

# Ambiguity, Equivocation, Unconscious

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## Abstract

In his text *L'étourdit*, Lacan develops a tripartite definition of the equivocal, distinguishing between the homophonic, grammatical, and logical. Psychoanalysis, being the praxis of alleviating unconscious symptoms via the semblance that is language, depends upon the equivocality of language. This paper elucidates these three forms of ambiguity in their relevance to the clinic and the end of analysis.

## Introduction

How does one define the equivocal in its relation to psychoanalysis? From a Freudian point of view, parapraxes, dreams, symptoms, and bungled actions first come to mind in that they all suppose compromise formations. Yet even speech without lapses remains equivocal. On the basis of the presumption that the equivocal is to be studied at the frontier of linguistics and psychoanalysis, a dictionary can be used and definitions support the research. According to the *Oxford Dictionary* (2010, p. 593), one finds the following definition: “An expression capable of having more than one meaning; a pun. The fact of having more than one meaning; ambiguity”.

Insofar as the term concerns the field of psychoanalysis, we propose to use the three final definitions found in the *Littré* (2007): “equivocal rhyme”, “interpretations of *double entente*” and “wordplay or *calembour*”. In other words, the equivocal refers to when the nature of language reveals itself in the ambiguous, arbitrary relation between signifier and signified; when the signifying chain diverges simultaneously towards two or more meanings.

The importance of the equivocal as a foundational concept appears discretely throughout Freud's written works. Indeed it is pivotal in the development of his hypothesis of the unconscious. “Freud's interest in the assumption [of the unconscious] was never a philosophical one - though, no doubt, philosophical problems inevitably lay just round the corner. His interest was a *practical* one. He found that without making that assumption he was unable to explain or even to describe a large variety of phenomena which he came across” (Freud, 2001b, p. 162). Furthermore, he learns from his patients that mutual contradiction is absent from the unconscious, perhaps most clearly in the case of dreams. “Dreams are disconnected, they accept the most violent contradictions without the least objection, they admit impossibilities, they disregard knowledge which carries great weight with us in the daytime, they reveal us as ethical and moral imbeciles”

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(Freud, 2001c, p. 87). One could thus say that equivocity is characteristic of the unconscious.

The equivocal is a topic that Lacan emphasized considerably in his last period, especially from 1972 on with his indispensable text, *L'Étourdit*. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to imagine that the equivocal doesn't appear in Lacanian theory prior to the seminar *Encore*. Already in 1953, at the time of his first "Rome Discourse", a monumental structuralist manifesto<sup>2</sup>, Lacan spoke about the equivocal in the symbolic register and its essential place in the analytic cure. In this discourse we find the following reference where he accentuates the importance of the letter in the analytic praxis. For Miller (2011a), the future importance of *savoir lire*, which will be central from *Radiophonie* on, is already announced:

Here the letter of the message is what's important. To seize it, one must stop an instant at the fundamentally equivocal character of speech, insofar as the function is as much one of concealing as of discovering. But even adhering to what the letter makes known, the nature of language does not permit the isolation of resonances which always indicate its reading along several significances. It is this inherent partition in the ambiguity of language that alone explains the multiplicity of possible entrances to the secret of speech. It remains there is only one text for which what is said and what is left unsaid can be read at once, and it is to this text that the symptoms are bound as intimately as a rebus to the phrase in which it figures (Lacan, 2001e, 140).

From the beginning of Lacan's seminars in the 1950's there is an emphasis on the pre-eminence of the letter<sup>3</sup> as being the only way to grasp the essence of the analytic

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<sup>2</sup> The Rome Discourse and corresponding article, *Function and field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, constitute a response both to continual pressure for his exclusion from the SPP on the part of the IPA which came to a head earlier that year, as well as the authoritarian approach of his analyst, Rudolph Lowenstein and his lover, Marie Bonaparte.

<sup>3</sup> It is essential not to forget that Lacan's definition of the letter changes over the course of his teaching. If in 1957, with the publication of *L'instance de la lettre*, the summit of an era of the pre-eminence of the symbolic, one finds, "By 'letter' I designate the material medium (*support*) that concrete discourse borrows from language" (Lacan, 1966b, p. 495). The definition of the letter in the final Lacan, e.g., *Lituraterre*, is hardly the same. There, the letter constitutes the shore between the real and semblance: "Between centre and absence, between knowledge and jouissance, there lies the littoral that only fetches to the literal provided you are able to take this very same bend at all times" (2001b, p. 16).

experience, of correctly reading the instance of the letter in subject's unconscious on his vocalizations. As Lacan proposes, the flexible relation between signifier and signified in speech and the abundant existence of homophones contribute to the fundamentally equivocal character of speech. If we take the *Two Ronnies* Hardware Shop sketch as an example, one quickly sees that the ambiguity of whether one said *Four candles* or *fork handles*, or even *fork and hells* needs the written letter be avoided. Lacan continues, however, asserting that such an "isolation of references", a reduction of possible significations for a given signifier or chain of signifiers, is not always possible simply through the written letter. Such is the case with Kuno Susumi's famous experiment, in which he requests a computer program to give him the signification for the English sentence, *time flies like an arrow* (Kuno, 1970). In this case, written language offers little help in reducing the plethora of potential meanings beyond the exclusion of homophones; for Lacan, the nature of language doesn't permit an absolute reduction of ambiguity. Here he references language because even when written, language remains equivocal, though admittedly less so than speech. A minimal sentence, *time flies*, could be understood in at least four different ways. The unspoken axiom of Lacan's assertion is that the unconscious is structured like a language, and furthermore is a combinatory of metonymic fragments and letters, an extreme hypothesis that Serge Leclair (1998) helped to corroborate with the formalization of his Dream with the Unicorn.

This attention to the letter continues throughout Lacan's teaching and his varied attempts to raise psychoanalysis to the dignity of science.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the letter proves to be primordial to the Lacanian approach. Even if, in *Seminar XXI*, when Lacan announces a new ethic, *The unfooled err*<sup>5</sup>, he finds this axiom in the confidence of the spoken, the *savoir lire* lauded by Miller (2011a) situates itself at the level of the letter and not the acoustic image conceptualized by Saussure. In his 2006-2007 *Lacanian Orientation*, Miller professes "Last year, thrice I found myself remarking on, and not in the manner of a feint, the distance I took, or rather that this *I* which speaks to you, itself took from Lacanian disance: distance and distance.<sup>6</sup> I said disance... That which saves, will save us from disance, I will say it: reading and reading to the *letter*" (Miller, 2012, p. 17).

But more specifically, this quotation indicates the direction to be taken when interpreting the "fundamentally equivocal character" of speech. Lacanian analysis aims not at meaning of the analysand's speech or the generation of new meaning: e.g., "I know what you really mean to say". Such an endeavour would be condemned to perpetual misunderstanding. Rather it directs itself towards the underlying interplay of letters of the unconscious. If "there is only one text where one can read at once what is said and unsaid", would this text would be the unconscious? Or *lalangue*? It would be best not to confuse the polysemous series of possible meanings of a given phrase and the fundamentally univocal nature of the *presence* of a certain signifier or letter. Let us imagine a patient telling us the following, "I dreamt of a woman, I can not be sure who it was, but I know it was not my mother". It is at the level of the materiality of the signifier "mother" that there is no equivocation, not at the level of signification. And so, the analytic ethic espoused in this paragraph of Lacan's first Rome Discourse (1956) does not consist in grappling with the production of meaning; it is not a case of explaining symptoms,

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<sup>4</sup> Initially *via* the structural linguistics of Saussure and Jakobson, then the formal logic of Russell and Gödel, and finally topology with Klein, Soury, Thom, and Thomé.

<sup>5</sup> *Les non-dupes errent*.

