

# The Ends of Rhetoric

History, Theory, Practice



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# Analytic Speech: From Restricted to General Rhetoric

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**H**as rhetoric ended? Or can we today still make it serve some end? Is it still the productive, influential *techné* of which the Ancients spoke? Is it dead, “dried up” (as Martin Heidegger says of the flowers of rhetoric),<sup>1</sup> or is it “living” (as Paul Ricoeur says of metaphor)?<sup>2</sup>

All depends on what is meant by “rhetoric.” Defined as the theory of tropes or of figures of speech, rhetoric undoubtedly died in the mid-nineteenth century. Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, Ricoeur, and Tzvetan Todorov have all variously written out its death certificate by imputing what they see as rhetoric’s two-thousand-year decline to a progressive restriction of its range and objectives: “natural eloquence” was reduced to a codification of probable argumentation; the great edifice of oratorical eloquence then shrank to the study of literary and poetic *elocutio*; *elocutio* subsequently diminished to a theory of tropes; tropes were limited to metaphor and metonymy; and, to end it all, the whole of rhetoric was defined as metaphor alone.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in their accounts, the history of rhetoric is a lethal “generalized restriction” (Genette, “La rhétorique,” p. 158).

To say that rhetoric is dead by restriction, however, is also to say that only restricted rhetoric is dead. Nothing prevents one part or another of ancient rhetoric-in-general from surviving, reviving, or simply prospering under another name. How could it be otherwise? The *techné rhétoriké* dealt with language that allows effective action on another; thus its vast “empire” (Barthes, “L’ancienne

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rhétorique," p. 174) comprised almost all aspects of language taken as an act of communication: *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *actio*, *memoria*. It would be very surprising if we had not kept or recaptured something of this domain, albeit unknowingly. To discover present-day relatives of ancient rhetoric, we need not invoke specialized research on "speech acts" or on the "pragmatics of communication," both attentive to the active and operant value of language. It suffices to think of the modern techniques of mass communication, whether advertising or political propaganda. Our "mediatized" societies, however different from Sicilian or Athenian democracies, are nonetheless similarly regulated by a rhetorical politics centered on the persuasive power of the probable and of popular opinion, of *eikos* and *endoxa*. Given the phenomenon of the mass media, how can we doubt that rhetoric is alive and well in the heart of our societies? Our very lives, both public and private, tend to turn (or to return) to rhetoric, to pure "commonplace."

Therefore it may be retrospective illusion to speak of the "end" or "death" of rhetoric. The history of rhetoric is not the continuous and closed story of its progressive restriction, but the discontinuous and indefinite one of a permanent tension between two uses of the term: one of extreme generality (and therefore also extreme vagueness), which makes it an art of persuasion (this is its oratorical, pragmatic, or "impressive" pole, corresponding roughly to what G. A. Kennedy calls "primary rhetoric");<sup>4</sup> the other of more restricted scope, which makes it an art of speaking well (this is its literary, poetic, ornamental, or "expressive" pole, corresponding roughly to what Kennedy calls "secondary rhetoric" and V. Florescu *letteraturizzazione*).<sup>5</sup> Between these two poles there is a constant oscillation punctuated by "deaths" and "renaissances" of rhetoric. That "secondary rhetoric" has regularly tended to replace "primary rhetoric" does not exclude (but, on the contrary, explains) the latter's having no less regularly reasserted its rights each time that historic conditions made the need of return to a persuasive or "impressive" use of language felt. No doubt today we are witnessing a resurgence of "primary rhetoric": the very fact that we ask ourselves about the "ends" of rhetoric testifies that we are living the *n*th chapter of that tension between a taxonomy of the figures of speaking well and a pragmatics (or politics) of effective speaking.

Conforming to the old probationary technique of the *exemplum*, in the interest of persuasive effectiveness, I propose to illus-

trate this "chapter" with a limited case, psychoanalytic rhetoric, or rather—for it is necessary to qualify immediately—what is conventionally called psychoanalytic "rhetoric."

