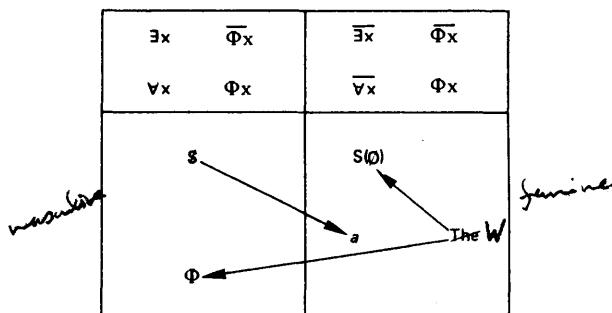


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A LOVE LETTER (UNE LETTRE D'AMOUR)⁵

Coalescence and scission of a and $S(\emptyset)$
 The outside sex
 To speak to no purpose
 Psychoanalysis is not a cosmology
 Knowledge of *jouissance*



After what I have just put up on the board for you, you might think that you know it all. Don't go too fast.

Today I am going to try to talk about knowledge, the knowledge which, in the inscription of the four discourses which I think I was able to show you as underpinning the social tie, I symbolised by writing S_2 . Perhaps I will manage to convey to you why this 2 goes further than being merely secondary in relation to the pure signifier which is inscribed as S_1 .⁶

Since I have chosen to give you the support of this inscription on the blackboard, I will comment on it, briefly I hope. I must confess that I have nowhere written it down and nowhere prepared it. It doesn't strike me as exemplary unless it be, as usual, for producing misunderstandings.

In effect, a discourse such as analytic discourse aims at meaning. Clearly I can only deliver to each of you that part of meaning you are already on the way to absorbing. This has a limit, given by the meaning in which you are living. It is not saying too much to say that this meaning does not go very far.

What analytic discourse brings out is precisely the idea that this meaning is mere semblance.

If analytic discourse indicates this meaning to be sexual, it can only do so by taking its limits into account. There is nowhere any last word unless in the sense in which *word* is *not a word* – as I have already stressed. *No reply's the word* says la Fontaine somewhere or other. Meaning indicates the direction in which it fails.

That much established, which should keep you from understanding too fast, and having taken all the precautions dictated by prudence, or by φρόνησις, as they say in Greek – a language in which many things have been stated which none the less fall short of what analytic discourse has allowed us to articulate – here then, roughly, is what is written up on the blackboard.

First, the four propositional formulae at the top, two on the right and two on the left. Any speaking being whatever is inscribed on one side or the other. On the left, on the bottom line, $\forall x \Phi x$, indicates that it is through the phallic function that man takes up his inscription as all, except that this function finds its limit in the existence of an x through which the function, Φx , is negated $\exists x \bar{\Phi} x$. This is what is called the function of the father from where is given by negation the proposition Φx , which allows for the exercise, through castration, of what makes up for the sexual relation – in so far as the latter can in no way be inscribed. In this case, therefore, the all rests on the exception posed as the term over that which negates this Φx totally.

Opposite, you have the inscription of the woman share of speaking beings. It is expressly stated in Freudian theory, that all speaking beings, whoever they be and whether or not they are provided with the attributes of masculinity – attributes which have yet to be determined – are allowed to inscribe themselves on this side. If they do so, they will allow of no universality, and will be that not all, in so far as there is a choice of coming down on the side of Φx , or of not being part of it.

These are the only possible definitions of the share called man, or else woman, for anyone who finds themselves in the position of inhabiting language.

Underneath, beneath the line going across where it intersects with the vertical division of what is incorrectly called humanity, inasmuch as it can be divided up into sexual identifications, you have a rough lay out of what goes on. On the side of the man, I

have written up here the \emptyset , certainly not so as to privilege it in any way, and the \emptyset which supports it as signifier and which can equally well be embodied by the S_1 . Of all signifiers this is the signifier for which there is no signified, and which, in relation to meaning, symbolises its failing. This is the half-sense, the *indefinite* par excellence, or if you like, the *reti-sense*. Since this \emptyset is thus duplicated by the signifier on which basically it does not even depend, so it only ever relates as a partner to the *objet a* inscribed on the other side of the bar. It can never reach its sexual partner, which is the Other, except by way of mediation, as the cause of its desire. On this account, and as is indicated in one of my other drawings by the dotted line joining the \emptyset and the *a*, this can only be a fantasy. This fantasy, in which the subject is caught, is the support as such of what Freudian theory explicitly calls the reality principle.

