

Hurly-Burly

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not going to work. When you cut a
the possibility of contradiction. If your
view of contradiction, it does not work.

what is called eternity. That is why
of eternity.

at the very end, in the same salon
of the Marquise
it was absolutely impossible to
between the Marquise de
in social, subjective, and
as time passes you by, no
contradiction afterwards.

eternity has to do with the
to do with the principle

dimension of waking-up. The
waking-up: waking up from
reference.

in the same series.
the play, whether tragedy or
There are seasons. I can testify
School, but I can speak of two
of analytic experience,
series, the main characters stay
there can come on the scene.
today, "The subject supposed
to the subject supposed to know

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The Couch

Éric Laurent

The Pass... or to Finesse Against the Subject Supposed to Know

Having learnt from Alexandre Stevens that the English-speaking audience seemed to have some difficulty with the expression "to finesse against" I have decided to say where I found it. I was looking for a title that could allude to Jacques-Alain Miller's course and the topics he has been touching on this year¹, and I was also trying to find an echo of one of the fundamental texts about interpretation, the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" which opens the *Écrits*.² And so, looking through the dictionary, I found that there is an expression in card games that says you can "finesse against the king". If it's your turn to play just before a player who you think may have the master-card – the king –, and if you have the queen, you can lay down the queen, hoping that, in the distribution of cards, it will be revealed that the following player does not have the king, this is called: "to finesse against the king". I loved the disposition of this, and it recalls of course the situation of "The Purloined Letter" in which the queen "finesses against" the king, making her interpretation of the letter, putting it in such a way that the king does not even see what is happening. And then Dupin's interpretation – a deep interpretation – that truth is at the surface of things and the world, that there is no deep hiding-place of the letter, that the letter is itself on the wall. I also liked the fact that in French this operation is called "faire une impasse". So you have a bilingual pun on how to "pass", how to go beyond the master-signifier, how to go beyond the belief in the kings, the cards that were dealt us which functioned as kings.

**Prerequisites to a reading of the experience of the Pass
*Signification of language as the effect of jouissance
produced by its use***

It would help to consider the experience of the Pass as a kind of game in which one bets against these master cards that have been dealt the subject. I will first lay out the prerequisites to my reading of Bernard Seynhaeve's description of his experience with the Pass. I have chosen Bernard Seynhaeve because most of you heard his testimony at the NLS Congress³, and those who did not have at least had an echo of it in reading Jacques-Alain Miller's course where Seynhaeve presented his testimony.⁴ So a certain number of things are already known and we can play with these cards.

The prerequisites to my reading of his experience are the fact that the possibility of interpretation as such is thought through by Lacan by insisting on the material consistence of speech, and by trying to define and specify it in the distinct moments of his teaching, each time further specifying the opacity, the consistence of speech, its matter, the matter of the words as facts. He starts with "The Function and Field of Speech and Language..." by stressing the resonance of the signifier, the fact that a signifier can go through a whole range of meanings, evoking precisely things that are not there, that the signifier defies any reduction whatsoever to a unique meaning. From the start, there is the question of the atom of signification that Saussure gave us:

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

Once you write the atom of signification with one signifier and one signified, you have this kind of imaginisation of meaning with a bijective application of the signifier on the signified or vice-versa, depending on whether you stress the syntactic or semantic components of language. But either way you are stuck with that.

Now, Lacan tried to "finesse against" this atom of signification, multiplying either the signifiers or the signified, writing chains of this type in which the atom is subverted by the idea of the chain itself:

$$\frac{S, S_1, S_2, S_3 \dots}{s, s_1, s_2, s_3}$$

The chain cannot be cut. The upper chain of signifiers and the chain below the bar cannot be reduced to a single atom or a single point or any other possible representation. This idea finds its development, starting with *Seminar XVIII* and from there on up to Lacan's last teachings, where you have an absolute

Experience of the Pass Effect of *jouissance*

... as a kind of game in which
... the subject. I will first
... aeve's description of his
... aeve because most of
... who did not have at
... course where Seynhaeve
... are already known and

... the fact that the possibility
... on the material
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... by stressing the
... through a whole range
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... and one signified, you
... application of the
... whether you stress the
... way, you are stuck with

