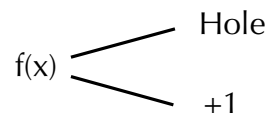


The Purloined Letter and the Tao of the Psychoanalyst

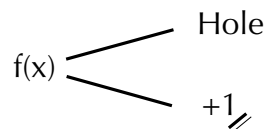
Eric Laurent

Last time I found myself here, at the end of the course *L'Autre qui n'existe pas et ses comités d'éthique*, Jacques-Alain Miller spoke of the possibility of continuing the work of the seminar that had begun that year. This is really what is coming to be realized today, since I envisage this session and the offer that he has given me to speak at his course as an occasion to communicate certain results of my teaching this year, halfway through the university year. I proposed, in effect, to study the function of the plus-One for Lacan, at least certain aspects of this function, in taking into account at once the aspect of the hole and the aspect of the plus-One, that underlies the utilization or the reference to the function of the plus-One.



We had the occasion, last year, to approach the link of this function of the plus-One with the place of the father and the Name-of-the-Father. This place of the plus-One is to be gone into in depth for the psychoanalyst, especially from the perspective of Lacan's *Séminaire V, Les formations de l'inconscient* in the current presentation that Jacques-Alain Miller has made of it. This seminar puts the accent on a place that is extimate to the system of language [*la langue*], distinguished insofar as it is outside the system and yet inside. This place authorizes new meanings that are produced each time that the effect of a *Witz* inscribes a totally new usage or a new way of speaking in language and it allows them to be admitted.

In the perspective constructed from this role of admission that the function of the plus-One fulfills, I wondered how to articulate the latter with the function of the psychoanalyst, which consists in editing the text, in punctuating it.



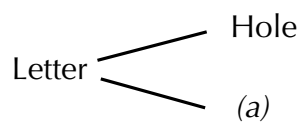
Thus, how to articulate the one who admits new meanings, the effect of sense, with the one whose practice is indexed less on the effect of sense than on scansion; without of course neglecting the fact that the scansion implied by the editing of the text distributes signification and produces effects of sense.

This is not, however, the whole of the definition of this place, which is centered more on punctuation than on sense. It is from this perspective that I have taken up the reading of “Lituraterre” again, an eminent text, in the series of texts by Lacan dating from the beginning of the seventies, to broach the question of the place of the letter, of its relation to semblants and to the effect of sense.

I took up “Lituraterre” again, with all the more keenness that it appeared to me that Jacques-Alain Miller, at the beginning of his course this year, had supplied the matheme that was missing for a clear reading of this text, which is not considered, in general, to be a text that is easy to access.

The Double Function of the Letter

The entire text of “Lituraterre” is centered on two aspects of the function of the letter: the letter insofar as it makes a hole and the letter insofar as it makes an object (*a*).



This text is articulated, in fact, around a reflection on the history of writing, much more than on a history of literature, on a history of

writing, to which correspond two approaches, two apologues, two modes of consideration.

The two approaches to writing correspond to two traditions, Western and Oriental, that Lacan examines one after the other. To each of the two modes of writing, alphabetic or ideographic, corresponds an apologue. For the first, it is “The Purloined Letter;” for the second, I will say that it is a story of water: from high in his plane, crossing the Siberian desert, Lacan sees rivers. It seemed to me that it was a question of the same apologue, and, in any case, it really is a question of grasping in what way the one and the other designate, deliver a message on the letter that indicates the same point.

“Lituraterre” is clearly the rewriting, in the seventies, of “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious,” a text in which Lacan was also particularly interested in two modes of writing, Greek and Chinese, but in another way. Thus, on page 504 of the *Écrits*, the opposition between them is evoked: “. . . is it your figure that traces our destiny for us in the tortoise-shell cracked by the fire, or your lightning that causes the slow shift in the axis of being to surge up from an unnameable night into the *Εν πάντα* of language”.

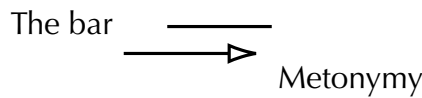
This sentence refers to Chinese writing, which everybody grants derives from a divinatory practice that consists in placing tortoiseshells in a fire and, in the cracks that appear upon them, to foresee destiny, the message of the gods, the writing.

The paths of writing in China are thus based on divinatory practices with which you know to what extent China remains encumbered. Hence, the Bank of China in Hong Kong was only built after some divinatory practices were performed in order to be assured of the circulation of different fluids, and so on.

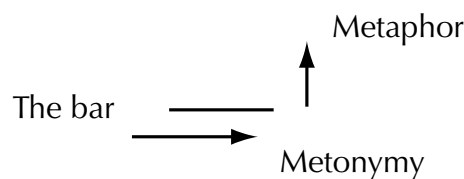
Thus, we have, on the one hand, divination by tortoiseshells placed in the fire and, on the other hand, lightning, the Heraclitian lightning that makes the slow mutation of Being surge forth from the night, and the way in which the One, being condensed in one phrase, comes to name the innumerability of things.

This passage of “The Agency of the Letter,” in which Lacan shares with us his meditation on the different modes according to which Being comes to language, leads us to the diagrams of metaphor and metonymy that appear to him, he says, to operate in Chinese poetry as well as in Western poetry. It is the bar [*barre*] that appears to him as the veritable axis [*arbre*] that organizes the division between them.

Here, in “Lituraterre,” Lacan rereads and reinterprets this place of the bar, whereas, before, he situated it as the reason for the unconscious, as repetition: either it repeated itself below the bar and it was metonymy,



or it crossed the bar, and it was metaphor that punctuated the incessant sliding of the signifier over the signified.



