

Lacan's *Siberiethic*

Jacques Lacan

## On a Function that is Not to Be Written - The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVIII, Chapter VI

TO MATHEMATICIANS  
THE KING SUBJECT  
WRITTEN MYTH  
THE NO-MORE-THAN-ONE  
TWO LOGICS

**T**HIS Seminar on "The Purloined Letter", I don't yet know what it might yield.

Can you hear me back there in the fourth row? Fantastic. At least there's room to breath in here. Perhaps it will allow for a better rapport. For example, in one instance, I could ask someone to leave. At the other extreme, I could have an attack of nerves and leave myself. Well, in the other amphitheatre things were a little too much like the majority of cases, where people believe a sexual relation exists, because everyone was crammed in as if it were a nightclub. This gives me the opportunity to ask you to raise a hand.

How many of you, following my express suggestion, made the effort to read pages 30-41 of what is known as my *Écrits*? Go on – raise your hands. You can raise your hands here. That's not very many. I'm not sure I won't have an attack



of nerves and simply leave, as after all, there are some minimum requirements to be able to ask someone what relation to what I said I was talking about, namely the phallus, they could possibly sense from these pages.

Look, I am kind. I am not going to put anyone on the spot, but who feels like saying something about it? Even this, why not, that there's scarcely any way of making anything of it?

Would someone please be so kind as to communicate a little scrap of reflection to me that may have been inspired, I won't say by these pages, but by what I said last time about what they consist of to my way of thinking.

Look. You. Have you re-read these pages?

You haven't re-read them. Well get the hell out then!

Well, it is rather annoying. All the same, I'm not going to read them to you. It's really too much to ask of me. Anyway, I am a little surprised not to be able to get a response, except by teasing you.

It really is very annoying.

## I

In these pages, I speak, very precisely, only about the function of the phallus as it is articulated within a certain discourse.

Having said this, at that time, I hadn't yet begun to construct the various forms of that tetradic combination, with four vertices, that I presented to you last year. Nevertheless, I would say that, since that level of my construction, since that time, I have directed my aim, if I can put it like that (it's going a bit far, being able to take a shot is already something), in such a way that I do not think it at odds now with a more advanced stage of this construction.

Of course, when I said last time (I sometimes let myself go like that, especially when I need to give the impression of pausing for breath) that I admired myself, I hope that you didn't take that at face value. What I admired was rather the fact that the outline I gave, at a time when I was beginning to plough a certain furrow with respect to certain reference points, is something that is now not simply to be rejected out of hand and is something that I am not ashamed of. This is what I ended on last year, shame, and it is rather remarkable. Perhaps, one could even take a little something from it, a rough draft like that – an encouragement to continue.

If I can put it like this, everything signifying that can be caught there is altogether striking and there it is precisely what is in question. That is what it is all about. I went to fish out this *Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"* and I think that, after all, the fact that I put it at the start of my *Écrits*, flying in the face of all chronology, perhaps showed that I had the idea that it was, in short, the best way of introducing them.

We now will  
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There are some minimum requirements that I said I was talking about, namely these pages. I'm on the spot, but who feels like that there's scarcely any way of communicating a little scrap of what I won't say by these pages, but by my way of thinking.

But then! I'm not going to read them to you. It's a little surprised not to be able to get

about the function of the phallus as I began to construct the various forms that I presented to you last year. I'm not going to read them to you. It's a little surprised not to be able to get

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Something that can be caught there is what is in question. That is what it is in "The Purloined Letter" and I think that, in fact, I'm not ashamed of. This is what is remarkable. Perhaps, one could say that – an encouragement

We now come to the remark that I make about this notorious man *who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man*. If, at that moment, I made a point of saying that it should be translated literally, as *ce qui est indigne aussi bien que ce qui est digne d'un homme*, it was because the phrase must be taken en bloc. The unspeakable, shameful aspect, which does not get said as far as a man is concerned, is clearly there, to spell it out: the phallus. It is not correct to translate this unit by fragmenting it in two: *ce qui est digne d'un homme aussi bien que ce qui est indigne de lui*. It is equally important to keep the unitary character of the phrase I quote: *the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber, la connaissance qu'à le voleur de la connaissance qu'à le volé de son voleur*. This aspect of knowing who it is, in other words the fact of having imposed a certain fantasy of himself, of being precisely the man who dares all things, is the key to the situation, as Dupin immediately says.