<sup>6</sup> *Disance* being a synonym for lexicon, similar to jargon.

which would approach a delusion of interpretation. Rather it is a case of fidelity to the letter in its materiality. From here one can see that “Interpretation is not open to any and all meanings”. The quote continues, “The fact that I have said that the effect of interpretation is to isolate in the subject a kernel, a *kern*, to use Freud’s own term, of *non-sense*, does not mean that interpretation is in itself nonsense... It has the effect of bringing out an irreducible signifier. One must interpret at the level of the *s*, which is not open to all meanings, which cannot be just anything, which is a signification, though no doubt only an approximate one”, says Lacan in his *Seminar XI* (1990, p. 250). Lacanian interpretation is at the level of the repetitive presence of a signifier or letter, and so the interpretation is just or proper insofar as it does not lead to a proliferation of meaning, to the establishment of a delusion of signification. An interpretation oriented by meaning will never reduce the excess of meaning.<sup>7</sup> This is the “bedrock of castration” Freud (Freud, 2001d) grappled with. As such, the only right interpretation would be that which dilutes meaning, which rests true to the letter.<sup>8</sup>

Later Lacan elaborated further on this “fundamentally equivocal character”, the polysemy of intentionality of the phrase in his notion of lying, misleading truth.<sup>9</sup> The lying truth constitutes the wall of the nature of enunciation itself, up against which all discourse stumbles. One can never tell the whole truth, regardless the judicial imperative “Swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing by the truth”; in its geometric consistency, a facet of the truth escapes any utterance. As such, the lying truth is clearly more radical than what could be called the veracious lie<sup>10</sup> — a concept Lacan passes by ephemerally in

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<sup>7</sup> As such psychoanalytic interpretation is perhaps a misnomer. It has little in common with legal interpretation in which judges wrestle with the appropriate signification of a text. Psychoanalytic interpretation more resembles oracular speech, oracular speech that aims for the discovery of the text of the unconscious.

<sup>8</sup> An analysand says he told a coworker how much money he spends on fashion, and yet how difficult it is to spend money on analysis. The analyst interprets from a position of surprise: “You told her all that?” Next session, “I thought about what you said, I think you’re jealous”. End of the session, the analyst’s punctuates based on the analysand’s fantasy. The analysand returns and speaks of how much money he spends on substances during parties and how he shares because he “doesn’t want to be taken as someone who *counts*”. The analyst echoes “You don’t want to be taken as someone who *counts*?” This declaration possesses a clear equivocal between a miserly subject and one of importance. Next session, the patient tells of a traumatic childhood separation from another placed at the level of imaginary and symbolic identification. He describes the separation, “It was exactly like coming down from ecstasy... Have you taken ecstasy?” Here the analyst does not respond with yes or no, nor drugs are bad for you or any other of the myriad of possible platitudes. Instead he says, “This is something which *counts* for you”. The vignette shows how psychoanalytic interpretation bases itself neither on morality, nor on the knowledge of the psychoanalyst, it is based on the materiality of language. The equivocal term found in the analysand’s speech is, in this case, the fulcrum for the installation of transference, of the subject supposed to know.

<sup>9</sup> *La vérité menteuse*

<sup>10</sup> “But, certainly, it is in the space of the Other that he sees himself and the point from which he looks at himself is also in that space. Now, this is also the point from which he speaks, since in so far as he speaks, it is in the locus of the Other that he

his *Seminar XI*, when he pays homage to the poet Aragon who “in the 60s had formulated something he called the *mentir-vrai*... The true lie is an untruth which attains, which reveals truth” (Miller, 2011c, p. 140). Simply put, its another name for *Einfall*, the phenomena that no matter what one speaks of, one will, or rather one’s subject will pronounce, quite possibly unbeknownst to the ego, a *Kern* of truth on the nature of his trauma by language. The lying truth is something entirely different, *qua* “the truth itself is a lie” (*ibid.*).

## **Les Tours Dit: Lacan’s definition of the equivocal**

### **Homophony**

In this great oracular text the early 1972s, Lacan divides the equivocal into a tripartite classification: homophonic, grammatical, and logical. Regarding homophonic equivocity, Lacan writes, “I begin with homophony, - whence depends orthography. The fact that in the language which is mine, which I played on above, “*deux*” [two] be equivocal with “*d’eux*” [of them/their], guards a trace of this soul game by which *make two-together of them* finds its limit in “*make two*” of them. One finds others in this text, from *parêtre* to *s’emblant*” (Lacan, 2001c, p. 491). To demonstrate the equivocity of spoken languages, he refers to the myriad of signifiers of the French language who share the phoneme *dø*. The French language is particularly resonant at the level of homophony; “Thank God the French language, often ambiguous when spoken” (Lacan, 1981, p. 307) provides countless examples in stride: *e.g.*, *vers/vert/verre/ver*, *ou/où/août/hou/houx*, and *sans/s’en/c’en/sens/sent/sang/cent*. Yet, the French language is hardly unique in this regard, in that it possesses so very many homonyms. Upon a quick glance at English one finds: *air/are/e’er/ere/err/heir* or *boar/Boer/boor/bore*. Such equivoques are assuredly present in all human languages; *A fortiori* by approaching the question of language from Gödel’s discoveries on the incompatibility in all formal systems of completeness and consistence, arise the striking realization that it is fundamentally impossible to have a univocal language. In order for a language to be without ambiguity, there must be a unique sign for each and every thing in the universe, and a system with one sign for every object wouldn’t truly be a human language but rather a code of signs. There would be no signifiers in the psychoanalytic sense since though “the sign is something that represents something for somebody, but the signifier is something that represents a subject for another signifier” (Lacan, 1970, p. 194). The signifier is not the bearer of the sense of the object, “but rather something of the order of a mark applied in some manner on the object, which superimposes it” (Lacan, 1960-1961).<sup>11</sup> The only human artefact remotely

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begins to constitute that truthful lie by which is initiated that which participates in desire at the level of the unconscious” (Lacan, 1990, p. 144).

<sup>11</sup> Lacan derived such definitions from Saussure’s work on the phonic chain and Jakobson’s research into aphasia, deducing a fundamental separation between sound and idea. For Saussure, the sign is the combination of sound image and idea. Jakobson’s major advance was the discovery that the signifier or phoneme can be without signified. In the New World, Charles Sanders Peirce instead termed the signifier a *representamen*, the referent as *object*, and named the meaning that one obtains from a sign the *interpretant*. More importantly, the relation between ‘sign-user’ or receiver and sign is one of negotiation with the receiver deciding one meaning from nigh infinite possibilities. Such a perspective, that the signified is not

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capable such of formalization would be mathematics, which, though a human language, is not a language of acoustic images but rather a highly formalized one with fixed meanings. Furthermore, Gödel proved that any even formal systems based in mathematics would always be incomplete, always *pas tout*. The “fundamentally equivocal character” of language need not arise from a human limitation, being the result of logical impossibility.

*A posteriori*, the decrease in phoneme perceptiveness in infants (Pons, F. *et al.*, 2009) renders inevitable the equivocality of language. Around the end of the first year of life, the total range of sounds produced by the child begins to diminish from a Babel of phonemes limited only by physiology to the more restricted set of sounds heard in the language of its entourage. Gödel’s impossibility aside, such a poor selection of sounds, limited first by human anatomy, and then by the newborn’s exposure to language will not be able avoid homophony and synonymy. And we have not yet considered the ambiguities of a given message in relation to where one places the cuts between sounds to form words, *e.g.*, *novio* vs. *no vio*. The serious researcher will undoubtedly find formal incoherencies in all human languages; all spoken languages possess equivocality.

Another Lacanian example of a homophonic equivocal is to be found in the binary “tu es celui qui me suivra partout” vs. “tu est celui qui me suivra(s) partout”. Naturally, the ambiguity between the simple future and the imperative future tenses only clarifies itself through writing, through the supplemental letter. This ambiguity at the level of speech reflects the unconscious desire of the subject of enunciation.

There is an underlying *I* to the “ You are the one who will follow me [“*Tu es celui qui me suivras partout*”] on which I insisted to such an extent.<sup>12</sup> It inscribes itself, with the whole problem of a certain future, at the interior of the vocatives properly speaking, the vocatives of vocation. For those who were not there, I recall the difference there is in French - it is a finesse whose demonstration not all tongues permit - between “You are the one who shall follow me ” and “ you are the one who will follow me”, [*Tu es celui qui me suivras partout* and *Tu es celui qui me suivra partout*], without *s*. In this occasion, the difference of the performative power of the *You* is effectively an actual difference of the *I* inasmuch as it operates in this act of speaking. One clearly sees at this level that the subject always receives his own message in an inverted form, namely it is the *I* to avow itself here by the intermediary of the form it gives to the *You*... Nevertheless, fundamentally what one finds at the second floor<sup>13</sup> [*d* arrow  $\$ \langle a \rangle$ ], is a call of the being

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the same as the message, is confirmed in the field of psychopathology. In delusions of interpretation as found in paranoia and erotomania, the chain signifier may lead unproblematically to significations, but the true meaning is the exclusive property of the subject, (s)he deduces a message, often menacingly, directed to his person. We take as a given that a signifier or signifying chain can signify one of many ‘signifieds’. Beyond this, it need have no relation whatsoever to the meaning ascribed to it by the receiver. Umberto Eco (1990) names this hermetic semiosis, explaining “*from a certain point of view everything bears relationships of analogy, contiguity, and similarity to everything else*”, but the phenomena of certainty and universal unicity of meaning in delusions of interpretations seem beyond even hermetic semiosis.

