *éminence grise*—subtly or ineptly repositioning himself, if merely behind an arras—to become in the course of events a type of burden of truth?). The oddly prescient Latinate name Polonius and its double, bearing echoes of Suetonius, “Claudius”—leads us to pose the question of who in effect wears the crown in *Hamlet*? Or, as Lacan asks: “Where does Hamlet’s ghost emerge from, if not from the place from which he denounces his brother for surprising him and cutting him off in the full flower of his sins? And far from providing Hamlet with the prohibitions of the Law that would allow his desire to survive, this too ideal father is constantly being doubted.”⁵

This too-ideal father, who is also ubiquitous (the translated figure of all that stands in the interim between the name and the name-of-the-name, the play and the play-within-a-play), is equally a figure of scepticism, doubt. The son-father-scriptor who is no longer the author of divine providence, but merely a conductor of rhetorical exercises (to be or not to be): the spectre-ego who returns in the reflexivity of a thought whose speculative expression always takes on the form of a certain theatre of reflection or mirror stage. “Descartes tells us—*By virtue of the fact that I doubt, I am sure that I think, and [...] by virtue of thinking, I am.*”⁶

2

HAMLET	O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space—were it not that I have bad dreams.
GUILDENSTERN	Which dreams indeed are ambition; for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.
HAMLET	A dream itself is but a shadow.

[*Hamlet*, First Folio II.ii.1300-6]

To put it in a nutshell, it seems to me that the “I think,” to which it is intended that presence be reduced, continues to imply, no matter how indeterminate one may make it, all the powers of reflection [*réflexion*] by which subject and consciousness are confounded—namely, the mirage which psychoanalytic experience places at the basis [*principe*] of the misrecognition [*méconnaissance*] of the subject and which I myself have tried to focus on in the *stade du miroir* by concentrating it here.

[Lacan, “Maurice Merleau-Ponty”]⁷

Placed side by side, two ambivalent statements by Hamlet: “The king is a thing” and; “The play’s the thing wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king.” And this third: “I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself

⁵ LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 34–35.

⁶ LACAN, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 35.

⁷ JACQUES LACAN, “Maurice Merleau-Ponty,” *Les Temps Modernes* 184-5 (1961): 248–249.

a king [a thing?] of infinite space.” What remains, of the resonance, perhaps, of a question, which haunts and yet somehow determines this play, to speculate (or not), as to “what is a thing?”

Between the play-within-a-play’s seemingly infinite reflexivity, that is, the reflexivity of a certain “thing,” *the* thing, and the conscience of that other “thing”—one which is both its object and its predicate (that which it is predicated upon, in fact, the thing *in itself*). One thing or another, on this circuit of recursion and reduplication. Between what is “bounded” and what is “caught.” Which is what “counts.” And the other, figure of temporal entrapment itself, herself: “*Ophelia. Her Heart is a clock*” in Heiner Müller’s version (*Hamletmachine*, Act 2). In this infinite space, time is out of joint, and Hamlet (the two, the three) is the name of the machine that sets right, countering and substituting, operating the gaps in repetitional oblivion—displaying, as Lacan says, “the miraculous character of a thing, this thing, which [...] pursues a human hypothesis, whether man be there or not.”⁸

This miraculous character (the one who does not lie still and keeps returning), in pursuit of its own hypothesis, “to be or not to be” (subjectless, objectless), followed by a question mark whose form is in almost every respect similar to that stooped shadow haunting the pages of *Hamlet* (whether man be *there* or not). Which is also to say, that in the end, it is this interminable hypothesis that makes such work of him, such *a* work—as Hamlet says: “what a piece of work is man?” Like the human hypothesis of Descartes (*Discours de la méthode*), this figure is also a machine, and it works, too, insofar as it can tell the time, or a hawk from a handsaw. A perverse semic machine, unpacking its heart with words (II.ii.1626), which may also be characterised in the mirroring relation of the (Lacanian) subject and the Symbolic: “The machine embodies the most radical symbolic activity of man.”⁹

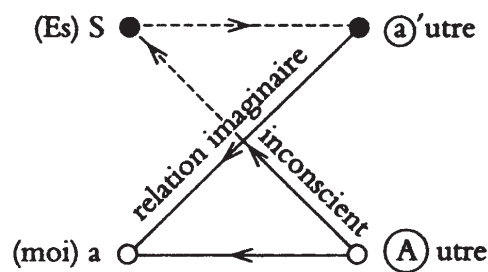
The machine-hypothesis, then, is also a stage—a *stade du miroir* (as topos of *symbolic activity*)—within the space or time of which the interminable drama of “identification” is played out (between a certain *specularis* and a certain *scepticus*) in the illusion of a perfect reflexivity: “Thus it is that if man comes to thinking about the Symbolic Order, it is because he is caught in it from the first in his being. The illusion that he has formed it by his consciousness results from the fact that it was by the way of a gap [*béance*] specific to his Imaginary relation to his counterpart, that he was able to make this entrance by the radical defile of the Word [...] each time the subject addresses himself to the Other as absolute, that is to say, as the Other who can nullify the subject himself, in the same way as he can do for him, that is, by making himself an object in order to deceive him.”¹⁰

⁸ JACQUES LACAN, “Freud, Hegel and the Machine,” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955*, trans. S. Tomaselli (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 73.

⁹ LACAN, “Freud, Hegel and the Machine,” 74.

¹⁰ JACQUES LACAN, “Le Séminaire sur *La lettre volée*,” *La Psychanalyse* II (1956): 9.

This Hamletmachine is productive of counterparts of its own, inscribing, re-inscribing itself in the endless play of ruse and subversion, the “I doubt” which predicates and retroactively asserts itself in the avowal of the Cartesian *cogito* (the I-doubt: the subject, in advance of itself, its doubtful *object*? in which, therefore, thought situates itself as the figure of a *détournement*, between scepticism and being). Its metonymic doubling and forethrow describes a schematic rendering of itself, depicting “the coupled reciprocal Imaginary objectification” which Lacan represents in the *stade du miroir*, and elsewhere (here, in what Lacan refers to as the “Schéma L”).¹¹



The Cartesian subject is thence drawn to the four corners of this schema: “S, his ineffable and stupid existence; *a'*, his objects; *a*, his *moi*—that is, what is reflected of his form in his objects; and *A*, the locus from which the question of his existence may be put to him.”¹²

In this fourfold relation (described through the occult image of the double inverted triangle, as “tropic” counterpart to the 3+1 structure of the classical stage with its *scenæ frons*), it is the *S* that stands in the position of an hypothesis, linked to the other three figures by two broken lines: the “Es” or *it* which commonly in Lacan’s writings designates the trinity of the Subject, the Symbolic, and the Signifier. This *it* which is not only the object of an hypothesis, of a speculation, but is also a “thing,” whose “pursuit of a human hypothesis” here programmes the relationship of the *moi* and its others, and consequently projects in “it” the erroneous idea of the ego as either verisimile or substance. Hence: “If it is in fact true that consciousness is transparent to itself, and grasps itself as such, it does seem that the *I* is not on that account transparent to it. It is not given to it as different from an object. The apprehension of an object by consciousness does not by the same token reveal its properties. The same is true for the *I*.”¹³

¹¹ JACQUES LACAN, “D’une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose,” *Écrits I* (Paris: Seuil, 1966) 548.

¹² JACQUES LACAN, “D’une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose,” *La Psychanalyse IV* (1958) 18.

¹³ LACAN, “Psychology and metapsychology,” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, 6.

This, too, is an effect of transmission, of the false-mirror of recognition (making this letter/pronoun itself into a type of *subjectum*), in which the “Es” figures as anything other than the object of a certain fantasy of the *I*, or the symbolic fourth term of the dialectic? And so: “If this *I* is in fact presented to us as a kind of immediate given in the act of reflection by which consciousness grasps itself as transparent to itself, for all that, nothing indicates that the whole of this reality [...] would be exhausted by this.”