... multiplying either
... which the atom is

... and the chain below the
... any other possible
... with *Seminar XVIII* and
... have an absolute

separation of the chains of signifiers to produce the division of the subject. Let's say that the chain of signifiers produces the divided subject, so this is reduced to:

$$\frac{S_1 \rightarrow S_2}{\$}$$

The signification is reduced to something unknown, a conundrum.

$$\frac{\$}{x}$$

If this signification can be named, it can then take the form of the object *a*, but it essentially keeps its non-Saussurian inscription between the conundrum and the object *a*.

$$\frac{\$}{a}$$

As Lacan says in the first lesson of *Seminar XVIII*, the signifiers are in the world, but to play you have to add the fragmented body.⁵ To play, to consist, to have a speaking body, the effect is at once a divided self and the division of the body through the forms of the object *a*. This means that, from that point on, the only signification of language as such is the effect of *jouissance* produced through its use. It is not that meaning is use, as Wittgenstein said. It is that meaning is the effect produced by use. It is what you want to obtain, seducing or insulting the one you address. The effect you want to obtain is the signification of what you are saying. The symptom produced as what you say is the meaning of what you are saying.

Production of the effect of anxiety in science, mathematics and finance

We have a good example of that with anxiety. Lacan considered the effect of the dimension of discourse from which meaning has effectively disappeared, and we have a good example with mathematics. In mathematics you do not know what you are speaking about, as Bertrand Russell said. This means that you can include a whole range of phenomena under a single formula. With $E=mc^2$ you can have the whole world described. So you do not know exactly what you are speaking about. It has to be specified. Lacan's idea is that, within natural languages, and the use of the letter as producing equivocation within the

language, you have a kind of use of the letter, separate from what is done in mathematics but producing a kind of equivalent effect, a kind of real, something that is produced without one knowing the signification of what one is saying.

The effect of science can be seen not only in the fact that it can include a whole range of phenomena under one single description, but what this means for a subject, for a mathematician for instance, is the moment at which the user of the signifiers is touched in such a way by his use of them that he obtains an effect of anxiety. The anxiety of the mathematicians, the anxiety of the physicists is what happened in the fifties after the atom bomb, after they produced an instrument of pure destruction, a real weapon of mass destruction. There was an effect of anxiety, embodied by Oppenheimer in the United States, but also by a whole group of physicists to whom he transmitted his own anxiety, and this produced in them a certain suspension of their research in the field of physics. There was quite a lot of discussion among the scientists about their anxiety, and they found a way to go beyond that. Nowadays the discussion on opening huge particle accelerators, whether in Europe or the US, doesn't produce any anxiety anymore. But there was at least that moment when the use of the language of science, of mathematics, within the physical field, produced an effect of anxiety due to the production of this new object of discourse, the atom bomb as pure power of destruction.

Lacan also mentions in his "Triomphe de la religion" the anxiety of the biologists who produced potential weapons of mass destruction in biological experiments.⁶ There was also a production of anxiety at the time of the anthrax letters in the US, which produced an epidemic of anxiety that was quite major. We may add that during the Iraq war, all the fantasies around weapons of mass destruction were quite present for us. Long before the Gulf War, Lacan mentioned that the biological weapon produced some kind of anxiety in the scientific community of biologists, and it is true that a certain number of biologists called for a suspension of such research.

This is a good example of what we have to accept in what the meaning of an abstract language is. It is the effects of anxiety it produces. Taking the anxiety of the scientists as a kind of compass to orient oneself in the history of science has to be done, this kind of history has to be carried out. It would be anti-Popperian. The problem is not the fact of constructing experiments in which you can say yes or no, in which you would determine the future of science. That does not produce any anxiety. What produces anxiety is the new object produced by science, which adds itself to the world, to nature, to destroy it outright.