<sup>12</sup> First found in *Seminar III*.

<sup>13</sup> Of the graph of desire.

emitted more or less forcefully. It always contains, more or less, a *Let it be*<sup>14</sup>, and there, once again, one of the marvellous homophonic equivoques that French contains. (Lacan, 2013, p. 46).

This homophonic equivoque explicitly demonstrated by Lacan plays on the finesse of the French language, on the distinction between certainty of the future and the causality of the invocatory future; this ambiguity returns to the subjective position of (s)he who accounts for subject of enunciation, to the “underlying *I*” (Jakobson, 1971, p 132).<sup>15</sup> The signification swings back and forth between stringency, plausibly from a universal observation - little matter which other - and the election of a singular other. One might say the meaning of the phrase oscillates between the sacrament of marriage and persecution.

“The appeal of the being”, which would be located at the second level of the graph of desire, involves the desire of the subject of the unconscious. The being - there, in *Seminar XI*, Lacan still uses this term (*l'être*) as though it referred to a being with consistence<sup>16</sup> - emits “full speech” (Lacan, 1988, p. 107)<sup>17</sup> via through its enunciations. This “appeal to the other” resides between the *suivra* of recognition or perhaps exasperation and the *suivras* of exigency; one hears the desire articulated in its relation to the fantasy, the delusion, formalized as follows:  $d \rightarrow \$ \langle a$ . Hence the affirmation, the desire of the subject makes itself heard in the space between the pronounced words, in the equivoques present. Here the psychoanalyst interprets; (s)he interprets based on the fantasy, the fantasy of the analysand, of course! It is precisely here that the famous ego-psychologists like Hartmann, Kris, and Lowenstein lose their bearings, believing they should interpret using their own fantasies, as though they could offer themselves as anchoring points for the madman. In that case, it is suggestion instead of psychoanalysis, the imposition of the analyst's fantasy, of his subjectivity upon the analyst.

Addressing the homophonic equivoque, Lacan goes even further, saying that if the listener, the receiver in question has not acquired “something that represents a knot, a clamping point in a bundle of significations... he will hear *you are the one who shall follow me everywhere*” (1981, p. 316), meaning a persecutory delusion. If there is not a certain suture between signifier and signified, something fulfilling the function of the

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<sup>14</sup> *Soit*: The subjunctive tense of *être*; the conjunction “soit... soit” / “either... or”; an affirmation of accordance “So be it” or “That being so”; an equivalent of “that is to say” or “namely”, in mathematics “Soit l'équation  $y=x+a$ ” / “Let  $y=x+a$ ”.

<sup>15</sup> According to Jakobson, a *shifter* is a term whose meaning can only be deduced by referring to the message communicated between the sender and receiver.

<sup>16</sup> Throughout Lacan's teaching, in accordance with his renouncement of ontology which gives way to henology, the term gradually changes from *being* to *subject*, and finally to *parlêtre*.

<sup>17</sup> “Full speech is speech which aims at, which forms, the truth such as it becomes established in the recognition of one person by another. Full speech is speech which performs [*qui fait acte*]. One of the subjects finds himself, afterwards, other than he was before. That is why this dimension cannot be evaded in the analytic experience” (Lacan, 1966b). “Full speech, in effect, is defined by its identity with that which it speaks about”.

maintaining the metaphoric structure of language, then the accentuation of equivocal enunciations will not be without risk.

## Grammar

The second modality of the equivocal addressed by Lacan in *L'étourdit* is the grammatical equivoque.

For interpretation is seconded here by grammar. To which, in this case as in others, Freud does not deprive himself of recourse. I do not return here to what I underscore in this practice confirmed in many examples. I stress only that it is there what analysts impute modestly to Freud as a slippage in the indoctrination. This has dates (cf. that of the rat man) when he had no more backdrop for proposing them than the system  $\psi$  prey to “internal incitations”. Thus the analysts who cling to the madhouse of “general psychology”, are not capable of reading, in these startling cases, that Freud made subjects “repeat their lesson,” in their own grammar. To the extent that he repeats for us that, from each of their statements, we must be ready to revise the “parts of discourse” that we have believed to be able to retain from precedents. Of course this is what linguists propose to themselves as an ideal, but if it appear-to-be (*parest*) propitious to Chomsky, I have marked that my first sentence is inscribed as a contradiction by equivoque countering his transformational tree. “I am not making you say it”. Is this not the minimum of interpretive intervention? But it is not its sense that matters in the formula that the language I use here permits to give to it, it is that the amorphology of a language opens the equivoque between “You said it” and “I take it all the less to my charge as, such a thing, I in no way made you say it” (Lacan, 2001c, p. 491-2).

Freudian interpretation is not limited uniquely to homophonic ambiguities; he “makes subjects ‘repeat their lesson’, in its grammar”, in the grammar of their drives. Freud makes his patients learn from their repetitions indeed, and long before his text of 1914 *Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten*. Lacan continues his elaboration, indicating  
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that the kernel of psychoanalytic interpretation can be reduced to a minimalist indication of the analysand's own position as a *sui generis* cause, a "I didn't make you say it". You yourself pronounced that without any exhortation on my part. The famous example from the case of Ida Bauer comes to mind. When she complains emphatically of the hypocrisy of her entourage and her objectification as an item to be bartered, Freud interprets, "Look to you're own role in the disorder which you bemoan" (Lacan, 1966a). This interpretation relies on grammatical equivocity, insofar as it opens access to truth of the grammar of the drive. And thus one can distinguish between interpretations on the equivocity of the grammar of the drive, and on the equivocity of the grammar of the *dire* that "remains forgotten behind what is said in what is heard" (Lacan, 2001c). First we will consider the grammar of speech before turning to the grammar of the drive. As the reduced core of interpretation, Lacan proposes a fundamental, *je ne te le fais pas dire*. The function of this minimal interpretation is one of decontextualising what was said, in order to allow new meaning to emerge (Miller, 1996; Leclaire, 1998). Even in Lacan's formulation, it does not only involve a simple indication with regard to the analysand's speech. There is ambiguity, a certain oracular nature to the analyst's interpretation; it is not clear if it is a more or less neutral indication, or rather an accentuation: *I* didn't make you say that, I didn't *make* you say that, I didn't make you *say* that, I didn't make you say *that*, etc. Lacan observes that the very absence of emphasis leaves the ambiguity open, leaves the act of joining signifier and signification undone. In this example one finds a slippage of meaning between the identity of the cause, coercion, the frontier of utterance, and an evaluation of the preceding speech. The equivoque "is seconded by grammar" because all of these connotations do not find their ambiguity in the indeterminacy between a singular acoustic image<sup>18</sup> and a plurality of words to which it may refer, but insofar as the accentuation of one of several signifiers in the sentence modifies the meaning, without any need of exchanging one homonym for another. Thus Lacan names the "amorphology of a language" (Blum, 2005), the monotone and homogenous nature of an enunciation which leaves the connotations at the level of the phrase undetermined, grammatical equivocity. As such, the grammatical equivoque remains distinct from the homophonic or logical. But, as mentioned above, the amorphology of a language is in no way the only manifestation of grammatical equivocity in the analytic experience.

During the 2014 AE soiree on the equivocal, Eric Laurent asked the auditorium - seeing how the definitions of homophonic and logical equivoques were evident enough - "what would be an example of grammatical equivocity?" Of an equivoque that does not rely uniquely on the sonorous poverty of all human languages, nor on the logical negation inherent to the end of psychoanalysis. Perhaps the simplest answer would be the pronoun. The pronoun and the ambiguity it can engender offer at least one clear example of grammatical equivocity. In the case of the pronoun, it does not strictly speaking involve

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<sup>18</sup> "The linguistic sign unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and an acoustic image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychic imprint of this sound, the representation which gives us the evidence of our senses; it is sensorial, and if we happen to call it 'material', it is only in this sense and in opposition to the other term of the association, the concept, usually more abstract [...] I call the combination of a concept and a sound image a *sign*, but in current usage the term generally designates only a sound-image, a word, for example (*arbor*, etc.). One tends to forget that *arbor* is called a sign only because it carries the concept 'tree', with the result that the idea of the sensory part implies the idea of the whole" (Saussure, 1916, p. 418).

homophonic equivocity; there is no abundance of possible words indicated by a single acoustic image, but rather a fundamental variability, a vacuity of signified, variability essential to the very function of the pronoun. Jean-Claude Milner (1982) writes extensively on the topic of grammatical equivoques in his works on the anaphor<sup>19</sup>, *ἀναφορά* being a figure of style, which consists in beginning verses, phrases, or larger syntactical groupings by the same word or syntagma. We are principally interested in the manifestations of anaphors that involve pronouns. Before advancing further, let us clarify the difference between co-reference and anaphor - especially since, in French, the term anaphor is defined in two divergent meanings.<sup>20</sup>