Hamlet-actor puts on costume and mask, miming (it is unavoidable) THE SPECTRE THAT MADE HIM and which is made to return like the circuit of hands on the face of a clock (the out-of-joint, infinite space of its interminable repetition, at least up until the crucial moment of its dysfunction; the moment of truth?): “OPHELIA Do you still want to eat my heart, Hamlet?” (Müller) Her *lac*, doesn’t he want to eat “it,” this Lacanmachine?¹⁴

3

HAMLET My father—me thinks I see my father—

HORATIO Where, my lord?

HAMLET In my mind’s eye Horatio.

[*Hamlet*, First Folio I.ii.372–374]

As elsewhere, it is also a question of situating the double destination of Hamlet’s letter—le double et le nom propre, “trait au problème du double, de son inquiétante étrangeté ou son étrange familiarité.”¹⁵ The petit “a” of this nom du Père, nom-du-fils, Hamlet: the silenced aspirant which gives to the first syllable the vocalisation of the first person singular, present indicative of *to be* (coupled with an archaic form of *permission*, among other things; this is the way in which Lacan will almost have pronounced the name Hamlet, *am-let* or *omlette*; unbound from an eggshell?) —and that strange counterpart (“Horatio. Co-conspirator of my thoughts,” as Müller says), henceforth an *oratorius*, which is to say a *figure* of speech. It is this Horatio (the play’s *mise-en-scène*, voice or ghost of Shakespeare) who, in giving orders, speaking “to the yet unknowing world,” will restart the clock, will re-enact from the beginning this drama of the name, *Hamlet*, and of how “*these things* came about” (is it not this *oratorius* who first brings word of the ghost and puts words in Hamlet’s mouth, giving him to call *it* by his own doubly poisoned name, “Hamlet”?).

A ratio of the speculative and the symbolic, describing itself through the locus of the *fac-similé*—Hamlet-Horatio, Horatio-Ophelia, Horatio-Polonius, Hamlet-Claudius, Hamlet-Laertes, Ophelia-Gertrude, and so on *seriatim*. “Le jeu du nom propre—anasémique quand il désigne et polysémique lorsqu’il

¹⁴ JACQUES LACAN, “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*,” *Yale French Studies* 55 (1977): 11–52.

¹⁵ RENÉ MAJOR, *Lacan avec Derrida* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001) 95.

signifie,”¹⁶ which at the same time masks a fundamental antagonism in each of these relations (that of impersonation itself, of the “it” as Signifier of the occultation of any present ... actor, murderer, suicide, parricide; faceless agent of its own dis-appearance, in that it is made to re-present everything which denies it, dis-avows “it”?).

In the “Schéma L” Lacan describes the double relationship between the self (*moi*) and other (*autre*) as one of aggressive objectification, elaborating upon Jean-Paul Sartre’s analysis of the “sodomasochistic” impulse (towards the other who is an object for us, or for whom we make ourselves into an object). The tenor of aggression is associated with a form of paranoid identification (*la connaissance paranoïaque*), in which the subject’s imagined persecution is linked to those “others” with whom it will have previously identified. The *moi* (object pronoun) is thus an other, an *alter ego*, but is nevertheless other in a different sense to the (subject pronoun) *je* of Rimbaud’s expression, *Je est un autre*.¹⁷ As Hamlet says: *methinks I see my father*. “The subject addresses himself to the Other ... as the one who can nullify the subject ...” And so Hamlet, too, makes himself into an object *to deceive the other*, “his ineffable and stupid existence” which nevertheless maintains its disguise of reflexivity (I think [therefore] I see my father).

But this subject no more deceives, putting on or feigning madness, grief, etc. (un-thought), than it resembles, *figures*, the stupidity of conscientious rationalism: a mechanism of error, in whose compounded self-deduction the “coupled reciprocity” of thinking and being resides (and on account of which we may arrive at the conclusion that the hands of fate, the sleight of hand of the Cartesian *artifex maximus*, are no less than those misguidingly humanistic colophons of the temporal prosthesis—the “hands of time”). In this, also, we may identify a certain impasse which is nonetheless constitutive of the “object” of what Lacan will term the *stade du miroir*. The orientation of this movement hangs entirely upon a compulsive or compulsory dysfunction: a “dialectic of jealousy-sympathy, expressed precisely in traditional psychology by the incompatibility of consciousness. This does not mean that one consciousness cannot conceive another, but that an ego which hangs completely in the unity of another ego is strictly incompatible with it on the plane of desire”¹⁸ (it is this *metonymy* from which Cartesianism cannot extract itself).

The drama set in place between the *je* and the *moi* takes on the form of an aporia: “This rivalry, which is constitutive of knowledge in the pure state, is obviously a virtual stage. There is no such thing as knowledge in the pure state, for the strict community of ego and other in desiring the object initiates something completely different, namely recognition.” Moreover, “for them

¹⁶ MAJOR, “«Hamlet» sur le Gange,” *Lacan avec Derrida*, 45.

¹⁷ LACAN, “Psychology and Metapsychology,” 7.

¹⁸ LACAN, “A Materialist Definition of the Phenomenon of Consciousness,” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, 51.

not to be forced to destroy themselves on account of the convergence of their desire—which in fact is the same desire, since at this level they are one and the same being—it would be necessary [...] to *inform* the other, to say to it—*I desire that*. That’s impossible. Admitting that there is an *I* would immediately turn it into *you desire that*. *I desire that* means—*You, the other, who is my unity, you desire that*.¹⁹ Most importantly, this assumption of “something which isn’t knowledge [*connaissance*], but recognition [*reconnaissance*],” suggests that the ego “can in no way be anything other than an imaginary function, even if at a certain level it determines the structuration of the subject. It is as ambiguous as the object itself, of which it is in some way, not only a stage, but the identical correlate.”²⁰

This then implies what Lacan refers to as the “third term,” a classical figure of dialectics which already, in the “Schéma L,” requires a fourth (a *sinthome*)—since, indeed “a quadripartite structure has, since the introduction of the unconscious, always been required in the construction of a subjective ordering.”²¹ And what is this subjective ordering but the apotheosis of a certain *thing in it-self* (*Ding an sich*, as Kant says)? That is, insofar as this speculative mechanism (*stade du miroir*) embodies the most “radical symbolic activity of man”—an “it,” or mechanism of inertia, entropy, like a clock constantly winding down and being re-set. A ritual *détournement* played out in the time of the mirror—in a *between* (“out of joint”) *time*—an immediation of a certain effect of reflexive delay, where the clock is the equivalent in time of the mirror in space.

In the mind’s eye, the reflection of two hands in constant pursuit of one another. And the one called the “second” hand, the one which comes after and yet somehow also precedes the other (its perennial ghost): the future, as they say, is in one’s hands, or at least in someone’s hand, Shakespeare’s perhaps ... But what of this Hamlet-thing, the one whose mechanism is in truth manufactured to run down, to affect in itself the spiral entropy which is the “present” and on-going state of affairs? Time is out of joint, and in its disjoining Hamlet is “born.” To set right or re-set the time of which he himself is the principal, if unseemly incarnation, would equally be to construct an anti-machine, a counter-mechanism, a mirror-apparatus to fill this gap of “infinite space.” An infernal machine, elaborating its self-purpose in a *reductio ad absurdum* of which what “seems” is at last the symptom of what it means for the ghost of this second hand to return only in the commencement, in the shadow of a shadow.

Prague, February 2002

¹⁹ LACAN, “A Materialist Definition,” 51.

²⁰ LACAN, “A Materialist Definition,” 52.

²¹ LACAN, “Kant avec Sade,” *Écrits I*, 774.

THE CYCLOPS & THE GNOMON*

• • •

This is the tune of our catch, played by the picture of Nobody.
[Shakespeare, *Tempest*, First Folio III.ii.125-126]

I. THE FREUDIAN THING

In a series of seminars conducted between 1949 and 1960, Lacan increasingly comes to identify language with the structure of the Freudian unconscious and consciousness with materiality. The proximity of these sets of terms to one another can hardly be gratuitous, other than in the sense they commit to the dictum of Heideggerian ontology—that is, “to be for nothing.” And for nothing, also, to speculate upon the significance of what remains to be expressed in this seemingly inverse, “dialectical” relation between language and materiality.