Lacan reconsiders his approach in an amusing way: “[I situated the letter as] reason for the unconscious. Does this not suffice to designate what in the letter, because it needs to insist, is not there rightfully, however much it may pretend to be?” (“Lituraterre,” 13)

Thus, he takes up once more the Saussurian algorithm, with this ‘rightfully,’

$$\frac{S}{s}$$

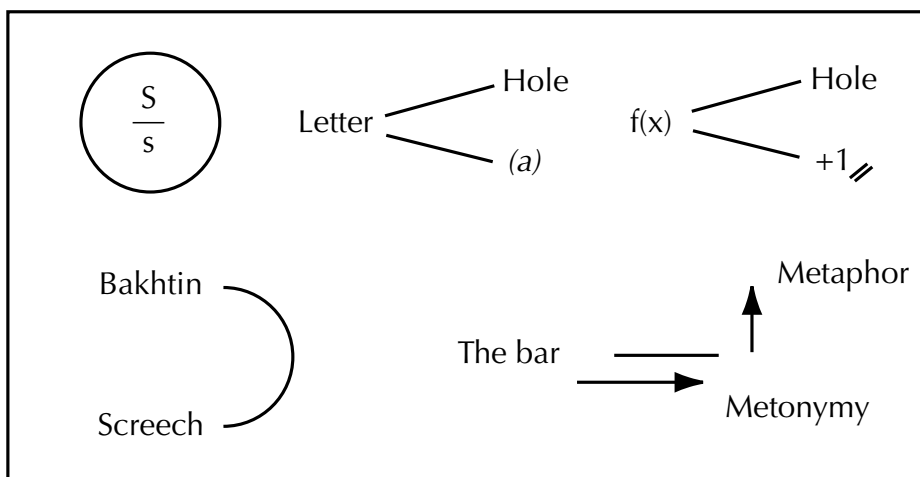
Once the question has been displaced and his teaching has reached the point at which metaphor and metonymy are linked, he wants to take a step further.

We have here a first misunderstanding. The misunderstanding, he says, is that in 1970 he is speaking in the context of the promotion of the written. The context is the implication, differently accentuated at the time by a certain number of authors (Derrida is the most eminent among them; one can also cite Barthes, since Lacan makes reference to him in his text, and, to a lesser or other extent, Michel Foucault), of Lévi-Straussian structuralism, which is too centered, according to them, on structural phonology and on the privileging, they say, of the voice, of speech.

Indeed, the philosophical chorus, which had been dumbfounded for ten years by the approach of Lévi-Strauss, started a comeback, in which Derrida’s lecture on Freud in 1966 at the Institut de psychanalyse was to

mark an important scansion. Lacan replies here, dryly, clearly, and vigorously to Derrida, fairly vigorously to Barthes, and leaves other authors to one side.

From the start, one can reduce the misunderstanding. Lacan does not want to get involved in the promotion of the written. He says, rather, that he delights in the fact that it is our epoch that has truly taken up the reading of Rabelais. Thus, he insists not on the promotion of the written, but on reading: to read Rabelais. What does it mean for this epoch to read Rabelais? He is a monument that has already been visited; what's more, Michelet has made him into the great man of the Renaissance. However, it is our epoch that has focused the reading of Rabelais on his laughter. It is the works of the Russian formalist Michael Bakhtin that have attracted the attention of critics to Rabelais's laughter. Altogether, Rabelais as *homme d'esprit* is known from the diffusion of these works, produced in Russia toward the end of the twenties and subsequently diffused throughout Europe. There is, on the one hand, this Russian school, which makes of Rabelais the laughter of the people of the Renaissance, replying to the collapse of scholastic semblants, and then you have other readings, notably that of the English with Michael Screech who, instead of considering Rabelais's laughter as a popular laughter, shows that it is the laughter of the humanists and that Rabelais's most smutty jokes are derived in general, with very precise references, from a piece of writing by Erasmus.



Let us leave these battles and simply highlight what our epoch brings to the fore; it is the effect of assuagement produced by these writings of Rabelais that is very important. The first texts of Kant were received with floods

of tears; as a moral effect it was so beautiful that it made generations of students cry; with Rabelais it was, and still is, laughter. And this is what is beautiful in their achievement: such writings provoke passions, like Lacan's *Écrits* in 1966, that made people laugh and cry at the same time.

So, it is necessary to emphasize this all the more given that Lacan borrowed the writing of the *sinthome* from Rabelais, and he ended up by making it his banner. To declare in this way that the letter, in literature, must be grasped in the effect that it has and not in its signification, clarifies the place that the two apologues developed by Lacan will occupy: "The Purloined Letter" and the apologue that I will entitle *Flight over the Letter*.

I will recall that *Flight over the Letter* [*Vol sur la lettre*], the aerial flight over the letter, is written on the ground. Evidently, "The Purloined Letter" [*La lettre volée*] is not here for nothing, given the fact that it is from a story of flight [*vol*] that Lacan constructed the second apologue.

What the Letter Is Not

It is a matter of considering, first, what the letter is not. The letter is not an imprint, and Lacan is precise about this. Contrary to what Freud says in "The Mystic Writing Pad" where, departing from the inscription or from the instance of the letter in the unconscious, he speaks about it as printing with these little tools, slates said to be magic that children are no longer familiar with today—they have computer screens. There were two sheets on which one pressed and made an imprint; you lifted the two sheets and suddenly there was nothing there. Nowadays, you simply turn off the computer screen. This metaphor of writing appears incorrect to Lacan; it does not seem to him that writing is printing. Here, he attacks what Derrida had advanced in his lecture of 1966, where it was a question of the first fundamental trace, a primary imprint, outside sense, which sense would then try to catch up with, never managing to reabsorb the primary outside-sense that makes a trace.

Hence, it is not an imprint, and, second, it is not an instrument. Indeed, he says "That it [the letter] is an instrument specific to the writing of discourse [that one can write discourse with the letter] does not render it improper to designate a word taken for another [this is a metaphor since with writing you can write discourse, you can always write a word that comes in the place of another],

$$\frac{\cancel{S}}{S}$$

or even a word taken up by another [and this is metonymy,

$$S \xrightarrow{\cancel{S}} S$$

hence, in “The Agency of the Letter,” Lacan gave as an example the way in which the word *tête* is taken up in *tempête*], in the sentence, and so to symbolize certain signifying effects, but it does not require that it be primary in these effects.”

$$T[\text{emp}]ête \quad \frac{\cancel{S}}{S \rightarrow S}$$

It is here that Lacan himself puts into question the ‘primary’ place of the bar, and struggles against the thesis of a primary imprint or the character of a primary instrument that the letter would have. In this way, he challenges the primary place of the bar that divides metaphor and metonymy. He says that this can serve for that, but it is not sufficient.

Thus, he criticizes himself, as he often does: if it is not an instrument, if it is neither trace nor imprint, what consequence can be drawn?

It seems to me that Lacan relates the ensemble of what has been considered as the genesis of writing, or as the history of writing in the West, back to a nonpertinent knowledge [*savoir*]. In one paragraph, quite an admirable one as a matter of fact, he says, “The question is to know whether what the textbooks seem to make a display of, namely that literature is the using up of leftovers, is an affair of collocation in the written of what would firstly be song, spoken myth, or dramatic procession.”