Presently, it appears that many discussions concerning linguistic identity can be taken up anew. Traditionally, one distinguishes the relation of two referential units into categories of identity of reference and lexical identity. The first is nothing other than actual co-reference: it implies the material identity of the designated segments (when these have substance), but not those of the designating linguistic units [*e.g.*, *Un train peut en cacher un autre*]. The second [anaphora] is more complex: for these linguistic units, the lexical identity is the lexical material itself: nothing more, nothing less. But, due to the inexistence of absolute lexical synonymy, when it is a case of nouns, virtual co-reference is tantamount to lexical identity. They are not the same concept, however: so, in strict terminology, it would be false to maintain that pronominal anaphora

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<sup>19</sup> For the purposes of our discussion on the relation between anaphor and grammatical equivocity, perhaps a clarification of the definition of “anaphor” imposes itself. In this way we hope to limit, at least to reduce the ambiguities of terminology, comically recursive in relation to the topic of this chapter. According to Jean-Claude Milner, *co-reference* and *anaphorisation* are two distinct concepts: “There is a relation of co-reference between referential unities, A and B, when it so happens that they have they refer to the same thing - which can arise, without the interpretation of one being affected by the interpretation of the other. [...] The relation is manifestly symmetrical and transitive; To consider it reflexive is not devoid of sense: one referential unity could be said to be co-referential to itself. [...] The relation of the anaphor, however, is an asymmetrical relation, existing between a first anaphorised term and a second anaphorising term”. (Milner, 1982, p. 32).

<sup>20</sup> “In English, the name of the pertinent class is *anaphor*, the name *anaphora* being reserved for the relation and not one of its terms. The French language does not permit such a distinction [though adopting these words to the lexica would suffice]; the name *anaphor* is thus ‘ambiguous and it depends upon the context to manifest whether it refers to the relation or to the term of the relation” (Milner, 1982, p. 32).

suppose lexical identity, since, by principle, a noun and a pronoun are materially (and lexically) distinct. But one could say that, in general, the pronoun must have the same virtual reference as its antecedent; sometimes, this is even the only, the unique relation that establishes it. By abuses of language, to the extent that the virtual reference is attached - in the case of nouns - to their lexical specificity, one would say the pronoun adopts the lexical unity: for example, such is the point of view of Gross (1973), according to whom *en*, points to the unit *lions* [I saw ten lions and you saw fifteen of them]. One can see how the formula is justifiable, but also how imprecise it is (Milner, 1982, p. 32).<sup>21</sup>

In simple co-reference, it is a case of two signifiers that designate the same signified. Simply put, they are synonyms. Milner provides the example, one train may hide another [*un train peut en cacher un autre*], The first train can hide a second train, signified here in French by the word, *en*; there is an identity of references. So we have two different words indicating one same actual reference - two distinct references which are equal. The two co-referents will never have exactly the same connotations, since so long as they are not the same signifier, they do not have the same signifying materiality, (Lacan, 1998b, p. 33)<sup>22</sup> but they aim more or less for the same signified.

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<sup>21</sup> «*Il apparaît enfin que bien des discussions touchant l'identité linguistique peuvent à présent être reprises sur nouveaux frais. Il est de tradition de distinguer, pour deux unités référentielles, entre l'identité des références et l'identité lexicale. La première n'est rien d'autre que la coréférence actuelle : elle implique l'identité matérielle des segments désignés (lorsque ceux-ci ont une substance), mais non pas celle des unités linguistiques désignantes [e.g., Un train peut en cacher un autre]. La seconde [l'anaphore] est plus complexe : elle-même, l'identité lexicale est l'identité matérielle des unités linguistiques : rien de plus, rien de moins. Mais, à cause de l'inexistence de la synonymie lexicale absolue, l'identité lexicale et la coréférence virtuelle s'équivalent, quand il s'agit des noms. Elles ne sont cependant pas le même concept : ainsi, en stricte terminologie, il serait faux de soutenir que l'anaphore pronominale suppose l'identité lexicale, puisque, par principe, un nom et un pronom sont matériellement (et lexicalement) distincts. Mais on peut dire que, dans la généralité des cas, le pronom doit avoir la même référence virtuelle que son antécédent ; parfois, c'est même là la seule et unique relation qui s'établisse. Par abus de langage, dans la mesure où la référence virtuelle est attachée, pour les noms, à leur spécificité lexicale, on dira que le pronom alors reprend l'unité lexicale : tel est par exemple le point de vue de Gross (1973), selon qui *en*, 'désigne' (points to) l'unité lions [j'ai vu dix lions et toi tu en as vu quinze]. On voit en quel sens la formule est justifiable, mais aussi combien elle est imprécise* » (Milner, 1982, p. 32).

<sup>22</sup> Lacan showed in his comparison between *abbatu* and *atterré*.

In the case of the anaphor, it is the lexical value which is identical across the various cases, and yet the signified differ. Here the pronoun offers a quintessential example of the anaphor.

The traditional notion is that of a relation between two terms. From this point of view one distinguishes between a free anaphor, which is indifferent to the constraints to the specified subject and finite sentences, and a bound anaphor, which is dependent upon these constraints. The first relation results from discourse, insofar as it exceeds the limits of the sentence. The second relation results exclusively from the sentence: *thus, a usual pronoun such as 'he' can have an antecedent situated in a distinct sentence, or even a different replica in a dialogue.* The reflexive, on the other hand, can only have a term situated in the same sentence as an antecedent (Milner, 1982, p. 363).<sup>23</sup>

Regarding the functioning of anaphoric pronouns, Jean-Claude Milner distinguishes between those of virtual reference and actual reference: “the segment of reality associated with a sequence is its actual reference; the ensemble of conditions characterizing a lexical entity is its virtual reference” (Milner, 1982, p. 32). In the case of the pronominal anaphor, one possibility is that the pronoun replaces a noun from a prior phrase; in such cases it would be called a bound anaphor. It can also be the case that the pronoun repeats itself throughout several phrases; in this case anaphor in question is free from any constraints of signification. Thus the pronominal anaphor gives an effect not without resemblance to that of *paroemion*, but at the level of the word instead of the letter.

Concerning the clinic, the anaphorisation of a pronoun can incarnate the equivocal point between the subject of enunciation and the subject of the enounced. A married patient complains of a couple that are always arguing, “They shouldn’t have had a child” [*ils n’auraient pas dû avoir un enfant*], he says. If the analyst punctuates here, (s)he causes the ambiguity of the pronoun *they* to resonate. In French, there is a homophonic equivocality between *Il* and *Ils*, but let us consider the grammatical aspect of this free anaphor, the semantic flexibility of the word *They* instead. The cut, the analytic punctuation, causes the signified of the pronoun to vacillate. Does *They* refer to the other

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<sup>23</sup> «La notion traditionnelle est celle d’une relation entre deux termes. On distingue de ce point de vue entre une anaphore libre, qui est insensible aux contraintes du sujet spécifié et des phrases finies, et une anaphore liée, qui est sensible à ces contraintes. La première relation ressortit au discours, en tant qu’il excède les limites de la phrase. La seconde relation ressortit exclusivement à la phrase : *ainsi, un pronom usuel tel que ‘il’ peut avoir un antécédent situé dans une phrase distincte, ou même une réplique différente dans un dialogue.* En revanche, le réfléchi ne peut avoir pour antécédent qu’un terme situé dans la même phrase » (Milner, 1982, p. 363).

couple, to the couple to which the subject of enunciation belongs, or even to the parental couple of the patient? As a result, the sentence in its ambiguity can be heard as an auto-condemnation of the analysand himself. In this aspect, the equivoque of the pronominal anaphor approaches the example *You are the one who will/shall follow me* where if “a clamping point in a bundle of significations” lacks; the analyst’s interpretation could lead to attributing the equivoque to the unconscious, enigmatic desire of the analyst, e.g., “The analyst is going to confuse my remarks... The analyst is putting words in my mouth”. It’s an opening of the unconscious in which the unbearable desire of the subject is located, projected onto the body of the analyst. For this reason Miller reminds us of how the analyst works with fire; one should not forget the distinct possibility of engendering the spectre of the malevolent analyst.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Lacan asserted that Freud made his patients “repeat their lesson”, meaning, learn the grammar of their drives. This is one reading of what Freud resumed in the phrase, *Wo Es war, soll Ich warden* (1923). This maxim highlights the analytic ethics of Freud, to bring into focus the grammar of the drive, of the *jouissance* of the analysand.