The assimilation of dream work, slips of the tongue, and symptoms to the figures of rhetoric has become one of the most insistent topoi of our linguistico-psychoanalytic culture since Emile Benveniste, Roman Jakobson, and Jacques Lacan first advanced it in a series of famous articles that appeared in 1956–57.<sup>6</sup> Benveniste, in a rather vague and prudent manner, outlined a comparison between the oneiric processes described by Freud and the stylistic figures of speech: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, but also euphemism, allusion, antiphrasis, litotes, ellipsis, and so on. Jakobson, more precisely (or more audaciously), proposed assimilating displacement and condensation to metonymy, identification and symbolism to metaphor—these two rhetorical figures being themselves reduced, by a perilous leap, to the two properly linguistic operations of syntagmatic combination and paradigmatic selection. Lacan, extending the hypotheses of Jakobson, with no less temerity suggested identifying condensation and symptom with metaphor, displacement and desire with metonymy, thus promoting a linguistic interpretation of the unconscious. These formulations, however different, agree that there is a "figurality" of desire, a "rhetoric of Freud," a "rhetoric of denial," and even a catachretical "anasemy" of psychoanalytic conceptuality.<sup>7</sup>

Is this "rhetorical" interpretation of the unconscious legitimate—beyond the objections that can be made to details touching such and such a more or less improper (more or less metaphoric) displacement of concepts? The principal reproach I would make is not that such an interpretation reduces the unconscious and its manifestations to rhetorical processes. Many passages in Freud's work can support such a reading, and I will return to them in a moment. Rather I would point out that this interpretation restricts the operations of the unconscious to a rhetoric that is itself restricted, whether the restriction takes the extreme form of an integral reabsorption of rhetoric into linguistics (as in the works of Jakobson and Lacan) or the inverse form of a boundless generalization to simple figural displacement (as in the Lyotard of *Discours, figure*). Psychoanalytic "rhetoric," as it has been understood and practiced for nearly thirty years, is in reality *restricted* rhetoric, rhetoric restricted to the figures of speaking well (or, in this case, the

impossibility of speaking well), and also, therefore, to a language amputated from its effective, pragmatic, or persuasive dimension.

We should recall that the inverse of such amputation—an examination of the persuasive power of language—was Freud's initial point of departure. Moreover, this point of departure is also, I will show, Freud's point of arrival: a pure question mark. To examine this is to explore the understanding that we today can have of psychoanalysis, of rhetoric, and of their common power.

The psychoanalytic "talking cure" is historically rooted in the practice of hypnosis, more precisely in what Hippolyte Bernheim, in his 1886 *De la suggestion et de ses applications à la thérapeutique*, called "suggestive psychotherapy." But what is "suggestive psychotherapy" or "psychical treatment," as Freud, who translated the work in 1888, preferred to call it? In the article "Psychical Treatment," a "defense and illustration" of psychotherapy published by Freud in 1890, we find the following definition: "'Psychical treatment' [*Seelenbehandlung*] denotes treatment taking its start in the mind [*Behandlung von der Seele aus*], treatment (whether of mental or psychical disorders) by measures which operate in the first instance and immediately upon the human mind. Foremost among such measures is the use of words; and words are the essential tool of mental treatment."<sup>8</sup> Contrary to modern medicine, which treats body and soul by means of the body, psychical treatment treats soul and body by means of the soul, by utilizing the word. Freud concedes, however, anticipating certain developments in *Totem and Taboo*, that this attributes a quasimagical power to words: "A layman . . . will feel that he is being asked to believe in magic. And he will not be so very wrong, for the words which we use in our everyday speech are nothing other than watered-down magic" ("Psychical Treatment," p. 283). This will necessitate, he adds, "a roundabout path in order to explain how science sets about restoring to words a part at least of their former magical power" (*ibid.*).

The goal of this roundabout path—which is the detour by hypnosis—is clear. Science (here medical science) must recuperate, to its profit, the power of language abandoned to magicians, preachers, and healers. That power—of which Freud remarks in passing that it is all the more effective in that it is employed in isolation from the discourse of science, in the domain of religious faith and

popular prejudice—that properly miraculous power of the word, is persuasion, *Einreden*. In brief, it is the rhetorical *dunamis*, the power of enchantment stigmatized by Plato under the name of *goétèia* (*Menexenus* 234c–235a) of which Nietzsche said, anticipating Freud, that it “does not intend to instruct, but to transmit to others a subjective emotion and apprehension.”<sup>9</sup> How, in fact, does the soul act on the body? Essentially by the intermediary of affects that “are characterized,” says Freud, “by a quite special connection with somatic processes”: grief, terror, anguish, joy, enthusiasm, or *gläubige Erwartung*, “confident expectation” vis-à-vis the therapist. It is by language that a person can communicate an affect to another person, can influence him, convince him, move him, and so forth. (One will have recognized in passing the two objectives of rhetorical *inventio*: *fidem facere et animos impellere*.) Freud’s provisional conclusion is: “Words are the most important media by which one man seeks to bring his influence to bear on another; words are a good method of producing mental changes in the person to whom they are addressed. So that there is no longer anything puzzling in the assertion that the magic of words can remove the symptoms of illness” (“Psychical Treatment,” p. 292).

