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Affecting the *Logos*

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Affecting the Logos

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Abstract

Affecting the Logos

By Mark Stoholski

The unconscious, Freud writes, speaks in sophisms. This work takes the psychoanalyst at his word, for it is indeed apt, perhaps more than Freud himself was aware. These “sophisms,” where unconscious affect signs itself in the interruption of the progression of articulated discourse, show the psyche to be touched by an aesthetic force that it cannot master. Language is itself made to serve otherwise; it does not communicate, but rather comports something of the aesthetic. This theme, in a literary idiom, is central to the surviving writings of the ancient sophist Gorgias of Leontini. Two chapters trace his arguments regarding the irreducible aesthetic character of the *logos* – for Gorgias, language is at once indissociable from affect and incommensurable with it. For Gorgias, language is incited by what he calls, *to ektos*, “the outside,” an indefinite field of formless affective excitations that impinge upon the psyche and to which language tries to give form. This work of formation is therefore both interminable and deceptive: as it purports to represent an unrepresentable affect, language can only dissemble the affect that prompts it into being. Literature is, for Gorgias, merely a limit case of a generalized *logos* that perpetually transforms images, showing itself to be affected and affecting at every turn. Gorgias’ argument is not merely a historical curiosity; he is cited nearly verbatim—albeit without attribution—in Nietzsche’s considerations of classical rhetoric. Via Nietzsche, Jean-François Lyotard’s work attempts to think a “sophistic” politics and ethics in relation to the aesthetic concerns of the ancient sophists, one which is continually animated by unrepresentable affect that stands to unmaster any pretention. Pascal Quignard’s rewritings of the authors of the second sophistic attest to a fascination with the work of affective images, the images that the ancients discuss and the image that they themselves become under Quignard’s pen. For Quignard, to be human is to betray a fixation upon the image, images that continually transform themselves, attempting to represent and to elude the terror and fascination of the primal scene.

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Introduction

ἐπεὶ δὲ λέγων ποτὲ γνώμην πρὸς τὸν
 δῆμον εὐδοκίμει καὶ πάντας ὁμαλῶς
 ἑώρα τὸν λόγον ἀποδεχομένους,
 ἐπιστραφεὶς πρὸς τοὺς φίλους εἶπεν:
 ‘οὐ δὴ πού τι κακὸν λέγων ἑμαυτὸν
 λέληθα;’

(When speaking his cause before the
 people, and seeing the uniform
 approval of all regarding his
 discourse, he turned to his friends
 and said, “Have I forgotten myself
 and said something stupid?”)

- Plutarch, *Lives, Phocion*

“The present *logos* does not seek a definition of rhetoric, for completeness is beside the point in the matter of the incomplete [περίεργον γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ἀτελέσι τὸ τέλειον].”¹ The line belongs to the *Commentary on the Aphthonian Progymnasmata* attributed to John of Sardis; it is the work of a Byzantine scholiast attending to ancient schoolboy textbooks in rhetoric. Why the project was undertaken, one is at pains to say. The age of classical rhetoric was already long past. As the text witnesses, the commentator might well appear to be unaware of this, or if he is, he does not care. It is only his Christian name that

¹ John of Sardis, *Commentarium in Aphthonii progymnasmata* 1.

betrays the work; if not for that signature, one might well be lead to believe that it belonged to those centuries when the voices of the sophists yet sounded.² He does not seek to revive them, at least not in the sense that he attempts a renaissance in his own day. As he readily concedes, the *progymnasmata* (“preliminary exercises”), taken on their own, do not lend themselves to use. They are merely preparatory works. They seek to impart a knowledge only of the basic components of oratory. Having mastered them, one would be no more qualified to argue before a court, a deliberative body, or any other audience than the reader of a contemporary manual on the technique of painting might be to deliver a canvas. The commentary, like any other, attempts to come to terms with the texts of his predecessors as they have been handed down, but it does not achieve any mastery over what it presents. Indeed, with its first line, it poses the question of the definition of rhetoric only to lose itself there. The attempt to capture the sense of the term turns back upon itself. This is not for lack of precision; the limit that one attempts to set, according to which the nature of rhetoric might come to view, appears as the unlimited itself. This is because, as John recognizes, one does not and cannot occupy a position exterior to rhetoric, from which its operations might indeed be appraised. The act of defining rhetoric is itself already a rhetorical gesture. Here, at least, there is no question of anchoring the operation of reference upon a signified that is independent of the operations of language. In attempting to trace the contours of rhetoric, language takes itself as its own object, working to give an account of its uses and its own effectiveness.

There is perhaps nothing new in the definition of rhetoric put forth by John, save perhaps in its emphasis. The binding of rhetoric to the incomplete, to call it endless - ἀτελής – recapitulates the gesture found in Plato’s *Gorgias*. It is in this dialogue where

² See George A. Kennedy’s introduction to his translation of the commentary, in Kennedy 2003, 173-175.

the word “rhetoric” is first attested in the Greek language. Its beginning is inauspicious. Socrates condemns the art of oratory as one of mere semblances, devoid of reality.³ It proceeds without certain knowledge of its object; it dallies with circumstantial appearances without making any true inquiry into the nature of things. For that, he condemns it, refusing to grant it the dignity of the name *technē*. It is, as Socrates names it, merely an ἐμπειρία, an “experience” of sorts, which might have practical implications, but which can only falsely be placed within the vaunted domain of *theoria*.⁴ Plato’s aim in the *Gorgias* is to dissociate the matter of rhetoric from that of language, of the *logos*, taken in its widest sense. This distinction is not known in any earlier Greek author; what one witnesses in this dialogue is the birth of philosophy itself through a constraint placed upon language: the abolition of pleasure from the movements of discourse. What one finds in Plato is the deliberate attempt to anesthetize the speaking body; only then is it possible to speak in the name of an ideal of truth that is dispassionate, universal and free of those attachments that one might deride as “merely subjective.” Still in Parmenides, persuasion was integral to ἀληθεία, to truth; Plato sets about breaking this bond. Insofar as language is able to mobilize pleasure and pain, it is able to compel the assent of its hearers even though the speaker might deceive. The Platonic *logos* disavows this psychagogy, presenting itself as means for an investigation into what is, free of the pleasant seductions worked by the ancient orators. Sentiment will nonetheless a danger that ever menaces philosophy, threatening to hurl it into the domain of images, which Plato deemed to be that of non-being.

³ Plato, *Gorgias* 463a-b.

⁴ Ibid., 465a.

For those sophists whom Plato condemned, there is perhaps nothing intrinsically shocking about this; the rhetorical mode of “straight-talk,” where one purports not to persuade, but to “tell it like it is” stands as a valuable one. There are few better ways to please an audience than to announce one’s respect for them – even perhaps one’s fear of them – by framing one’s discourse in such a mode.⁵ And even if Plato asserts the inutility of rhetoric, demanding that argumentation be delivered in an apodeictic mode, this is not necessarily a problem. The sophists were themselves also authors of statements that would seem to bring an end to debate and perhaps even to interlocution, were one to take them at face value: the most ready examples are found in Antisthenes’ argument that contradiction is impossible, because all statements are true. That the sophist should take it upon himself to argue this proposition within the context of eristic debate nonetheless betrays a sense of humor; when, in Plato’s *Euthydemus*, the sophist Dionysodorus gives voice to the argument of Antisthenes, it is as a challenge to Socrates. He demands that the philosopher refute him. Socrates cries foul, claiming that if contradiction is impossible, then refutation is likewise, but in his insistence on speaking from a position that searches after a truth held universal, he misses the point.⁶ There is a real humor here, resting on the artistry of language that inheres in the eristic debates of the sophists – one can indeed argue that contradiction is impossible, as a snare for the opponent. If he falls silent, or offers no counterargument, he has lost the debate – the provisional prohibition of an argumentative move, whether contradiction, or any other is a snare set for the opponent. The argumentation of the sophists is an experimentation with the substance of language, a perpetual affair of putting modes of argument and of representation to the test. The

⁵ For an example, see Socrates’ own use of this mode, in a patently rhetorical fashion, in the opening lines of the *Apology*.

⁶ Plato, *Euthydemus* 285d-287c.

sophist makes use of paradox; it is, of course, the case that inviting the opponent to refute the impossibility of contradiction is itself manifestly contradictory, but this is the point. Via his *logos*, the sophist may assert the impossible, he may even demand it – and a sufficiently clever opponent will be able to deliver. The sophists mobilize the *logos* as a problem; language is not the reflection of a reality that is somehow given independent of it, nor does it necessarily confine itself to the domain of logic. In this, they are not unlike that other group famously denounced by Plato, the poets. Though their arguments and their compositions are taken up in prose, the sophists position their discourse as an investigation into the very possibilities of speaking itself, the forms that the *logos* may take and the effects that it is able to work. This is an interrogation of the possibilities of language itself, when it is untethered from the domain of practical or communicative constraints. The immoralities peddled by the poets and the paradoxes that the sophists set to play are the result of the representative function of language let to play, without regard for the canons of what may pass for a given reality, nor for the pragmatics of communication.

This is not, however, to say that what is at stake in sophistic oratory is merely a matter of the production of formal arrangements within language, thought as a closed system of differences. The *logos* is not self-contained, it is intimately tied to the question of the aesthetic, thought in its broadest sense, pertaining to the aesthetic excitations that animate psyche and soma alike. As Gorgias – not the character in Plato's dialogue, but the sophist himself – contends, the philosophical attempt to produce a dispassionate *logos* is but an exercise in self-deception; one who sets to speak or to write does so as one already moved by the aesthetic excitations that befall the psyche through the senses.