Now for the other side. This year I am taking up what Freud expressly left aside, the *Was will das Weib?* the *What does the woman want?* Freud argues that there is no libido other than masculine. Meaning what? other than that a whole field, which is hardly negligible, is thereby ignored. This is the field of all those beings who take on the status of the woman – if, indeed, this being takes on anything whatsoever of her fate. Furthermore, she is incorrectly called *the woman*, since, as I have stressed before, once the *the* of *the woman* is formulated by means of a not all, then it cannot be written. There can be no *the* here other than crossed through. This *The* relates, as I hope to show you today, to the signifier O when it is crossed through.

The Other is not only this place where truth falters. It is worth representing what the woman necessarily relates to. Certainly we only have sporadic testimonies of it, which is why I took them last time in their function as metaphor. By her being in the sexual relation radically Other, in relation to what can be said of the unconscious, the woman is that which relates to this Other. This is what I am going to try to articulate a little more precisely today.

The woman relates to the signifier of this Other, in so far as, being Other, it can only remain always Other. I can only presume here that you will think back to my statement that there is no Other of the Other. As the place where everything of the signifier which can be articulated comes to be signified, the Other is, in its very foundation, radically the Other. Which is

why this signifier, with this bracket open, marks the Other as crossed through – S(\emptyset).

How can we conceive that the Other might, somewhere, & that to which one half – since that is roughly the biological proportion – one half of speaking beings relates. And yet that is what is written up on the blackboard by means of the arrow pointing from the *The*. This *The* cannot be said. Nothing can be said of the woman. The woman relates to S(\emptyset), which means that she is already doubled, and is not all, since on the other hand she can also relate to Φ .

Φ is assigned this phallus which I specify as being the signifier which has no signified, the signifier supported in man by phallic *jouissance*. What is it? – other than this, sufficiently stressed by the importance of masturbation in our practice, the *jouissance* of the idiot.

2

After that, to help you recover, all that remains is for me to speak to you about love. Which I will do in an instant. But what is the point of my ending up speaking to you about love, given that it scarcely follows the pretensions of analytic discourse to being something of a science.

This *something of a science* – you are hardly aware of it. Of course you are aware, since I have pointed it out to you, that there was a moment when with some justification we were able to boast that scientific discourse had been founded on the Galilean turning point. I have stressed this often enough to presume that some of you will have gone back to the sources, meaning to the work of Koyré.

In relation to scientific discourse, it is very difficult to hold equally present two terms which I will give to you now.

On the one hand, this discourse has given rise to all kinds of instruments which, from the point of view involved here, we must classify as gadgets. This makes you to a much greater extent than you are aware, the subjects of instruments which, from the microscope to the radio-television, become elements of your existence. At the present time, you cannot even measure their magnitude, but that doesn't make this any less part of what I call scientific discourse, a discourse being that which

determines a form of social tie.

On the other hand, and this is where things don't jell, there is a subversion of knowledge (*connaissance*). Up till now, in relation to knowledge nothing has ever been conceived of which did not share in the fantasy of inscribing a sexual tie – and we cannot even say that the subjects of the ancient theory of knowledge were not conscious of the fact.

For example, simply take the terms active and passive which dominate everything which has ever been thought up on the relationship of form to matter, a relationship which is so fundamental and which Plato, and then Aristotle, refer to at every step they take regarding the nature of things. It is visibly, palpably the case that these propositions are only upheld by a fantasy of trying to make up for what there is no way of stating that is, the sexual relation.

The strange thing is that something, albeit something ambiguous, has none the less come out of this crude polarity, which makes matter passive and form the agency which brings to life, namely, that this bringing to life, this animation, is nothing other than the *a* whose agency animates what? – it animates nothing, it takes the other for its soul.