But this is not all. The affective power of the word would remain abandoned to chance and empiricism (that is, would remain “magic”) if science did not have at its disposal a *techné* capable not only of provoking such and such an affect, but also of inducing *pathèia* as such, a “mental compliance,” or what Freud calls, after Bernheim, “suggestibility” (“Psychical Treatment,” p. 293). That technique (that “specific therapeutic method”; “Psychical Treatment,” p. 294) is hypnotism, with which, Freud tells us, “modern mental treatment has taken its start” (“Psychical Treatment,” p. 293). In effect, he explains, playing on the word *Ein-reden*, one can “talk” the patient “into” a special state of “mental compliance,” in which he becomes “obedient and credulous” vis-à-vis the hypnotist, submits himself to the hypnotist’s injunctions, models his “mental life” on the hypnotist’s, and so on (“Psychical Treatment,” pp. 293–95). In brief, by a fabulous process (which would have been the dream of the ancient rhetoricians) one can persuade the listener to be “persuadable,” “affectable.” Suggestion (which is, says Freud, the technical name of the “words spoken by the hypnotist which have [these] magical results”; “Psychical Treat-

ment," p. 296) possesses the remarkable property of annulling (at least for the hypnotized person) the distance between locutor and listener, emitter and receiver. It does not communicate a message (information, or even an order), it communicates a state of faith (*Gläubigkeit*)—that is to say, both a receptivity to the message and an identification with the emitter. Freud wrote in his preface to the German edition of Bernheim's book: "What distinguishes a suggestion from other kinds of psychical influence, such as a command or the giving of a piece of information or instruction, is that in the case of a suggestion an idea is aroused in another person's brain which is not examined in regard to its origin but is accepted just as though it had arisen spontaneously in that brain."<sup>10</sup> Hence its affective (pathogenic or, contrarily, cathartic) power, since the listener completely appropriates for himself this discourse of the other; hence also its contaminating, contagious power, since the listener identifies with and mimics it. As Freud says, "Words have once more regained their magic" ("Psychical Treatment," p. 296)—that is, their mimetic magic, their mimologic omnipotence, described (and condemned) by Plato in Books 3 and 10 of the *Republic*.

This reading of "Psychical Treatment" could take us far toward what Freud later called the "magical omnipotence of thoughts" and the absence of doubt and negation proper to unconscious "primary processes":<sup>11</sup> the singular "logic" of the unconscious is, undoubtedly, the mimo-patho-logic of hypnotic suggestion. That is to say, it is the rhetorical mimo-patho-logic understood as the "art of conducting souls by words" (which is Socrates' definition in *Phaedrus*).<sup>12</sup> If the effectiveness of the psychoanalytic cure rests entirely on the power of speech, as Lacan has repeated many times, this power was originally, in Freud's work, that of "suggestive," affective, and impressive—in brief, persuasive—speech. What Freud rediscovered, around 1890, in Bernheim's, Joseph Delboeuf's, or Pierre Janet's researches on verbal suggestion, was at base a new version (with scientific and experimental pretensions) of the "pathic" part of ancient rhetoric, as we know it in its codification by Aristotle in Book 2 of the *Rhetoric* (1377b–1391b). How can we not see that the project outlined in "Psychical Treatment" is a sort of medical rhetoric, fallen away from its relation with scientific medicine and yet, nevertheless, sufficiently "technical" (thanks to hypnotism) to escape from empiricism and from the magic of healers? It is the project—halfway between *épistémé* and *empeiria*—of

a *patho-logy*, in the double sense of an affecting discourse (capable of provoking certain *pathé*) and of a discourse *on* affects (of an *Affektivitätslehre*, as Freud would later say).