That's what I say and I won't go back over it again, for, to tell the truth, what I have indicated to you would have made it possible for anyone who had gone to any trouble with a text like that to put forward most of the articulations that I will, perhaps, have to develop, unfold, construct today, as you will see in a second moment, after you have heard what perhaps I will have more or less managed to say, which, in short, can be found already written there, and not only written, but with all the same necessary articulations, those I believe I will have to take you through. Thus, all that is there has not only been sifted and bound, but is clearly made up of signifiers that are available for a more elaborate signification, that of a teaching, my own, which I would qualify as being without precedent, without precedent except for Freud himself and in so far as it defines that preceding moment in such a way that its structure must be read in its impossibilities.

For example, can one say that, properly speaking, Freud formulated the impossibility of the sexual relationship? He did not formulate it as such. If I have done so, it is simply because it is quite easy to say. It is written all over the place. It is written in what Freud wrote. One only has to read it. Only, later on, you will see why you don't read it. I am trying to say it and say why I do read it.

The letter then is *purloined* [in English in the original], not *stolen* [*volée*], as I explain, this is how I begin, it *will make a detour*, or as I translate it myself, it is a letter *en souffrance*. This is how this little piece of writing begins and it ends with the fact that it nevertheless arrives at its destination. I hope there will be a few more who will read it before I see you again, which won't be for some time, because you won't see me now until May. There will be time enough to read the forty pages of *The Purloined Letter*.

At the end of it, I insist on underlining what is essential about it and why translating it as *La Lettre volée* is not correct. *The Purloined Letter* means that, all the same, it arrives at its destination. And I give this destination. I give it as the fundamental destination of every letter, I mean epistle. It arrives in the hands, let's say, not even of him, nor of her, but of those who can understand nothing

about it, namely, when it comes down to it, the police. Of course, they are completely incapable of understanding anything at all of this substrate, this material of the letter. I underline and explain this over a number of pages and it is for this reason that the police are not even capable of finding it. Poe's invention, his fabrication, everything in it is very nicely put; it is magnificent. The letter is of course beyond the reach of any explication of space, since that is what is at stake. It's what the police, first, and then Prefect come to say. At the Minister's lodgings, it is certain that the letter is there, so as to be always ready to hand, space has literally been marked out in squares, without it being found.

It is amusing, is it not, that every time I let myself go and follow my inclination, from time to time, I end up returning to certain considerations about space, and why not?

For some time now, since Descartes' time, this notorious space has been the most cumbersome thing in the world for our logic. All the same, it gives us an opportunity to discuss it, should it be necessary to add it as a sort of note in the margin, as what I call the imaginary dimension.

All the same there are people who fret over it, not over that piece of writing [*écrit*] in particular, on others, and there are even those who have sometimes kept notes on what I said, at a certain time, for example, on identification. That year, 1961-1962, I must say my whole audience was thinking about something else, except, I don't know, for one or two who came from outside and who did not exactly know what was going on. There I spoke of the *unary trait*, people now worry (and it seems to be legitimate) over the question of whether this unary trait should be put on the side of the symbolic or that of the imaginary? And why not on that of the real? As such, such as it was, since that is how it goes, a baton, *ein einziger Zug*, it is of course in Freud that I went to fish for it.

This raises a few questions, as I already indicated a little last time, by remarking that it used to be simply impossible to think anything coherent about the dividing line between logic and mathematics, so difficult, so problematic for mathematicians. Can everything be reduced to pure logic, in other words, to a discourse that is supported by a specific structure? Is there not an absolutely essential element that remains, whatever we do in order to insert it into this structure and reduce it – a last kernel that is nevertheless left over and which is called intuition?

Undoubtedly, this is the question that Descartes set out from. I will draw your attention to the fact that, for Descartes, mathematical reasoning extracts nothing efficacious, nothing creative, nothing at all of the order of reasoning, only his point of departure does, namely an original intuition, one that he postulates, institutes, from his original distinction between extension and thought. This Cartesian opposition, established more by a thinker than by a mathematician (one who was certainly not incapable of introducing new things in mathematics, as the facts show), has of course been enriched much more by the mathematicians themselves. It was the first time that something came to

mathematics by way of intuition. It seems to me quite certain that it will be easy to find some of these things among mathematicians of all times in consideration for what has been done in the schools of philosophy. It is now that, undoubtedly, the question of intuition and reasoning is being raised.

It is for this reason that I think that there has a certain relation to what I have just said. It seems to me that the term *intuition* regarding the relation between logic and mathematics reached this first edge of what I have written with respect to the question of mathematics take not only the Euclidian space owes its origin to intuition.

On the other hand, when we speak of mathematical operations, of the manipulation of lower letters, of Greek letters or German letters, we only have to follow it in its own right, mathematical reasoning is not going to go a little further for you.