Look at the way that the idea of a God has progressed through the ages – not that of the Christian faith, but the God of Aristotle, the unmoved mover, the supreme sphere. The idea that there should be a being such that all lesser beings than he can have no other aim than to be as great a being as they can be, is the whole basis of the idea of Good in Aristotle's *Ethics*, which I urged you to look at so as to grasp its impasses. If we now base ourselves on the inscription on the blackboard, it becomes clear that the supreme Being, which is manifestly mythical in Aristotle, the immobile sphere from which originate all movements, whether changes, engenderings, movements, translations or whatever, is situated in the place, the opaque place of the *jouissance* of the Other – that Other which, if she existed, the woman might be. It is in so far as her *jouissance* is radically Other that the woman has a relation to God greater than all that has been stated in ancient speculation according to a path which has manifestly been articulated only as the good of mankind.

The objective of my teaching, inasmuch as it aims at that part of analytic discourse which can be formulated, or put down, is to dissociate the *a* and the O, by reducing the former to what

belongs to the imaginary and the latter to what belongs to the symbolic. That the symbolic is the support of that which was made into God, is beyond doubt. That the imaginary is supported by the reflection of like to like, is certain. And yet, it has come to be confused with the S(O) beneath which it is written on the board, and it has done so under pressure of the function of being. It is here that a rupture or severance is still needed. And it is in this precisely that psychoanalysis is something other than a psychology. For psychology is the non-achieving of this rupture.

3

At this point I am going to allow myself a break by reading you something I wrote for you a while back – on what? – simply from where it might be possible to speak of love.

Speaking of love, in analytic discourse, basically one does nothing else. And how could it escape us that, as regards everything that the discovery of scientific discourse has made it possible to articulate, it has been one pure and simple waste of time. What analytic discourse brings to bear – which may after all be why it emerged at a certain point of scientific discourse – is that speaking of love is in itself a *jouissance*.

This is confirmed beyond any doubt by the wholly tangible effect that by saying anything – the very rule of the discourse of the analysand – you arrive at the *Lustprinzip* (pleasure principle), and by the most direct route, without there being any need for the elevation to the higher spheres which is the basis of Aristotelian ethics.

The *Lustprinzip* can indeed only be set up through the coalescence of *a* with S(\emptyset).

For us, of course, the O is crossed through. Which doesn't mean that it is enough to cross it through for nothing of it to exist. If I am using this S(\emptyset) to designate nothing other than the *jouissance* of the woman, it is undoubtedly because I am thereby registering that God has not made his exit.

This is roughly what I was writing for your benefit. So what was I writing you? – the only thing one can do with a measure of seriousness, a love letter.

As far as the supposed psychologists are concerned, thanks to

whom all this has gone on for so long, I am one of those who don't do much for their reputation. And yet I fail to see why the fact of having a soul should be a scandal for thought – were it true. If it were true, the soul could only be spoken as whatever enables a being – the speaking being to call him by its name – to bear what is intolerable in its world, which presumes this soul to be alien to that world, that is to say, fantasmatic. In this world, the soul can only be contemplated through the courage and the patience with which it faces it. The proof is that up till now the soul has never had any other meaning.

At this point, *lalangue*, *lalangue* in French, must come to my aid – not, as is often the case, by providing me with a homonym, such as *d'eux* [of them] with *deux* [two], or *peut* [can] with *peu* [little], or take *il peut peu* [he little can] which must surely be there for a purpose – but simply by allowing me to say *on âme* [one souls]. *J'âme, tu âmes, il âme*. You can see that in this case we have to use writing, which even gives *jamais j'âmais* [never have I souled].

The soul's existence can, therefore, be placed in question [*mise en cause*] – cause being the appropriate term with which to ask if the soul be not love's effect. In effect, as long as soul souls for soul [*l'âme âme l'âme*], there is no sex in the affair. Sex does not count. The soul is conjured out of what is *hommosexual*, as is perfectly legible from history.