One might object that this patho-logical *techné* has exactly nothing to do with psychoanalysis and that Freud quickly abandoned it in favor of the technique of “free association” (by the patient), and an “art of interpreting”<sup>13</sup> (by the therapist). The hypno-suggestive technique was expressly rejected by Freud (even in its “cathartic” form), for a very simple reason, which is, at bottom, reason itself. The patho-logy, understood as discourse *on* affects (thus as theoretical discourse), can only compete with, and finally eliminate, the patho-logy, understood as affective, persuasive discourse. For how is one to say the truth about this false power, this *pseudologos* that makes one believe in no-matter-what and causes, according to Socrates, “that which is small to appear large, and that which is large, small”? As Plato says in *Phaedrus*, the rhetoricians do not know what they are saying (that is to say, what they are doing): they speak *to* the soul of their listeners, but not *of* the soul in its relation with speech, and therefore they cannot produce the truth of their own psychagogic discourse (266e–267c; 270b–272d).

Beginning in 1895, Freud directed just such a reproach against suggestion, and that reproach is a sign of a forceful return in his discourse to the values of truth and scientificity, in the very place where the hypno-suggestive *techné* was only interested in therapeutic effectiveness. Freud does not object to the effectiveness of suggestion (on the contrary, here and there Freud even regrets its loss),<sup>14</sup> but rather to its irrational, “mysterious,”<sup>15</sup> and thus unmanageable and “uncheckable” character.<sup>16</sup> This critique is made explicit in chapter 4 of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*: Suggestion—which is supposed to explain everything—cannot even explain itself; a word for the “magic of words,” it would itself be a “magic word,” a *Zauberwort*, incapable of resolving the enigma (*Rätsel*) of an “influence without adequate logical foundation” (pp. 88–90); in brief, it designates a power not that of the truth, not a knowledge. Hence, of course, its condemnation as “violence” and as a hold exercised on another, a condemnation that is itself very violent (indeed “magic”) and that evokes Plato’s expulsion of rhetoric from the philosophical *logos*. Psychoanalytic dialogue has often been compared to Platonic dialectic,<sup>17</sup> and here this comparison is more pertinent than ever: the passage from sug-



gestive technique to analytic "talking cure" corresponds almost point for point with the Platonic passage from rhetorical argumentation, in which the stakes are persuasive "probability," to the "true rhetoric" or *dialèktikè*, in which the stakes are "the truth about the subject that you speak . . . about" (*Phaedrus* 277b).

The "thing of which one speaks" in the analytical *dialegethai* and about which one is to arrive at a consensus or *homologia* is here the speaking subject himself, however. (In this the psychoanalytic cure is already much closer, as Lacan has noted, to dialectic in its modern Hegelian form.)<sup>18</sup> The post-Cartesian Freud conceives of truth as certitude, as the self-knowledge of consciousness. This attitude explains, beyond historical vicissitude, why "psychical treatment" passes from the persuasive setup of hypnosis, where it is the other who *ein-redet* the subject (in a state of unconsciousness), to the auto-enunciative setup of psychoanalysis, where the subject speaks of himself to another who is now only the mediator of his certainty (of the *Erinnerung*, the "realization" of the repressed). The treatment continues to be a treatment by words and by affects, though now in the sense that the words of the subject must adequately express (and thus "abreact," as Freud says)<sup>19</sup> an affect that has been detached from its proper representation because of repression. As for the therapist, he no longer speaks (or he speaks very little); moreover, he becomes himself one of the "transferential" forms in which the subject fallaciously expresses his affect. In a word, he becomes a *figure* of the subject and of his auto-enunciative discourse.

It is here that Benveniste, Jakobson, and Lacan have, more or less legitimately, grafted on the rhetorico-linguistic interpretation. Once one admits that the subject's discourse (which includes his dreams and symptoms) is the indirect expression of an affect that cannot be directly expressed because of repression and censorship, then the different operations of symbolization located by Freud can all be described as the distance between a proper sense and a transposed or tropic sense (one need only think of *Übertragung*, which exactly translates Aristotle's *metaphora*). By radicalizing certain Freudian themes (for example, the necessary inaccessibility of the unconscious apart from its "translation" to consciousness,<sup>20</sup> or the figural character of the analytic *Bildersprache*),<sup>21</sup> one easily arrives at Lacan's thesis: the subject can only signify himself by metaphorizing himself in the signifier by which he expresses himself,

and therefore, he cannot signify himself except by losing himself as subject of the enunciation, in accordance with a metaphoricity without proper sense (or a *signifiance* without signified), which makes the whole structure of the unconscious like language and the "discourse of the Other."