The anxiety of the scientist occurs when, confronted with the object he produces, he has the idea that maybe the god science believes in does not have any previous knowledge of such a thing as has been produced by that discourse. When we say that within our modernity, or within the Western world, you've got to oppose Europe – a continent made up of non-believers – to America – a country of

believers, born again, a continent of believers. It is precisely its culture that demonstrated that the philosophers of religion that can be produced by Einstein when he speaks of objects of absolute truth, maybe such a truth that falls upon them, the existence of a subject in solitude in the crowd. Within the matrix of the real, you might think that it produces anything, but who when he takes a position was destroyed out the great doors of churches, and he invented. On this subject, details.⁸ The same delusion when he had started off. So you also have, you have these epistemological problems are not to be taken as knowledge when a sociological view when the community way. What Lacan says science is precisely the fact that there is a fact that you cannot know at which the subject the scientist can't know. I would like to do mathematics, and a crisis in finance were not designed a range of other things finance. So the

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...elievers – to America – a country of

believers, born again or not – you have to qualify this opposition. Europe is a continent of believers, believers in the god of science. Europe has demonstrated precisely its cult of secular religion, as communism and fascism were, and then demonstrated its faith in the god of the scientists, as Pascal called it, the god of the philosophers and the scientists, the subject supposed to know the knowledge that can be produced with rational procedures, its guarantee being stated by Einstein when he said that God "doesn't throw dice"⁷. When science produces objects of absolute destruction, then there is the idea among the scientists that maybe such a thing as a god who could predict this does not exist, and so anxiety falls upon them. Science, this discourse, once it is not guaranteed by the existence of a subject supposed to know, confronts the scientist with the utmost solitude in the creation he makes.

Within the mathematical field, where at least there are no objects produced – so you might think that at least there it would be anxiety-free, you do not have to produce anything, just think and write down – but even there, there was Cantor who when he touched the infinite touched it in such a way that god and his position was displaced in such a way that it produced in Cantor not only anxiety but the great delusion he had. He tried to cure that by calling on the existing churches, and especially on the pope, to guarantee the *Aleph*, the infinite he had invented. On this you can read the book on Cantor by Dauben which gives the details.⁸ The same thing happened with Gödel. Just before he had his really major delusion when he thought that everyone wanted to kill him, the great paranoia he had started after he produced his great inconsistency theorem of 1931.

So you also have what are called the crises of the foundations in mathematics, you have these moments of anxiety. They are not to be taken as the epistemologist Kuhn takes them in his examination of crises within science, they are not to be taken only as moments of knowledge as such, as crises of knowledge when the paradigms stop. They are not to be taken from the sociological view, which has it that due to sociological factors there is a time when the community of scientists thinks one way and then they think another way. What Lacan alluded to when he referred to these moments in the history of science is precisely that these moments are subjective moments in science. The fact that there is a foreclosure of the subject in scientific discourse does not imply that you cannot consider the history of science precisely through the moments at which the subject supposed to know does not function anymore. The desire of the scientist can just be given to his god. They have to eat it back.

I would like to add one more example of the effects of the anxiety produced by mathematics, and that is what happened to finance. The origin of the current crisis in finance is precisely due to the importation of mathematical models that were not designed for finance but for the physics of gas distribution and a whole range of other phenomena. These stochastic models were then imported into finance. So the effects produced by importing these results – starting in 1973

with an economist called Scholes – the massive use of mathematical models produced the fact that nobody knew what finance was speaking about, and in the end it produced an effect of anxiety. The anxiety effect we went through was the crumbling down of the whole thing that was produced, not as an effect of a lack of regulation, as the Social Democrats want us to believe – regulation always produces effects of non-regulation somewhere else – it was produced by the massive importation of mathematical models and the effect that goes with it. They went on developing it until they produced the weapon of massive destruction, and we had the massive destruction of wealth. The Obama administration is addressing it with the best answer that can be found for the moment. It does not get all the results we would like to obtain. It is not easy, once the point of anxiety has been reached, to rebuild the trust that was there before, that is to say, the belief.

A reading of the experience of the Pass

So, let's go back to the experience of analysis. Lacan isolated the word's matter, as he said in French, the *motérialité*, the fact that words are matter.

motérialité
matérialité

Once you have isolated the words, and once you have isolated the effect of anxiety produced and more generally the symptoms produced by the use of natural language, this gives us an idea of what the signification is.