What I said earlier about the courage and the patience of the soul in bearing the world, is what guarantees that someone like Aristotle, in his search for the Good, stumbles on the fact that each of the beings in the world can only tend towards the greatest being by confusing their own good with that same good which radiates from the supreme Being. It is because it displays this tension towards the Supreme Being, that what Aristotle evokes as *φιλία*, which represents the possibility of a love tie between two of these beings, can equally be inverted in the way I expressed – that it is by their courage in bearing this intolerable relation to the supreme being that friends, *φίλοι*, come to recognise and choose each other. The outsidesex [*hors-sexe*] of this ethic is so evident that I would like to give it the emphasis given somewhere by Maupassant in his coinage of the strange term, *Horla*. The outsidesex [*Horsexe*], such is mankind on whom the soul did speculate.

But it can happen that women too are soulful in love [*âmour-*

euses], that is to say, that they soul for the soul. What on earth could this be other than this soul for which they soul in their partner, who is none the less *homo* right up to the hilt, from which they cannot escape? This can only bring them to the ultimate point – (ultimate not used gratuitously here) of hysteria as it is called in Greek, or of acting the man, as I call it, thereby becoming, they too, hommosexual or outsidesex. For it is difficult for them not to sense from then on the impasse of their soully liking themselves [*se mèment*] in the Other, since after all in being Other there is no need to know that one is.

For the soul to come into being, she, the woman, is differentiated from it, and this has always been the case. Called woman [*dit-femme*] and defamed [*diffâme*]. The most famous things that have been handed down in history about women have been strictly speaking the most defamatory that could be said of them True, the woman has been left the honour of Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi. There's no point in talking about Cornelia to analysts, who scarcely give her a thought, but if you talk to them about any one Cornelia, they will tell you that it won't be very good for her children, the Gracchi – they'll be crack liars till the end of their days.

\That was the beginning of my letter, an *âmusement*.

Earlier I made an allusion to courtly love, which appeared at the point when hommosexual *âmusement* had fallen into supreme decadence, into that sort of impossible bad dream called feudalism. In such depths of political degeneracy, it must have become noticeable that on the side of the woman, there was something which really would no longer do.

The invention of courtly love is in no sense the fruit of what history usually symbolises as the thesis-antithesis-synthesis. And of course afterwards, there was not the slightest synthesis – there never is. Courtly love blazed in history like a meteor and we have since witnessed the return of all its trappings in a so-called renaissance of the old craze. Courtly love has remained an enigma.

A brief aside – when one is made into two, there is no going back on it. It can never revert to making one again, not even a new one. The *Aushebung* [*sublation*] is one of those sweet dreams of philosophy.

After the blazing of courtly love, it was assigned once more to its original futility by something which sprang from an entirely

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different quarter. It took nothing less than scientific discourse, that is, something owing nothing to the suppositions of the ancient soul.

And only this could give rise to psychoanalysis, that is, the objectification of the fact that the speaking being still spends its time speaking to no purpose. It still spends time speaking for the briefest of purposes — the briefest, I say, because it simply keeps at it, that is, for as long as is needed for the thing finally to be resolved (which is what we've got coming to us) demographically.

No way could this sort out man's relationship to women. Freud's genius was to have seen that. Freud, the very name's a laugh — *Kraft durch Freud* [strength through Freud (joy)] there's a programme for you. It is the most hilarious leap in the holy farce of history. Perhaps while this turning point still lasts, we might get a glimmer of something about the Other, because this is what the woman has to deal with.

I would like to add now an essential complement to something which has already been very clearly seen, but which might gain further clarification by our looking at the paths which led to that insight.

What was seen, but only from the side of the man, was that what he relates to is the *objet a*, and that the whole of his realisation in the sexual relation comes down to fantasy. It was of course seen with regard to neurotics. How do neurotics make love? That was where the whole thing started. It was impossible not to notice that there was a correlation with perversions — which lends support to my *objet a*, since, whatever the said perversions, the *a* will be there as their cause.

The funny thing is that Freud originally attributed perversions to the woman — look at the *Three Essays*. Truly a confirmation that when one is a man, one sees in one's partner what can serve, narcissistically, to act as one's own support.