How then to speak of a materiality *of* language (the chain of “materially unstable elements that constitute language”); that is to say of a certain “thing” (in) language—the quintessentially “Freudian thing”? This, the title of a lecture delivered by Lacan in Vienna on the 7th of November, 1955, poses this “thing” in a particular relation to an experience of recursion or *détournement*, alluded to in the full title of the lecture published in the *Écrits*, “La chose freudienne, ou Sens du retour à Freud en psychanalyse.”

But what, firstly, is the meaning of this *return* to Freud in psychoanalysis, so announced by the avatar of the Freudian Reformation? Is this not, in some insistent way, the disguised venture of a certain return of the repressed? (A return whose compulsion hence acquires a significance not belied in the expectation that it may yet speak for itself.) And is it not by means of precisely such a *retour* that the Oedipalised drama of Freud’s text, and the relentless pantomime of its analysis at the hands of Lacan, achieves a perverse apotheosis as the very adversary of analytic meaning itself—that is, the Freudian thing.

“The meaning of a return to Freud,” says Lacan, “is a return to the meaning of Freud.”¹ And by this chiasmatic sleight of hand Lacan nevertheless arrives

* Parts of this text originally appeared in *Rhizomes* 6 (2003) and *The Symptom* 5 (2004).

¹ JACQUES LACAN, “The Freudian Thing,” *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 117.

at the underside of an otherwise innocuous statement: “one has only to remember that Freud’s discovery puts truth into question, and there is no one who is not personally concerned with the truth.”² Or: the meaning of this *retour* is the *discovery* of Freud? And in this translation between “the meaning of a return” and “the meaning of Freud”—translation only ever gets as far as the father, as Lacan says elsewhere, vis-à-vis the symptomatic ambiguity of a certain *perversion* (version vers le Père) or of a certain *jouissance*. And farther, as we may say: between the meaning of “Freud” and the meaning of this *retour*. That is, the meaning of this return of Freud under the nom-d’analyse “Lacan”? What, then, is this “Freudian thing” if not in some sense also the play-thing of the *fort/da* repetition-ritual of psychoanalysis’ subjection to the signifier of “Freud” and prefigured by Freud in the *pleasure principle*?

“The meaning of a return to Freud ... *one has only to remember* that Freud’s discovery puts truth into question, and there is no one who is not personally concerned with the truth.” The vigilance of memory: one has only to remember, as in analysis itself, the primal scene, the discovery of the father *in flagrante delicto*, as it were, whence the truth is put into question. And what follows: “It must seem rather odd that I should fling this word in your faces—a word almost of ill repute [*ce mot qui passe presque pour mal famé*].” (In no short time it will be in the face of Freud himself that Lacan will fling this word of ill repute, returning it to the one whose discovery has placed it in question. Whence the question of the address: to whom is Lacan addressing “himself” in this lecture on Freud?)

The “spectography” of a certain Freud whose meaning, in truth, puts the truth in question. A counter-truth, perhaps, that (it follows) is the concern, precisely, of *no one*. Nemo, Οὐτις (οὐδεὶς), which is the “antonym” by which Ulysses-Odysseus not only blinds the Cyclops to its adversary’s true identity, but by which language “itself” is blinded with regard to its subject: *no one has done this to me*. The figure of the double negative, as in Nietzsche defining a particular relation of subjectivity to “thing” or rather *no-thing*: the event of this relation as what recurs in the counterwise becoming-subject of the thing, is demanded by the invention of an ego—which likewise necessitates a subject as such, a subjectum, the “intersubjectivity” of Lacan’s schema (L), whose determination is contradiction rather than interdiction, since it stands in place not of what *cannot* or will not be said, but of what, in spite of everything, *speaks* (that is, in spite of, or for, *nothing*). That is to say, a certain *acte gratuit*.

And it is by means of a comparably gratuitous *retour* (of a certain word of ill repute flung in the face of the mon-ocular giant) that analysis “itself” is literally blinded—its adversary vanishing into the malevolent non-presence of the “thing.” That thing about which it is impossible to speak (the truth, in any case) without, in a very real sense, being struck dumb. A dumbshow which, if the truth be told, returns upon the exquisite corpse of the analytical scene—the rest, as Hamlet says, is silence. Blinded, traduced in the passage of its own

² LACAN, “The Freudian Thing,” *Écrits*, 118

discovery—this symbolic castration takes effect in the seemingly paradoxical fact that some-thing has been returned.

Il n'est personne que ne soit personnellement concerné par la vérité ... no one who is not personally concerned with what Freud's discovery has put in question. Freud's return: la retour à Freud (*Le sens d'un retour à Freud, c'est un retour au sens de Freud*). This meaning of Freud which is his discovery—the discovery, the return, of what is at once designated and put in question by the name “Freud.” And the no one who “there is” but who nevertheless stands outside the question under which truth is placed (and by virtue of which it obtains its ill repute?)—a question, as Lacan effectively states, that is nevertheless addressed to all [*adressé à tous*].

“Freud” whose meaning places truth in question—whose discovery, whose retour—addressed to *all* and with which *no one* will avoid being personally concerned ... “Freud” who places in question the truth *no one* will evade being concerned with. This “Freud” (*adressé à tous*) *communiqué à quiconque*, that is conveyed to anyone (one has only to remember), in the form of a “repetition automatism (*Wiederholungszwang*)” (the *symptomatic* form of the return of the repressed)?

Between what is of concern, what is addressed and what is communicated here? This “envoy” of or from Freud—by means of a series of metonymic recursions: the return to Freud, the meaning of Freud, the meaning of what “Freud said” (the words in Freud's mouth), Freud's “discovery,” the truth it places in question, etc. ... Communicated to anyone *because* addressed to all and hence lacking concern for no one (“It concerns each individual” or rather each “one” [*chacun y sera intéressé*]). This curious equivocation of address which is in no sense obviated by the impression, indirectly conveyed, that these things already belong “to Freud” and must in truth be returned, as Lacan says elsewhere, to their proper owner.

2. D OR THE MEMORY OF NO ONE

An envoy postmarked *retour à Freud*. Which can never be received, of course, nor can it have been supposed to be. Unless by some sleight of hand, the so-called signatory impersonating the assumed legatee ... “The truth of the letter from Freud's hand.”³ Is it also to say, the legatee of Freud, by metonymy

³ Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA, “Le Facteur de la Vérité,” *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987) 470 n45. “‘True speech’ is the speech authenticated by the other in faith sworn or given. The other makes speech adequate to itself—and no longer to the object—by sending back the message in inverted form, by making it true, by henceforth identifying the subject with itself, by ‘stating that it is the same.’ Adequation—as authentication—must pass through intersubjectivity. Speech ‘is therefore an act, and as such supposes a subject. But it is not enough to say that in this act the subject supposes another subject, for it is much rather that the subject is founded in this act as being the other, but in that paradoxical unity of the one and the other, by whose means, as has been

Freud's (right) hand, his proxy? The truth of Freud which both takes the place of it (Freud) and makes it (Freud) into a thing: the "Freudian thing"—*Là où fut ça, il me faut advenir (wo Es war, soll Ich werden)*? And between the agency of this letter and the *facteur* or *contrafacteur* of its truth, there remains ... a certain cipher, a no-man, which is also to say, a gnomon ("un dessein si funiste"—the one who knows where the corpse is hid?)—who stands, so to speak, as the figure of the analytic scene par excellence.