As I keep repeating to you, it is not about and what was, for a long time, the problem in demonstrating Euclid's proposition. And because of this even today we speak of a general triangle or a particular triangle. Whatever you do, it is the same story, three angles of a triangle can be incorrect to say that a triangle and an equilateral triangle are the same thing.

This has worried many people, it is in the right place to recall that there have been various people who have tried to do this, right up to Husserl. The snag, namely that mathematical reasoning homogeneous with Euclid's drawings. And this is what makes a difference.

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seems to me quite certain (you are welcome to contradict me if you can, it would  
be easy to find someone more competent in this matter than I): that the  
mathematicians of antiquity pursued their progress without the slightest  
consideration for what might have been going on in the schools of wisdom, in  
the schools of philosophy, of whatever kind. It is a different matter nowadays,  
now that, undoubtedly, the Cartesian impulse concerning the distinction between  
intuition and reasoning has had a profound influence on mathematics itself.

It is for this reason that I cannot but find in it a vein, an effect of something that  
has a certain relation to what I am trying to negotiate in the field at stake here. It  
seems to me that the remark that I am able to make (at the point that I've reached  
regarding the relationship between speech and writing, at least now that we've  
reached this first edge, concerning what is specific about the function of the  
written with respect to any discourse) is perhaps of a kind to make the  
mathematicians take note of what I indicated last time, that the very intuition of  
Euclidian space owes something to writing.

On the other hand, what in mathematics is called the logical reduction of the  
mathematical operation cannot occur without, has no other support than, the  
manipulation of lower or upper case letters of various alphabetical sets, I mean  
Greek letters or Germanic letters, many different alphabets. To confirm this you  
only have to follow its history. Any manipulation that moves logical reduction in  
mathematical reasoning forward requires this support. I will try to push this a  
little further for you.

As I keep repeating to you, I don't see any essential difference between this  
and what was, for a long time, for a whole era, the seventeenth and eighteenth  
centuries, the problem for mathematical thought, namely the need for drawing  
in demonstrating Euclid's proof. At least one of the triangles has to be drawn.  
And because of this everybody panics. Is this triangle that has been drawn a  
general triangle or a particular triangle? It is quite clear that it is always  
particular. Whatever you prove for triangles in general (namely, that it is always  
the same story, three angles formed by two straight lines), it is clear that it would  
be incorrect to say that this triangle could not be both a right-angled isosceles  
triangle and an equilateral triangle. So it is always particular.

This has worried mathematicians enormously. Of course, as this is not the  
right place to recall it, I am not here to display erudition, I will not mention the  
various people who have taken up this question since Descartes, Leibniz and  
others, right up to Husserl. It seems to me that they have never seen the real  
snag, namely that writing is there on both sides, rendering intuition and  
reasoning homogenous with one another. In other words, the writing of little  
letters does not have a less intuitive function than the one at stake in good old  
Euclid's drawings. All the same, the important thing is to know why people think  
it makes a difference.

I don't know if I should point this out to you, but it seems to me that the consistency of space, of Euclidian space, of space enclosed in three dimensions, should be defined in a completely different way. If you take two points, they are at equal distance from each other, if I can put it like that, the distance from the first to the second being the same as from the second to the first. You could take three and make it so that this is still true, in other words that each is at an equal distance from each of the other two. You could take four and make it so that it would still be true. I have never heard this pointed out explicitly. You could take five, but this time don't rush on and say that you could also put them at equal distance from each of the four others because you will not be able to do so, at least in our Euclidean space. For these five points to be at equal distance from each of the others you would have to construct a fourth dimension. There you are.

Of course, it is very easy to do this with letters and then it holds up very well. One can demonstrate that a four-dimensional space is perfectly coherent, in that one can show the link between its coherence and the coherence of real numbers. It is even on this very basis that it all holds together.

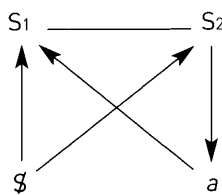
But in the end, it is a fact that, beyond the tetrahedron, intuition always has to be supported by the letter.

## II

I GOT started on this because I said that the letter that always arrives at its destination is the letter that arrives in the hands of the police, who understand nothing about it.

The police, as you know, were not born yesterday. Three pikes on the soil, three pikes on the campus, if you know a little of what Hegel wrote, you will know that it is the State. The State and the police, for anyone who has reflected a little, and Hegel would not be badly placed in this respect, are exactly the same thing. This rests on a tetradic structure.

In other words, as soon as we put something like the letter in question, we have to leave behind my little schemas from last year which were constructed, you remember, like this:



*The Discourse of the Master*

Here is the basic character of the letter, which is broken. If these letters are put one another on the same direction, the letter is broken very precisely, it is broken at the tetradic level. We can see the instance of the letter with it by remaining with it, it is always broken.