Much in what follows will be devoted to directly unpacking Gorgias' texts; for present purposes some remarks given by Nietzsche in his 1872-1873 lecture course on ancient rhetoric will suffice. Although he does not attribute these statements, they are a succinct paraphrase of Gorgias' arguments on the nature of the *logos*, assembled from the sophist's *On Nature, or On Non-Being* and *Encomium of Helen*:

It is not difficult to prove that what is called "rhetorical," as a means of conscious art, had been active as a means of unconscious art in language and its development, indeed, *the rhetorical is a further development*, guided by the clear light of the understanding, of the artistic means which are already found in language. There is no unrhetorical "naturalness" of language to which one could appeal; language is itself the result of purely rhetorical arts. The power to discover and to make operative that which works and impresses [*was wirkt und Eindruck macht*], with respect to each thing, a power which Aristotle calls rhetoric is, at the same time, the essence of language; the latter is based just as little as rhetoric is upon that which is true, upon the essence of things. Language does not desire to instruct, but to convey to others a subjective impulse and its acceptance [*eine subjektive Erregung und Annahme auf Andere übertragen*]. Man, who forms language, does not perceive things or events, but *excitations* [*Reize*]; he does not communicate sensations [*Empfindungen*], but merely copies of sensations. This sensation, evoked through a nerve impulse, does not take in the thing itself; this sensation is presented externally through an image.⁷

To follow Gorgias' thought, one must discard the presumption that objects are in any way given. The originary state of the *logos* is a body afflicted with excitations that do not

⁷ Nietzsche 1872-1873 (1989), 21.

present immediately identifiable qualities; the psyche is agitated, animated even, but what befalls it from an indefinite “outside,” which the sophist calls τὸ ἔκτος. The *logos* follows after these excitations, it attempts to give form to them by representing them, fashioning copies that ascribe some degree of definition to what is, at first, simply a shock to the system. The excitation befalls before there are means to capture it and qualify it; the psyche follows after it, rendering an account – a *logos* – of what has afflicted it. As Nietzsche makes clear, Gorgias’ notion of *logos* is one that extends beyond instances of a spoken or written language, and is not, at least initially, communicative in character. It belongs to a dynamic that is integral to, and indeed constitutive of, the psyche. To borrow the language of a perennial philosophical problem, the fashioning of excitations by the *logos* is the matter of the translation of quantity into quality. The *logos* would be the process whereby excitations without quality are bound and qualified within the psyche. If the production of an image in the absence of any quality through which the faithfulness of a representation might be judged strikes the reader as nonsense, this is exactly the point. As Gorgias frames it, the *logos* is not the exertion of a reason freely operating. It is driven by what it does not and cannot contain, but approximates nonetheless in the crafting of forms. The *logos* is the product of a metaphor – or to be more specific, a catachresis – that precedes the possibility of speaking or of writing. What, for lack of quality, must remain unrepresentable is represented, even so. And if it were not represented, there would be no *logos*, no language, no reason, and indeed no thought – all of these are but the belated products of the infliction of aesthetic excitation that precedes them and which will have continued to drive them.

The *logos* is a coming to terms with an excitation that remains foreign to any term. As Gorgias remarks, these excitations inscribe themselves on the psyche as what he terms “images,” εικόνες.⁸ The work of these images is not confined to the moment of their inscription – they install themselves as internal foreign bodies which continue to excite the psyche from within. If they cannot be bound to qualities and thus represented, the sophist argues, the outcome is madness. The internal image drives the production of those representations that one recognizes more readily under the name of the “image” – representations, whether visual or verbal. Insofar as these latter are host to quality, they remain heterogeneous to the internal image that compels their production. It is nevertheless the case that they retain traces of their source behind whatever transformations might accrue. The *logos* remains bound to the aesthetic, even in its most quotidian instances. It is not merely a vehicle for the communication of sense; in the matter of the voice, or in the turns of styles, it remains bound indissociably to the aesthetic even if a speaker or writer should aspire to neutrality. The *logos* is superposed upon an incessant exposure to those excitations that arrive from the “outside” in its double aspect – both as that exterior that excites via the senses, and as an internal exterior, where that which is inscribed upon the psyche continues to agitate. With respect to these excitations, language serves a double function. It is apotropaic, insofar as the forms which it renders serves to ward off the threat of an excitation imposing directly; the result of this could only be madness, if not something yet worse. But as an aesthetic medium, it also serves to transmit excitations – the one who speaks or writes will have inflicted the aesthetic upon those who read or who hear. The nameless and formless shock that is aesthetic experience, at its most basic level, continues to pass within the

⁸ Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen* 15-17.

logos and through it. In this sense, even though it might disclaim itself John of Sardis' definition of rhetoric is quite exact; rhetoric is a matter of the incomplete precisely insofar as it contends that which refuses any final determination.

The reader will have noticed that the terminology here invoked is adjacent to the lexicon of psychoanalysis, particularly that of the early Freud. The present writing does indeed position itself at the intersection between the literary interrogations of the sophists and the investigation into the dynamics of the unconscious. This is no arbitrary conjunction. After all, it is Freud, in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, who remarks that the unconscious speaks in sophisms: the idiosyncratic uses of words in jokes and in dreams present the mere appearance of logic, a facsimile of reason that attempts to prevent an excitation from reaching consciousness.⁹ The most famous of these “sophisms” is, of course, the instance of kettle logic, which Freud invokes both in that book and in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

The story of the borrowed kettle which had a hole in it when it was given back is an excellent example of the purely comic effect of giving free play to the unconscious mode of thought. It will be recalled that the borrower, when he was questioned, replied firstly that he had not borrowed a kettle at all, secondly that it had had a hole in it already when he borrowed it, and thirdly that he had given it back undamaged and without a hole. This mutual cancelling-out by several thoughts, each of which is in itself valid, is precisely what does not occur in the unconscious. In dreams, in which the modes of thought of the unconscious are actually manifest, there is accordingly no such thing as an “either – or,” only a simultaneous juxtaposition. In the example of a dream, which, in spite of its

⁹ Freud 1905a, *SE* VIII 60-65.

complication, I chose in my *Interpretation of Dreams* as a specimen of the work of interpretation, I tried to rid myself of the reproach of having failed to relieve a patient of her pains by psychical treatment. My reasons were: (1) that she herself was responsible for her illness because she would not accept my solution, (2) that her pains were of organic origin and were therefore no concern of mine, (3) that her pains were connected with her widowhood, for which I was evidently not responsible and (4) that her pains were due to an injection from a contaminated syringe, which had been given her by someone else. All these reasons stood side by side, as though they were not mutually exclusive. I was obliged to replace the ‘and’ of the dream by an ‘either – or’ in order to escape a charge of nonsense.¹⁰

In the case of the hapless man who seeks to avoid owning up to the necessity of returning a borrowed object in a damaged state, as with Freud’s own attempt to not admit responsibility for Irma’s continued sufferings, multiple lines of defense are posed against an imposing accusation. That the lines of defense that are sequentially posed represent impossible circumstances is, as far as unconscious operations are concerned, of no import. Freud identifies here a “faulty reasoning,” but he judges according to the statutes of reality. These are not the only measure according to which the defense might be judged, and it is here that the epithet “sophism” appears exceedingly well chosen. The use of incommensurable lines of refutation was indeed a means of which the ancient sophists availed themselves, precisely in the matter of legal defenses. The aim of an orator placed in such circumstances is not to establish what had been the case, whether and how a given offense had been committed; that belongs to the prosecution. The task of the defense is only to bring the judges to that “reasonable doubt” that remains the

¹⁰ Ibid., 205.

standard in contemporary courts. Here, mutually incompatible lines of refutation may be invoked, if it is not a matter of certainty, but only of probability. Gorgias mobilizes this strategy in his *Defense of Palamedes*, a show piece in which he argues on behalf of a mythological figure, Palamedes, one of the Achaeans whom Odysseus falsely accused of plotting treason. This was revenge for Palamedes' unveiling of the feigned madness by which the storied hero sought to avoid going to Troy. As the myths have it, Palamedes was indeed condemned to death on account of Odysseus' perfidy, but Gorgias nonetheless takes up the argument on his behalf. Considering only the direct line of contestation, one may thusly outline Palamedes' plea:

1. To have betrayed the Greeks, he would have needed to communicate with the Trojans beforehand, but they do not possess a common language;
2. If he had come to some agreement via an interpreter, an exchange of pledges would have been necessary. Had Palamedes' son, or anyone else from his retinue, gone missing and a Trojan taken his place this would have been obvious to all;
3. Had this nonetheless happened, he would have been paid a great sum for his efforts, but there is no effective way to conceal a large amount of gold in a military camp, let alone to smuggle it inside;
4. Even had he been bribed successfully, he could not have carried off the plan alone. He would have needed co-conspirators amongst the Achaeans, but any secret meetings would have been detected in the close confines of the camp;
5. Following their victory, the Trojans would not trust one who had betrayed their enemies to them. Only a fool would believe himself secure amongst them in the

aftermath. The act of which he is accused is in no way in keeping with Palamedes' wise and prudent character, which is known to all.¹¹

Gorgias does not set about to prove a set of circumstances that would be incompatible with the accusation, and thereby to establish an alibi. Instead he successively sets out five conditions for the act to have taken place; each of them is improbable. Even if Palamedes did have an interpreter who remains unknown to the court, another improbable circumstance would be necessary for the betrayal to have even been attempted, and then another. While the later defenses do presume that those earlier are false, this is not contrary to his aim. The refrain of the *Defense of Palamedes* is “therefore, let happen even what did not happen [καὶ τοίνυν γενέσθω καὶ μὴ γεγόμενα].”¹² In a more straightforward parlance “even if what was previously declared unlikely did in fact come about, even so, another unlikely circumstance would need have happened.” On the side of the prosecution, who needs establish the reality of an event, this style of argument would be useless. But for the defense, these incompatible lines of defense, linked together with an “even if,” may indeed be mobilized in order to compound the doubt of the jurors. To establish the fact of the crime, the prosecution must establish not the falsity of a single alibi, but must prove every element that must be supposed for the crime to have taken place. Incommensurable statements of reality might transgress the old Aristotelian *dictum* of non-contradiction, but improbabilities may indeed be compounded. Blame it on the brevity of the one who owes the kettle, but Freud is wrong to assert that only an “either-or” is possible; when it is a matter of establishing doubt, an “even if” may well serve.