Which leads Derrida to ask the obvious question: "What happens in the psychoanalytic deciphering of a text when the latter, the deciphered itself, already explicates itself? When it says more about itself than does the deciphering (a debt acknowledged by Freud more than once)? And especially when the deciphered text inscribes in itself *additionally* the scene of the deciphering? When the deciphered text deploys more force in placing

shown above, the one depends upon the other in order to become identical to itself. Thus one can say that speech manifests itself not only as a communication in which the subject, in order to await that the other make his message true, is going to project the message in inverted form, but also as a communication in which this message transforms the subject by stating that it is the same. As is apparent in every given pledge, in which declarations like "you are my wife," or "you are my master," signify "I am your husband," "I am your disciple." Speech therefore appears all the more truly speech in that its truth is less founded in what is called adequation to the thing: true speech, thereby, is opposed paradoxically to true discourse, their truth being distinguished by the fact that the former constitutes the subjects' acknowledgment of their Beings in that they have an interest in them, while the later is constituted by the knowledge of the real, to the extent that the subject aims for it in objects. But each of the truths distinguished here is changed by intersecting with the other in its path.' *Écrits I*, 351 (*Variantes de la cure-type*). In this intersecting, 'true speech' always appears as more true than 'true discourse,' which always presupposes the order of true speech, the order of the intersubjective contract, of symbolic exchange, and therefore of the debt. 'But true speech, in questioning true discourse about what it signifies, will find that signification always refers to signification, there being no thing that can be shown otherwise than with a sign, and henceforth will show true discourse to be doomed to error.' *Écrits I*, 352. The ultimate adequation of the truth as true speech therefore has the form of making quits (*l'acquiescement*), the 'strange adequation ... which finds its response in the symbolic debt for which the subject as subject of speech is responsible.' *Écrits*, 144. These are the final words of "The Freudian Thing." Adequation to the thing (true discourse) therefore has its foundation in the adequation of speech to itself (true speech), that is to the thing itself: in other words of the Freudian thing to itself: 'The thing speaks of itself' (*Écrits*, 121), and it says: 'I, the truth, speak.' The thing is the truth: as cause, both of itself and of the things of which true discourse speaks. These propositions are less new, particularly in relation to the Rome Report, to *Variantes de la cure-type*, and to the texts of the same period, than their author says: 'This is to introduce the effects of truth as cause at a quite different point, and to impose a revision of the process of causality—the first stage of which would seem to be to recognise the inherent nature of the heterogeneity of these effects.' *Écrits*, 127. (The footnote: '5. This rewritten paragraph antedates a line of thought that I have since explored further (1966).' *Écrits*, 145.) "True speech' (adequate to itself, conforming to its essence, destined to be quits of a debt which in the last analysis binds it only to itself) therefore permits the contract which permits the subject 'to become identical to itself.' Therefore it reconstitutes the ground of Cartesian certainty: the transformation of the truth into certainty, subjectification (the determination of the Being of beings as subject), and intersubjectification (the chain Descartes—Hegel—Husserl). This chain ceaselessly captures, in the *Écrits*, Heideggerean motions which would appear, rigorously speaking, to be allergic to it, and would appear to have 'destructive' effects on it. For the moment, let us abandon these kinds of questions—the most decisive ones—that Lacan's discourse never articulates."

onstage and setting adrift the analytic process itself, up to its very last word, for example, the truth?”⁴

And beyond the “acknowledged” debt, what happens when this deciphered text itself is named “Freud”? Whence the “addition,” the gesture of supplementarity directed back at itself in that particular form of *détournement* which affects itself only by means of a pair of *inverted commas*—in truth, a pretence to speech, as the original counterpart of citation, repetition, reference ... As in Edgar Allan Poe’s story of the purloined letter, something is being openly concealed here beneath our very eyes. A stolen letter, turned inside-out ... and its recovery or recuperation, by means of the simple deception of re-addressing the reversed envelope to oneself ... This is the substance, in effect, of Lacan’s *Séminaire sur «La lettre volée»* (1956) and of Derrida’s analysis of “Lacan,” *Le Facteur de la vérité* (1975).

“This story,” Derrida says, “is certainly that of a letter, of the theft and displacement of a signifier. But what the Seminar treats is only the content of this story, what is justifiably called its history, what is recounted in the account, the internal and narrated face of the narration. Not the narration itself. The Seminars’ interest in the agency of the signifier in its letter seizes upon this agency to the extent that it constitutes, precisely, on the first approach, the exemplary content, the meaning, the written of Poe’s fiction, as opposed to its writing, its signifier, and its narrating form. The displacement of the signifier, therefore, is analysed as a signified, as the recounted object of a short story.”⁵

This supplemental reversioning which gives the signifier back (to itself) as signified—between certain repetitions (as we might say) of Freud, of the *fort/da* regimen of the pleasure principle that the repetition itself names vis-à-vis the “retour à Freud” and its reappearance here in the guise of a narrative unveiling of its own cipher, or symptom, by means of an inverse mirror apparatus—being the *histoire* of Poe’s story or rather the story of its narration under the sign of “Dupin,” that is “Freud” ... The countless rehearsals of this story and the sites of its analysis may also give allegorical expression to the sense that what is at stake here is a certain knowledge of what something means *to be concealed* or *discovered* between instances of a *détournement* ...?

And so, while Lacan conspicuously temporises the fact that Poe’s *voleur* performs a double reversal of the letter by faking a broken seal on the

4 DERRIDA, “Le Facteur de la Vérité,” *The Post Card*, 414. Cf. JACQUES DERRIDA and ELISABETH ROUDINESCO, *De quoi demain ...* (Paris: Galilée, 2001) 281–282: “Parmi les gestes qui m’ont convaincu, séduit en vérité, il y a cette indispensable audace de la pensée, ce que je n’hésite pas à appeler son courage: cela consiste ici à écrire, inscrire, signer, au nom d’un savoir sans alibi (et donc le plus «positif»), des «fictions» théoriques. On reconnaît ainsi deux chose à la fois: *d’une part*, l’irréductible nécessité du stratagème, de la transaction, de la négociation dans le savoir, dans le théorème, dans la *position* de la vérité, dans sa démonstration, dans son «faire savoir» ou dans son «donner à entendre,» et, *d’autre part*, la dette de toute *position* théorique (mais aussi bien juridique, éthique, politique), envers un pouvoir performatif structuré par la *fiction*, par une invention figurale. Car la convention qui garantit tout performatif inscrit en elle-même le crédit accordé à une fiction.”

5 DERRIDA, *The Post Card*, 427–428.

envelope's obverse, fashioned from *his own* cipher (an almost identical gesture to Lacan's in the lecture on Freud), Derrida conspicuously redoubles the stakes by fashioning the cipher itself after his own analytic persona (as though to implicate Lacan himself, or rather his name, in the *coupure* implied by the letter D—not as the truncated genitive *du* of Dupin, but as the privative *dé* which points towards a certain *lac* ... as a metonymic recursion between what “belongs” to psychoanalysis and what is appropriated to it under the ciphered proper name of Freud/Lacan).

This D-cipherment, between the Minister D and Dupin, between Lacan and Derrida (and a third party: the ghost of “Freud”)—as though to say, he who plays the dupe, laughs last ... As Lacan *knows*, despite appearances to the contrary, this letter is in effect addressed to no one, and it is this *no one* who (being the true signatory) alone assumes receipt of it: the dupe is doubled, and the lesson, or rather the letter, as Lacan insists it should, ends up in the hands of its proper recipient ...

The lesson of this seminar is intended to maintain that these imaginary incidences, far from representing the essence of our experience, reveal only what in it remains inconsistent unless they are related to the symbolic chain which binds and orientates them. ... We have decided to illustrate for you today ... that it is the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject—by demonstrating in a story the decisive orientation which the subject receives from the itinerary of a signifier.⁶

An illustration of imaginary instances—being the subject in the intransitivity of its orientation towards or by the signifier ... which remains inconsistent if not *inconscient* (in truth *indifferent*) unless related (by whom, by what?) to the “Symbolic order” (under whose compulsive sign it, the subject, indeed “makes something of itself”—of its “ineffable and stupid existence,” as Lacan says elsewhere (the Schéma L)—as the *Es* which stands as counterpart to the *S* of the signifier whose itinerary binds it to an essence which it far from represents ... diffuses, rather, in the deferral of an illustration, a demonstration, a story, wherein this “subject's” decisive orientation is received from those imaginary instances which, only if they are related to the Symbolic, describe the itinerary of the “signifier” ... that is, as traces of a previous circuit of *détournement* “avant la lettre”).