Except that what came after gave ample opportunity for realising that perversions, such as one had thought to locate them in neurosis, were no such thing. Neurosis is dream rather than perversion. Neurotics have none of the characteristics of the pervert. They simply dream that they have, which is natural, since how else could they reach their partner?

It was then that one began to come across perverts — Aristotle having refused to recognise them at any price. There is in them a

subversion of conduct, based on a know-how, linked to a knowledge, a knowledge of the nature of things, which leads directly from sexual conduct to its truth, namely, its amorality. Put some soul in from the start – soulmorality [*âmoralité*].

There is a morality – that is the inference – of sexual conduct. The morality of sexual conduct is implicit in everything that has ever been said about the Good.

Only, by having good to say, you end up with Kant, where morality admits to what it is. This is something which I felt needed to be argued in an article – ‘*Kant with Sade*’ [*Écrits*, (1963)] – morality admits it is Sade.

You can write Sade how you like – with a capital, as a tribute to the poor fool who gave us endless writings on the subject; or with a small letter, which is finally its way of being agreeable, the meaning of the word in old French; or, even better, *çade*, since it has to be said that morality stops short at the level of the *id* [*le çal*]. In other words, what it is all about is the fact that love is impossible, and that the sexual relation founders in non-sense, not that this should in any way diminish the interest we feel for the Other.

Ultimately, the question is to know, in whatever it is that constitutes feminine *jouissance* where it is not all taken up by the man – and I would even say that feminine *jouissance* as such is not taken up by him at all – the question is to know where her knowledge is at.

If the unconscious has taught us anything, it is firstly this, that somewhere, in the Other, it knows. It knows precisely because it is upheld by the signifiers through which the subject is constituted.

Now this is what makes for confusion, since it is difficult for anyone soulful not to believe that everyone in the world knows what they should be doing. If Aristotle upholds his God with that immobile sphere for all to use in pursuit of their own good, it is because this sphere is assumed to know what that good is. This is what the break induced by scientific discourse compels us to do without.

There is no need to know why. We no longer need that knowledge which Aristotle originally started out from. In order to explain the effects of gravitation, we have no need to impute to the stone a knowledge of the place where it must land. By imputing a soul to an animal, we make knowledge the pre-eminent act of nothing other than the body – note that Aristotle

wasn't so wide of the mark – except that the body is made for an activity, a *ένεργεια*, and that somewhere the entelechy of the body is upheld by that substance it calls the soul.

Here analysis adds to the confusion by giving back to us the final cause, and making us state that, at least for everything concerning the speaking being, reality is of one order, that is to say, fantasmatic. How could this in any way be likely to satisfy scientific discourse?

There is, according to analytic discourse, an animal which finds himself speaking, and for whom it follows that, by inhabiting the signifier, he is its subject. From then on, everything is played out for him on the level of fantasy, but a fantasy which can perfectly well be taken apart so as to allow for the fact that he knows a great deal more than he thinks when he acts. But the fact that this is the case is not enough to give us the outlines of a cosmology.

That is the perpetual ambiguity of the term *unconscious*. Obviously the unconscious presupposes that in the speaking being there is something, somewhere, which knows more than he does, but this can hardly be allowed as a model for the world. To the extent that its possibility resides in the discourse of science, psychoanalysis is not a cosmology, although man has only to dream to see re-emerging before him that vast jumble, that lumber room he has to get by with, which doubtless makes of him a soul, and one which can be lovable when something is willing to love it.

As I have said, the woman can love in the man only the way in which he faces the knowledge he souls for. But as for the knowledge by which he is, we can only ask this question if we grant that there is something, *jouissance*, which makes it impossible to tell whether the woman can say anything about it – whether she can say what she knows of it.

At the end of today's lecture, I therefore arrive, as always, at the edge of what polarised my subject, that is, whether the question can be asked as to what she knows of it. It is no different from the question of knowing whether this end point from which she comes, which she enjoys beyond the whole game which makes up her relationship with the man, whether this point, which I call the Other signifying it with a capital O, itself knows anything. For in this she is herself subjected to the Other just as much as the man.

Does the Other know?