¹¹ Gorgias, *Defense of Palamedes* 6-12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

This is to say that the old sophists may yet serve to critique psychoanalysis, not in order to dismantle it, but so as to extend the understanding of the unconscious. This writing poses itself a point of translation that perhaps remains unlikely, but upon which a great deal hinges. Those excitations, lacking quality, which Gorgias saw as motivating the operations of the *logos* find analogue in one of the terms that is key in Freud's early writings: affect. Before invoking this word, one must hesitate, precisely on account of the present enthusiasm that it enjoys. A plethora of potential definitions impose themselves, stemming from no-less variegated paradigms, threatening to drown out the specific valor of the term. Let it be stated clearly – affect, as it is understood here, is not a synonym for “feeling” or “emotion.” Nor is it to be identified with the autonomic reactions of the body to stimuli that happen alongside but apart from cognition. “Affects” cannot be mapped by studying facial expressions, bodily movements or tissues. This must be emphasized, not to discredit other paradigms of investigation, but for the sake of making precise the terminological valence that is specifically Freudian – Freudian, not psychoanalytic, given that even within this field, few have followed the founder. Affect, within Freud's early writings, is defined as the quota of excitation that impinges upon the psyche. It is a quantitative measure, which is minimally experienced as pleasure and/or pain, without determination, it is an excitation that is forced upon the psyche. The import of this notion first emerges in his observation of hysterical symptoms, where it is a question of warding off an unacceptable idea. As he writes in “The Neuro-psychoses of Defence”:

The task which the ego, in its defensive attitude, sets itself of treating the incompatible idea as “*non arrivée*” simply cannot be fulfilled by it. Both the memory-trace and the affect which is attached to the idea [*Vorstellung*] are there

once and for all and cannot be eradicated. But it amounts to an approximate fulfillment of the task if the ego succeeds in turning this powerful idea into a weak one, in robbing it of the affect – the sum of excitation [*die Erregungssumme*] – with which it is loaded. The weak idea will then have virtually no demands to make on the work of association. But the sum of excitation which has been detached from it must be put to another use. Up to this point the processes in hysteria, and in phobias and obsessions are the same; from now on their paths diverge. In hysteria, the incompatible idea is rendered innocuous by its sum of excitation being transformed into something somatic. For this I should like to propose the name of conversion. The conversion may be either total or partial. It proceeds along the line of the motor or sensory innervation which is related – whether intimately or more loosely – to the traumatic experience. By this means the ego succeeds in freeing itself from the contradiction [with which it is confronted]; but instead, it has burdened itself with a mnemonic symbol which finds a lodgement in consciousness, like a sort of parasite, either in the form of an unresolvable motor innervation or as a constantly recurring hallucinatory sensation, and which persists until a conversion in the opposite direction takes place. Consequently the memory-trace of the repressed idea has, after all, not been dissolved; from now on, it forms the nucleus of a second psychical group.¹³

This early description of neurotic pathogenesis points to several of the peculiar properties of affect, as it is depicted in the Freudian *corpus*. Affect is described as a “quota of excitation,” one that might be attached to a given idea or representation, but which

¹³ Freud 1894, *SE I* 48-49.

maintains a relative independence from the determinations of quality which Freud terms *Vorstellungen* – “ideas,” or perhaps better, “representations.” Under normal circumstances, the distinction between the two will perhaps pass unnoticed, but it becomes apparent when a given idea undergoes repression. The ego accomplishes repression, Freud tells us in this text, by withdrawing the quota of excitation from a given idea, such that it no longer serves as a locus of attraction within chains of association. This does not, however, repress the affect as such; it must needs be bound to other representations, which, in effect, assume an attractive force seemingly disproportionate to what one might expect; the result is potentially a somatic conversion or the emergence of fixed ideas within the work of association. Purely quantitative, and lacking any qualitative determination of its own, affect is a “null” excitation – not the absence of excitation, but the active imposition of an absence of representation – that must be itself warded off through binding it to one idea or another. Should a given representation prove unacceptable, on account of an established association with displeasure, affect is routed otherwise, easily displaced precisely on account of its lack of determination. The binding of affect is always accomplished contingently. It must be bound, for if it were not, this would entail the disintegration of the ego and the boundaries that allow it to define the world in which it exists – yet this binding is never accomplished completely. Given the absolute heterogeneity between affect and representation, the two cannot finally be brought into accord. Those distortions of the *logos* that belong to dreams, somatic symptoms where the body is made to speak, to slips and other symptoms bespeak the continuing presence of affect; it does not show itself directly, but leaves traces in the

warping that it inflicts on the *Vorstellungen* that are meant to contain it. And one needs to be clear on this – these representations do not avail themselves from the first.

Freud places the affected body previous to any representation, in the night of auto-erotism. One must take care with this term; contrary to what it might indicate, there is not yet any *autos* that might allow for an implied reflexivity. Auto-erotism is the result of the body excited in the absence of representations. There is not of yet any body image, any ego, or any objects to which one might relate. What emerges is the free movement of excitations, of pleasures and pains that befall without reference and without cause in an absolute fashion. Psychogenesis occurs insofar as one goes in search of these excitations after the fact, attempting to make a kind of sense of what has been inflicted by crafting representations for it. As Freud writes in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*:

it is clear that the behaviour of a child who indulges in thumb-sucking is determined by a search for some pleasure which has already been experienced and is now remembered. In the simplest case he proceeds to find this satisfaction by sucking rhythmically at some part of the skin or mucous membrane. It is also easy to guess the occasions on which the child had his first experiences of the pleasure which he is now striving to renew. It was the child's first and most vital activity, his sucking at his mother's breast, or at substitutes for it, that must have familiarized him with this pleasure. The child's lips, in our view, behave like an erotogenic zone, and no doubt stimulation by the warm flow of milk is the cause of the pleasurable sensation.¹⁴

What follows the pleasure of feeding at the breast – one in which Freud finds the prototype of the sexual – is an investigation into the terms of this pleasure according to

¹⁴ Freud 1905b, *SE* VII 181.

which representations are rendered. This is manifest in the preliminary organization of the body, in the emergence of erogenous zones – in them the excitation is localized, taking on rudimentary qualitative determinations, one which is expanded through the ongoing work of experimentation that takes place between phantasy and gesture. The thumb may be used to evoke something of oral pleasure; the infant attempts to recall the excitation in a form that is relatively bound to *Vorstellungen*. This is, as has often been remarked, similar to the dynamic reconstitution of the lost object that manifests in melancholy, but there remains an important distinction. That for which the psyche goes in search is not an object – it is neither the breast nor the milk that an outside observer might identify – but the excitation itself. Freud’s student Ferenczi is unequivocal on this point, writing in his 1909 article “Introjection and Transference”:

If the individual has at his disposal unsettled affects [*unerledigte Affekte*], and these he soon has, he accepts this challenge by extending his “interest” from the ego to the part of the outside world. The first loving and hating is a transference of autoerotic feelings of pleasure and unpleasure [*Lust- und Unlustgefühle*] to the objects that give rise to these feelings [*Gefühle*]. The first object-love and the first object-hate are, so to speak, the *primary transferences* [*Urübertragungen*], the roots of every future introjection.¹⁵

The mechanism of transference is, as Ferenczi depicts it, integral to psychic development.

Primary transference marks a translation between *Affekt*, as an unqualified excitation, and

¹⁵ Ferenczi 1909 (1952) 49, translation modified. This paper marks the first usage of “introjection” within psychoanalytic literature, one which does not accord with the later and perhaps more familiar sense of the term. Ferenczi coined “introjection” simply to describe transference in a non-clinical setting. In a footnote to the same paper, (53), he remarks: “The kind of practical significance and the exceptional position of the kind of introjections that have as their object the person of the physician, and which are discovered in analysis, make it desirable that the term ‘transferences’ given to them by Freud be retained. The designation ‘introjection’ would then be applicable for all other cases of the same psychical mechanism.”

Gefühl, qualified feeling. This act of definition depends upon the active invention of objects to which the feeling is pinned; it may be accordingly associated with a particular cause, a particular significance, and particular means of treating it. The gesture of transference subjects affect to primary repression. This differs from secondary repression – that which one usually understands by the term “repression” – insofar as what is repressed is not a *Vorstellung* associated with a feeling of displeasure, but an affect that lies anterior to any possible qualification.¹⁶ One represses the heterogeneity of affect to any possible representation, precisely in order to clear the ground upon which representation may be undertaken and objects thereby discovered. Like any repression, this does not mean that one is done with affect once and for all – it will continue to stir, threatening to absent the psyche of its means, and distorting what one might have hoped would be neatly bound. As such, Ferenczi indicates, the process of transference will continue, discovering new objects, new qualifications, and new occasions through which further attempts at binding will be undertaken.