It is by means, then, of what amounts to an *acte gratuit* that the Symbolic obtains its determination of the subject only through a particular relation to the Imaginary (by way of the ineffability and insistence of the Real). In this way Lacan divides Poe's story into a number of basic complimentary *scenes*,⁷ structured according to a narrative montage operating a seam between visuality and verbal substance, hinging upon Dupin's citation from Crebillon inscribed “in place of the letter,” as it were. The play of the signifier (the

⁶ LACAN, “Séminaire sur «La lettre volée»,” *Écrits I*, 28–29.

⁷ LACAN, “Séminaire sur «La lettre volée»,” 30.

letter) is doubled, for Lacan, in a certain drama of the gaze—beginning with what “we shall straightaway designate the primal scene,” a glance that *sees* “nothing”:

... three moments, structuring three glances, borne by three subjects, incarnated each time by different characters.

The first is a glance that sees nothing: the King and the police.

The second, a glance which sees that the first sees nothing and deludes itself as to the secrecy of what it hides: the Queen, then the Minister.

The third sees that the first two glances leave what should be hidden exposed to whoever would seize it: the Minister, and finally Dupin. ...

Given the intersubjective modulus of the repetitive action, it remains to recognise in it a *repetition automatism* in the sense that interests us in Freud’s text.⁸

In this way the materiality of the letter as “signifier” is linked to the unconsciousness of the glance (what Derrida terms the “vigilance de l’inconscient”)⁹ in the form of a visual “prosthesis,” a projection or extension of the eye as that phenomenal aspect of the body invisible to the subject (*l’objet petit a*), but which nevertheless leaves a trace or series of traces (*une série de contiguïtés matérielle*).¹⁰ Here resides the affective counterpart of the gaze as “locus” of the other, that is, of the lack of intersubjectivity symbolised in the condition of a certain blindness (as in Duchamp, the King and Queen surrounded by swift nudes, marking a tactical blindness in the game of the letter that has been pur-loined):

On n’arrivera certes jamais à une sorte de symétrie ou de réciprocité; ce mirage de la réappropriation par le destinataire de ce qui lui arrive est un fantôme, mais ce n’est pas une raison pour abandonner le destinataire à la passivité ...¹¹

It remains to recognise that while this letter may yet be made to speak for itself, it also comes to symbolise what, in this drama of speculation, prescience and hindsight, must “see for itself”—in the place *of* seeing, which determines “it” according to an overwhelmingly visual paradigm as both a no-thing and a signifier of nothing; exposes nothing that is hidden (a false blind)—a species of thing, precisely, that no one sees and is only recognised (as Lacan says) in what is left over from this “seeing-not-seeing” ... That is, the spectrality of the gaze, the very “thing” that returns the subject’s glance to it, as a glance which sees nothing but which is seen—in which perception enters upon the subject as though in the form of an “intersubjective modulus” (*percipere, cogitare*) that is nevertheless predicated upon some (contradictory) *thing* ... and according to which “it remains to recognise in it a *repetition automatism* ...”

The intersubjectivity of a between-two-egos as the modulus of the signifier (its repetition automatism)—effectively, the neutrality of a “third person” (it) of this determination of the gaze, or the structuring lacuna of a speculative or

⁸ LACAN, “Séminaire sur «La lettre volée»,” 32.

⁹ JACQUES DERRIDA and BERNARD STIEGLER, *Échographies de la télévision* (Paris: Galilée, 1996) 151.

¹⁰ DERRIDA and STIEGLER, *Échographies de la télévision*, 146.

¹¹ DERRIDA and STIEGLER, *Échographies de la télévision*, 69.

spectral dialectics: “For the signifier is a unit in its very uniqueness, being by nature the symbol only of an absence. ... What is hidden is never but what is missing from its place ... for it can *literally* be said that something is missing from its place only of what can change it: the symbolic. For the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always in its place; it carries it glued to its heel, ignorant of what might exile it from it.”¹² (Derrida: “Un spectre, c’est à la fois visible et invisible, à la fois phénoménal et non phénoménal: une trace qui marque *d’avance* le present de son absence.”)¹³ And so, “the sender ... receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form ... What the ‘purloined letter,’ nay, the ‘letter in sufferance,’ means is that a letter always arrives at its destination.”¹⁴ As Lacan says, the Real is precisely the *lack* of intersubjectivity.

In this way, what “begins” with language always comes back to language “from the moment” it is language (“it”—Es—because nothing makes sense, as Lacan says, until you put a sign on it, until it is symptomatised: “the boundary between the object and being” is a “symptom”)—which in no way affects the assumption of a “dominion” of the Symbolic over the Imaginary and Real. The place of the letter, of its “return,” at which the signifier appears as its “lack,” is itself part of the symbolic organisation that binds over the Symbolic itself to the “preclusion” of the Real (as the counterpart in the Imaginary configuration of the subject to the affective self-evidence of the Symbolic vis-à-vis the itinerary of the signifier as the subject’s decisive orientation). In “L’Ordre symbolique,” the signifier is thus “devoted to ambiguity” as that form of truth hollowed out of the Real: it has no “proper meaning” other than in hollowing out “reality” (by affecting a form of blind, or mask *of* meaning). A signifier, like a spectre, is not a signifier except insofar as one believes in it.¹⁵ For this very reason, however, it thereby opens the dialectic of truth and being (subjectivity) as that which, because it says what it is not (no-thing), can say what *is*.¹⁶ De revolutionibus orbitum litteralium.¹⁷

Within this elaborate decipherment of Poe’s text (in the name of Freud, under the name of Lacan), there is a “retour” which remains the work of no one—a *détournement* between the ciphered meaning of a letter and its discovered *duplicity*, or rather triplicity, by which Lacan hands Freud’s letter back to him, and gets his in return ... This facteur de la vérité who, in the guise of no one, places truth itself in question—and by what else than through the questionable proposition of its “return” in the promiscuous circulation of a counterfeit and ambiguous cipher which must ultimately stand for psychoanalysis itself (as the duplicity *of* discovery)?

¹² LACAN, “Séminaire sur «La lettre volée»,” 39–40.

¹³ DERRIDA and STIEGLER, *Échographies de la télévision*, 131.

¹⁴ LACAN, “Séminaire sur «La lettre volée»,” 52–3.

¹⁵ LACAN, *Séminaire* I.xix.264.

¹⁶ LACAN, “L’Ordre symbolique,” *Séminaire* I.xviii. Cf. *Séminaire* II.xv.215

¹⁷ LACAN, *Radiophonie*, cited PHILIPPE LACOUE-LABARTHE and JEAN-LUC NANCY, *Le Titre de la lettre: lecture de Lacan* (Paris: Galilée, 1973).

“This letter,” as Derrida argues, “apparently, has no proprietor. It is apparently the property of no one. It has no proper meaning, no proper content, apparently, that bears on its itinerary. Structurally, then, it is *volante* and *volée*. And this theft/flight would not occur if the letter had a meaning, or at least if it were constituted by the content of its meaning, if it limited itself to being meaningful and to being determined by the legibility of this meaning: ‘And the mobilisation of the elegant society whose frolics we are following would as well have no meaning if the letter itself were content with having one’ (S., p. 56).”¹⁸

The *lettre volée*—the eponymous non-subject of Poe’s text, which is also a *retour à la lettre* ... the letter of the law, as it were, of “Freud” (*le nom du Père*). This letter that “speaks” (the subject’s material extensivity into the world?). And, to bring this detour to the point, that is, of a certain “retour” or *Wiederkehr* of this letter which at the same time takes flight from the one who would possess it, finally, who would steal from it precisely that which will get it (the subject) nowhere (not even back to the starting point) ... appearing and vanishing again like a ghost of itself, a mere cipher, *point de capiton* between the subject that would seem to speak and that which says it will not? Derrida: “... the circuit [of the letter] can always not finish. Here dissemination threatens the law of the signifier and of castration as the contract of truth. It broaches, breaches ... the unity of the signifier, that is, of the phallus.”¹⁹

Just as in the apocryphal return of the ghost in Nicolas Abraham’s “sixth act” of *Hamlet* (“The Phantom of Hamlet or The Sixth Act, preceded by The Intermission of ‘Truth’”),²⁰ in which psychoanalysis itself appears on stage in the guise of the father, as though to reinforce the order “remember me”—*one has only to remember* ... Recalling that, like the *lettre volée*, the “content” of memory, the unconscious (*das Unbewusste*) is also a palimpsest, a writing apparatus or Wunderblock (*bloc magique*) in which the materiality of the cipher is itself a rebus or symptom, if not yet a thing²¹ ... A sign that is lacking (the analyst plays dead “cadaverising his position”)²² and the so-called subject made to “speak” as though to fill the space left in or by the analytic apparatus—in the

¹⁸ DERRIDA, *The Post Card*, 422–423.