Indeed, it is written everywhere, at least in the serious textbooks on the history of writing, that at a certain moment the Greeks judged it timely to reunite the hymns with the gods, the songs, the myths that they recounted to each other or the dramatic processions, that is, the tragedies, and to put them down on paper. In fact, we still have the written record of the order that Pericles gave one day to establish the best possible version of Homer’s texts, this version that was the glory of Athens, until the Hellenic sovereign, one of the Ptolemaists, in fact, laid his hands on it and took it to the library at Alexandria.

Thus, there are these “collocations,” as Lacan says, “in the written, of what would be, firstly, song, spoken myth, dramatic procession.” Here we have what writing would be: a means of allowing this, and thus transforming all these texts into a useful instrument.

Now, what all these textbooks well and truly avoid is the effect of *jouissance* thus produced. What was it, for Pericles, to gather together Homer’s texts? What did it inscribe, other than his nostalgia for not having been one of Homer’s heroes? Would he have suffered a slight effect of passivation from it, this first tyrant, unless he was not, already, the second, and hence, already nostalgic for the time when there were real men? So here we have what brings us back to “The Purloined Letter.” There’s a letter, a love letter addressed to the queen by her lover, which undergoes a detour, with the paradox that those who come to be in possession of the letter start, shall we say, to busy themselves with their appearance. The unscrupulous minister, the plain-speaking man, the chap who is “up-for-anything,” for any kind of treason, who is a bit like Alcibiades, takes the letter in order to do what appears to him to be opportune and thereby becomes a dandy of the nineteenth century. He becomes Lord Byron, he busies himself with his tie, with his posture; he is on his sofa and he poses, while the police bustle about him, seeming to say to them: “Well done, if you find it.” Finally, he ends up back there in the position of the dandy, mocking the men of action. Dupin who, being more cunning, armed with his green glasses, is going to snatch the letter from the minister, and in so doing will find himself likewise encumbered, in a different way but with the same traits of dandyism. He ends up in the style of Edgar Allan Poe, of Baudelaire. He also becomes a man of the nineteenth century.

Lacan summarizes this in the following way: “The letter produces an effect of feminization.” This term has an initial sense that is Freudian, since for Freud the feminine position consists of actively searching for passive aims; it is the ‘feminine masquerade’. We have an initial sense of the position of passivation of these men of action. In a second and more profound sense, among all these people who bustle around and who, in fact, are all men, the grand enigma is the position of the queen. As for her, amid all this, what does she want—what does the woman want?

This second level allows us to note that the feminization induced by the letter, that is, the very sense or senses of the tale, the effects of signification,

the story itself, all that is told in the tale, do not account for the position of jouissance, for the enigma of her position. It suffices that this enigmatic place be a place in reserve. In this respect, the place of jouissance surges up as, at once enigma, a hole in sense, and, at the same time, the place of this jouissance. To read “The Purloined Letter” against the grain of signification, one must distinguish the share of jouissance (*a*) and the effect of sense or the effect of signification introduced by the path taken by the signifier.

Thus, Lacan is opposed to the philosophical position that simply organizes itself according to the perspective of the opposition of sense and outside-sense, and does so in relation to Being.

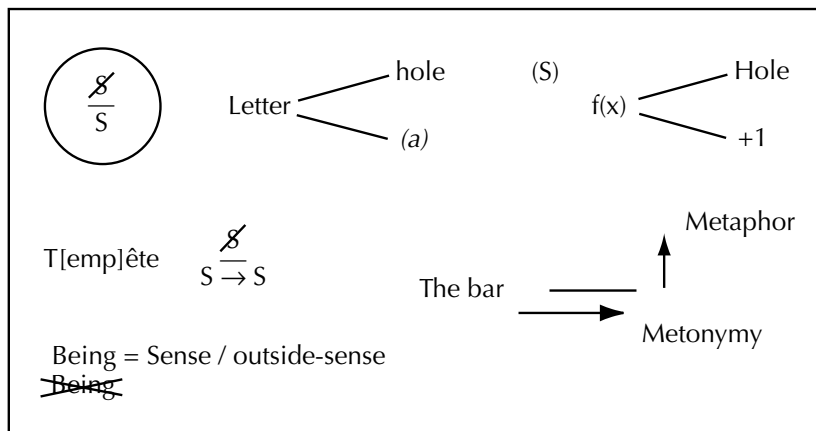
Sense / outside-sense

Being, as that which has some sense, is the status from which the philosopher interrogates contemporary non-sense. To put this in Heideggerian terms, which Derrida cites, it is ‘Being crossed out [*barré en croix*]’; crossed out or barred being the status of modern non-sense in which the subject, given over to nothingness, moves. It is the status of modern subjectivity: Being and nothingness.

Being = Sense / outside-sense
~~Being~~

Lacan, on the contrary, shows that it is not from this perspective that the question of sense and of outside-sense must be understood, but from that of the opposition between the effect of signification and the place of jouissance. Writing allows this place of jouissance to be registered; it inscribes what Pericles did in gathering the hymns and what Edgar Allan Poe did in naming the jouissance of his time, the place of the dandy reflecting a contempt for a man of action. In other words, a certain mode of the man of action (par excellence, that of the entrepreneur) is going to be inspired by the dandy’s withdrawal from the world.

Thus, each time, we have an inscription and a trace of something that is primary and exceeds all the significations in play, and each time it is this harboring, this very reception, of the jouissance in the letter, in writing, that comes to inscribe itself.



What are the relations—and it is really these that Lacan will interrogate in this text—between the effect of signification and jouissance? He can no longer content himself with what he had introduced with metonymy, where the effect of sense, the metonymic flight [*fuite*]¹ of sense, was equivalent to the metonymic object. It is here that we must have recourse to what Jacques-Alain Miller raised in his *Course* of 1987–1988, *Ce qui fait insigne*. At that time, he broached Lacan’s texts from the seventies (*L’Étourdit*, *Joyce-le-Sinhome*, and *R.S.I*) around a problematic articulating the real and sense.

Real / Sense

It is a problematic that has been established explicitly in the teaching of Jacques-Alain Miller since 1987, and that he pursued throughout that year in order to make us perceive the consequences to be drawn from this approach, in what way it touches the heart of our practice.

Three Reals

In 1987, toward the month of June, when he was bringing his *Course* to a close, J.-A. Miller was speaking of the function and noting that, in approaching the real, it is necessary to distinguish the real in science, the real in the symptom, and the real in the analytic operation. He proposed, after a series of simplifications, to inscribe in the place of the hole, in the hole that any function supposes, the categories of the real, symbolic, and imaginary.