It is here, perhaps, that the sophists yet have something to teach the psychoanalyst. One should not forget that the *logos*, in its derivation from λέγειν, maintains a sense of gathering together, or binding. Gorgias interrogates the *logos* as a perpetual work of formation that finds only its most obvious outward manifestation in articulated language. The *logos* contends with affect, struggling to provide representations for the unrepresentable. For the sophist, all language becomes literary, after a fashion – it dismisses as mere pretense the notion that the matter of language are those “realities” somehow given, which one aims to communicate to another. Instead, he pursues the operations of the *logos* in relation to the effects that it can work, which

¹⁶ Nouvet in Gaillard, Nouvet and Stoholski 2016, 39.

exceed the mere function of representation; language is itself an aesthetic phenomenon, able to excite its audiences, just as it is inhabited from the first by an aesthetic presence that exceeds representation. This is in no way to assert that one finds in the surviving texts of Gorgias and the other ancient sophists something like a psychoanalysis *avant la lettre*. Such a gesture would be reductive in the extreme, and could only be made possible by a willful ignorance of the breadth of both analysis and the literary investigations of the classical orators. Still, there is something irreducibly sophistic about psychoanalysis – this has long been recognized by its critics – but one need not and indeed must not follow them in ascribing a pejorative sense to the term. The present writing affirms this sophistic dimension of analysis. In attempting to treat that which will have remained unconscious, psychoanalysis contends with what does not avail itself to discourse; it works to render an account of the incomplete. Freud himself recognizes this in the famed footnote to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where he writes of dreams that, “there is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable – a navel, as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown.”¹⁷ The same would go for all of the other formations that are animated by the unconscious. Yet to meet these distorting effects that are inflicted upon the *logos*, psychoanalysis must bend to its object; this is visible in its theory. As N. Abraham remarks in his review of Laplanche and Pontalis’ *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, analytic theory trades in terms that, no matter how natural they may appear in the eyes of the practitioner habituated to their use, remain contradictory, if not absurd, according to the standards of common sense, let alone those of the regnant empiricism. Unconscious guilt or pleasure, discharge, even the extended sense which psychoanalysis lends to the “sexual” – the development of a psychoanalytic theory which aims at the unconscious has

¹⁷ Freud 1900, *SE IV* 111.

demanded, and continues to demand, the adoption of aberrations of sense. The peculiarity of this language, as Abraham remarks, is manifest in the recourse of Freud's earlier French translators to capitalization in writing these logically perverse terms. Abraham phrases it thusly:

Voilà justement le rôle des majuscules: au lieu de les re-signifier, elles dépouillent les mots de leur signification, les dé-signifient pour ainsi dire. Non pas par quelque contingent télescopage des sens, comme dans le “cadavre exquis” de l’écriture automatique. La dé-signification psychanalytique précède la possibilité même de la collision des sens. Les majuscules effectuent la dé-signification selon un mode particulier et précis, apte à la fois à faire échec à la signification et à mettre à découvert le fondement même de la signifiance. Leur rigueur réside en leur manière toujours singulière de l’opposer à l’actualisation sémantique – ce à que [sic] Plaisir puisse vouloir dire plaisir – tout en renvoyant très précisément à la non-présence d’où le “plaisir” émerge et qui, en lui, se fait représenter.¹⁸

The language of psychoanalysis aims at what it does not, and indeed cannot encompass. It is not a matter of signification but of that indefinite, unformed significance that one terms affect. It is affect that motivates the production of discourse; in whatever mode these may appear, they work to make sense of affect, in its impossible significance, devoid of quality but which nonetheless insists. Abraham refers to affect as a “non-presence,” which is indeed the case, though one cannot take this as a simple absence. Affect announces itself precisely when the allegedly proper order of representations goes into abeyance – in slips, in jokes, neurotic symptoms and in dreams. These are, of course,

¹⁸ Abraham in Abraham and Torok 1987, 210.

not absolute failures of representation but in their disordered state, something is let to appear in excess, which does not belong to the qualified orderings of the *logos*. A “non-sense” interrupts the simple movements of sense and forces them into abeyance. The non-presence to which Abraham gestures is, in a sense, the presence of what is radically otherwise than signification, what cannot be accorded representation, and which nonetheless appears as active, inflicting distortions upon representation. It is no coincidence, Abraham argues, that insofar as psychoanalysis takes the affected psyche as its object, its theory would necessarily bear the traces of this unruly affectedness in its formulations, torn from the domain of common sense and pushed to the point of paradox.

Insofar as this dynamic belongs to the rendering of the *logos* writ large – and this is an assertion found in Gorgias no less than in Abraham – psychoanalysis cannot claim affect as its unique domain. Its specificity might well be found in the active pursuit of this incompleteness that lies behind the *logos*, but this is possible in other disciplines as well, should one discard the phantasy of mastery that forecloses what lies outside the bounds of articulation. There is nothing unique to the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle here – the gesture which they inaugurate is one that the Occident has repeated without cease, and not only within philosophy, but in a plethora of forms. It is reiterated, as Jean-François Lyotard remarks, in the iterations of the ideal of emancipation and the necessity of actualizing this state, however it may be phrased – in classical philosophy, in the escape from this world promised by Christianity, the cultivation of a liberating reason dear to the Enlightenment, or any other.¹⁹ These programs seek to inaugurate a striving towards a kind of self-presence of the human, a mastery over itself and the world in which it exists. What is at stake here is a departure from a state which Lyotard terms *enfance*, “infancy,”

¹⁹ Lyotard 2000, 122.

understood not merely as the origins of individual life, but according to its Latin etymology – the infant is one who is “*in-fans*,” literally unspeaking, dependent upon others. It is without the safeguard of the *logos*, whether one understands this as speech or as reason. The much-vaunted animal that prides itself on having been “endowed with reason” forgets that it is not possessed of the *logos* from the first. It comes to speak only belatedly, forgetting that it was ever otherwise. As Lyotard writes:

Par enfance, je n'entends pas seulement, comme des rationalistes, un âge privé de raison. J'entends cette condition d'être affecté alors que nous n'avons pas les moyens – le langage et la représentation – de nommer, d'identifier, de reproduire, et de reconnaître ce qui nous affecte. J'entends par enfance que nous sommes nés avant d'être nés à nous-mêmes. Et donc nés des autres, mais aussi nés aux autres, livrés sans défense aux autres. Soumis à leur mancipium qu'ils ne mesurent pas eux-mêmes. Car ils sont eux-mêmes enfants aussi, seraient-ils père ou mère. Ils ne sont pas émancipés de leur enfance, de leur plaie d'enfance ni de l'appel qui en est issu.²⁰

The curious feature of the phantasy of emancipation from the state of infancy, which discourses of emancipation do not cease to invoke, is this – long after one has come to speak, one is still haunted by the figure of infancy. Even though one might speak, might pride oneself in one's rationality, a kind of doubt yet remains; one is yet not free of one's infancy. One has not yet learned to speak. Lyotard's phrasing actively recalls that of Freud, what he termed “infantile” sexuality. This infantile state is not merely one where speech is absent, but where the body remains disorganized and exposed. It is affected, moved by what it cannot identify. It suffers excitations, lives them as wounds that are

²⁰ Ibid., 121.

impressed upon the surface of the flesh. This passivity before the aesthetic lies anterior to the work of representation, of naming, of the discovery of objects. One could call it a shock to the system, were it not the case that the psychosomatic “system” emerges only in the wake of this affectedness. It is the case, Lyotard argues, that these injuries, metaphorical or real, do not pass. The infant is exposed to whatever excitations may beset it – and it is not to be discounted that the parents themselves are exciting objects, and in ways that they themselves will not have known. For they too remain infants in their way, they too were affected. The garb of adulthood is but a necessary disguise; it attempts to conceal the affection that cannot be mastered. Their bodies are too animated by that which they cannot articulate and thus do not know, and with a touch, with a gesture, the infant may be thus afflicted.

“*Pour l’enfant,*” Lyotard writes, “*tout est plaie, la plaie d’un plaisir qui va être défendu et retiré.*”²¹ Affect befalls in a fashion that is absolute, without past or future, without reference and without possible positioning. It knows neither respite nor mercy. In the wake of its infliction, one searches for means to defend against this excitation, a movement that demands that the affect be taken up once more, investigated, and bequeathed with determinations. One contends with one’s affectedness interminably. It presents itself as an enigma that cannot be surpassed, no matter how one might attempt to treat it with representations. To this enigma belongs a central paradox: insofar as affect befalls absolutely, there is no regard for the one who will have suffered it. And yet at the same time, it is this affect that animates the psyche, setting in motion the reciprocal definition of self and of world. In the contention with the excitation, endeavoring to bring it to representation, one treats the affect *as if* it was an “I” that was affected, *as if* the

²¹ Ibid.

enigma were addressed to me. That is to say that a notion of self is positioned, *après-coup*, in a situation that it does not and could not occupy. Only with the *logos*, belatedly emerged, is such a position possible. The phantasies of emancipation might imagine otherwise, precisely to avoid this impossibility; this is but a deception. For Lyotard, the task of thinking must attend to that which lies anterior to any thought. This is not, to be clear, one more frontier to be conquered and subjugated. Thinking must give an account of its own passivity, its own lack of mastery, an exposure to the aesthetic by which it is grasped and never released. Faced with this enigmatic presence, one is deprived of means, and yet this powerlessness does nothing to dispel the demand that one make sense of one's affectedness. One searches for signs, struggles to find means within one's language, to convey something of that which afflicts. "*Nous lisons parce que nous ne savons pas lire*," he writes.²² This is not merely a matter of the derivation of sense, but of an encounter with the sensible – one reads not to know, but to cast one's self into the place where the aesthetic effects that traverse the word in their style, in their rhythm, in the images that are there deployed bring to light. Adult though one may be, this in no way interrupts the passivity that remains, and the affective wounding that one attempts to retrace.