If we go back to the analytic experience and we consider Bernard Seynhaeve's presentation, it is useful because you have his condensation of his wandering through all the chains of signifiers into two moments: a first interpretation and a final interpretation. He condenses his experience.

The first interpretation is from the first analyst – he had three analysts – who makes a reproach: "What is that little scar on your cheek? You ought to have spoken to me about that." And then Seynhaeve has a dream:

"I am wandering about in the corridor of the Holy Family Clinic, the hospital where my mother gave birth to all her children. The corridor is L-shaped with black and white chequered tiles that are coming loose. I am careful not to walk on the joins. All of a sudden I feel the pressing need to urinate. The toilets are at the corner of the L. I go in and start to urinate in the lavatory bowl without being able to stop. The bowl overflows and I wake up urinating in the bed."

It is a strong dream, producing what is usually called a regression: he pisses like a child and goes through the moment of his birth on the imaginary level. Seynhaeve shows that in this dream his whole history is concentrated, both the

signifiers he received
puissance they had
The main signifier
sentence from an
saying, "Everything
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brother marries the
have the sentence

is a signifier that
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This functioned as
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"He is in the wa
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The Pass

...isolated the word's matter,
...words are matter.

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...sider Bernard Seynhaeve's
...compensation of his wandering
...ents a first interpretation and
....

...he had three analysts – who
...cheek? You ought to have
...a dream:

... Family Clinic, the hospital
... The corridor is L-shaped with
... case. I am careful not to walk
... to urinate. The toilets are at
... the lavatory bowl without being
... in the bed."

... a regression: he pisses like
... on the imaginary level.
... is concentrated, both the

signifiers he received through the generations of the family, and the effects of
jouissance they had on him.

The main signifier transmitted through the generations of his family was a
sentence from an uncle who, dying in the First World War, wrote to his brother
saying, "Everything's going badly here. I don't know if I'll get out alive. Should I
die, *occupe-toi d'elle*, take care of her." He was referring to his loved one. The
brother marries the loved one, and these are the parents of Seynhaeve. So you
have the sentence *occupe-toi d'elle*, which is reduced as the "L" in the dream.

Occupe-toi d'elle

L

It is a signifier that runs through the family as a kind of superegoic command
but does not have a precise meaning. The word's effect of the transmission of
desire in the brothers – desire and the command – produced the effect that the
child produced by this command running through the generations had a lot of
difficulty identifying himself as a boy. He was stuck with the *occupe-toi d'elle*.
This functioned as a command, not only for the father, but for his mother too, who
had great difficulty taking care of *him*, and not of *her*. As Seynhaeve has
transmitted, he was accepted and loved as a child, but as a *her*, as a *she*, and not
as a *he*. And so the problem of the toilets at the corner of the "L" is, of course,
crucial. We have this re-signification of him as a boy that will run through his
entire analysis until its end.

At the end of the analysis, you have one interpretation that opens a new field. He
was developing the imaginary contradiction he had between his identification as
a boy and being raised as a girl within the desire of the family, until his analyst
says to him, "you love your fantasies too much." The effect produced was that he
did not have any fantasies anymore. He was void. He testifies to the fact that for
two years he did not have any more fantasies; he had anxiety. But only in going
to his sessions, it did not invade his whole life. It was concentrated on the analytic
experience. It lasted quite a while though. Two years throughout which he was
confronted with this anxiety, and the void that produced the fact that his fantasies
were not allowed any more, the fact that the jouissance he had from them was
not admitted. At least, that is what he thought: being himself the production of a
command, he received the interpretation as a command of the same impact as
the command that presided over his birth had had on his previous fantasies.

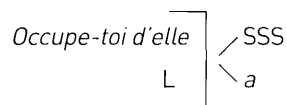
And then, through this wandering through the desert, he wanted to go forward
for the Pass. The analyst said: "not yet".

Then a second moment occurs. He dreams that:

"He is in the waiting room waiting his turn. There is bustling in the corridor.
Different from usual. Something important is going on. The analysand does not

understand. He wants to understand and goes to find out. He learns that it is a day of mourning. The analyst has lost a close one. They are going to do an autopsy, which explains the bustle. There is an autopsy table and some instruments. The cranium is open. Someone takes out a gelatinous mass and lays it down roughly on a chair. The analyst moves closer and perceives a lump of head pâté. The funeral attendants take the body away.”