The real that science knows is mathematisable, it presents itself under a symbolic form:

$$f(R) = S$$

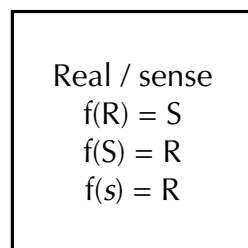
In the symptom, the symbolic becomes real in the psychoanalytic sense:

$$f(S) = R$$

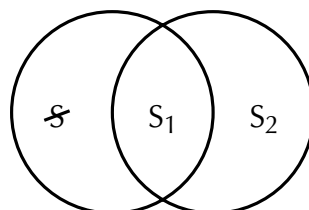
Lacan’s idea is that it would be wonderful for psychoanalysis to propose that a certain function of the signified, not of the signifier, gives us a real—that is, in operating on the effects of sense, we might have a function where the effect of sense touches the real.

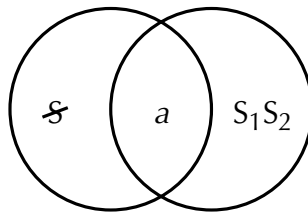
$$f(s) = R$$

Within the manifold problematic of the seventies, “Lituraterre,” in trying to catch the links of sense and of the real, is eminently situated from this perspective.



How can we account for the fact that some real is produced by means of the effect of sense? It is necessary to distinguish the register of alienation—by means of which a subject inscribes himself in the Other, where the effects of sense are produced by the primary identification—from that of separation—where the place of jouissance is inscribed, marking the place of the lost object through the effects of sense (e.g., Pericles’s nostalgia circulating between the lines of Homer’s poem).





It is with the apparatus of these schemas, which Jacques-Alain Miller established while transcribing Seminar XI for us, that we are going to approach the second apologue.

“I’m coming back from a journey in Japan,” says Lacan. The anecdote is that of a flight over a desert, Siberia, a route that, he says, he is taking for the first time—this is a real thumbing of the nose at the imprecise routes of Derrida—he travels thus for the first time by a polar route that has just opened (the Russians accepted this route, which allowed, in fact, a reduction of four or five hours by plane on the journey back from Tokyo to the West, but it is a desert route, for the Soviets wanted to be sure that no spy plane would photograph their installations. Besides, it is fairly reasonable seeing as, since then, we have learned that all the commercial planes were at the very least equipped with small spying devices).

Here we have an impossible route in the complete desert, the Siberian plain, truly more deserted than any other and, what is more, a plain that is totally plain: no mountains, but only water, rivers.

So, OK, we can see the montage between “The Purloined Letter” and the flight. Then in the montage, he says, it is wonderful; he sees the rivers as a kind of trace from where the imaginary is abolished and he says it in the style of Mallarmé: “Such as it invincibly came to me . . . from between the clouds, the streaming, the sole trace to appear, that forges, more than it brings out, the relief at this latitude, in what constitutes the plain of Siberia, a plain desolate of any vegetation but for reflections, reflections which push into the shadow all that does not shimmer.”

Indeed, it is written in Mallarmé’s style; this is a French on which you really have to rack your brain to understand the exact construction—where are the relatives, is the subject in apposition, where? how? It is language at work.

We can see, thus, this abolition of the imaginary: “reflections push into the shadow all that does not shimmer.” It is not the sign, for the sign indicates something, but we have this trace that does not even come to

underscore a preexisting aspect of the world. It is not even the opposition of the river and the mountain; there is no deception—no opening out of a path—it is a pure trace that operates.

He tells us he is coming back from Japan, but, as he says, he is coming back, above all, from a certain relation to writing. He draws his inspiration mainly from China. During those years, he reflected deeply on Chinese. We know from François Cheng, and from the interview published in the Freudian magazine *L'Âne* No 48, that between 1969 and 1973 he had very thorough conversations with Lacan once a week on the Chinese classics and on three of them in particular: Lao Tzu, Mencius, and Shih-t'ao. Cheng had published the latter's treatise on painting as an addendum to his essay on Chinese painting *Le vide et le plein* published by Seuil in 1977. Furthermore, the combination of the characters "mountain" and "water" in Chinese means the landscape in general. Obviously, it is not without this reference to Chinese painting that Lacan reads Siberia as calligraphy, as a pure trace that operates without indicating, without signifying what is there: nothing human, not a single human product on the horizon, that is, no dustbins (the human par excellence—here it is the dustbin, rubbish); this is what industrial China is going to produce by way of radioactive rubbish and which always leaves a trace. Here the beginning of Beckett's *Endgame* is evoked: "no trace of living life, hurry up, sprinkle on some powder." This is the pure operation of the letter taking place. "And there," he says, is established "the dimension, the demansion . . . of the *nomorthunwonn* [*papeludun*],² that which is evoked by the part of the subject, the part I set up in the *Wonn-mor* [*Hun-en-peluce*],³ as such it fills the anguish of the *l'Achose*."

The One more [*Un en plus*], one could say, the One more with which the anguish of *l'Achose* is filled, is the object (*a*), and in what form if not that of the teddy bear [*l'ours en peluche*]?

(a)

It is the teddy bear as a reservoir of fundamental libido that one adds to the Other, that each of us adds to the Other, which, when the Other has gone and leaves you all alone, left to your own anguish, your anguish deserted of *l'Achose*, you cling to once more. You hang on like a wretch, to your bobbin, to your teddy bear, and then, when you grow up, you cling to other objects that attempt to replace this, but evidently do so in vain.

So you approach, as you can, what allows you to hold on, and here where there once was the hole, where the hole of *l'Achose* appeared, the void, hey presto!, the *One more* [*Un en peluce*], of which it is very important that there's no more than one, is lodged.

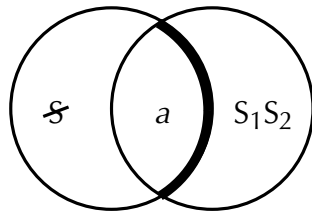
Hole
(a)

You know, if you have a mother who spends her time taking away your teddy bear and washing it, so it is clean, because it is dribbled, my dear, well, that is no good. In the seventies, this gave rise to the cult of the teddy bear; it gave rise to some stinking, appalling things, that were not to be washed. Neither must one fall into excess, but, finally, it is like everything—good maternal care is a question of tact; you have to make do, without extremes, not being dogmatic or too fanatical about a thing because, in the advice given to mothers when they become fanatical about a solution, Doctor Spock said: above all, you must not physically abuse a child; that turns out bad. In any case, when it is necessary to discipline a child, it gives rise to a great deal of ravage due to a dogmatism of nonviolence, it topples over in the other direction, so there is no method but for a sufficiently bad one.