¹⁹ DERRIDA, *The Post Card*, 444.

²⁰ NICOLAS ABRAHAM and MARIA TOROK, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis, Volume 1*, ed., trans., and intro. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994). Cf. MARIE-ANGE Depierre, “Hamlet: ou des pas fantomatiques dans un espace littéraire en anamorphose,” *Paroles fantomatiques et cryptes textuelles* (Paris: Éditions Champ Vallon, 1993). Cf. also Jacques Derrida, “Moi—la psychanalyse,” *Psyché: Invention de l’autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987) 145–158.

²¹ Cf. LACAN, “The Freudian Thing,” *Écrits*, 141: “To touch on the symbolic nature of memory it is enough to have studied once [...] the simplest symbolic sequence, that of a linear series of signs connoting the alternative presence and absence of something, each being chosen at random by whatever pure or impure mode adopted. One then elaborates this sequence in the simplest way, that is, by noting it in the ternary sequences of a new series, and one will see the appearance of the syntactical laws that impose on each term of this series certain exclusions of possibility until the compensations demanded by its antecedents have been lifted.”

²² LACAN, “The Freudian Thing,” *Écrits*, 140.

gap between the ghost's invocation and the actor's "silence," between D and the attestation of Dupin ("copied into the middle of a blank sheet") ... which is to say, the remainder—what is left over in what returns in the neutrality of the analyst/narrator (it is by means of the letter, of a subjection to the letter which thereby "speaks," that this D has been caused to expose itself, himself): the truth is, in the register of the signifier, "not there"—*the rest* is silence, "un dessein si funeste."²³

3. THE DISCOURSE OF THE OTHER

A. "La chose parle d'elle-même"—this is the third in a long series of section headings which structure the detour from the assumed subject of "The Freudian Thing." It is immediately followed by the words: "But the truth in Freud's mouth takes the said beast by the horns."²⁴ Without proceeding to further quotation (to *the gift of the secret* of psychoanalysis)—what is the purpose of this strange locution?

It is not enough to put words in Freud's mouth, one must put the very truth there. And like Theseus, this metaphorised truth takes the said beast by the horns (it is perhaps in the nature of such beasts to be taken by the horns). Freud's mouth which, by *taking*, "puts in question" [the truth]? The question in which truth takes the beast by the horns? And what is this beast if not the horned paternalistic monstrosity of invented doubt and pseudo-uncertainty waiting also at the end of these sentences?

This thing which—in spite of everything—apparently speaks for itself. And the words, the truth put in the blind oracle's mouth, though questionable, speaking directly to the question, "mute" therefore, addressing each, every, all—in whom its meaning unnervingly returns, a form of resuscitation (even of the dead?), in the truth it itself puts into question, whose putting into question is the truth of its discovery—in flagrante delicto—its truth, which speaks for itself, speaks itself ...

And the word "or" between the title "The Freudian Thing" and the subtitle "the meaning of the return to Freud in psychoanalysis" (*by means of psychoanalysis?*). What is this thing, the doubtful Freudian thing *or*? The adjective *Freudian* which mimes the truth-of-Freud, returns to put the truth in

²³ In his 1998 essay on Blanchot, *Demeure*, Derrida poses the question of the possibility of attestation, of "who keeps witness for the witness" (Blanchot), and consequently of "what attests to the absence of attestation." These questions raise the spectre of a fundamental dilemma of ethics, one elsewhere expressed in the "figure" of Bentham's panopticon and Nietzsche's *Götzendämmerung*, but above all in the "discovery" of the Freudian unconscious and the structure of attestation in the post-Cartesian subject, vis-à-vis what Lacan, following Sartre, came to term the *regard* or gaze (of the Other)—the optical metaphor extending the idea of a signifying materiality in the mechanics of subjection or subjectification. Cf. MAURICE BLANCHOT and JACQUES DERRIDA, *The Instant of My Death/Demeure. Fiction and Testimony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

²⁴ LACAN, "The Freudian Thing," *Écrits*, 121.

Freud's mouth, articulating it, as a form of duplicity or lability. Whereby this doubly questionable truth (psychoanalysis itself?) takes the beast "Freud" *by the horns?*

Like a blind or castrated Cyclops, the spectre of Freud is made to give the lie to the beast that truth has taken by the horns. The very horns taken by truth in the spectral mouth of "Freud." To take truth in one's mouth, does it mean one must also be fed the lie along with it? Or as Ulysses knew, one should never look a gift horse in the mouth. This thing which gives its question in advance of it. Which broaches no return. The secret cunning of its apparatus, like a labyrinth or odyssey: a thing fabled of no one, and which lacks nothing in the telling which could not be retold or re-embroidered under any other name? A thing made to act as though it were a subject—"some thing which thinks"—being the very image of a reflexivity between the font of truth and the nature of the beast ...

B. Echoing Lewis Carroll's Mad Hatter, Lacan—in a passage preceding the section of his lecture on Freud entitled "The Discourse of the Other"²⁵—asks: what is the difference between the Ego and a writing desk? (The Ego and Poe's Raven?) "I am quite willing," says Lacan, "to accept that the Ego, and not the desk, is the seat of perceptions but in doing so it reflects the essence of the objects it perceives and not its own, insofar as consciousness is its privilege, since these perceptions are very largely unconscious."²⁶

And so, as it may seem, we should perhaps (invoking a particular form of the pathetic fallacy) speak of the "unconsciousness" of the signifier, to which the "I" *as* subject is subjected, in the Lacanian schema—in that consciousness engenders what we might call (belying the signifier's assumed symmetry, between *like* and *same*, as Levinas says, or *as* and *is*; simile and metaphor) "the bastard forms of phenomenology"—to those *things* which are not its own but which nevertheless seem to mirror its essential inertia at the level of assumed perception (the Ego's *opaqueness* to reflection):

we perceive the desk and give it meaning, and as much trouble goes into doing so, perhaps, as into the making of the thing.²⁷

Retreating, or retracing here the detour of pronominal extension, the generalised counterpart of subjectivity—this "we" who *give meaning* as though in place of the Real, the Other-locus in its "annunciation" of the signifiatory act (the Freudian thing that speaks for itself?) ... a usurpation that "allows" the subject to play out the divine role (casting itself in inverted form), in which "inertia" is raised to consciousness—the very *making* of the thing, as one says *the making of a man* ("what a piece of work is man"). It is in the mirror, as Lacan says, that the Ego is first born as an idea, and it is in the echo of the symbolic voice that it gains its identity.

²⁵ LACAN, "The Freudian Thing," *Écrits*, 135.

²⁶ LACAN, "The Freudian Thing," *Écrits*, 134.

²⁷ LACAN, "The Freudian Thing," *Écrits*, 134.