It is here that literature assumes a particular importance, insofar as it poses a *logos* that is not contained to itself, but which finds itself moved, affected from the first. To account for this affectedness of discourse and of thought, Lyotard contends, philosophy must become literature. It cannot assume that its reason is given from the first, repressing the passivity that remains anterior to the *logos*. Language does not cease to partake, in every instance, of that fundamental trope of rhetoric named by Quintilian, *abusio*, or

²² Lyotard 1998b, 63.

catachresis, as the Greeks called it, not the substitution of one word for another, but the use of figurative language for that which lies beyond direct means of representation.²³ It is to this aspect of the *logos*, with which the orators of the Roman Empire did not cease to contend in their writings, that Pascal Quignard turns. He discovers in them the assertion that language is nothing more than the sedimentation of instances of *abusio*. As Quignard writes, “*Rien dans la dévotion au langage ne permet de s'arrêter à un effet de langage et le prétendre comme la source du langage.*”²⁴ The affective source of language does not belong to language, it is inexpressible. Nevertheless, one struggles to give it voice, invents *metaphora*, which the ancient orators also term *imagines*, images. The term itself is equivocal, referring either to visual images or to figures of discourse; what is at stake is the representation of the unrepresentable. The affection of the *logos* does not show itself through immediately, but shows its traces where passion overwhelms that which it wants to say; the aesthetic force of the image surpasses that which it purportedly represents. There is a violence here, Quignard writes, one which the orators affirm against a philosophy that attempts to forget the originary aspect of the *logos*. Language is not given, it is born of the exposure of *enfance*, and the terror of being beset upon by that which one can neither master nor know. Those orators Quignard draws upon are those who experiment with style and with the possible effects of language, but their interest is not, or at least is not contained to the pragmatic ends to which the *logos* might be set. Their rhetoric is one that, though it might appear dressed in words, though it might indeed signify, issues forth from the mouth of one who remains an infant, who remains affected. Accordingly, it attempts to speak a silence that will have remained within

23 Quintilian, *Institutes* VIII 34-36.

24 Quignard 1995, 72.

discourse, a muteness that conceals itself in the etymon of the French “*mot*.” This is, he writes, a

*Rhétorique muette sans cesse exomorphique, métamorphique, spéculante, dérivante, arrivante, qui ajoute son silence explosif à la voix humaine acquise par l’aparlant, à la langue culturelle apprise par cœur par tous les éduqués, au discours courant du groupe qui entoure le naissant qui entend tout ce qui l’entoure et n’y comprend rien.*²⁵

This muteness, Quignard remarks, belongs to the status of the image, insofar as there is always a kind of insufficiency present in it. One invents forms, subjects the terror of the aesthetic to a perpetual metamorphosis, and crafts forms for what which one has no means to say. That is to say that eloquence itself, for Quignard, becomes a means of making heard the infantile cry that the *logos* will have remained.

Quignard reads the *imago* through its Latin etymology, as the bust of a dead ancestor; it continues to speak with a dead, silent voice that must be met with filial piety. In the figure of the ancestor, the *domus* is never allowed to rest in the simple present, but attests the hold of the past upon it, even as this past is unspoken. It is less a matter of the specific forms of structure that are at stake, but the mystery of an origin, marked by the sexual, that is originary but without definite origin – it is never a matter of this ancestor alone, but a host of them, a chorus of silent voices. This seizure by the image is primordial, the ancestor too was seized, set in motion and made to speak by that pathics that precedes and gives rise to language. Quignard invokes these figures of the Second Sophistic, their texts as catalogues of images, but does not treat them in the manner of a historian; his texts render the rhetors of the early Empire themselves images of a violence

²⁵ Quignard 2010, 213.

doubly figured. First, as the object of the violence of the writing of the tradition that has rendered them all but forgotten, that has deemed them to be unworthy representatives of the proper classical tradition. Second, these figures – Fronto, Albucius Silus, and Marcus Porcus Latron – were those who took up arms against the tradition even in their own day, challenging the ontological closure worked by philosophy by opting for a rhetoric that makes manifest the violence of the image, the terror that demands speech, the sublime transport of literature that is the referent of no possible discourse. In a way that mirrors classical literary criticism, Quignard adds quasi-biographical narratives to the fragmentary texts that survive, making their authors the image of the texts that they composed; his portrait of Marcus Porcus Latron is no less violent than the attacks on philosophy that he composed. Quignard presents him as the contrary of an urbane Roman, a disgusting figure who cared only for the hunt and for sexual encounters, one who despite his skill in the spoken word, preferred to abandon the Eternal City of political reason to live the grotesque terror of the primordial.

In keeping with this fascination with the fictive image, Quignard's descriptions of the imperial sophists are interspersed with accounts of a primal scene, that of the paleolithic hunt that he reads as the genesis of the human. Citing Serge Moscovici, Quignard insists that the originary scene of the human lies not in a “homonization” of certain primates, but rather their “cynigentization;” as he writes, “Such is the source of humanity: imitated predation.”²⁶ Terror-stricken, the prey of other animals, the early homonids made metaphor of themselves so as to displace the terror of predation – in imitation of its predators, the human takes up the javelin or the bow in order to become itself a hunter and inflict this terror upon another. The human is not a developmental

²⁶ Ibid., 37.

given, but the emergence of metaphor within the realm of the animal, it is the space of an affective transport, by which the terror of being awakened to sensation might be seduced. The fascination with this scene, a depiction of a terror seduced, displaced, mislead, is not on account of its causal power of explanation. It is rather that the scene itself is a myth, an image and a metaphor, depicting the birth of the human as metaphor itself. The human comes to be in displaced, imitated predation worked as a means of defense against affect – a labor that rhetoric, that literature only continues. This connection is furnished through the Longinian sublime; for Longinus, the sublime is the *kairos*. Quignard understands this term (albeit without marking it) as it is first attested in Homer, in the adjectival form *kairios*. *Kairios* is used relative to the flight of a projectile, one that strikes a lethal blow.²⁷ The transposition of the term finds itself rooted in a metaphor that is at least as old as the poet, one that declares words spoken to be themselves projectiles, and its occurrence in Longinus cannot be dismissed; one is not merely speaking a sensation of awe in the face of the sublime, but an ear, a body, stricken, mortified, and torn from itself and thrown violently into a passionate state. The work of literature does not invoke this sublimity lightly, it turns upon it, always under its hold, under the sign of a terror that is endemic, constitutive of the human. The violence of affect, the terror of its violation demands metaphor – Quignard will understand metaphor as originary, through primal scenes that are no less themselves metaphors. The scene is primal, which is to say ahistorical, impassible, bearing the oblique traces of a primordial terror that demands a reiterated gesture, new metaphors, as means of defense. One only displaces, one is never done with it – the labor of defense also makes certain a prolongation.

27 Trédé-Boulmer 2015, 25-31.

The work that is undertaken in literature is interminable, and yields no result – one will not finally have made sense of affect. One can only aspire to make manifest something of it, in the traces that it leaves within articulated discourse, attesting the affect whose presence is anterior to the work of the *logos*. The “talking cure” cannot, in good conscience, do away with the literary character of its material, language marked by the affections of the *logos*. The most forceful and enduring of these affections must be refused: the philosophical ruse, born with Plato and Aristotle if not before, that it is possible for the *logos* to be uttered from an unaffected position, one that is protected by a master referent to which discourse is pinned. Call it being, communication or by any of the other names which they and their heirs might have invoked; as Aristotle makes clear, the invocation of such a referent serves to disqualify those who, like Protagoras and the other sophists, might challenge the totalizing character of the *logos* and the knowledge that it generates.²⁸ To attempt to gesture towards that which does not give itself to the declarations of the *logos* is to invite a particular species of failure into one’s discourse. It is one that comes of its own accord, and yet which will have escaped any snare that is set for it, no matter how cleverly these might be set. Affect is that which one will not have finally captured. Nevertheless, one attempts to make this silent presence heard, even as it says nothing, indicates nothing save the absence of sense that precedes the *logos* and which continues to animate it. It is a struggle to recall the passivity to the aesthetic that remains anterior to any communication, to the ambition to discover meaning. The author of this writing is under no delusion that he will have captured the notion of affect within this text, and thereby made a coherent concept of it. Such could only be one more betrayal, where affect is forgotten, the *logos* once again allowed to assume an aspect of

²⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1006a.

completeness. Doubtless there are moments of overreach – these could hardly be avoided, if one is to risk anything. This work remains a product of the *logos*. Nevertheless, if all should go well, I will have invited a reconsideration of the sophistic, as it shows itself in authors ancient and modern, in spite of the calumnies that literature has suffered in on their account. I have attempted to write a *logos* of affect, a diversion for others.

Freud, Ferenczi, N. Abraham: Symbolization

The present reflections aim to retrace the perspectives on affect and its relation to symbol formation, as it appears in the works of Freud and two analysts of the “Budapest School,” Sándor Ferenczi and Nicolas Abraham.²⁹ They are not, by any means, a comprehensive treatment of the theme, which would require a study in its own right; the goal is rather to provide a general point of orientation for the discussions of affect and its relation to aesthetics and the work of art that are found in subsequent chapters; these latter expand upon the perspective found here and will sometimes challenge it, but nevertheless it is in these psychoanalytic reflections that the wider investigation is rooted. The current argument proceeds in two sections, the first of which reviews Freud’s reflections on affect and symbol-formation as a response to trauma, which are found largely in his writings preceding 1900, though it is necessary to supplement them with the later reflections on affect in the metapsychological paper on “The Unconscious.” The second section then takes up Ferenczi’s extension of this motif in Freudian theory in his own writings following 1923. From the *Attempt at a Theory of Genitality* to “The Confusion of Tongues,” Ferenczi revives Freud’s earlier perspective on symbolization and makes of it the central dynamic of psychoanalysis writ large; his later writings take as their central motif the affectability of the body and its various retranslations into somatic and psychic symbols. For the most part, Ferenczi’s views, which inform the “bioanalytic” investigations of the *Attempt* no less than his later papers on clinical technique never received a systematic treatment, remaining scattered across a plethora of published