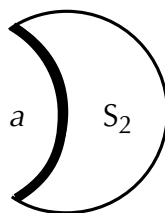
Littoral

All this, ultimately, is to say how the subject is established. The subject, when he cannot be represented, when he is no longer represented in the Other, when the Other is no longer the place where he is alienated, or where he inscribes himself, but becomes the desert of *l'Achose*, then, instead, the subject clings to what is its fastening point, the object (*a*). And the letter, Lacan tells us, becomes littoral: “between knowledge [*savoir*] and jouissance, there is the littoral that only turns into the literal on condition that this turn may be taken in the same way at any time.”

So, what is the littoral? This littoral appears so enigmatic, to the point that some people made it the title of a review, a little as if it were *Ornicar?*, as if it were the enigma, littoral. Littoral designates exactly the border that separates the letter, (*a*), from knowledge [*savoir*], reducing the pair ($S_1 S_2$) to S_2 for simplicity's sake.

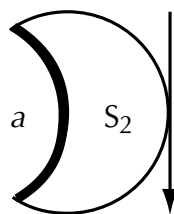


The littoral is represented knowledge and, indeed, the letter that comes to inscribe itself in that place makes one edge distinct in its function from the other edge.

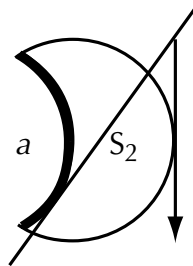


There are not two signifiers; there are two things that are of two distinct kinds. The effect of sense, noted by S_2 , and the place of jouissance mean that between the two there is no longer a frontier but a line that is everywhere heterogeneous. It is this line that in *Encore* Lacan will approach in terms of compactness. One could reproach him for the importation of this mathematical concept into psychoanalysis, but I would nevertheless emphasize that it is an extremely sound way to bring forth a separation that is not a frontier and, above all, not a frontier between an interior and an exterior.

It is here that we find in the text the critique of a perspective brought about by biology, where the interior and the exterior, the subject and the object, are separated. Here, you see that with alienation and separation, if one takes these formulas from which Jacques-Alain Miller has established the schemas, in fact the frontier, the littoral enters the interior of psychic reality. This is not a frontier between the interior and the exterior—it is within the subject.



This is the point of the apologue that Lacan adds to “The Purloined Letter.” In “The Purloined Letter” he made the place of consciousness apparent; however, it is still too exterior. Here, he points out that the division between unconscious knowledge and jouissance is carried out on the side of the subject and, as noted by Jacques-Alain Miller in “The Seminar of Barcelona” in 1997, Lacan makes a radical jump in refusing the Freudian opposition between the pleasure principle and the reality principle and in considering them as distributed around a topology of the interior and the exterior.



The Unary Stroke of the Brush

Lacan only accepts this opposition as being at play in the interior of the subject, like in this apologue of the trait [*trait*] that operates in the desert, without indicating that what he sees there, secretly, is the stroke [*trait*] of the calligrapher. Here the reference is less to Japan than to Shih-t’ao and to what he had read of the major lesson of chapter V of Shih-t’ao, which François Cheng translated in his book *Le vide et le plein* (p. 84).

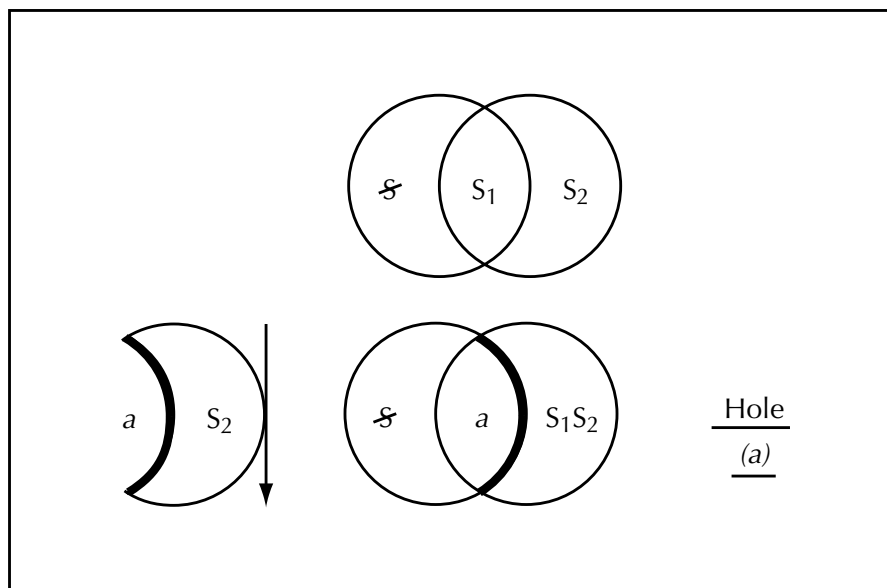
Shih-t’ao, who was writing in the seventeenth century, had the particularly original theory that the painter and the calligrapher proceed by what he calls the unary stroke [*trait*] of the brush. This is a Chinese word that François Cheng translates by “unique” in his book; however, it would be better to translate it by “unary,” which is what Lacan did in his *Séminaire XIV, La Logique du fantasme*, where he makes reference to this find of Shih-t’ao. He says the following: “The indistinct function of Yin and Yun—it is chaos, not Yin and Yang—constitutes original chaos. And if it is not by way of the unary stroke of the brush, how could one disentangle original chaos? . . . To carry out the union of the Ink and the Brush is to resolve the distinction between Yin and Yun and to undertake the disentangling of chaos. . . . In the midst of the ocean of Ink, to firmly establish the spirit [*l’esprit*]; at the tip of the brush, that

life might assert itself and surge forth; that on the surface of the painting is the metamorphosis; that at the heart of chaos the light is installed and springs up! . . . From the One, the Multiple is divided; from the Multiple, the One is conquered, the metamorphosis of the One produces Yin and Yun—and behold! all the virtualities of the world are accomplished” (op. cit., pp. 84–85).⁴

As Cheng notes very well, it is a conception in which there is no opposition between the subject One, and the world that it represents. Creation for the Chinese painter is not opposed to him; he pursues it, he adds himself to it. Far from being a description of the spectacle of creation, painting is an addition that allows a disentangling, to open the way, to add, not to a world conceived as exterior, but to a world conceived as an object.