It is on this basis of the tetrahedron, the letter, that my discourse is constructed. To be eliminated, it is necessary to step into the structure. The letter has a meaning, we can say which, I repeat, is not extraordinary, it is the one it makes a meaning of (nothing), is the letter.

He understands nothing, nevertheless, it is given that it is the letter, underline that that is nothing with it. In other words, that, in all probability, it is. What gives it its meaning, subject, the King, what is this, that it is sure (yes) this meaning of "contradiction" and given you to read.

As there are letters, a Minister, what is that it is solely, that the said letter is moved, changes of colour, whole text, what is heard, turns on the letter.

But once heard, in some way, returned to him, namely, the letter.

to you, but it seems to me that the space enclosed in three dimensions, that way. If you take two points, they are not like that, the distance from the second to the first. You could take other words that each is at an equal distance and make it so that it could take four and make it so that it is pointed out explicitly. You could take that you could also put them at equal distance because you will not be able to do so, at the points to be at equal distance from each other in a fourth dimension. There you are. The letters and then it holds up very well. The space is perfectly coherent, in that sense and the coherence of real numbers. They are together.

In the tetrahedron, intuition always has

the letter that always arrives at its destination in the hands of the police, who understand

what Hegel wrote, you will know that for anyone who has reflected a little, the two respects, are exactly the same thing.

Something like the letter in question, we have seen last year which were constructed,

Sc

a

the Master

Here is the discourse of the master, as perhaps you remember, and it is characterised by the fact that, of the six edges of the tetrahedron, one is broken. If these structures are turned on the edges of the circuit that follow one another on the tetrahedron (this is a condition) and are fitted in the same direction, the variation of what the structure of discourse is gets established, very precisely in so far as it rests at a certain level of construction, which is the tetradic level. We can no longer be content to remain at this level as soon as the instance of the letter emerges. It is even because one can only be content with it by remaining at this level, that one of the sides of what makes a circle is always broken.

It is on this basis that, in a world such as is structured by a certain tetrahedron, the letter only arrives at its destination by finding the one whom, in my discourse on *The Purloined Letter*, I designate with the term subject. It is not to be eliminated in any way nor withdrawn on the pretext that we are taking some steps into the structure. If what we have discovered under the term unconscious has a meaning, we must not in any way, even at this level, disregard the subject, which, I repeat, is irreducible. But the subject distinguishes itself through its extraordinary imbecility. This is what counts in Poe's text, through the fact that the one it makes a mockery of here, when it comes down to it (and it is not for nothing), is the King, who here shows himself as subject.

He understands absolutely nothing and his whole police structure will nevertheless not be able to ensure that the letter does not come within his reach, given that it is in the custody of the police – who can do nothing about it. I even underline that, had it been found among his papers, a historian could have done nothing with it. On one of the pages of what I wrote about this letter, one can say that, in all probability, no one but the Queen knows what the meaning of the letter is. What gives it its weight is that, if the only person that it concerns, namely the subject, the King, were to have it in his grasp, the only thing he would understand is this, that it surely means something, and that (and this is where the scandal lies) this meaning escapes him, the subject. The term "scandal" and again "contradiction" are in the right place in these four last little pages that I have given you to read. I underline it.

As there are a few here who have read Poe before, you should know that there is a Minister mixed up in the affair. He's the one who filched the letter. It is clear that it is solely according to this circulation of the letter that, in the course of the said letter's movements, the Minister goes through some changes, like the changes of colour on a fish. In truth, the letter's essential function, which my whole text plays a little too freely with, but that's what it takes to get oneself heard, turns on the fact that it has a feminising effect.

But once he no longer has it, the letter, without his being aware of it, he is in some way returned to the dimension that his whole plan was intended to make him, namely the man who dares all things. And I insist on the turn of events in

what happens and it is exactly on this that this Poesque utterance ends. It is at that moment that the thing appears, *monstrum horrendum*, as it says in the text.

This is what he had wanted to be for the Queen, who, of course, took account of it, since she tried to get the letter back. But in the end, it is with him that the game is played out. It is now our friend Dupin's turn, namely the most cunning of the cunning, the one to whom Poe assigns the role of throwing something that I readily call, and I underline this in the text, dust in our eyes. Namely, that we believe that the most cunning of the cunning exists and that he truly understands and knows everything – that, being inside the tetrahedron, he understands how it is made.