What, then, is here made to speak? This discourse of the other vis-à-vis the Freudian unconscious ... between subject and counter-subject (signifier) and its abnegation in the inertia of the “discourse” of the Real? That is to say, perhaps, its *subjection* as what (re)turns the subject (into) a thing—this thing which “thinks” (is made to think, subjected as it is to a discourse whose “symbolisation” in the miraculous embodiment of the signifier belies the inertial moment that renders this “reflexive apparatus” as nothing more than a work of mechanical iteration or *iterability* ...). The locus of a *détournement* which is the very “essence” of its inertia, being the impossible signifier of the thing-in-itself?—i.e. the desk, or “Freud”? “... it did not have its say. For the simple reason that it was itself a word; it was *I* as grammatical subject.”²⁸

The Other is, therefore, the locus in which is constituted the I who speaks ... that which is said by one being ahead of the reply, the other deciding to hear it whether the one has or has not spoken. But this locus also extends as far into the subject as the laws of speech, that is to say, well beyond the discourse that takes its orders from the Ego, as we have known ever since Freud discovered its unconscious fields and the laws that structure it.²⁹

It was I. A numenology or nomenology of the Ego-Other? Là où était ça, le je (le jeu?) doit être. Or: “Somewhere in the Other, It knows.”³⁰

4. GNOMON

To speculate upon the relationship between “materiality” and “discursivity”—as in “the materiality of language”—this quintessential Freudian “thing”? That which (inanimate, a-subjective) no longer describes the relation of the Symbolic and Imaginary vis-à-vis Lacan, but rather a certain encounter *of* the Real, as what gives the Symbolic-Imaginary relation its possibility. That is to say, the materiality of that which becomes language by way of a semantic *détournement*: this paltry “thing” which is posed as speaking, returning upon itself in the formulation of a language that “acts” (the assumed agency of a subject or psychological entity)—as the “reflexive” shift from substantive to verb (transitive, intransitive).³¹ A question, as Lacan says, of having confused the symbolic *relation* in language as being some *thing*, as the “surface effect” of consciousness—which, to occur, produces “what is called an *image*.”³² And in the image resides the illusion not only of the subject’s unity, as such, but also

²⁸ LACAN, “The Freudian Thing,” *Écrits*, 136.

²⁹ LACAN, “The Freudian Thing,” *Écrits*, 141.

³⁰ LACAN, *Séminaire XX*.vii.81.

³¹ The question not of the subject’s grasp on “reality” but of reality’s grasp on the subject. The mirror play which both enforces and obfuscates the significance of the Lacanian Real in relation to its opposite figure, in so-called “reality.”

³² LACAN, “A Materialist Definition of Consciousness,” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, 49.

of an “image of alienation” in the inertial object of reflexive consciousness that is taken, in spite of the subject, as a “thing” (albeit an illusory thing, but a thing no less—a no-thing: the question of language having always been bound to the question of how thinking itself becomes “sensible”).³³ One should not forget that, in order to be what it is, the image must always stand in place of some other-thing, which is not or cannot be presented in itself or against the field of the Imaginary—that is, which cannot be signified ... marking not only the supplementarity and metaphoricity of the “imaginary,” but also that language *always points to the Real*. Hence:

It is in the disintegration of the imaginary unity constituted by the ego that the subject finds the signifying material for his symptoms.³⁴

It is in this phantasm of a base materiality, as we may call it, that resides the alienation “affect” of the mirror dialectic in Lacan’s theory of language acquisition—the invention of the subject as the individual’s entry into the Symbolic, by way of the Imaginary, through a “missed encounter” with the Real. Before the “dialectic of identification” there remains, nevertheless, some “thing.” Some matter whose organisation, although programmed in advance (as it were), has neither function nor meaning in this hypothetically pre-subjective (pre-Symbolic) world. *Le sens est ce par quoi répond quelquechose qui est autre que le symbolique, qui est ... l’imaginaire*. “Meaning is that by which something other than the Symbolic responds, which is ... imaginary.”³⁵ Somehow this thing which neither acts nor can be made to act is “given”—not *to* the subject, but as we may infer *by way of* the subject.

It would be a mistake to say that this thing, therefore, does not work. It may be that it is all that works.

This does not mean that it requires work: that it is a matter of labour—applied *to* language, to its matter, by way of some form of incipient *utility*. Although one may speak of *forging*, in such and such a manner, as in Joyce, it is not such a labour that *makes language “speak”* (as though rendering up its secret), but rather this labour, this belabouring, which speaks in language. As in the early Marx, this labour is without belonging—“its” product is what relates in us this not-belonging, the alienation effect of what, for potentially ironic reasons, is termed the “commodity.” That is, the alienation effect of language, of its materiality which is precisely what, in spite of any expense of labour, cannot be made to speak—cannot, in other words, be reduced to (a) property (of what is given, a priori? as that which *belongs*, in the ontology of presence, “to the subject,” or Dasein as Heidegger says)—even if merely for the sake of convenience.

³³ LACAN, “The Freudian Thing,” *Écrits*, 138: “the decisive signification of the alienation that constitutes the *Urbild* of the ego appears in the relation of exclusion that then structures the dual relation of ego to ego.”

³⁴ LACAN, “The Freudian Thing,” *Écrits*, 137.

³⁵ LACAN, *Ornicar?* (1975): 91.

And this may equally apply to the matter of consciousness and of the “thingness” of that which gives reflexivity its apparent possibility as a turning of or towards the self (an object of what species of labour?). As Lacan argues, “The philosopher does seem to start with an indisputable given when he takes as his starting point the transparency of consciousness to itself. If there is consciousness of something it cannot be, we are told, that this consciousness does not itself grasp itself as such. Nothing can be experienced without the subject being able to be aware of itself within this experience in a kind of immediate reflection.”³⁶

Beyond the metaphor of transparency of consciousness, what is it that allows this subject-thing to stand out from the experience within which it is contained and communicate, as it were, its presence to the “subject” as *the* object (and may we also say *agent*) of immediate reflection—that is, its reflection as such? But also, and more incisively, is it not precisely here, between the immediate and its reflection that “nothing can be experienced without the subject”? And may we also say that this no-thing can *only* be experienced “without the subject” (because “aware of itself within this experience”—that is, the experience of nothing, of which it is irremediably a *part*)?

In Sartre, and consequently Lacan, this “experience of nothing” by means of a (missed) “encounter” with a certain base materiality in the world (“the retorsive aggressivity” of its echo), gives rise to an effect of objectification (of the subject) at the same time as it transposes onto the world a consciousness vis-à-vis the gaze or *regard* (as a metonymic recursion between the subject’s “being seen” and the “eye”)—translating the well-abused Berkeleyan dictum *esse est percipi*, “to be is to be perceived,” in the inflected manner of Descartes, i.e. *to be thought*. And by means of this *regard*, the subject is not only approved, as it were, but proved against what amounts to a universal indifference “towards it.” As Wittgenstein has it in the *Tractatus*, “from nothing in the field of sight can it be concluded that it is seen from an eye” (*nichts im Gesichtsfeld lässt darauf schliessen, dass es von einem Auge gesehen wird*).³⁷ Or again, “that which mirrors itself in language, language cannot represent ...” (*Was sich in der Sprache ausdrückt, können wir nicht durch sie ausdrücken*).³⁸

Here we see that solipsism strictly carried out coincides with pure realism. The I in solipsism shrinks to an extensionless point and there remains the reality co-ordinated with it.

*Hier sieht man, dass der Solipsismus, streng durchgeführt, mit dem reinen Realismus zusammenfällt. Das Ich des Solipsismus schrumpft zum ausdehnungslosen Punkt zusammen, und es bleibt die ihm koordinierte Realität.*³⁹

³⁶ LACAN, “A Materialist Definition of Consciousness,” *Écrits*, 45–46.

³⁷ LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922) 5.633.

³⁸ WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus*, 4.121.

³⁹ WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus*, 5.64.

This is what Wittgenstein refers to as a “non-psychological I” (*nicht-psychologisch vom Ich*),⁴⁰ the imaginary representation of the subject “in language” (so to say). The solipsistic mechanism of consciousness which is nevertheless beyond the Cartesian subject’s grasp, is neither initiated nor determined by it, and cannot be represented to itself other than by means of tautology. That is to say, by means of logical propositions.⁴¹

Objects I can only *name*. Signs represent them. I can only speak of them. I cannot *assert them*. A proposition can only say *how* a thing is, not *what* it is.