This approach to Chinese painting, which has been dominant for twelve hundred years, is very specific. The painting of the calligrapher is not a question, as in Renaissance painting, of describing the world, of ordering the internal chaos, but of ordering by way of the stroke [*trait*] of the paintbrush, of operating by making a trace. This is where the gesture of the painter, the gesture of Shih-t’ao, meets up with the gesture of the infant throwing his bobbin to enact the *fort-da*, to shape the anguish of *l’Achose*. It is not only the phonemic opposition of the ‘o-a’, *fort-da*, but the gesture itself that counts, bearer that it is of the inscription of this trace.

From this distinction, where the real is not in opposition, is not exterior, a littoral is deduced: wholly interior, between the sense, the effect of sense, and the place of jouissance.



The Tao of the Psychoanalyst

Hence, the last part of Lacan's text can be understood, following these two apologues, one on the Western letter, the other on the Oriental letter, with some considerations that can be centered around a reflection on the conditions "of a discourse that would not be a semblant". From the perspective that Jacques-Alain Miller had thus established, in what conditions could a discourse truly touch *jouissance* and its littoral with the signifier?

Lacan draws on many discourses. He considers, on the one hand, science and, on the other, psychoanalysis, avant-garde literature and the Japanese subject. In a disparate fashion, he broaches this question so as to designate and articulate what must be called the *tao* of the psychoanalyst, his way [*voie*].

How might the analyst situate himself in relation to these effects of sense? If we refer to the transcription made by François Cheng of his dialogues with Lacan, and to what he noted, precisely enough, it seems, to have been able to subsequently make a transmission of it in *L'Âne* No 48, we find that this was precisely what Lacan was looking for the most with him: the Chinese way in which sense, and not *l'Achose*, but that which has a name and that which doesn't have a name, come to be articulated.

There is a very beautiful passage in the transcription that François Cheng has provided, and who, after having situated the way [*voie*] in Lao-Tzu, isolates the passage that had gripped Lacan: "the way insofar as it is that which is nameless, and that can all the same name itself."

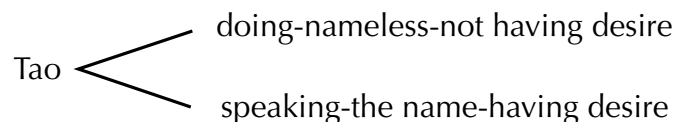
So, I am quoting it because it corresponds exactly with the summary that Lacan made of this problematic at the bottom of page 10 of "Lituraterre."⁵ It is from chapter 1 of the *Livre de la Voie et de sa vertu*:

The Way that can be enunciated
Is not the Way forever
The name that can be named
Is not the name forever
Without name: from which Heaven-and-Earth proceed
The name: mother-of-all-things

The *Voie/voix* [Way/voice], insofar as it is, first of all, nomination, and then effect of nomination, makes something come about, but what? For where it is not Greek; the question is no longer one of bringing into

Being, but of acquiring a certain usage. Chinese is not an Indo-European language; it has no verb “to be.” At the place of the copula there is this invention proper to Chinese, which is that the word *tao* means at the same time “to do” and “to say,” “to enunciate.” It is one of the most extraordinary stories of thought that is revealed by the history of thought in China, where Chinese thought has succeeded in accommodating the Being transmitted by Buddhism in the mode of the void because it spoke Sanskrit, an Indo-European language, thus implying Being and non-Being. The Chinese took, all the same, eight hundred years to make *tao* meet up with the Buddhist void. It took a long time, and caused a lot of friction in the different Chinese schools, to adjust two notions that had nothing to do with each other, and to make of it a creation of discourse, which would be transmitted to Japan, with the Buddhism that we call *Zen*. The ‘Chan’ sect devised, in fact, a rather sophisticated version of this combination of the Hindu void and the Chinese *tao*.

Here we have the *Voie/voix* insofar as it is prior to nomination, and Cheng says that while reading this text, Lacan notes, “it is wonderful!” He stops Cheng and produces the following little schema:



He says to him: there you are, here is the *tao*, so we make two registers. Thus, Lacan produces this little schema, but straightaway he says that “it is now a question of knowing how to hold on to its two aspects, of what Lao-Tzu proposes in order to live with this dilemma.”

What use to make of it? This is the question that Lacan poses. How to make these things hold together? When we read this interview from the perspective that Jacques-Alain Miller has traced, once one has isolated the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary, the real, sense, and outside-sense; or these are some dimensions, this is what is at stake—but how to live with them, how to live with this dilemma?

What interested Lacan in speaking with Cheng was the proposed solution, and in Cheng’s testimony we read this: “without thinking about it too much, I responded: ‘by the Void-median’. Once this term ‘Void-median’ was pronounced, we did not stop until we had elucidated the reality of this most fundamental of all notions.” After having examined

the sources closely and verified the interpretations, they were able to establish that the three, in Lao-Tzu, was nothing other than the Void-median. And yet, according to Cheng, who is here the specialist, whereas, until then, the three had not really occupied the specialists of Chinese thought, who stopped at two, at the opposition of Yin and Yang, this interpretation was henceforth adopted by all the sinologists as well as by the learned Chinese themselves. (Cf. *L'Âne*, op. cit., p. 53.) They took great care to observe the multiple usages of the Void-median in the concrete domain at the heart of a person—it is very precious, the Void-median, at the heart of a person—in a couple, between two tribes (with reference to Lévi-Strauss), between actor and spectator in the theatre, and so on.

So this is where, concretely, the void is situated. How to articulate the void is what interested Lacan: the correct use of the void, of this Void-median that is a kind of version of the littoral, that which separates two things that between them have no way of holding together, or any way to pass from one to the other.

In following this inquiry into the Void-median with Cheng, Lacan finds that, all in all, Chinese poetry, the Chinese mode of reasoning, is altogether invaded by metaphor, that everything is metaphorized. And there, he says to Cheng, what strikes him is that, in Chinese thought, metaphor and metonymy are not really opposed. “All in all,” he says, “the more there is metaphor, the richer the metonymy. In other words, metaphor and metonymy result from one another, they mutually engender each other, man being the metaphor *par excellence*”—he refers to his own classic definition from *Booz endormi*: *Sa gerbe n'était point avare ni haineuse* [His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful]—“man being the metaphor *par excellence*, his relation to the world—another metaphor—would be, I suppose, but a universal metonymy.”