I have ironized enough about these certainly very clever things, namely the play on words in relation to *ambitus*, *religio*, and *honesti homines*, in order simply to say that, as far as I am concerned, I have gone a little further in my search for the little beast. Have I not? In truth, it is somewhere. It is somewhere, if we follow Poe, yet one could ask whether Poe really managed to make it out.

Namely that, through the sole fact of having fallen into his hands, the letter feminises Dupin in turn, enough at least for it to be precisely at this moment that he is unable to contain himself and expresses some rage towards the Minister, who believes everyone to be sufficiently at his mercy to have made no other record, but who is of such a character that he, Dupin, nevertheless knows he has deprived him of what could have allowed him to continue to play his role if ever he had to show his hand. He sends him this message in the note that he substituted for the stolen letter, *Un dessein si funeste/S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste*.

As I might say, it is a question of knowing whether, when it comes to it, Poe realises the consequences of the fact that Dupin sends a sort of message beyond all realms of possibility, for God knows if it will ever happen that the Minister will take out the letter and find himself deflated at one and the same stroke. That is to say that, like the letter, here, castration is suspended, yet perfectly realised.

I also indicate this eventuality that does not seem to me to have been determined in advance [*écrit d'avance*]. This only gives greater value to what Dupin writes as a message to the person who he has just deprived of what he believes to be his power. He rejoices at the thought of what is going to happen (before whom? to what end?) when the person concerned makes use of this little *billet doux*. What we could say is that Dupin enjoys [*Dupin jouit*]. This is the question that I opened up last time by asking: are the narrator and the one who writes one and the same? What is incontestable is that the narrator, the subject of the statement, the one who speaks, is Poe. Does Poe enjoy Dupin's jouissance, or elsewhere? That is what I will endeavour to show you today.

I am speaking of *The Purloined Letter* as I articulated it myself. Here is an illustration that I can give of the question that I posed last time. Are the person who writes and the one who speaks in his own name as the narrator in a piece of writing not radically different? At this level it is noticeable.

In fact, what happens is what I would call, in this little essay, the most cunning is equally deceived and

The King has come to the end of his days.

The Queen does not over heels for this man who castrated him, not this

The Minister to deceive him at all, because he is not other: either he will be pleasant (in principle) or really has one of those feelings, namely hatred. He loves him all the more at the same, starting to suspect. Because he will, of course, with him, it's because he will in time, but in no case will end up making a mistake.

Good. Well, that's what I would like to tell you today. If you would like to hear

I will tell you straight away. I think about what I have to say

At a time when there are technicians. They are not

Note that this is a world full of hope. It is a world we have understood nothing of in your head. But that's not

It is not enough to see one must see why the everything that we do around this is you should

In short, that's what I would like to tell you today. It is the same, to a piece of writing



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...et. It is noticeable.

In fact, what happens at the level of the narrator is, when all is said and done, what I would call, forgive me for insisting on the demonstrative character of this little essay, the most perfect castration, which is here demonstrated. Everyone is equally deceived and no one knows it.

The King has certainly been asleep from the beginning and will sleep soundly to the end of his days.

The Queen does not realise that it is almost inevitable that she will fall head over heels for this minister, now that she has him in her clutches, that she has castrated him, no? It is love.

The Minister to be duped is duped, but when all is said and done, it doesn't bother him at all, because, as I clearly explained somewhere, it's either the one thing or the other: either he will be happy to become the Queen's lover, and that should be quite pleasant (in principle, we could say, although it's not to everyone's taste), or if he really has one of those feelings for her of the order of what I have called the only lucid feeling, namely hatred, as I have explained to you very well, if he hates her, she will love him all the more and that will allow him to go so far that he will end up, all the same, starting to suspect that the letter has not been there for quite some time. Because he will, of course, make a mistake. He will say that, if she is going so far with him, it's because she is sure of herself, thus he will open his little scrap of paper in time, but in no case will what everybody wants to happen happen, namely that he will end up making a fool of himself. He will not make a fool of himself.

Good. Well, that is what I have managed to say about what I wrote. And what I would like to tell you now is that this derives its value from the fact that it is unreadable.

If you would like to keep listening to me, this is the point that I will to try to develop.

### III

I WILL tell you straightaway that the only ones capable of telling me what they think about what I try and fob off on them are society people.

At a time when my *Écrits* had not yet come out, they gave me their opinion as technicians. They told me, *We can't understand anything in it.*

Note that this is saying a lot. Something that you understand nothing about is full of hope. It is the sign that you have been affected by it. It is fortunate if you have understood nothing, because you can only ever understand what is already in your head. But still, I would like to try to articulate this a little better.

It is not enough to write something that is deliberately incomprehensible; one must see why the unreadable has a sense. I will point out to you first that everything that we deal with, which is the story of the sexual relation, turns around this: you could think that it is written.