This interpretation, however, continues to make the analytic setup into a setup of auto-expression (even if this is declared impossible), and the "rhetoric" of the unconscious into a rhetoric restricted to the figures of discourse (even if these are defined in terms of signifying substitution, and no longer as figures of sense). The Lacanian subject cannot properly express himself, since his discourse is always already that of the Other—but that is exactly his most proper truth (which says, "I, truth, speak" and which, as we know, must be taken "literally"; *Ecrits*, p. 411), and the "discourse of the Other" has nothing to do with some "persuasive" or "suggestive" discourse of the analyst. Lacan's whole enterprise is expressly directed against an interpretation of the analytic cure as persuasion or suggestion, which he always denounces in the name of "Freudian truth" as "imaginary identification with the analyst" and "alienation" into the specular "petit autre." Freudian rhetoric is perhaps that of the "metaphor of the subject,"<sup>22</sup> but it should definitely not be that of the persuasion of the subject, according to Lacan.

Such an interpretation would be unproblematic if Freud had kept to his initial rejection of verbal suggestion and of the persuasive dimension of words. But that is not the case, and on this point the "truth" or "the letter of Freud" is much less univocal (in any case, much less appropriable) than Lacan says. Suggestion—more precisely, the *question* of suggestion—returned in many ways to the center of Freud's preoccupations, above all in the practice of the cure itself, under the form of the transference. Freud realized very early on that the analyst's abandonment of all forms of suggestion or verbal persuasion did not prevent the "spontaneous" reappearance in the patient of the suggestibility that is characteristic of hypnosis. On the contrary—this is the phenomenon of transference called "positive"—the more silent and reserved the analyst remains, the greater the patient's passion for him: the subject "loves" his analyst, thinks only of him, submits to his "influence," has faith in his interpretations, and so on. All of these traits being those of the hypnotic "relation," Freud could not miss making the

connection. To quote the *Selbstdarstellung*, one among many analogous passages: "In every analytic treatment there arises, without the physician's agency, an intense emotional relationship between the patient and the analyst which is not to be accounted for by the actual situation. . . . We can easily recognize it as the same dynamic factor which the hypnotists have named 'suggestibility,' which is the agent of hypnotic *rapport*."<sup>23</sup>

This affirmation has many implications (for instance, for the henceforth problematic "objectivity" of analytic interpretations, or for the no less problematic possibility of a final "dissolution" of the transference). Here I will simply note that the connection between transference and suggestibility causes an inevitable resurgence in reverse, so to speak, of the whole problem of the pathologic, understood as affective power, and of the "magic" of language. At bottom, what is transference as described by Freud if not hypnosis without a hypnotist, if not persuasion without a rhetorician, since it is produced in the absence of any direct suggestion? Paradoxically, the phenomenon of the transference reveals that the influence of the hypnotist and/or analyst is based not on a particular technique or power, but rather on an a priori affectability (a "spontaneous receptivity") in the patient—that is to say, on the "rhetoricity" of the affect *as such*, a rhetoricity anterior to any verbal persuasion and also to any metaphoric expression of passions. The analytic pathology in its ensemble, now understood as *Affektivitätslehre* and the theory of drives, thus finds itself concerned with the problem of rhetoric and its power. Why does another affect me? Why am I affectable, suggestible, persuadable by the discourse of the other—even, and especially, when he says nothing? Is it because I feel an affect in his regard (because I love him, or the unconscious personage that he represents "transferentially")? Or does he affect me with "my" affect, because I have no affect of my own?

This is the question of the "affective tie" with another, alias the "enigma of suggestive influence." This last question appears (or reappears) in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, in a detour made in an inquiry on the nature of the social tie. Why there rather than elsewhere? Because Freud, in conformity with the analyses of Gustave Le Bon (and also Gabriel Tarde and William McDougall), understands the essence of social being on the model of the crowd (or *Masse*) dominated by a leader (or *Führer*). This

model is that of collective hypnosis, as the characteristics of “group psychology” enumerated by Freud, following Le Bon, can testify: disappearance of any individual will or personality, affective contagion, suggestibility, hypnotic submission to a “prestigious” leader, and finally, the “magic power of words.” Freud writes: “The crowd is extremely credulous and open to influence . . . the improbable does not exist for it. It thinks in images . . . whose agreement with reality is never checked by any reasonable agency. . . . A group, further, is subject to the truly magical power of words; they can evoke the most formidable tempests in the group mind, and are also capable of stilling them. . . . And, finally, groups have never thirsted after truth” (*Group Psychology*, pp. 78, 80). This dramatic picture is not an aberrant or pathological phenomenon. It is the very image of our mediatized societies, which I invoked earlier. It is also the vision that the fascist ideologues, great readers of Le Bon (if not of Freud), made into a historical reality in the 1930’s with the terrifying efficiency that we all know. And it is, finally, almost to the last detail, the picture accusingly painted by Plato of the listeners enchanted by poets and orators. Here we arrive at the common root of the patho-logic, of rhetoric, and of politics.