²⁹ For the purposes of this paper, I count in this tradition Ferenczi, Hermann and Nicolas (Miklós) Abraham of principal importance. Róheim and Hollós’ contributions are also significant, but are not treated here. Bálint could likewise be counted, but his reading of Ferenczi’s *Attempt at a Theory of Genitality* is largely counter to Abraham’s; he largely sets aside the symbol in favor of greater biological precision.

papers, short notes and fragments, as well as his *Clinical Diary*. The most sustained and insightful attempt at gathering together Ferenczi's perspective belongs to Nicolas Abraham, who treats them in a series of papers written in the late 1950s and early 1960s; the chapter accordingly concludes by following Abraham's articulation of the status of the symbol as the central fact of psychoanalytic investigation.³⁰

I. Affect and the Symbol in Freud

Though the emphasis placed on the relation of symbolization and defensive functioning is particularly characteristic of the Hungarian analysts, the connection between symbolization and defense belongs to the earliest strata of psychoanalytic thinking; indeed, in the *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud attributes such insight to Breuer. In the treatment of hysterics, he writes:

we must take our start from Josef Breuer's momentous discovery: the symptoms of hysteria are determined by certain experiences of the patient's which have operated in a traumatic fashion and which are being reproduced in his psychical life in the form of mnemic symbols.³¹

Despite the brevity of the allusion, it is notable that numerous salient features of the symbol, as it is invoked within the field of psychoanalysis, are already here indicated.³²

³⁰ Abraham's texts that treat Ferenczi's metapsychology, for the most part, predate his collaboration with Maria Torok; unlike the products of their work together, the influence of Klein and the central position granted the dynamic of mourning are mostly absent. For present purposes, I leave the later writings aside; a consideration of the work on the phantom and the crypt as a rearticulation of symbolic palingenesis will provide matter for a later study.

³¹ Freud 1896, *SE* III 192-193.

³² As Ernest Jones remarks in his seminal paper "The Theory of Symbolism" (Originally written in 1916, but published in revised forms numerous times), attempting to convey a precise sense to the term "symbol" presents great difficulties, not least because of the greatly varied use that the term has acquired across academic fields, whether anthropology, linguistics, literary criticism, philosophy, rhetoric, or any number of others, to say nothing of the everyday usages to which it is put. It would likely be impossible to construct a definition of the symbol specific to psychoanalysis (and it is debatable whether such an attempt would even be desirable), but the indicative features outlined by Jones remain a useful set of guidelines. Three are of particular importance: 1) Representation of Unconscious Material – the symbol indirectly represents

The symbol arises in response to the infliction of a trauma. The outward symptoms of the patient are not the result of the process of symbolization – this is only the tip of the iceberg, as it were. Beyond the link furnished between an idea and an unpleasure manifest to consciousness, there is the activity of a mnemonic trace that remains outside the realm of conscious apprehension. Accordingly, the connection between the conscious feeling and the idea may indeed appear absurd even to the patient who suffers this symptom. In the *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, Freud describes the process of symbol formation as such:

Before the analysis, A is an excessively intense idea, which forces its way into consciousness too often, and each time gives rise to weeping. The subject does not know why he weeps at A; he regards it as absurd but cannot prevent it. After the analysis, it has been discovered that there is an idea B, which justifiably gives rise to weeping and which justifiably recurs frequently so long as a certain complicated psychical action has not been performed against it by the subject. The effect of B is not absurd; it is intelligible to the subject and can even be combated by him. B stands in a particular relation to A. For there has happened an experience which consisted of B+A. A was an incidental circumstance; B was appropriate for producing the lasting effect. The reproduction of this event in memory has now taken a form of such a kind that it is as though A had stepped into B's place. A has become a substitute, a symbol for B. Hence the incongruity:

repressed or otherwise unconscious material, and may or may not also bear associations apparent to consciousness, 2) Constant Meaning – the symbol differs from other products of condensation and displacement in that its form and significance are relatively stable across its iterations, 3) Independence of Individual Conditioning Factors – the features of an outward manifestation of a symbol are not strongly determined by the circumstances that gave them rise. See Jones 1950, 87-144.

A is accompanied by consequences which it does not seem worthy of, which do not fit in with it.³³

As it is here described, the process of symbolization rests upon a series of displacements that must be retraced in analysis. What is initially manifest is the apparently ungrounded relation of an unpleasure to a given idea (*Vorstellung*).³⁴ The reason that this idea, A, should provoke conscious dismay in the patient is unknown and, indeed, their relation may appear absurd to him or to her. This type of symptom formation, rests upon a constitutive displacement. The apparently illogical association of displeasure with idea A rests upon the fact this idea has been substituted for another idea, B; with reference to B, the patient's dismay may appear entirely warranted. A has become a symbol for B, insofar as it serves to keep the idea A from reaching consciousness.

Nevertheless, the displacement that Freud depicts, readily apparent in phobic and hysterical symptoms, is not one that merely entails two ideas, A and B. Nor does it rest upon a single event. As is clear from the Emma case, described later in the *Project*, the initial event that lies at the root of the trauma and the occasion that gives rise to the symbol are to be distinguished. To briefly recall the details of the case: Emma suffers from a compulsive inability to enter shops alone, which she attributes to an experience when, at twelve years old, she fled a shop in terror. The immediate cause for her flight was the laughter of two shop assistants; it had occurred to her that they were laughing at her clothes. The apparent disproportionality of the event is, however, explained when

³³ Freud 1895, *SE I* 348-349, translation modified.

³⁴ Strachey generally translates *Vorstellung* as "idea," though sometimes as "presentation," as in the case of "thing-presentation" and "word-presentation" (*Sachvorstellung* and *Wortvorstellung*, respectively). The German term is perhaps better rendered by "representation," and I use the term in such a sense in this chapter. Where it is necessary to follow Strachey, or is preferable for English usage, I have maintained "idea"; "idea" and "representation" should be understood as synonymous in this paper. "Presentation" I reserve otherwise, in keeping with Lyotard's use of the distinction between "representation" and "presentation."

another memory comes to light – Emma, at eight years of age, had been previously molested by a shopkeeper. The laughter of the shop assistants recalled to her the grin of the shopkeeper who had grabbed her through her clothes. The manifest product of symbolization, the association between the grin and the laughter, does not reproduce the earlier event directly, but rather moves via incidental details which provide material for the phobic symptom. In this case, the key illustration the motif of *Nachträglichkeit* (belatedness), pathogenesis is not to be located in the prior scene alone, where the prepubescent girl is assaulted by the shopkeeper. It belongs rather to an unconscious conjunction of this event with that which succeeds it. At age eight, as Jean Laplanche has noted in his essential study of the case, Emma has no symptoms; it is only following the second scene that the affect manifests itself via the symbolic connection furnished between the first scene and the second.³⁵ The traumatic event thus cannot be simply ascribed to the first scene; in belated fashion, the trauma emerges via the activation of the mnemonic trace left by the initial scene in the second.³⁶ As Freud writes:

If the mnemonic image of the (hostile) object is freshly cathected in some way – for instance, by a fresh perception – a state arises which is not pain but which nevertheless has a resemblance to it. In the actual experience of pain it was the interrupting external Q that raised the ψ level. In the reproduction of the experience – in the affect – the only additional Q is that which cathects the memory, and it is

³⁵ Laplanche 1970, 45-76. The schematic illustration furnished by Freud, where an idea A is substituted for a repressed idea B, is a manifest simplification of the symbolic relation between the two scenes of the Emma case. One need only consult the diagram furnished in the *Project* (Freud 1895, 354) to see that the production of her symptom passes through a number of associative relays, some of which are available to consciousness, others not. As Jones remarks in his study, the symbol is always overdetermined (Jones 1950, 98-100).

³⁶ My reading of the Emma case is greatly indebted to Laplanche's presentation, as well as Jean-François Lyotard's reading, "Emma" in Lyotard 2000 and Claire Nouvet's "For Emma," in Gaillard, Nouvet and Stoholski 2016.

clear that this is in the nature of any other perception and cannot have as a result a general raising of Qñ. It only remains to assume, therefore, that owing to the cathexis of memories unpleasure is released from the interior of the body [*Körperinneren* entbunden] and freshly conveyed up.³⁷

With the laughter of the shop assistants, the memory of the prior scene is recalled via association. Nevertheless it is not consciously recalled. What emerges with the “reproduction” of the earlier scene, catalyzes the work of symbolization, is affect. This affect does not, as Freud indicates, belong to the prior scene. It stirs in and through the second scene, with the release of an unpleasure “from within the interior of the body.” That is to say that it is not located within the psychic apparatus proper, it is not simply a matter of a repressed idea that risks entering consciousness. The affect remains in some way foreign to the psychic apparatus, even as it impinges upon it.

While Freud leaves the notion of affect relatively obscure in this passage, it remains a crucial one. In a strict Freudian sense, affect should be understood neither as a synonym for conscious feeling, nor as an autonomic physiological reaction, as much of contemporary theorizing would have it; affect is a purely quantitative excitation, devoid of quality. The ego works to bind this quantity to *Vorstellungen* (ideas or representations), whereby it is qualitatively determined. To put it simply, affect is an undetermined quota of pleasure and/or pain; the psyche is excited by it, but only after it is bound are the reasons for this excitation discovered – what excites, why it excites, and so on. An “idea” can be any qualitative determination, no matter how vague, and need not be capable of verbalization. Insofar as excitations are bound and qualified, they may be recalled in conscious or unconscious memory, and allow for an ordering of experience.

³⁷ Freud 1895, *SE* I 320. Emphases original.