In short, that's what was discovered in psychoanalysis; we referred, all the same, to a piece of writing [*un écrit*]. *Totem and Taboo* is a written myth and I would



even say that this is precisely the only thing that specifies it. Any myth could have been taken, provided that it was in written form. What is specific to a myth that has been written down, as Claude Lévi-Strauss has already remarked, is that, being written, it has only a single form, while the property of myth in general, as Lévi-Strauss's whole oeuvre tries to demonstrate, is to have a very great number of forms. This is what constitutes *Totem and Taboo* as a myth, a written myth.

This written myth could very well be taken as the inscription of what is involved in the sexual relation. But I would still like to point out certain things to you.

It is not a matter of indifference that I should have started off from *The Purloined Letter* because, when it comes to it, if this letter can have this feminising function, it is in so far as the written myth, *Totem and Taboo* was made very precisely to point out to us that saying *The woman* [*La femme*] is unthinkable.

Why unthinkable? Because you cannot say *all the women*! One cannot say *all the women* because it is only introduced in this myth through the fact that the Father possesses *all the women*, which is obviously an indication of an impossibility.

On the other hand, what I underline in *The Purloined Letter* is that there is only *a woman* and not *The woman*, in other words if the function of woman is only deployed through what the great mathematician, Brouwer, in the context of what I proposed to you earlier about mathematical disquisition, called *multi-unity*, then there is a function in play there which is, properly speaking, that of the Father. The Father is there to make himself recognised in his radical function, the function he has always made manifest, each time that it was a question of monotheism, for example.

It is not for nothing that Freud landed on this. It is because there is an entirely essential function that must be reserved as being, properly speaking, at the origin of the written. It is what I call the no-more-than-one [*pas-plus-d'un*].

Aristotle, of course, makes delightful and significant attempts in this regard, as he usually does, in order to make this accessible one rung at a time – to refer to the name of his principle, which could be called the principle of climbing back up the ladder,<sup>1</sup> from cause to cause and from being to being, etc., you really have to stop somewhere. This is what is so considerate about him. He was really speaking for imbeciles – hence, the development of the function of the subject.

The no-more-than-one is posited in a completely original way. Without the no-more-than-one, you cannot even start to write the series of whole numbers. I will show you this on the board next time. There needs to be a 1 and then, after that all you have to do is give up the ghost each time you want to start again, so that each time it makes one more, but not the same. On the other hand, all those that get repeated like this are the same; they can be added up. That's what we call the arithmetical series.

1 [TN, This is a reference to Aristotle's *scala naturae*, which literally translates as the "ladder of nature", but which is most commonly translated as "the great chain of being".]

But let us not  
jouissance.

As experience  
only one structure  
results from this  
something about  
number of forms  
provide a general

The structure  
and on the other  
could be said to  
attention to the  
something that  
woman has not

So, how can we  
the? People make  
moment, you start  
time, and we are  
that people were  
the age of some  
structuring and  
is that doesn't

Can sexual  
this, let's say, of  
the fact that the  
myself, any other  
hole gets produced  
result is different  
hole and as that

The symbol is  
about food, but  
concern that we  
are vague. They  
articulate it with  
only have the  
jouissances which  
outwardly, to all

It is true, we  
found a reference  
with something  
speaking with  
structure, that

ing that specifies it. Any myth could have  
form. What is specific to a myth that has  
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they can be added up. That's what we

which literally translates as the "ladder of nature",  
[re-than-one of being].

But let us return to what seems essential to this subject, concerning sexual  
jouissance.

As experience shows, whatever the particular conditions might be, there is  
only one structure. It turns out that sexual jouissance cannot be written and what  
results from this is structural multiplicity and first of all the tetrad, in which  
something is outlined that situates it, but that remains inseparable from a certain  
number of functions that, in short, have nothing to do with anything that could  
provide a general specification for the sexual partner.

The structure is such that man as such, in so far as he functions, is castrated;  
and on the other hand, something exists at the level of the feminine partner that  
could be simply outlined by means of this trait, whose importance I draw  
attention to, the whole function of the letter when it comes to it – the letter is  
something that *The woman*, if she exists, has nothing to do with. In so far as *The*  
*woman* has nothing to do with the law.

So, how can we understand what has happened? People still make love don't  
they? People make love all the same and the difficulty is apparent the very  
moment you start to take an interest in it. We have been interested in it for some  
time, and we are perhaps still interested in it, only we have lost the key to the way  
that people were interested in it before. But for us, at root, in the blossoming of  
the age of science, we see the crux of it through Freud. When it is a question of  
structuring, of getting the sexual relation to function by means of symbols, what  
is it that poses an obstacle? It is that jouissance gets mixed up in it.