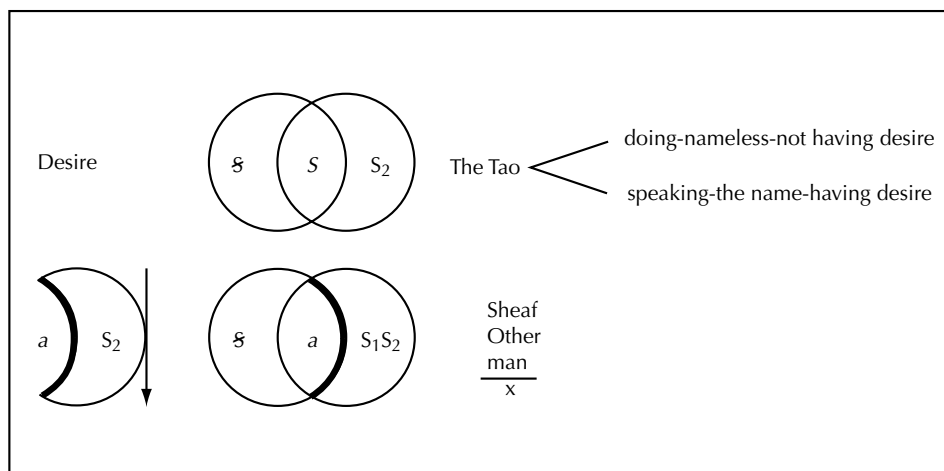
Sheaf
Other
man
x

“Shih-t'ao, did he not speak of Universal Circulation?,” he continued. “That explains perhaps why the Chinese privileged the notion of subject/subject to the detriment of that of the subject/object, since, as

the subject is completely metaphorized, what is important in their eyes is what happens between subjects, rather than the subject itself in terms of being a separate or isolated entity. Here without doubt, concludes Lacan, “the Void-median again intervenes.”

This is the summary of a long exchange that situates well the problematic in question, since it is neither with the help of the opposition between metaphor and metonymy, nor with the help of the old system of the bar, that we can best situate the metaphorized place of the subject, but in its relation, in the interior of itself—the relation subject/subject—that is at the same time the relation to another subject or the relation to itself in terms of addressing itself to the Other.

So we can understand from this perspective why the end of “Litura-terre” is concerned with the mode of address of the Japanese subject. Considering the way in which the Japanese subject comes to say “you,” how can he prop himself up on the “you,” how can he separate what comes back to him—that is, his place as subject—from the Other, insofar as he is a deposit of jouissance, insofar as he is the partner, the “you” to which the subject addresses himself?



What has to be read, moreover—I will not do it here in detail—in “L’adresse au sujet japonais” concerns the Japanese mode of language [*lalangue*], the way in which this fixes a mode of the littoral separating of jouissance and signifying articulation. It is, again, necessary to consider the discourse of science—Lacan puts a damper on this discourse—insofar as it would come to absorb entirely the real without symptom, a mathematizable symptom.

A Lacanian Ecology?

Here we have the indication of a sort of Lacanian ecology that is yet to be fully developed and is engendered from the following sentence, written in 1971: “Physics finds itself, is going to find itself, brought back to the consideration of the symptom by the pollution of the environment.” It must not be forgotten—to the extent that the discourse of science seemed to be without remainder, without any littoral between signifying articulation and jouissance—that what we are going to find, he says, is pollution, the big pile of waste that science fabricates for us and that is becoming more and more difficult to eliminate from the surface of the planet, provoking an interrogation. We are beyond interrogating the links between science and conscience, beyond the moral quandaries of the atomic bomb inventors in their different versions. The scientists of today are no longer seen as grand consciences; besides, it is no longer demanded of them, nobody believes in it any more. The torments that occupied the postwar years, where these grand scientific consciences managed to have an effect of sense, the moral wranglings of Oppenheimer, of Einstein or of Sakharov, mattered, but now everybody knows very well that for a scrupulous biologist, who would stop such and such research, having caught sight of terrible consequences, there would always remain ten or a hundred others to continue the research. No problem—that makes one less competitor, everybody is delighted, and that’s all. Things are different now, however, on the other hand, the problems of responsibility, of pollution that are at the heart of our relation with science matter—like the story of contaminated blood—insofar as it concerns, very precisely, a relation to the symptom: we know something about it now, one can no longer say that the discourse of science does not produce a certain number of leftovers.

Avant-garde Literature

There is this other figure that Lacan takes into consideration, that of avant-garde literature. Well, it must be said that Lacan evoked a most contemporary problematic for the intellects who were very lively in those years, in broaching the social bond from the point of view of avant-garde literature, from communities such as surrealism, the

Collège de philosophie, *Acéphale*, then *Les temps modernes* and *Tel Quel*, and so on, communities founded precisely on a certain relation to outside-sense, to the affect of panic, to jouissance and not to the useful.

In the seventies, Philippe Sollers could still write the single sentence, without punctuation, of his *Paradis*; there was that and then there was a literature that was looking to making a community of readers in the outside-sense, which was transmitted according to certain channels, and this was what Lacan puts in question, in asking this literature on what grounds it is to be distinguished: “Is it possible for the littoral to constitute such a discourse that is characterised by not being issued from the semblant?” For Lacan, it is not because this avant-garde literature is itself made of littoral that it can claim to prove something other than the fracture of which it itself is an effect. As for the fracture itself, avant-garde literature cannot produce it—only a discourse can do it.

The Psychoanalytic Discourse

Now we come to the fourth diagram that is ordered by the relations of the semblant and of sense. It arises from the psychoanalytic discourse in which the letter is grasped in the effects of reading the signifier that it allows.

It is what Michel Leiris illustrates with his exclamation “*reusement*.” It is what comes to mark his first memory, the screen memory of his life, which marks his relation to happiness, or, more exactly, his relation to unhappiness and his relation to the woman who corrects him. He chooses the toy soldier he loves, a soldier is going to fall, he only just catches him, he says “*reusement*” and his mother says to him, “No, we don’t say ‘*reusement*’ we say ‘*heureusement*’.” Thus, there is this memory that he places at the forefront of his writings, at the forefront of his book, and from there one knows that he has experienced unhappiness, full stop. He had analysis after an extremely serious suicide attempt that occurred in the course of a night spent with Bataille; they had pushed it a bit far on the unhappiness of living, and so on. In addition, he constructed a literature that is of an extreme purism; that is, he never again allowed anybody to say to him: “No, no, we don’t say ‘*reusement*,’ we say ‘*heureusement*,’” he never allowed that again. It is he who distributed the deformations, who was able to invent codes, deform the usages,

and that is wonderful—“we don’t do such things, but yes we do, but, yes, old chap!”

Reusement

We can see here what he lodged of *jouissance* in secret. We can also see that writing is not primary; what is primary is the signifying exclamation of the chap who says “*reusement*” and who drops the “*heu*”; he will always be a little hung up on the “*heu*” in general.