*I’m much more myself. Before, I was a para-me who thought of myself as the true one, and who was absolutely false.* I think that no sentence is more appropriately expressed. It was *absolutely false*, this para-me. An *I* in the first part of the sentence, it has become an *it* in the second.... *the Other is, therefore, the locus in which is constituted the I who is speaking with him who hears* (Lacan, 1981, p. 307).<sup>24</sup>

The vignette quoted by Lacan, the phrase that expresses itself justly, recounts the passage from a *paramoi*<sup>25</sup> to a divided subject. It is difficult to imagine the subjective division between the identifications of the *ego* and the unconscious subject, of the alienation which the person undergoes as a result of his unconscious desire, and even of ego identifications being based in the locus which is the Other, as being more clearly spoken.

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<sup>24</sup> «Je suis beaucoup plus moi. Avant j’étais un *paramoi* qui croyais être le vrai et qui était absolument faux’. Je pense qu’il n’y a pas de phrase qui s’exprime plus juste ; ça ne sonne nullement à côté, mais vous sentez bien ce que ‘l’absolument faux’ n’est pas, ‘l’absolument faux’ ne colle pas. Il ‘était absolument faux’ ce *paramoi*. Il est un *il* dans la deuxième partie, et il est un *je* dans la première... L’Autre est donc le lieu où se constitue le *je* qui parle avec celui qui entend; ce que l’un dit étant déjà la réponse, et l’Autre décidant à l’entendre si l’un a ou non parlé» (Lacan, 1981, p. 307).

<sup>25</sup> *paramoi* is either a neologism, or an obscure allusion to *Hellinsia paramoi*.

## Logic

Number 3 now: it is logic, without which interpretation would be stupid, the first to serve themselves of it being of course those who, to transcendentalise existence with the unconscious, arm themselves with Freud's thesis that it is insensible to contradiction [Popper] (Lacan, 2001c, p. 492).

Here Lacan alludes to the famous Popperian critique of psychoanalysis. Popper denounced psychoanalysis for as always being right; that the principle of treating denials as confirmation of the existence of the unconscious *Vorstellung* opens the door to irresolvable logical paradoxes. If the psychoanalyst is always right, then psychoanalysis can never attain the rigor of a science. This perspective is based in a certainty of the impossibility of induction. Popper writes, "I approached the problem of induction through Hume. Hume, I felt, was perfectly right in pointing out that induction cannot be logically justified" (1963, p. 55). For Popper, no positive induction is certain; the only possible certainty follows the refutation of a theory *via* a negative result. Falsification thus functions for Popper as the indispensable criteria as to when a theory may be considered scientific. This absolute mistrust in the Other resonates with that of Descartes, of an Other, an untrustworthy God. One can see that "the absolute is always an affair of the impossible" (Miller, 2011b). For Popper, the absolute is the certainty of not knowing. All knowledge is never anything more than a fragile hypothesis awaiting the caprice of falsification. Hence Popper's critique with respect to the concept of the unconscious, if it is never falsifiable, it cannot be scientific. If such a paradox were possible, it would threaten his certainty.

It has no doubt not yet occurred to them that more than one logic has taken advantage of interdicting this fundament, and of no less remaining "formalized," which means proper to the matheme (Lacan, 2001c, p. 492).

Lacan does not directly respond to Popper's critique at the level of the clinic, but he does address that critique via the history of mathematics, commenting on the apparent lack of perceptiveness of Popper and Hume, who have both failed to notice advances in mathematics, which demonstrate the fatality of contradiction (Fierens, 2002, p. 285).<sup>26</sup> Some examples among many include Lambert's discoveries in non-Euclidian geometry and Gödel's ever-famous proof. Gödel demonstrated that any formal system, any theory to use Popper's lexicon, can never escape the fate of contradiction. Either the system is incomplete or it is inconsistent. We would add that inasmuch as the unconscious is

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<sup>26</sup> "Les logiques qui admettent plus de deux valeurs de vérité ou les logiques qui ne sont pas vérifonctionnelles (comme la logique modale ou la logique déontique) n'en reste pas moins *formalisées*" (Fierens, 2002, p. 285).

structured as a language, with a formal structure, it is unavoidable that it be incoherent. “To sum it up: exemption from mutual contradiction, primary process (mobility of cathexes), timelessness, and replacement of external by psychical reality - these are the characteristics which we may expect to find in processes belonging to the unconscious” (Freud, 2001b, p. 187).<sup>27</sup> The symbolic unconscious is complete not in relation to the meaning of words, but due to the *Vorstellung Representanz* themselves, in their *lexicality*<sup>28</sup>; at the level of the real of their combinatory. For Lacan (1978, p. 122), the real is without lack?<sup>29</sup>

Who would reproach Freud for such an effect of obscurantism and the dark clouds that it immediately, from Jung to Abraham, accumulated in response to him? Certainly not I who have also, to this place (of my inversion), some responsibilities (Lacan, 2001c, p. 492).

Freud stayed the path of granting his creation, psychoanalysis, the dignity of science. At the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, one finds his essays on aphasia and his famous unfinished letter to Fliess, titled: *Entwurf*. Indeed, he sustained his earliest scientific formation throughout his career; in the *Studies on Hysteria*, once again one finds the claim that psychoanalysis belongs to the sciences: “And no doubt yet other forms of this process exist, which are still concealed from our young psychological science; for it is certain that we have only taken the first steps in this region of knowledge, and our present views will be substantially altered by further observations” (1895, p. 262). This is still the case in the end, or at least until 1937 (1937a; 1937b). Moreover, Freud maintained this epistemological position despite the periodic departures of colleagues in disagreement with his theories.<sup>30</sup>

So then, how can we understand Lacan’s attribution of obscurantism, to a response of obscurantism “from Jung to Abraham”, to Freud’s discovery? Dr. Carl Jung famously distanced himself from Freudian theory in 1914. Jung’s view on the nature and contents of the unconscious was becoming incompatible with Freud’s, and his conception of sexuality and libido differed from Freud’s.

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<sup>27</sup> In his *Traumdeutung* (Interpretation of dreams, 2001c), one finds the following: “Dreams are disconnected, they accept the most violent contradictions without the least objection, they admit impossibilities, they disregard knowledge which carries great weight with us in the daytime, they reveal us as ethical and moral imbeciles”.

<sup>28</sup> *motérialité*

<sup>29</sup> “Le réel est sans fissure”.

<sup>30</sup> Freud begins his first major work *Instincts and their vicissitudes* (1915a), as follows: “We have often heard it maintained that sciences should be built upon clear and sharply defined basic concepts. In actual fact no science, not even the most exact, begins with such definitions. The true beginning of scientific activity consists rather in describing phenomena and then in proceeding to group classify, and correlate them”.

I can still recall vividly how Freud said to me, “My dear Jung, promise me never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark”. He said that to me with great emotion, in the tone of a father saying, “And promise me this one thing, my dear son: that you will go to church every Sunday”. In some astonishment I asked him, “A bulwark -- against what?” To which he replied, “Against the black tide of mud” -- and here he hesitated for a moment, then added – “of *occultism*”. First of all, it was the words “bulwark” and “dogma” that alarmed me; for a dogma, that is to say, an indisputable confession of faith, is set up only when the aim is to suppress doubts once and for all. But that no longer has anything to do with scientific judgment; only with a personal power drive. This was the thing that struck at the heart of our friendship (Jung, 1961, p. 150).

It seems difficult to disregard that this quotation be the allusion to which Lacan refers in *L'Étourdit*. For Freud, the abandonment of the theory of libido constituted the fall into obscurantism. From this point, it is clear that Lacan has his own responsibilities for such obscurantism; during his *retour à Freud*, the application of structural linguistics to obtain *L'inconscient est structuré comme un langage* and the pre-eminence of reading symptoms to the letter, minimize the importance of libido and *jouissance*.

After the schism, Jung's theory (1978) developed into its own discipline with concepts such as the *imagos*, the collective unconscious, and the *unus mundus*<sup>31</sup>. In this way, Jung's path passes from Freud's focus on sexuality to a more encompassing, monistic definition of libido; for Jung, libido is psychic energy, “It is the energy that manifests itself in the life process and is perceived subjectively as striving and desire” (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 697).