Can sexual jouissance be dealt with directly? It cannot and it is because of  
this, let's say, and let's say no more, that there is speech. Discourse begins from  
the fact that there is a gaping hole there. We can't leave it at that, I mean I deny  
myself any position of origin, but, after all, nothing stops us saying that the gaping  
hole gets produced because discourse begins. It doesn't matter at all as far as the  
result is concerned. What is certain is that discourse is implicated in the gaping  
hole and, as there is no such thing as a metalanguage, it cannot get out of it.

The symbolisation of sexual jouissance, which makes what I am articulating  
about it obvious, where does it borrow its symbolism from? From what does not  
concern it, namely jouissance, in so far as it is prohibited by certain things that  
are vague. They are vague, but not as vague as all that as we have been able to  
articulate it perfectly well under the name of the pleasure principle, which can  
only have one meaning – not too much jouissance. In fact, the stuff of all  
jouissances verges on suffering, it is even through this that we can recognise it  
outwardly. If plants did not outwardly suffer, we would not know that they are alive.

It is thus clear that, in order to structure itself, sexual jouissance has only  
found a reference point in the prohibition of jouissance, in so far as it is named,  
but this prohibited jouissance is not that dimension of jouissance that is, properly  
speaking, lethal jouissance. In other words, sexual jouissance only acquires its  
structure from the prohibition concerning jouissance directed at one's own body,

in other words, very precisely, at this stopping point and frontier where it verges on lethal jouissance. And it only returns to the dimension of the sexual by bringing a prohibition to bear upon the body that one's own body emerges from, namely the body of the mother. Only in this way is there structured and linked into discourse what the law alone can lead there, namely what is involved in sexual jouissance.

When it comes down to it, the partner is in fact reduced to a *one*, not just any one, but the one who bore you. It is around this that everything that can be articulated is constructed, as soon as we enter into this field in a way that can be verbalised. When we come to advance further, I will come back to the way in which knowledge comes to function as a means of enjoying. We can leave this for now.

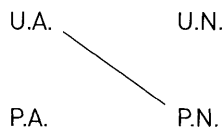
Woman, as such, finds herself in this uniquely composed position through the fact that she is, I would say, prone to [*sujette à*] speech.<sup>2</sup> I will spare you the tangential remarks. While speech is what gives rise to a dimension of truth, the impossibility of this sexual relation is also what gives speech its range in that it can do everything, except be of use at the point where it is produced. Speech tries hard to reduce the woman to subjection, in other words to make of her something from which one expects some sign of intelligence, if I can put it like that. But of course, it is not a question of any real being here.

To say the word, *The woman*, when it comes down to it, as this text has been designed to prove, I mean the in-itself of *The woman*, as if one could say *all the women*, *The woman*, I insist, who does not exist, is precisely the letter – the letter in so far as it is the signifier that the Other does not exist, S(∅)

Before leaving you, I would like to make a remark that outlines the logical configuration of what I am in the process of developing here.

#### IV

IN Aristotelian logic, there are propositional categories. I do not write them with the usual letters found in formal logic, I do not write A for the universal affirmative, I write it U.A. I write U.N for universal negative. That is what it means. I write here particular affirmative and particular negative. I will note that at the level of the Aristotelian articulation, logical discrimination is conducted between the two poles U.A. and P.N.



*Aristotelian Propositional Logic*

<sup>2</sup> [TN, *Sujette à la parole* also simply means "subject to speech", but Lacan is clearly exploiting the double meaning here.]

The universal  
the past which  
perfectly, and  
situated in the

Logical  
this object of  
logical statement  
particular of  
contradiction of  
essence

in the way of  
secondarily. And  
can one know  
negative truth  
as saying the  
eternity is a

What is  
An statement  
constructed by  
near me as  
what this is

The universal  
notation which  
discourse of

U.A. U.N.  
P.A. P.N.

U.A. U.N.  
P.A. P.N.

U.A. U.N.  
P.A. P.N.

U.A. U.N.  
P.A. P.N.