Significantly, Freud, while subscribing unreservedly to this description of “group psychology,” refuses the hypno-suggestive theory that underlies it in the work of Le Bon. (It is in *Group Psychology* that Freud’s virulent critique of suggestion as *Zauberwort* is to be found.) If the individuals assembled in a mass are so easily persuaded by another, it is not, he explains, by virtue of a mysterious “suggestibility,” but because of *love* for the leader. More precisely, if the social tie is really a mimetico-affective tie—an identificatory *Gefühlsbindung*, according to Freud—it is because the members of the mass identify with each other in the mode of hysteria (here a collective one) as a function of their love for a common “object,” the *Führer*. Far from being a mass affective contagion, the social tie indirectly expresses the affects of individuals: the identification is a sort of libidinal metaphor (a comparison on the base of an “analogy”),<sup>24</sup> and the *Führer* takes his power from being a transference figure of desire just like the analyst or hypnotist. Exit, consequently, the phantom of suggestion and of the “magic of words.”

In *Group Psychology*, however, this official doctrine of the social tie is paralleled by a different, much more problematic doctrine, which returns us to the “enigma of suggestive influence.” For

the affective tie with the *Führer*, Freud had to concede, is not a libidinal tie. It is a perfectly "desexualized" tie of submission, analogous if not identical, he says, to the "mysterious" hypnotic rapport; he proposes to assimilate it to the tie with the narcissistic ego ideal. Now, this tie, Freud had expressly established in chapter 7, is really just identification, understood as the "earliest and original form of emotional tie," anterior to any libidinal-erotic investment (p. 107). "Identification is known to psychoanalysis as the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person. . . . A little boy will exhibit a special interest in his father; he would like to grow like him and be like him, and take his place everywhere. We may say simply that he takes his father as his ideal" (p. 105).

To summarize briefly, the affective social tie—that is, the whole domain of suggestion, of mimetico-affective contagion, of the magical power of words, and so on—reposes on the equally hypnotic tie with the *Führer-Ego-Ideal*, itself reduced to the affective tie of "primary identification."<sup>25</sup> This solution to the "enigma of suggestive influence"—and therefore to the *Einreden*, the power of rhetoric—is merely *that enigma itself*, brought back to the vanished ground of the "subject." For what is the identificatory *Gefühlsbindung* if not another word for stating (or restating) openness to influence, passiveness in regard to another, or depropriation of the affect? To affirm that "the earliest emotional tie with another person" is identification is, in effect, to assert that affect as such is identificatory, mimetic, and that there is no "proper" affect except on the condition of a prior "affection" of the ego by another. Another does not affect me because I feel such and such an affect in regard to him, nor even because he succeeds in communicating an affect to me by way of words. He affects me because "I" *am* that "other," following an identification that is my affection, the most strange alteration of my proper auto-affection. My identity is a passion. And reciprocally, my passions are always identificatory.

Here, therefore, is the enigma—the renewed enigma of rhetoric—and I do not believe that it can be resolved. This enigma hides nothing, dissimulates nothing—or only *the* nothing, the absence of any ground, of every *subjectum* and of every subject. It is the irrevealable enigma of a *mimesis* that is all the more effective and "technical" because it has nothing of its own, and because it creates from nothing. Thus there is absolutely nothing to say about it

unless it be to repeat, following Freud and so many others, that this enigma is not that of truth. This does not render it any less powerful, as those who have tried to silence rhetoric have always recognized. For, as rhetoric herself says, through the mouth of Socrates in *Phaedrus*: "Why do you extraordinary people talk such nonsense? I never insist on ignorance of the truth on the part of one who would learn to speak; on the contrary, if my advice goes for anything, it is that he should only resort to me after he has come into possession of truth: what I do, however, pride myself on is that without my aid knowledge of what is true will get a man no nearer to mastering the art of persuasion." (Plato, *Phaedrus* 260d.)