There was once a certain Empedocles – Freud happens to make use of him from time to time, much as a corkscrew. We only have a few lines by him, but Aristotle clearly saw what they implied when he commented that basically, for Empedocles, God was the most ignorant of all beings because he had no knowledge of hatred. Later, Christians transformed this into torrents of love. Unfortunately, it doesn't work, because to be without knowledge of hatred, is also to be without knowledge of love. If God does not know hatred, it is clear for Empedocles that he knows less than mortals.

Which might lead one to say that the more man may ascribe to the woman in confusion¹ with God, that is, in confusion with what it is she comes from, the less he hates, the lesser he is, and since after all, there is no love without hate, the less he loves.

Notes

1. The first part of this seminar refers to *La titre de la lettre, une lecture de Lacan* by P. Lacoue-Labarthe and J-L. Nancy (Paris: Galilée, 1973), and has been omitted in translation; wherever possible, subsequent references to this discussion have also been omitted (tr.).
2. Lacan gave his seminars at the psychiatric hospital *Saint Anne* in Paris (Centre hospitalier Saint Anne) up to the time of the split in the *Société française de psychanalyse* in 1964 (tr.).
3. The pun is on *con*, French slang for the female genitals (tr.).
4. Henceforth *the* refers to the French feminine definite article (*la*) (tr.).
5. 'Une lettre d'amour': throughout this section Lacan puns on *amour* (love) and *âme* (soul) – hence *une lettre d'amour* (a love (soul) letter), love as 'soulful' in the dual sense of sexuality's relation to the mystical at the point of its excess, and of love's binding to the ethical at the point of its conventions (tr.).
6. Lacan's four discourses, introduced in his 1969–70 seminar '*L'envers de la psychanalyse*' (SXVIII) are intended to distinguish 'a certain number of stable relations in language' which go beyond 'the always more or less casual utterances of individual speech' (SXVIII, 1, p. 2), according to the place they assign to four basic units: the signifier as such (S_1), the signifying chain (S_2), the subject in its division (\$), the object of desire (a). Each unit is defined by its relation to two others:



What matters is the primacy or subordination given by each form of discourse to the subject in its relation to desire. Permutation of the four basic

units produces four discourses as follows (i) $\frac{S_1}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{S_2}{a}$: *discourse of the master*:

tyranny of the all-knowing and exclusion of fantasy; primacy to the signifier (S_1), retreat of subjectivity beneath its bar ($\$$), producing its knowledge as object (S_2), which stands over and against the lost object of desire (a); (ii) $\frac{S_2}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{a}{a}$: *discourse of the university*: knowledge in the place of the master: $S_1 \rightarrow \frac{\$}{\$}$

primacy to discourse itself constituted as knowledge (S_2), over the signifier as such (S_1), producing knowledge as the ultimate object of desire (a), over and against any question of the subject ($\$$); (iii) $\frac{\$}{\$} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$: *discourse of the hysterick*:

the question of subjectivity: primacy to the division of the subject ($\$$), over his or her fantasy (a), producing the symptom in the place of knowledge (S_1), related to but divided from the signifying chain which supports it (S_2); (iv) $\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\$}{S_1}$: *discourse of the analyst*: the question of desire: primacy to the

object of desire (a), over and against knowledge as such (S_2), producing the subject in its division ($\$$) ($a \rightarrow \$$ as the very structure of fantasy), over the signifier through which it is constituted and from which it is divided (S_1). Each discourse can be produced from the one which precedes it by a quarter turn of its units. Hence Lacan's description of psychoanalysis as the 'hysterisation of discourse . . . the structural introduction via artificial conditions of the discourse of the hysterick' (SXVIII, 3, p. 4). Lacan, therefore, poses analysis against mastery, hysteria against knowing, all of which terms reappear in his account of sexual division in the chapters of *Encore* translated here. Note also the shift away from the earlier formula of language as arbitrary in its effects, to this emphasis on discourse as 'that which determines a form of a social tie' (E, pp. 152–3) 'where does the arbitrary come from, if not from a structured discourse' (O, p. 165), a shift which mirrors the change in his account of sexuality towards the specific fantasies which it supports, as described in the introduction (Part II, section II) (tr.).