Reusement

Heureux Heureusement

Heu

Nevertheless, and without doubt for a reason, he produces a signifier. Subsequently, the letter allows a reading which is that, indeed, there was *heureu*, *heureusement*, and so on, and that there is a part, namely, the “*heu*,” that fell. But what it inscribed, from the moment when the signifier that appeared is read, is the part of lost *jouissance*, happiness forever lost, from where the subjective position is deduced, which is linked to this relationship with unhappiness, an unhappiness that will always be, throughout all the effects of sense, profoundly a relation with the unhappiness of Being that will accompany the subject. It is not linked to the effect of signification; in the same context, if things had been otherwise, if his mother had been a little happier and without doubt a little more cheerful—she did what she could—if his mother had not been depressive, if instead of saying to him, well, bothering him with this purism, she would have given him a cuddle, and presto!, all would’ve been back as it was, they would have burst out laughing and after he had said: “Everything is really possible,” she would have said, “Ah! it’s very funny, I’m going to tell your father about it when he comes back, I’m going to say to him ‘you know, he did something amazing, he said “*reusement*,” amazing’,” well, everybody burst out laughing. Obviously it does not have the same effect; it does not leave the same trace as unhappiness, does it, so it is not signification; it can be read in many ways, and above all the littoral can be inscribed between the effect of sense and the place; the effect, the affect, of *jouissance* can be inscribed in many ways.

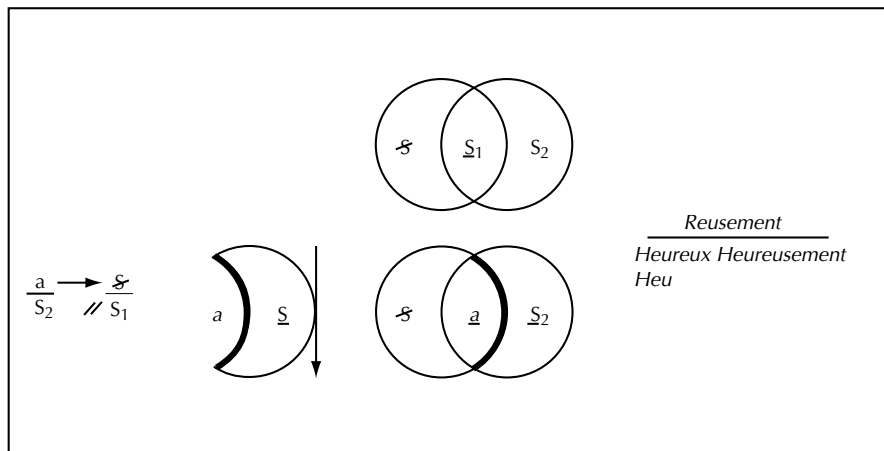
And there Lacan is able to say that in the analytic discourse what operates is the letter, insofar as it dissolves what gives form. What gives form is the signifier, the semblant, the “reusement,” and afterward the letter will break it up, will enable it to be read, to be articulated, to produce a certain effect, to transform what “in the semblant pleased” [*plu du semblant*] insofar as it constitutes the signifier with a play on words: one for the rain [*la pluie*], and one is for what pleased [*a plu*] in the sense of the verb “to please” [*plaire*].

Reading

Here, what in the signifier pleased is subsequently placed in question in the reading of the unconscious made by the analytic discourse. Lacan carries out this reading by respecting the fracture that was produced and in causing or in emphasizing the effect of production of this fracture. This effect is what the analytic discourse inscribes from the discourse of the master.

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \longrightarrow \frac{\mathcal{S}}{S_1}$$

Once you make this type of distinction, it is necessary to produce the identification: you identified yourself with the unhappy child, you were devoted to unhappiness, the time when your happiness, your “reusement” was not welcomed by your mother, well, there is your identification and that is separated from all that is unconscious knowledge linked to this “reusement” that remains a memory. Still, it is necessary to tear from the subject, for the subject to produce his identification and this in the name of unhappiness, of the trace, I would say, written forever, of the voice before all domination, of the *tao* of unhappiness that he traced for himself. And there it operates on condition that a certain void is introduced between the identification with the master signifier and the unconscious chain.



The Void-median . . . Making Active

I would like to finish on the handling of the *tao* of the psychoanalyst and the very example that François Cheng gives of it when recounting a day spent with Lacan in 1977.

Cheng wrote his book *La poésie chinoise* in 1977. Lacan asked him to spend an afternoon with him at Guitrancourt. Throughout the whole day, which Cheng recounts wonderfully, Lacan interrogates him on one sole problem, saying to him: explain to me, from this poem, the Chinese conception of time. After having spoken about it for the whole day, and while accompanying him back home in the evening, Lacan said the following: “Dear Cheng, you have known many ruptures in your life. You’ll know how to transform these ruptures into an active Void-median linking for you your present with your past, you will, at last, be in your time.” It is an interpretation that Lacan allowed himself in the name of friendship. Since it is Cheng who told us this, I am not being indiscreet in making you party to it, and one can see how—with the aid of what is language that was being elaborated, the Void-median meaning something for one and for the other—they knew what they were speaking about. He said to him: “You have known fractures, you have known these frontiers, you have known without continuity a certain number of things, exile, the re-appropriation of another culture,” and so on, and the following: “You will know how to transform these ruptures into an active Void-median,” with “active” here meaning allowing him to circulate in his history.

All told, the *tao* of the psychoanalyst, if we follow Lacan’s indications, is to manage to be able to hold oneself in one’s place, there where

there was a rupture, there where there was a fracture, there where the letter came to inscribe the littoral, the edge of all possible knowledge, transforming this into an active Void-median. To transform this into a possibility of making what does not hold together hold together, the real and sense, doing and speaking; these registers that were stated in a distinct way by Lacan, but are held together by the place of the psychoanalyst, insofar as, in this place, acting within the rubric of the non-acting [*non-agir*], within the rubric of the active-Void, which is another way to formulate the non-acting of the psychoanalyst, is to manage to do this, to hold oneself at this point where, ultimately, someone can circulate within what, for him, returned.

Notes

1. Although the English translation “flight of sense” would seem to make reference to the theme of flight that runs throughout the text, the original French *fuite de sens* makes no such direct reference.
2. The neologism “*papeludun*” is a homophone of the French *pas plus d’un*, which could be translated in English as “not more than one.”
3. The neologism “*Hun-en-peluce*” is a homophone of the French *un en plus*, which can be translated in English as “one more” or “one extra.”
4. The page numbers here correspond to those of *Ornicar?* No. 41.
5. J. Lacan, *Seminar III, The Psychoses* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 228.

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