*Die Gegenstände kann ich nur nennen. Zeichen vertreten sie. Ich kann nur von ihnen sprechen, sie aussprechen kann ich nicht. Ein Satz kann nur sagen, wie ein Ding ist, nicht was es ist.*⁴²

This imaginary representation, it would seem, stands as a (specular?) counterpart to the relation of “how a thing is” and the nature of propositions, or what they say. An unlikely proposition. Or, is it possible, an unlikely thing? And while these things are unlike—*must* be unlike—nevertheless the one reflects, in a sense, (on) how the other *is* without necessary recourse to the Cartesian *ergo*. That is because the relation is implicit, if not consequential, that “I think I am.” And that is how it is—as, regardless of how this “I” postures itself, it takes the position of being in advance of what “it is,” and thereby gives something like an expression to the paradox of the mirror stage wherein reflection precedes the *proposition* of the subject. Or, as Merleau-Ponty contends (by way, merely, of provocation?): “man can speak in the same way that an electric bulb can become incandescent.”⁴³

Which leads us to question the effective distinction between (as in Saussure) a so-called language of mental concepts (reflections) and (no-) things. And by this same principle, between signifiers and things (the subject of signification which is a no-thing). If one were to pursue this detour further, it may be that coming upon itself—as though by surprise—it might discover the implication of the dictum “every signified is always already a signifier”—having less to do with supposed *signifying chains* or the *free play of signification*, than with a metonymic recursion between apparent “discursivity” and materiality (*la pensée dans la parole* or *parole-pensée*).

This peculiar assumption (or resumption) of a linguistic animus which mysteriously compasses the signifier’s relation to a “signified,” a verbal (or imaginary) expression of its other (its prosthetic extension towards the world, counterpart of a “verbal substance”)—by means of an undisclosed mechanism of “linguistic anteriority” (as Merleau-Ponty says, “the relation of the subject to the term into which he projects himself”).⁴⁴ What remains missing is any

⁴⁰ WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus*, 5.641.

⁴¹ WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus*, 6.1.

⁴² WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus*, 3.221.

⁴³ MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY, *La phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945) 204.

⁴⁴ MERLEAU-PONTY, *La phénoménologie*, 203.

effective determination of this animus, this ghost in the linguistic mechanism operating the great chain of signifying substitution (the ego of “iterability”)—according to the formula *in principio erat verbum*.

It is at this juncture that Lacan’s conjecture regarding the machine (symbolic activity) bears directly upon the question of signification per se. In other words, what is “left in the machine,” in the mirror apparatus between signifier and signified, or S/s? Could it be, after all, the solution to the mystery of perpetual motion? Or is this too merely a play of desire—of the subject-dialectic as the perpetuum mobile projected in its own firmament?⁴⁵

Implicitly, modern man thinks that everything which has happened in the universe since its origin came about so as to converge on this thing which thinks ... which is this privileged vantage-point called consciousness.⁴⁶

In this rationalist cosmology, which has nothing rational about it other than a certain gratuitous reflexivity (the imposition of human thought upon the universe at large—being some-thing which, grasped as it is, reflexively, amounts to a no-thing, a mere dilation of reflexive consciousness or a mirror-effect), there remains the question of what, for the sake of argument, we might call ontological or rather semantic inertia—of language “at rest” (its “non-signifying” condition)—and of an ergonomics, of language in flux (its “signifying” condition).⁴⁷ That is, the reconciliation of universal matter with universal mind, according to the old philosophical dualism. But each of these is a convenient fiction, as likewise a “pure materiality” of language, or a “pure play” of signification—if it is not to be a counter-play also, a movement of entropy, which draws the subject ever nearer to a mechanistic catastrophe—the *détournement* of all ontico-linguistic insistences to the contrary of nothingness, as the repetitional nullity (*Angst*) which nevertheless seems to affirm that language is some “thing.” And it is to this “thing” that the subject tends, not

⁴⁵ It is not a question of *accounting* for a materiality irreducible to “linguistic grids.” Such an accountability is a philosophical chimera—an after-effect of reduction, of the quasi-reduction of a certain hermeneutics (its *prima materia*, supposedly).

⁴⁶ LACAN, “A Materialist Definition of Consciousness,” *Écrits*, 48.

⁴⁷ This compulsive, or rather convulsive, movement of structuration towards a totality of the (w)hole, provides an organisational impetus of the linguistic apparatus—as semantic agent—at the same time as it determines its radical “decentredness.” The “illusionistic” nature of this structure describes a quasi-dialectic: between the visual *discursus* of the “mirroring horizon of subjectivity” and the architectonic *discursus* of a “signifying materiality.” The implications of this movement point towards the way in which the signifier, as such, describes a *virtual* which cannot be situated according to either Cartesianism or Hegelian dialectics. Insofar as it suggests the transitional state of a forethrow of metonymic substitution (desire towards the *topos* of the signified non-place), it does so only in the open possibility of a literate *technē* in whose machinations “desire” is affected as the *gratuitous* operation of a “quasi-subjectivity”; of a switching mechanism within the production/consumption of signs, like Maxwell’s demon. Beyond the “reflexive” action of repetition and autopoiesis, this *technē* is “for” nothing. It constitutes a forethrow only in the assumption of “itself” as that mechanism capable of “making decisions” or “telling differences.” The world extends from it like a prosthesis constantly being re-integrated into the whole: a supplemental form of literacy in which no ego can be said to be present, but whose possibility it nevertheless structures.

as subjectification *to* the signifier, but as its subjectification *in* the signifier to that “thing” of which it cannot speak and in whose place it is compelled “to respond to or for *it*,” as Derrida says ... On the verge, that is, of a determination of language not (only) as some-thing in the universe, but *as* its universe—that is, as a species of category which does not represent but rather constitutes the ungraspable, the in-excess of itself, a categorical impossibility, a no-thing.

This subjectification as the *limit of the subject's universe* or “world” (“the limits of my language mean the limits of my world,” as Wittgenstein says: *Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt*)⁴⁸ consists both in the inertial immanence of materiality and the perpetual forethrow of signification. Signifying materiality operates in the inequivalence of these two conditions: such that we might speak of a generative inequivalence which underwrites all signifying relations. This inequivalence—difference, repetition, *détournement*—retains a mechanistic character. As in Lacan, reflexivity requires a mechanism, into which the ego is projected (a forethrow in advance of this no-thing whose figure it nevertheless “is”). This projection is contingent, determined, facilitated, conditioned or programmed by the inequivalence (the it-self of a mere hyphen?) from which it gains its seeming dialectic formulation.

Or, as we might say, it is a universe which takes the place of the image of consciousness, as it were—of a projection into consciousness of the world—whereby we may also say that “the birth of meaning is never finalised” (as Merleau-Ponty does),⁴⁹ in that “no language detaches itself entirely from the precariousness of the mute forms of expression, nor reabsorbs its own contingency, nor consumes itself to make the things themselves appear.”⁵⁰ The subject is not a *gesta Dei*—is not the realisation of a consciousness in the world, divine or otherwise—but the condition of a “predication” of which consciousness is the indirect propositional form.

Prague, April 2003

⁴⁸ WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus*, 5.6.

⁴⁹ MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) 52.

⁵⁰ MERLEAU-PONTY, *Signes*, 98.

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS CAROLINAE
PHILOLOGICA - MONOGRAPHIA CXLVIII

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Incendiary Devices
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Řídí: prof. PhDr. Libuše Dušková, DrSc. (předsedkyně),
prof. PhDr. Petr Mareš, CSc. (tajemník), s redakční radou

Prorektor-editor prof. MUDr. Pavel Klener, DrSc.

Recenzovali: PhDr. Karel Thein, Ph.D.

prof. Jean-Michel Rabaté, University of Pennsylvania

Redakce: Mgr. Iva Sokolová

Obálku navrhla a graficky upravila Kateřina Řezáčová

Vydala Univerzita Karlova v Praze

Nakladatelství Karolinum, Ovocný trh 3, 116 36 Praha 1

Praha 2005

Sazba a zlom DTP Nakladatelství Karolinum

Vytiskla tiskárna Nakladatelství Karolinum

Vydání I. Náklad 300 výtisků

ISBN 80-246-1024-8

ISSN 00567-8277

Objednávky přijímá ediční oddělení Filozofické fakulty UK, nám. J. Palacha 2,
116 38 Praha 1 (edice@ff.cuni.cz)

Distributed by the Editorial Office of the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts,
Charles University 2, Jan Palach Sq. 116 38 Praha 1, Czech Republic (edice@ff.cuni.cz)