What Seyhnaeve stresses is that for him the dream of the death of a close one and the autopsy of the corpse is to go beyond the death of the command incarnated in his father. He makes a pun on the fact that pâté is *pater* without the “R”. The bereavement he is going through is the moment he can go beyond what had been sustaining his world until that moment. So he dreams that he wakes up and his analyst is there on the couch he is lying on, and he says to him: “it’s over”. He presents himself for the Pass after these distinct moments, saying that for him it was over after that moment when there was something that goes beyond the moment of anxiety, the bereavement for the father, and the encounter with the mass of jelly he had in his brain, his fantasies he loved so much, which are just put there on the chair. You can see the opposition between the object *a* that was imaginised at the beginning of the treatment as a formless liquid, inside his body but coming out like a fluid that could not find its form, its shape, and at the end the mass of jelly that was inside the cranium which has at last found its form, and he can leave it in the analyst’s consulting room and go beyond. So you have two things in this sequence of events: one is the crossing of the point of the subject supposed to know, the stories that his unconscious told him, the chains of signifiers that were supposed to know his *jouissance* and the guarantee they found in the command that, starting with the previous generation, had been the guideline of his parent’s life and his own, he was able to go through this moment and wake up on new ground; and the other is that he could also give a shape to the object *a*. So you have at once the crossing of the subject supposed to know and the encounter with the object *a*.



I would like to say that in this kind of opposition, in which there are the histories that one is made up of, Seyhnaeve testifies to the fact that at one moment they can be left behind, on the condition that one find the contingency of both his encounter with *jouissance* and the contingency of this absolute command that functioned as a master signifier, as a trump card in his life, as the king that ordered all the cards he had been dealt, including his difficulties with sexuation.

All this ordering... considering all that...

Contingency and the Pass

In our scientific age... difficulty of how to... Renaissance with... the eighteenth century... John Locke's ph... to describe *l'homme*... *Shandy*; the form... everything is cont... everyone has his... of all that. On the... In our post-Einst... especially in the E... building wonder... are nothing, that... are only the arte... novels he has w... stories are stor...

“Only when a story... off at both ends... story in the world... margins, bind to... take the finished... Also, another... *Innocent*, reflect... then a murder... each successive... and how no one...

We can see the... consistency of... precisely the cr... confronted with... the contingency... than any story...



...to find out. He learns that it is a
...the. They are going to do an
...an autopsy table and some
...takes out a gelatinous mass and
...moves closer and perceives a lump
...away."

...of the death of a close one
...of the death of the command
...that *pater* is *pater* without the
...ment he can go beyond what
...Some dreams that he wakes
...and he says to him: "it's
...not moments, saying that
...was something that goes
...the father, and the encounter
...he loved so much, which
...between the object a
...as a formless liquid,
...not find its form, its shape,
...cranium which has at last
...room and go beyond.
...the crossing of the point
...unconscious told him, the
...presence and the guarantee
...ous generation, had been
...able to go through this
...that he could also give a
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...which there are the histories
...the fact that at one moment they
...the contingency of both his
...at this absolute command that
...his life, as the king that
...his difficulties with sexuation.

All this ordering is now obsolete, and he finds himself in the necessity of considering all that as contingency.

Contingency and the dissolution of the semblants in fiction and the Pass

In our scientific age, you can see that the power of fiction, especially faced with this difficulty of how to reconcile histories and the contingency of a life, started in the Renaissance with Cervantes, in France with Rabelais, and was then transmitted in the eighteenth century with the two novels that were derived from the impact of John Locke's philosophy, the two great novels that interpreted the problems of how to describe *l'homme de désir*, as Diderot put it: *Jacques le fataliste* and *Tristram Shandy*; the former stressing that everything is predetermined and the latter that everything is contingency: from the hobby-horse to the fortifications of Uncle Toby, everyone has his own delusion and the world is just a mess and the accumulation of all that. On the one hand pure determination, and on the other pure contingency. In our post-Einsteinian and post-Joycean world, the novels confront that, and especially in the English language. Ian McEwan has defined his art as at once building wonderfully crafted histories and deprecating them, showing that they are nothing, that they make us believe that the world has a meaning when they are only the artefacts of tales as such. And recently in one of the most perfect novels he has written, *Atonement*, one of the characters, Briony, says that all stories are stories only when they have endings:

"Only when a story was finished, all fates resolved and the whole matter sealed off at both ends so it resembled, at least in this one respect, every other finished story in the world, could she feel immune, and ready to punch holes in the margins, bind the chapters with pieces of string, paint or draw the cover, and take the finished work to show to her mother, or her father, when he was home. Also, another character in another novel of his, Leonard Marnham in *The Innocent*, reflecting on the fact that his engagement party had become a fight, then a murder, then a sawing-up of body parts, thinks, "how all along the way each successive step had seemed logical enough, consistent with the one before, and how no one was to blame."

We can see the way that McEwan's characters want to avoid anxiety with the consistency of the stories they make up. The title of the novel *Atonement* is precisely the crafting of the history itself, which is the only way to find a salvation confronted with the impossibility of giving an account of the unpredictabilities of the contingency one encounters in one's life, and which determine one more than any story, no matter how well crafted it is.

In the Pass, if we go back to the limits we experience, we are not artists producing novels, and an analysis is not an autofiction, though this is what some would like to reduce the analytic experience to. The analysis is an experience in which we experience the absolute contradiction between the dimension of jouissance and the semblants. The dimension of jouissance shows itself in contingency, a contingency that dissolves all the semblants rather than binding them together. If one were to develop a novel, an auto-fiction, at the end of the experience, all of this would merely be the mass of jelly. In the Pass we hope to hear from the subject's testimony the idea he has of the tension between these two aspects, which it is impossible to hold together. We hope to hear how he has managed to organise his life in such a way that he does not succumb to his anxiety but at the same time he respects what he has encountered as contingent.

Let's say that he is someone who can find himself in the position of a character from another of McEwan's novels, Henry Perowne the neurosurgeon in *Saturday*. It's a novel about neuroscience. Waking up in the early hours after making love to his wife, the neurosurgeon goes to the window and he sees a light in the sky. He does not know what it is. Is it a hallucination? Is it an image? But an image of what? In the end he spots that it's a plane. A plane on fire. Why? *Is this a terrorist operation on London?* he wonders. It is as if the meteor had appeared to him. The fact that the novelist could have the intuition that the best way to produce the phallic value was through this meteor going through the sky, something perceived that could not have a name, could not exactly be named, but could have a terrific impact – and then the protagonist finds the impact in his life – this announces the development of the novel. This conundrum at the beginning, in the experience of the Pass has to be found at the end.

Transcribed and established with footnotes by Adrian Price

- 1 Miller, J.-A., *L'Orientation lacanienne III, 11, Choses de finesse en psychanalyse* (2008-09), teaching delivered in the framework of the Paris VIII Department of Psychoanalysis, unpublished.
- 2 Lacan, J., "The Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'", in *Ecrits, The First Complete Edition in English*, transl. by Fink, B., New York: Norton & Co., 2006, pp. 6-63.
- 3 Seynhaeve, B., "An Act of Saying That Holds Up By Itself Alone", paper given at the VIIth NLS Congress, *Lacanian Interpretation*, Paris, 9 May 2009, in this issue, pp. 89-95.
- 4 Miller, J.-A., *L'Orientation lacanienne, Choses de finesse en psychanalyse, op. cit.*, Lesson XIII, 25 March 2009.
- 5 Lacan, J., *Le séminaire, Livre XVIII, D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant* (1971), Paris: Seuil, 2006, p. 16.
- 6 Lacan, J., *Le Triomphe de la religion*, Paris: Seuil, 2005, p. 74-75.
- 7 From Einstein's letter to Max Born, dated 4 December 1926 in *The Born-Einstein Letters*, New York: Walker and Company, 1971.
- 8 Dauben, J.W., *Georg Cantor, His Mathematics and Philosophy of the Infinite*, Princeton University Press, 1979.

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