...ing point and frontier where it verges  
 ...the dimension of the sexual by bringing  
 ...s own body emerges from, namely the  
 ...re structured and linked into discourse  
 ... what is involved in sexual jouissance.  
 ... is in fact reduced to a *one*, not just any  
 ...ound this that everything that can be  
 ... enter into this field in a way that can be  
 ... then, I will come back to the way in which  
 ... of enjoying. We can leave this for now.  
 ... is uniquely composed position through  
 ... [s,ette à] speech.<sup>2</sup> I will spare you the  
 ... that gives rise to a dimension of truth, the  
 ... what gives speech its range in that it  
 ... point where it is produced. Speech tries  
 ... other words to make of her something  
 ... e.gence, if I can put it like that. But of  
 ... ng here.  
 ... comes down to it, as this text has been  
 ... The woman, as if one could say *all the*  
 ... exist, is precisely the letter – the letter  
 ... does not exist, S(A)  
 ... make a remark that outlines the logical  
 ... of developing here.

... categories. I do not write them with  
 ... do not write A for the universal  
 ... versal negative. That is what it means.  
 ... particular negative. I will note that at the  
 ... discrimination is conducted between

U.N.

P.N.

...s :nal Logic

... speech", but Lacan is clearly exploiting the

The universal affirmative states an essence. I have stressed often enough in the past what is involved in the statement *all traits are vertical* and which is perfectly compatible with there being no traits. The essence is essentially situated in logic. It is a pure statement of discourse.

Logical discrimination, its essential axis in this articulation, is very exactly this oblique axis that I have just noted here. Nothing counters any recognisable logical statement except the remark that *there are some that do not...* This is the particular negative, *there are some traits that are not vertical*. This is the only contradiction that can be made against an affirmation stated as a matter of essence.

In the way Aristotelian logic functions, the two other terms are completely secondary. Namely, *there are some that...*, particular affirmation, and then, how can one know if it is necessary or not? It proves nothing. And the universal negative, *there are none that...* [*il n'y en a pas qui...*] which is not the same thing as saying *there are some that do not...* [*il y en a qui... pas*] – that proves nothing either, it is a fact.

What I can point out to you is what happens when we pass from this Aristotelian logic to their transposition into mathematical logic, which is constructed by means of what one calls quantifiers. Don't bawl at me if you don't hear me say anything for a while. First, I am going to write and that is precisely what this is all about.

$\forall x.Fx$		$\forall x.\bar{F}x$
$\exists x.Fx$		$\exists x.\bar{F}x$

*The Logic of Quantifiers*

The universal affirmative will now be written with this unverbalisable notation,  $\forall$  It is an upside down A. I said upside down, but in the end, this is not discourse, this is writing. It is a signal, as you will see, to keep chattering on.

$\forall x.F(x)$ , universal affirmative

$\exists x.F(x)$ , here, particular affirmative.

$\forall x.\bar{F}(x)$ , which I will say is a negative. How can I? I am struck by the fact that it has never been articulated in the way that I am going to, in that the bar of negation must be placed above the F(x) and not, as is usually done, over both. You will see why.

Finally, it is over  $\exists x$  that you must put the bar.

I am putting here now myself a bar equivalent to the one that was there and that separated the group of four into two zones. Here, it divides the group in two in a different way.

What I am proposing is that, in this way of writing, everything depends on what can be said about the written.

The distinction between two terms united by a point, written like this,  $\forall x.F(x)$ , has this value of indicating that one could say of all  $x$  (this is what the upside down A signals) that it satisfies what is written  $F(x)$ , that it is not displaced there.

The same goes for the particular,  $\exists x.F(x)$ , but with a different accent. The accent of writing here bears on this, that there is something that can be inscribed, in other words, some  $x$  exist that you can make function in the  $F(x)$ . You then go on to speak about them in the quantifying transposition, by means of the quantifiers of the particular.

As far as the displacement of the distribution is concerned, it pivots around the written. For what is in the foreground, and admissible, nothing has changed as far as the universal is concerned. It still has value, although not the same value.

On the other hand, in what is at stake here,  $\forall x.\bar{F}(x)$ , the difference consists in noticing the non-value of the universal negative, since here, for whatever  $x$  you go on to speak about,  $F(x)$  must not be written.

The same goes for the particular negative. While here, with  $\exists x.F(x)$ , the  $x$  could be written, was admissible and could be written in this formula, with  $\exists x.\bar{F}$ , it is simply said that  $x$  cannot be written.

What does this mean? In these two ways of structuring things, the universal negative has remained in some way neglected, without value, in so far as it makes it possible to say that if you speak of any  $x$  whatever,  $F(x)$  must not be written. In other words, an essential cut operates here.

Well, it is around this that what is involved in the sexual relation turns.

The question concerns what cannot be written in the function  $F(x)$ , from the moment that the function  $F(x)$  is itself not to be written. In this respect, it is what I stated earlier and which is the point around which what we will pick up again when I see you in two months will turn – namely, this function is, properly speaking, what is called unreadable.

17 March 1971

**Translated from the French by Philip Dravers**

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