As he presents it in the metapsychological paper on “The Unconscious,” affect belongs to the level of the drives, outside the realm of the psychic apparatus properly speaking – this follows the reference to the corporeal character attributed to affect in the *Project*. Freud writes that:

I am in fact of the opinion that the antithesis of conscious and unconscious is not applicable to drives. A drive can never become an object of consciousness – only the idea that represents the drive can. Even in the unconscious, moreover, a drive cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea. If the drive did not attach itself to an idea or manifest itself as an affective state, we could know nothing about it.³⁸

The drives never present themselves immediately to observation in an unalloyed state; nevertheless the internal attack worked by the drive may be indicated through two different paths. The alternative is a crucial one: either the drive is bound to a representation, or it is let to manifest as an affective state. It is the first of these alternatives that is the more conventional – indeed the *Project* as a whole could be read as an elaboration of this process – where a corporeal excitation, lacking quality, is directed to the psychic apparatus, where it is bound to one or more representations and thus qualified; such is the groundwork upon which specific actions, bringing about discharge, may be effected. It may be the case, as in that of Emma, that the excitation is bound to a representation that then undergoes repression on account of its association to a feeling of

³⁸ Freud, 1915, *SE* XIV 177. The translation has been slightly modified; the passage is as difficult in German as it is in English, perhaps even more so: “*Ich meine wirklich, der Gegensatz von Bewußt und Unbewußt hat auf den Trieb keine Anwendung. Ein Trieb kann nie Objekt des Bewußtseins werden, nur die Vorstellung, die ihn repräsentiert. Er kann aber auch im Unbewußten nicht anders als durch die Vorstellung repräsentiert sein. Würde der Trieb sich nicht an eine Vorstellung heften oder nicht als ein Affektzustand zum Vorschein kommen, so könnten wir nichts von ihm wissen.*”

unpleasure; if Freud speaks of “unconscious drive impulses” – to be understood as affect – it is in this sense. It is not the drive that has become unconscious, but rather the idea that it is associated with is repressed. As Freud remarks, “there are no unconscious affects as there are unconscious ideas”: it is hence something of a misnomer to say that the affect itself is unconscious, as if it had been repressed.³⁹ The drive itself does not enter into the psychic apparatus, and thus can be considered neither conscious nor unconscious according to the topographical view (though to speak of it as dynamically unconscious would not be at all improper). It is not allowed to enter the psychic apparatus and then refused access to consciousness. Affect never enters into the workings of the psychic apparatus in the first place. It finds entry only through the discovery of what, in Strachey’s translation, is deemed an “ideational representative.” This rendering of Freud’s *Vorstellungrepräsentanz* should be understood, following Laplanche’s suggestion, as a “representative,” in the sense that an ambassador, speaking the language of his host, may serve as a representative of his country in a foreign land.⁴⁰ The affect might remain outside of the psychic apparatus properly speaking, but a representation is found that is made to serve as its delegate, “representing” it within the psyche. The giving of the *Vorstellungrepräsentanz* is a gesture of translation, twice-over and a sort of a hinge; the affect is translated into the language of the psychic apparatus, actively in spite of the lack of a common idiom between psychic representation (which knows quality) and somatic excitation (which is purely qualitative, a degree of pain and/or pleasure). Once it is thus translated, registered as the representative of the affect within the psyche,

³⁹ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁰ Laplanche 1981, 239.

it may then be translated into other representations, as with the example of the shopkeeper's grin translating itself into the laughter of the shop assistants.

Freud outlines this work of translation in his letter to Fliess of December 6th, 1896:

I should like to emphasize the fact that the successive registrations [here, he names these perceptions – indication of perceptions – unconsciousness (*Unbewusstsein*) – consciousness] represent the psychic achievement of successive epochs of life. At the boundary between two such epochs a translation of the psychic material must take place. I explain the peculiarities of the psychoneuroses by supposing that this translation has not taken place in the case of some of the material, which has certain consequences. For we hold firmly to a belief in a tendency toward quantitative adjustment. Every later transcript inhibits its predecessor and drains the excitatory process from it. If a later transcript is lacking, the excitation is dealt with in accordance with the psychological laws in force in the earlier psychic period and along the paths open at that time. Thus an anachronism persists: in a particular province, *fueros* are still in force; we are in the presence of “survivals.” Within one and the same psychic phase, and among registrations of the same kind, a normal defense makes itself felt owing to a generation of unpleasure. But pathological defense occurs only against a memory trace from an earlier phase that has not yet been translated. A failure of translation – this is what is known clinically as “repression.” The motive for it is always a release of the unpleasure that would be generated by a translation; it is as though

this unpleasure provokes a disturbance of thought that does not permit the work of translation.⁴¹

As it is here presented, the translation of an excitation into a conscious idea is not a simple process, but rather passes through a series of topographical positions and a concomitant series of translations. Rote perception is first translated into indications of what has been perceived, entailing an initial qualification of what has been perceived, be it in terms of colors, tones, patterns of movement, or whatever other sensory measure. Further, more sophisticated qualifications are introduced in those subsequent translations, to and from unconsciousness to consciousness. In the former case there is the relatedness of ideas, albeit without temporal succession, negation and a coordinating grammar; these are only found in the translation to consciousness. As Laplanche has emphasized, this is not a translation between two languages where one might presume a common idiom, allowing for the more or less seamless transposition of categories given in one into those of the other.⁴² Nor is the movement “upward” a simple matter of an increasing complexification without loss; without rehashing the Wittgensteinian problematic, between the color red and the word “red”.... The translation here is metaphorical, not in the sense of a simple term-for-term substitution, but according to the extended meaning found in the rhetorical tradition. As Quintilian has it: “A noun or verb is transferred [*transfertur*] from the place to which it is proper to another where there is no proper term, or a translation [*translatum*] proves better.”⁴³ In the transposition between psychic systems, excitations are translated across heterogeneous registers; in the idiom of the system into which the excitation is translated, terms are invented according to which it

⁴¹ Freud 1896 (1985), 208-209.

⁴² Laplanche 2007, 120.

⁴³ Quintilian, *Institutes* VIII.1

might be accounted for and thus bound. Freud notes that this process of qualification serves, at each turn, to inhibit the level of excitation that impinges upon the psychic apparatus; the total excitation that impinges upon the psychic apparatus is divided up along temporal and spatial axes, and the fact of its befalling is supplanted by an investigation into what befalls. In short, it is the work of what Freud will later term the secondary process.⁴⁴

As Freud indicates in the letter, the failure of translation entails repression. Nevertheless, as the passage from “The Unconscious” quoted above indicates, there is another alternative. The process of binding the drive impulse to a representative through translation may indeed fail otherwise, previous to the transposition to conscious representation; what comes about is an affective state [*Affektzustand*]. Such does not signal itself as a disorder within the realm of representation, whether it be a slip, condensation, displacement, or any other. It rather occurs at the level of the body; it agitates at the level of the body, of muscular activity; in a footnote to “The Unconscious,” he writes, “Affectivity manifests itself essentially in motor discharge resulting in an

⁴⁴ My understanding of the primary and secondary processes largely follows that put forward in Loewald 1978 (2000), a paper which draws in turn upon Ferenczi’s work as well as that of Freud. While it is indeed the case that the primary and secondary processes are closely related to the pleasure and reality principles of a later Freud, the two pairs should not be conflated. The primary and secondary processes are a matter of delay and differentiation (there’s a French word that would be good for this, but someone got to it first). He summarizes the distinction thusly: “The primary process has been called primary because it is developmentally the first, the earliest form of mentation, and because it is seen as more primitive than secondary process. But the process is *primary* in a deeper sense insofar as it is unitary, non-differentiating, non-discriminating between various elements of a global event or experience. Thinking in terms of elements or components of an experience or act already bespeaks secondary process thinking. In primary process mentation *oneness*, as against duality or multiplicity. In secondary process mentation *duality* and multiplicity are dominant, i.e. differentiation, division, a splitting of what was unitary, global, unstructured oneness” (196). For Loewald, these processes are poles on either end of a scale – there is no primary process or secondary process thinking in pure form, but the terms remain descriptively useful. Relative to the Freudian model of intrapsychic translation, secondary process would increase along with the number of translations to which an excitation is submitted.

(internal) alteration of the subject's own body *without reference to the external world.*⁴⁵

For lack of a representative, there is a failure of representation. No reference is made to any representation – and thus neither to the external world, nor to the body-*imago* that positions itself within it – the affective state signifies nothing whatsoever. It does not encode something that cannot be said by other means, it is not an enactment. The body sounds off, signaling an attack of the absolute – what it cannot dissolve, cannot integrate, cannot translate. A ready example is found in those “bellowing-miracles” that afflicted Judge Schreber, but, as Freud notes, such attacks are not necessarily so extreme in their manifestations, nor are the exclusive to psychotic patients.⁴⁶ It might well belong to the stuttering and clacking of Emmy von N., where the voice ceases to signify, but sounds off, where the tongue is made to serve the affect.⁴⁷ If, in the Emma case the affective assault is successfully warded off through binding it to the symbol, this is not to say that a failure of representation does not loom. From the standpoint of the eight year old Emma, the first scene was insignificant – but in the second, this insignificance returns aggressively, threatening an absolute collapse of representation, and the dissolution of the psychic apparatus entire. That is to say that the affective assault anything but inconsequential for the psyche. If affect is “insignificant,” it is insofar as it is unbound to any representation, affect is devoid of any quality, and cannot be qualified. Its surging is that of an absolute absence of meaning, which the psyche is made to suffer; affect

⁴⁵ Freud 1915b, *SE* XIV 178. Emphases added.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁴⁷ Such a reading is asserted in Kahn 1993, 63-64. One notes that this affected state is to be distinguished from hysterical conversion, as it is conventionally thought. In the latter case, a repressed idea finds symbolic expression at a motor level; this is to say that an excitation would pass into the psychic apparatus, where it is bound to a particular idea, and on account of the repression of this idea, its manifestation is referred to the body. The affective attacks that I indicate here are distinct in that they never enter into relation with an idea, and thus do not reflect unconscious, repressed material.