As for Karl Abraham, it is curious that Lacan pairs him with Jung; how does the innovative author of the *Liber Novus* resemble the loyal disciple aside from their given name? Abraham never left Freud's school of psychoanalysis (Freud, 1917). Rather he remained in the role of the ideal disciple. Moreover, he wrote extensively on sexual

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<sup>31</sup> “The unexpected parallelisms of ideas in psychology and physics suggest, as Jung pointed out, a possible ultimate *one-ness* of both fields of reality that physics and psychology study - i.e., a psychophysical one-ness of all life phenomena. Jung was even convinced that what he calls the unconscious somehow links up with the structure of inorganic matter - a link to which the problem of so-called “psychosomatic” illness seems to point. The concept of a unitarian idea of reality was called by Jung the *unus mundus*” (Jung, 1978, p. 309).

libido! In fact, when Abraham died tragically young on Christmas 1925, Freud wrote the following eulogy, “Among all those who followed me along the dark paths of psychoanalytic research, he won so preeminent a place that only one other name could be set beside his. It is likely that the boundless trust of his colleagues and pupils would have called him to the leadership; and he would without doubt have been a model leader in the pursuit of truth, led astray neither by the praise or blame of the many nor by the seductive illusion of his own fantasies” (1994, p. 101). Why then does Lacan locate Abraham on the side of obscurantism?

Lacan’s attribution of obscurantism to Abraham found in *L’étourdit* only takes on meaning when read together with his previous condemnation of Erikson’s culturalism. Erik Erikson elaborated a theory for the chronologically progressive hierarchy of psychosexual stages (1956). In the 1950s, Lacan discredited Erikson’s theory of a hierarchical development of stages of ego development, proposing instead a theory of the ego as the contingent sum of all identifications as well as a shift in emphasis from the ego to the subject of the unconscious.

In his seminar on March 9 1955, while speaking on the difficulties of regression theory, Lacan said the following of the cultural focus of Erikson’s theory.

This so-called culturalism consists in emphasising in analysis those things, which in each case, depend on the cultural context in which the subject is immersed... You will be surprised to see that this culturalism converges quite singularly with a psychologism that consists in understanding the entire analytic text as a function of the various stages in the development of the *ego*... Unfortunately his culturalism isn’t a very useful tool for him. This culturalism obliges him to raise the so-called problem of the study of the manifest content of the dream. Erikson then sets up an entire theory of the different stages of the *ego*, with which I will acquaint you. These psychological diversions are certainly extremely instructive, but to me they seem in truth to go against the very spirit of Freudian theory. For, in the end, if the *ego* is this succession of emergences, of shapes, if this double face of good and evil, of realisations and modes of derealisations constitute its type, one fails to see what can be made of the fact that Freud states in a thousand, two thousand different places in his writings, namely that the ego is the sum of the identifications of the subject, with all that that implies as to its radical contingency (Lacan, 1978, p. 187).

The dwarfing of the radical decentring of the Freudian discovery, the closing of the traumatic discovery of subjective division behind the banality of the progressive development of the self, as seen in Piaget and Erikson's theories, will eventually lead to an accentuation of the ego as exemplified in Ego psychology. Let us return to Abraham's theoretical work. From 1907 to 1912, Abraham endeavoured to distinguish between hysteria and schizophrenia by their subjective constitution. Since both structures can involve body events - depersonalization, paralysis, psychosomatic symptoms, etc. - the theoretical differentiation between these two structures becomes difficult without the Freudian distinction *Verdrängung* vs. *Verwerfung* nor the Lacanian concepts the Name of the Father and phallic signification. After all, acquisition of language effects the nature of libido for all humans. "This body, when it incorporates the symbolic, this has an effect on its *jouissance* in Lacan's sense" (Miller, 1983). The traces of language on the body is perhaps most clear in hysterical conversions that attests to the potential effects of the symbolisation of *jouissance* in the body. The hysteric bears witness with an imaginarily organised body, etched by words in a manner that has nothing to do with anatomy and physiology. For the schizophrenic, there are also body events, but not symptoms of metaphoric conversion as found in hysteria. Typically, these body events rest enigmatic, inaccessible to language. The schizophrenic's body is not one organised as a constellation around a master signifier. Lacan (2001c) will explain that the "so-called schizophrenic" doesn't enter into discourse since the phallus as an imaginary signifier is necessary to operate a separation between symbolic and real; this phallic signification is absent in schizophrenia<sup>32</sup>. And early as 1894, Freud had already significantly advanced the distinction between repression in hysteria or obsession, and "a much more energetic and successful kind of defence. Here, the ego rejects the incompatible idea together with its affect and behaves as if the idea had never occurred to the ego at all. But from the moment at which this has been successfully done the subject is in a psychosis, which can only be classified as *hallucinatory confusion*" (Freud, 1989, p. 15). Thus the notion of *Verwerfung* is already present in the *Neuro-Psychoses of Defence* as this "more energetic defence", though he does not explicitly name this defence mechanism *Verwerfung*. Yet, Abraham, faced with the problematic of distinguishing between the cause of hysteria and schizophrenia, chooses to differentiate at the level of psychosexual constitution based in "a premature appearance of libido and also in pathological fantasies, which are prematurely engaged with sexual matters to the exclusion of all other conscious thoughts... Therefore these individuals never really surpassed infantile autoerotism. Objectal love never completely developed... The psychosexual constitution of dementia praecox thus rests on an inhibition of development" (1965, p. 32). For Abraham, the schizophrenic subject remains in an infantile autism at the level of the oral erogenous zone due to a developmental impasse. The correspondence between Freud and Abraham clarifies Freud's reception of these ideas. For Freud, it is simply impossible to attribute an aetiology such as Abraham's conception to psychosis since "this abnormal constitution is the general infantile constitution" (Abraham & Freud, 1969). Moreover, any analogy between psychotic autoerotism and the so-called regression to infantile autoerotism would be suspect seeing as "the detachment of libido [in the case of the psychotic] is almost always of a partial nature" (*ibid.*). Thus Freud rejected Abraham's reduction of differential diagnosis to subjective evolution, to the condition of successful traversal of progressive stages.

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<sup>32</sup> "Ce dont le dit schizophrène se spécifie d'être pris sans le secours d'aucun discours établi" (Lacan, 2001c).

At the beginning of the twenties, Abraham theorised on the development of the *ego*, successful or abortive, in a progression through three stages - oral, anal, and genital - each with two sub-stages. Furthermore, he outlines this nosography of character as dependent upon the reception of the child by the maternal Other in each of these sub-stages. From this hypothesis, Abraham writes the following, "It is now easy for us to circumscribe the task of an ideal therapy of melancholy. It would consist in lifting the libido's regressive movements, and in labouring for its progression in the direction of a completed love for the object and genital organization" (Abraham, 1965, p. 208).

Lacan's criticism of Abraham will be multifaceted. With regard to melancholia, he disapproves of Abraham's reductionism and the normative aims of treatment, as well as his conception of a hierarchic progression of stages. In opposition to the predominance of the undifferentiated object in Abraham's theories, Lacan underlines the importance of Freud's theory of castration. In Lacanian theory, it is more a question of the want-to-be than the object found wanting. In this way, Lacan follows Freud's example, who, already in 1915, had written to Abraham, "Your observations on melancholia are precious... And yet you still pass by the veritable explanation" (Abraham & Freud, 1969). It is not simply that the arrival of psychoanalysis occurs at very specific historical coordinates, but its progress, and Lacan's contribution is no exception, does also continually destabilise the semblance that spares us from the real. This other side of psychoanalysis reveals itself in the modification of other discourses *via* the destabilisation of semblance. An comparable event can be found in the text *L'étourdit*, where the complete lack of imaginary scaffolding, the pursuit of reducing semblance renders the text nearly indecipherable; the Lacanian definition of a writing, of an *écrit*, being "Not-For-Reading... Something like 'Beware of dog', or 'No trespassing'. Verily: *Lasciate ogni speranza*" (Lacan, 2001c). It consists in an effort to orient oneself towards the real, towards the pure logic of the signifier, as found in the unconscious. This short digression aside, Lacan returns to the theme of logical paradox. Theories of absolute falsifiability do not only encounter problems at the level of inherent contradiction in formal logic, the realm of logic has never escaped the paradoxical.

I will recall only that no elaboration of logic, this beginning before Socrates and from elsewhere than our tradition, has ever proceeded except from a core of paradoxes, -for having served itself with a term, receivable everywhere, by which we designate the equivoques which situate themselves by this point which, for having come here as third, is also first and second. On what have I run aground this year in making felt the bath of Jouvence of which the matheme said logical has found for us its place and its vigour, are these the paradoxes not only refreshed from being promoted in new terms by Russell, but still original in coming from the dire of Cantor? (Lacan, 2001c, p. 492).

This fundamentally contradictory nature of logic exists from long before Aristotle, indeed before Socrates. Lacan continues by referencing other traditions than ours, meaning those cultures who do not stem from the *Judeo-Greco* roots of occidental society. For Lao Tzu, the logic of his great work, the *Tao Te Ching*, *founds itself in paradox, on a profound separation that would impede any and all access to the real by means of the symbolic. With regard to the philosophy of Socrates, one finds a similar foundation upon paradox.*<sup>33</sup> *Further paradoxes found the henology of Parmenides and Zeno*<sup>34</sup> (Planck, 1901). *Moreover, one can hardly claim that the formalisation of modern physics has somehow reduced the scope of such paradoxes at the foundation of knowledge (Bekenstein, 1973)*<sup>35</sup>. On the contrary, the advances of physics in the last century led to an eruption of the real, one directly in contradiction with Popper's excessive simplification. Quantum mechanics heralds the existence of new paradoxes, such as the quantum Zeno effect (Hodges, 2004, p. 54).<sup>36</sup> The perseverance of these pre-Socratic paradoxes, their reappearance, ever unattainable at the frontier of scientific knowledge, as the real which always returns to its place, undermines the validity of the Popperian perspective, namely the validity of his doctrine of zero tolerance towards contradiction.

Will I go on to speak of the "genital drive" as the cata-logue of the pre-genital drives insofar as they do not contain themselves, but have their cause elsewhere, that is, in that Other to which "genitality" only has access inasmuch it takes on a "bar" from the division effected by its passage to the major signifier, the phallus? (Lacan, 2001c, p. 493).

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<sup>33</sup> γνῶθι σεαυτόν (Know thyself) in contradiction with *ipse se nihil scire id unum sciat*.

<sup>34</sup> Their paradoxes aim to assert a philosophy of the one, of the singularity of all. These paradoxes, formulated as critiques of pluralist philosophies, were of with surprising rigour. The paradox of complete divisibility, for example, was not satisfactorily resolved until Cantor's discovery of transfinite and the minimal distance discovered by Planck.

<sup>35</sup> "Considerations of simplicity and consistency, and dimensional arguments indicate that the black-hole entropy is equal to the ratio of the black-hole area to the square of the Planck length times a dimensionless constant of order unity" ... *Planck length* =  $1.616\ 199(97) \times 10^{-35}$  m (Bekenstein, 1973).

<sup>36</sup> "It is easy to show using standard theory that if a system starts in an Eigenstate of some observable, and measurements are made of that observable  $N$  times a second, then, even if the state is not a stationary one, the probability that the system will be in the same state after, say, one second, tends to one as  $N$  tends to infinity; that is, that continual observations will prevent motion" (Hodges, 2004, p. 54).

In reading *Three Essays on Sexuality*, we see Freud arrive at the lucid conclusion that there is no universality in sexual behaviour, no sexual instinct in humans that is not reshaped in a singular manner by language. On the one hand, the myriad of possible detours in object choice testifies to the non-existence of another where libido naturally condenses. On the other, perversions with distortions not at the level of the object, but of the aim, indicate that the drives in question do not involve a complete “genital drive”; the normative sexual drive reveals itself to be a mirage. After all, not even the so-called “normal” sexual relation sustains itself without recourse to the fantasy, by a “psychical participation in the transformation of the sexual drive” (Freud, 1962, p. 49). The partial object is always there as cause of desire; the fantasy transforms agony and ecstasy to pleasure. Moreover, the beloved other is represented mentally with the characteristics of idealisation and overestimation (*Ibid*).

For Freud, “The sexual drive in and of itself is not a simple given fact; it is formed of diverse components, which dissociate in cases of perversion” (*Ibid*). The five Freudian cases of psychoanalysis show the pre-eminence of other drives: oral, anal, scopic, and invocatory. These pre-genital drives find their cause in the Other, located on the liminal spaces of the body of the infant, there where the maternal Other cares for the newborn. The pre-genital drives find their cause in the reception this Other offers. It seems access to the dialectic of desire and the social bond depend upon the “good enough” reception by this Other, as seen in the famous Kleinian case (Klein, 1930). This reception will always be uncertain since its “good enough” nature necessitates a minimal distance, a separation; this reception would also be in relation with the maternal fantasy.

Therefore, if one wishes to speak of the set of “sexual drives”, it seems one would be obliged to admit that this constitutes an empty set. *Il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel...* in other words, there is no normal sexual *trieb*; any instinct that may have been was fractured by the inscription of language in the body, by the genesis of the subject. Just as any other formal set, that of the drives obtains no coherent completeness in its totality, and above all attains no universality. As such, the so-called genital drive would be located where the impossibility of Gödel’s discovery manifests itself. If Freud considered the verb ‘love, *lieben*, as “the expression of the sum total of sexuality” (Freud, 1915a)<sup>37</sup>, here one runs up against a logical equivoque of the human experience. The tabulation of partial drives, the set of the genital drive that would assemble all the pre-genital partial drives, itself excepted, is contradictory. This apparent paradox stems from the logical equivoque of the drives in the sexual life of man.

And for the transfinite of demand, that is, re-petition, will I return to its only having another horizon from giving body to the two, being no less than it inaccessible in only beginning with the one which would not be that of the empty set? (Lacan, 2001c, p. 493).

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<sup>37</sup> “*Ausdruck der ganzen Sexualstrebung*” (Freud, 1915a).

The repeated petition, that is to say, “the transfinite of demand”, originates from the gap between demand, *die Forderung*, and desire, *das Begehren*. Satisfaction of demand never attains the level of desire. The metonymic object of desire is always elsewhere. “*It wasn't really that which I wanted*”. The Freudian example of the butcher's wife's dream elucidates this asymmetry between demand, desire, and want in exemplary form. “This patient very much smitten with her husband, what does she demand? It is love, and hysterics, like everybody else, demand love, except that for them, it is more of an encumbrance. What does she desire? She desires caviar. One need only read. And what does she want? She wants not to be given caviar” (Lacan, 1998, p. 364). This vignette shows us the disconnect between demand and desire; she wants for her demand not to be satisfied in order to be able to continue desiring. In this way, no fulfilment of the demand of love ever attains desire, as the tortoise chased by Achilles.

The primordial demand is the infant's cry of suffering a physiological need. Insofar as the Other interprets this primordial cry, the Other transmutes it from biological need into demand. By this transformation from need to demand, the child enters into the circuit of demand, which consists in a separation that gives the Other its status. From this moment on, the child's life will unfold along the coordinates of a demand aimed at the Other. What Lacan names the transfinite of demand involves this horizon, the horizon that demand approaches asymptotically, never becoming parallel with desire. This demand addressed to the Other lends a dyadic structure. Hence the transference unconscious of psychoanalysis, the unconscious is fundamentally intersubjective. Yet Lacan envisions the end, the exit out of analysis by the passage from two to one; from the intersubjective nature of the transference unconscious to the real unconscious in order to arrive at the function of the analyst, singular and unique.

### **The end of analysis**

The obstacle, which the transfinite of demand presents at the end of analysis, appears in cases of hysteria, just as obsession, in the transference love of the Other. For the obsession neurotic, attempts to go beyond the barrier of demand to his desire are haunted by anxiety. Lacan observes that manifestations of obsessive's desire carry with them a certain paradoxically in that they depend upon the Other - as all desire does - but simultaneously involve a fading of the Other, a kind of destruction of the Other. “The desire of man in so far as it is the desire of the Other, namely that it is beyond the passage of the articulation of man's need in this necessity to make it known to the other, this desire in the form of absolute condition, of something which is beyond every satisfaction of need, and which is produced in the margin which exists between the demand for the satisfaction of need and the demand for love, which is situated there. As such a demand contains within it the demand for love, it is a simply fulfilled biological necessity, but a demand “which presents the character of an absolute condition, that it is this one and same one which I designate to be proper to desire”, and when this fixated demand which contains the truth of desire is in play, this “desire as such, namely that in its constitution, comprises the destruction of the Other”. Such desire minimizes the Other. Yet, desire is always desire of the Other; it is always located in the Other, a logical paradox. “The obsessive, insofar as his fundamental movement is directed towards his desire as such, and above all in its constitution as desire, implies in every movement towards the attainment of this desire what we call the destruction of the Other”. This very destruction of the Other renders his desire ephemeral, hesitant.

The desire of the obsessive thus “dissimulates beneath the demand of the Other”. The obsessive fantasy is that of sustaining the completeness of the Other, which is simply another way of saying “the obsessive applies himself to destroying the desire of the Other”. The obsessive finds manifestations of the desire of the Other, the desire of the analyst, unbearable in all their capriciousness. This paradox “can lead to the eternalisation of the cure”. Each time his desire as desire of the Other, or the desire of the analyst manifest, the obsessive risks backpedalling before the Other’s lack. The unconscious as real in the very last period of Lacan’s thought, of *Preface to the English edition of Seminar XI*, announces a radical turning point. There Lacan writes, “The space of a lapse, has no significance of meaning (or interpretation), only then is one sure of being in the unconscious. One knows it, oneself. But paying it attention suffices for one to exit. No amity there, which this unconscious sustains” (Lacan, 2001d). This conceptualization of the unconscious is radically devoid of meaning. It is only in the nonsensical lapses that the unconscious can be claimed to be present. Moreover, it is no longer envisioned as being sustained by the transference relation between the analysand and the analyst as a subject supposed to know. Lacan no longer conceives of the unconscious as intersubjective, it concerns the solitary analysand, the singular one.

In a final period of his analysis, Bernard Porcheret - recently named AE - experienced an “*éclaté d’équivoques*” during which meaning and the story tale, his fiction, fragmented and revealed the hole of non-meaning bordered by the letter. During this time of understanding, he dreamt the following dream, which he named ‘the dream of the *biffure*’: “I have before me a vague relief map of northern Spain. My analyst passes by me and crosses out a sort of [unintelligible] with a yellow marker. He underlines the letters of a name of a town *Llógar*, written with an accent above the ‘O’. The analyst snatches my iPhone, I find myself without means of accessing knowledge, I am anxious since soon I must intervene about my own case in the improbable scenery of study days. I rejoin him further on, the analyst, in order to recover my iPhone. Without looking, without speaking, he negligently gives me a broken telephone, a child’s plaything”.<sup>38</sup>

Mr. Porcheret begins the analysis of his dream by telling us that *llógar* condenses two Spanish words *lugar*, and *llegar*. On the one hand, “the accent points as an index”, a vector towards the destination. On the other hand, it is a crossing-out, *LlØgar*. The ‘o’ could also be read as a hole, a zero, ‘0’. In this case, a hole doubly negated, by its very nature and then by the added accent of annulment, the crossing-out. This neologism, *Llógar* anticipates itself somewhat in the French language since the word ‘*zéro*’ is written with this same trace. One can clearly see the *Wunsch* of the dream in the fact; “soon I must intervene about my own case in the improbable scenery of study days”. This very testimony of his dream took place at the AE study days on the *équivoque*. But the veritable kernel of the dream is the destitution of the subject supposed to know. The enacting of the fall from grace of the transference to the Other. “Without looking, without

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<sup>38</sup> «J’ai devant moi une carte vague des reliefs du nord de l’Espagne. Mon analyste passe à côté de moi et fait une biffure avec une marqueur jaune sur une sorte de [inaudible]. Il souligne les lettres d’un nom d’une ville *Llógar*, écrit avec un accent sur le ‘O’. L’analyste embarque mon iPhone, je me retrouve sans moyens d’accéder au savoir, je suis angoissé car je dois bientôt intervenir, à propos de ce cas. Dans le décor improbable d’une journée d’études. Je le rejoins plus loin, l’analyste, pour récupérer mon iPhone. Sans regard, sans parole, négligemment il me donne un téléphone cassé, un jouet d’enfant.»

speaking, he negligently gives me a broken telephone, a child's plaything". It is a dream of the passage from the two of the transferential unconscious to the one of the real unconscious; where with the mirage Other being the subject supposed to know and the "love addressed to knowledge" (Lacan, 2001a) yield to the *one* without recourse to the knowledge of a second.

The end of analysis and the narrow path of the *passe* involve a logical equivoque. For M. Porcheret, "an equivoque on being".<sup>39</sup> It consists in the isolation and consent to a creative trace, genitor of the subject unseizable at the level of the signified. A logical equivoque between the unconscious meaning of symptoms and the fundamental nonsense of the traumatism of the inscription of language in the organism. Furthermore, there is logical equivocity in the destitution of the transferential unconscious, of the subject supposed to know without which no analytic act exists, and its contradiction, the real of the unconscious, '*Ere's one*'<sup>40</sup>, as the exit point from the analytic experience towards the singular.

Bernard Porcheret's dream constitutes a traversal of the transfinite of the transferential unconscious, that of the intersubjectivity of two - the demand ever-directed towards another - to the autism of the one of the real unconscious. He awaited the Other's knowledge, but the dream shows the Other is equally deprived of meaning, of an anchoring point that would orient the subject. He lends his knowledge to the Other, and the other returns the letter.

I want to mark here that there is only a collection there--ceaselessly fed by the testimony that those of course whose ears I open give to it--a collection of what anyone as well as I and they get from the mouths themselves of analysands however little they are authorized to take the place of the analyst (Lacan, 2001c, p. 493).

The passage from analysand to analyst plays out in the singularity of the one. The generation of the one does not occur from the basis of addition, of counting one's possessions. It is not through sameness, by the inclusion in the universal, - for example, counting sheep, 1, 2, 3, ... *ad infinitum*. Rather "It is very exactly that, contrary to appearance, *the One* by essence could not be founded on sameness, but it is very precisely, on the contrary, by set theory, marked as needing to be founded in pure and simple difference" (Lacan, 2011, pp. 110-111). Set theory teaches us the one is founded by its absence, a lack. The "pure and simple difference" is, insofar as it concerns the analyst, his singularity, the unicity of his linguistic trauma. The one appears from the starting point of the lack; regarding the analyst to be, it is from the letter, which causes the want-to-be. At the end of the analytic experience, reading desire at the letter passes by negation. It requires a refusal to read the letter at the level of meaning, at the level of the signified. In a way, it is no longer a case of the signifier either, but of tracing, by the combinatory of signifiers, the letter as unit of jouissance.

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<sup>39</sup> "*une équivoque sur l'être*".

<sup>40</sup> "*Y'a de l'Un*".

That it be simply a question of a herd of domesticated animals does not provide for the genesis of the one, it is more the one which lacking in the real, in relation to the expected number in the symbolic. To assert this modern mathematical logic took quite the detour to find again what was there in the beginning of writing. Not enumeration of worldly objects, but starting from the moment when the trace refers to nothing to be found in the world. The structure of the number is made to designate what doesn't exist in the world. The same could be said of the letter. It concerns the gap between being and existing.

## Conclusion

Late in his teaching, Lacan will remark, "When all is said and done, equivocation is the only weapon we have against the *sinthome*... In effect, interpretation operates uniquely by equivocation. There must be something in the signifier which resonates" (Lacan, 2005, p. 17). I read Lacan's quote as an observation that equivocation is the only path for grasping the singularity of the subject. It is the true *Via regia* to the unconscious. Whether it be via the analyst's systematic misunderstanding of the analysand's discourse, or his punctuations which accent the ambiguity of the analysand's speech, or by repetition or other interpretations based around the analysand's master signifiers, or even the analyst's simple stupidity (Allouch, 2009, p. 81).<sup>41</sup> we know the psychoanalytic experience advances through incomprehension and surprise; effects of truth occur at the fault lines of the lying truth. And of course, if this exclusive function (equivocation → unconscious) is true, which I hold it to be, we soon find ourselves confronting serious questions on the nature of this relation. Does the equivocal nature of language itself engender the unconscious,  $f(\epsilon)=\$$ . Alternatively we could formulate it  $L\Diamond\$,$  does the incoherence of language as a formal system leads unavoidably to the phenomena of the unconscious, to the subjective division? Lacan visits this hypothesis in passing, first saying in "the unconscious is structured by language" (1998, p. 65)<sup>42</sup> before modifying his thesis, "the unconscious is structured *like a language*" (Lacan, 1990, p. 20). All of these complicated questions are fundamentally relevant to psychoanalysis, as they are difficulties encountered in reduction of the oppressive over-determined meaning which initially causes the subject's suffering, as well as in deduction of the singular one at the end of the psychoanalysis. Attaining the one, the unary trait, constitutes the prime goal, the foundation of the psychoanalytic ethic. This is the root of the opposition between ego psychology and other cognitive or behavioural approaches on the one hand, which

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<sup>41</sup> "He had to decide. For months and months he had told Lacan of his love for X, talked about her, of his relationship with her, of her life. In short, he had completely analysed his choice of her....

He arrives in the session to declare, finally:

- 'I'm getting married next week.'

Lacan:

- 'To whom?'"

(Allouch, 2009, p. 81)

<sup>42</sup> "Disons que tout ce qui est de l'ordre de l'inconscient en tant qu'il est structuré par le langage, nous met devant le phénomène suivant - ce n'est ni le genre, ni la classe, mais seulement l'exemple particulier qui nous permet de saisir les propriétés les plus significatives" (Lacan, 1998, p. 65).

attempt the suppression of the symptom and the normalization of the subject, and psychoanalysis on the other, oriented towards the denomination of the one.

## **Biographical Note**

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