appears as a lapsus, a void in the operations of the psyche, an active “nothing” that is indicated only by the pain and/or pleasure that appears as overwhelming.⁴⁸

A failure of translation between the unconscious and consciousness, as Freud remarks in the quotation above, entails repression. It is not, however, the case that, with such a failure, no translation would occur. It is rather that the unpleasure belonging to a lower level of psychic functioning transposes itself to consciousness; it is here that the link between pathogenesis and the symbol becomes apparent. The work of symbolization, then, would serve as an attempt to come to terms with such attack, to furnish a form to which affect would be, if not bound, then at least redirected. There are two distinct displacements in this operation, which should not be confused. The first, and more obvious one, is the transfer of the unpleasure associated with idea B to idea A, which is accomplished via the hypercathexis of the latter term and the concomitant repression of the former. The reciprocal relation that is thus drawn between these two ideas is, however, only of secondary importance with regard to symbolization. It rests upon a prior displacement and a prior repression. The relation of A to B does not rest upon these two terms alone, but entails a third factor, one which is not itself quite a term: the affect that motivates the process of symbolization. The oscillation between the two terms A and B, which occurs at the level of the ego, depends on the association that is forced upon them by the stirring of affect. The symbol serves to dissemble the unrepresentable affect. Insofar as affect cannot be directly bound to a representation, thus represented within the ego, the attack cannot be warded off in a direct fashion. Nevertheless, it is signed within

⁴⁸ Strachey justly remarks in a footnote to the *Project* (SE I, 321) that, despite Freud’s mention of a possible pleasure in affect, his descriptions seem largely to treat it in its painful aspect. If anywhere, the notion of a pleasurable affect is to be found in infantile sexuality, as it appears to contraindicate the (early) pleasure principle; infantile masturbation raises the level of excitation of the psyche without possible discharge, and without regard to a qualified object.

the operations of the ego precisely through a disturbance of representation, that which occurs in the condensation A+B; the failure to bind the affect within the psychic apparatus is figured, through primary process distortion, as a composite. The condensation product A+B would be akin to the “sophisms” of the unconscious, it defies logical distinction, it is both “A and B” *and* “neither A nor B.” This is to say that the figure that initially emerges in the process of symbol formation is not idea A superadded onto idea B, but rather that, in the process of symbolization, the two appear initially in conjunction.

It is not a matter of disguising B with A, even if this is what will occur at the level of secondary repression, as Freud makes explicit. It is not merely idea B, but the composite figure A+B that serves as *Vorstellungrepräsentanz*, as the hinge that allows for an affective disturbance to be transposed into representation. It displaces the ostensible “source” of the attack; the failure of any possible representation is translated into a disturbance within the movements of representation. This translation accomplished, the attack can be warded off. A+B is split into distinct ideas A and B, and the latter repressed. The conflict that occurs about ideas A and B would be only secondary. The conflict that is figured through the conjunction of A+B is itself a figure for the more primal conflict between the affect and the ego, which attempts to bind this excitation, despite its heterogeneity to possible representation. The repression of idea B would belong to secondary repression. This defensive operation is itself a figuration of the primary repression that takes place with the transposition of the conflict to the level of representation – here, it is the affect, and the void of possible representation that is repressed. The unpleasure stemming from the affect is displaced onto B, against which

ego-defenses may be brought to bear; as Claire Nouvet writes of the double dynamic of repression in the *Project*, “While secondary repression ‘forgets’ that which is remembered in a representation, primal repression ‘forgets’ that for which there is no representation.”⁴⁹ The dynamic conflict staged at the level of secondary repression is itself defensive, ensuring the forgetting of the affective “nothing” that has been repressed; it is not this nothing that has been repressed, it is something, and that something may be represented by idea B, which is then repressed.

II. Pansymbolism: Ferenczi and Abraham

If I open with this admittedly long digression before turning to the analysts of the Hungarian tradition, it is because Abraham roots his reflections on the symbol in this moment of the development of Freudian theory, as well as its extensions in Ferenczi’s later works, most notably the *Attempt at a Theory of Genitality* as well as the elder analyst’s later notes and fragments.⁵⁰ Abraham describes Ferenczi’s trajectory in relation to Freud thusly:

*L’hommage du disciple est de prolonger, tout en le préservant, la pensée dont il a héritée. De cette pensée, Ferenczi tient à sauvegarder, contre le gré du maître lui-même, la pièce fondamentale et la plus originale: la théorie du symbole, liée indissolublement au principe de plaisir.*⁵¹

Of the writings that were published during his lifetime and in the half-century following, it is the *Attempt* that most seriously takes up the thinking of the symbol. Perhaps not

⁴⁹ Nouvet 2016, 38-39.

⁵⁰ I cite this work according to its original German title, *Versuch einer Genitaltheorie*. The book has appeared with nearly as many titles as there are translations – that in English is *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality*, the French, *Thalassa: psychanalyse des origines de la vie sexuelle*, while the revised and expanded Hungarian translation, prepared by Ferenczi himself, is designated *Katasztrófák a nemi élet fejlődésében (Catastrophes in the Evolution of Sexual Life)*.

⁵¹ Abraham, introduction to the French translation of Ferenczi 1924 (1977), 9.

inconsequentially, it is without question the most roundly derided of Ferenczi's writings – even with the contemporary revival of interest in his work, it has received at best an embarrassed silence – on account of the attempt to open biological phenomena to psychoanalytic investigation, precisely through the motif of the symbol. To briefly recall the outlines of the argument, Ferenczi extends the thinking of the symbol from the psychic domain, properly speaking, to that of the living body itself, where the drives, as internal sources of excitation are themselves to be understood as residues of primordial traumata inflicted upon life. This is, in essence, the extension by analogy of the Freudian presentation of the symbol from the ontogenetic to the phylogenetic, a move already prepared by Freud in numerous works, most notably *Totem and Taboo*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* and *Moses and Monotheism*, as well as the unpublished metapsychological paper “Overview of the Transference Neuroses.”⁵² If Freud was, however, resistant to certain of the moves undertaken by Ferenczi, it is on account of the departure from the oedipal framework that they make possible, even if they are left implicit. Whereas the elder analyst's accounts of the primal horde served to assert the universality of that central complex even in the absence of an actual domineering father, for Ferenczi, this trauma would itself only be the recapitulation of a series of earlier catastrophes suffered by living organisms, where a drastic change in the environment would incur a near total failure of representation (here, understood in the most basic sense, as qualification, however minimal) of their transformed condition.⁵³

⁵² An admittedly rough draft of this latter paper was discovered in 1983; it was published with a title that can only be construed as a deliberate disavowal – *A Phylogenetic Fantasy: Overview of the Transference Neuroses*, in 1987.

⁵³ A speculative list of such catastrophes may be found in Ferenczi 1924 (1938), 61.

The result of these traumata is the sexual. As he notes, in the aftermath of a trauma,

the tendency towards self-gratification of individual organs may be revived, to the detriment of their cooperative functioning as parts of a whole – much as an ill-treated child has recourse to self-gratification. ... But localized injury, also, may result in the suspension of altruistic functioning and the instigation of “autoerotic” processes in the tissues.⁵⁴

The affected organism breaks down, reference to the external world and to a self ceases – what remains is the onset of autoerotism, and all of the polymorphously perverse forms that it may assume, where the organs of the body are set not to their ostensibly dedicated purposes, but towards accruing pleasure, as an attempt to recapture a former satisfaction now lost.⁵⁵ Yet no more than can the human infant remain in such a state, can the organism more generally; on account of the exigencies of the environment, compromises will need be forged. These appear not as “the fortuitous and sportive expression of fantasy activity, but rather the historically significant traces of ‘repressed’ biological situations.”⁵⁶ The consequence of this move, where the sexual drives are positioned as historically acquired in the development of living organisms, are of critical importance. As Ferenczi readily admits – which his scientifically-minded critics have largely ignored – this shifts the drives from a conventional biological perspective founded on the methods and epistemology of the hard sciences, to one where the libidinal body, defined

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁵ For an exposition of the relation of autoerotism to affect, see Nouvet in Nouvet, Stahuljak and Still 2007, 108-110.

⁵⁶ Ferenczi 1924 (1938), 87.

by its affectability and the symbolic character that arises from this, is foregrounded.⁵⁷ This is not so much an attempt to synthesize psychoanalytic findings with the data of biology, but rather to break the shackles that would tie the development of psychoanalytic theory to epistemic constraints that are not its own.⁵⁸

Its result would be, Abraham writes, a conception of the body that is “composed by symbols part by part, our atoms, our cells, our final ideals. These symbols bear with them their history, the sense of their genesis.”⁵⁹ That is to say that the body and the psyche alike are composed of symbols, relics of past traumata. It is of little import as to what the “initial scene” might have objectively been, whether Ferenczi’s speculations on the drying up of the ocean and the abandonment of life to a terrestrial existence, or any other; what is at issue is that the individual body and psyche alike come into being as already affected, moved by a excitations that do not initially lend themselves to any qualification. And concomitantly, the trauma that sets the work of symbolization in motion may well not belong to the confines of an individual’s history; traumata are indeed transmissible, perhaps not according to the rules of a biological heritability, but

⁵⁷ Ferenczi 1924 (1938), 88. Within the American tradition, Loewald’s 1988 paper “Psychoanalysis in Search of Nature: Thoughts on Metapsychology, ‘Metaphysics,’ Projection” – another unjustly ignored text – provides a fruitful complement to Ferenczi’s work, and that of the Hungarian tradition more widely. It is perhaps worth noting that the three figures to have gone the farthest in asserting the singularity of psychoanalytic knowledge and the clinical experience on which it was founded – Abraham, Loewald and Laplanche – were all trained in phenomenology previous to becoming psychoanalysts. This is not to say that their considerations are to be subordinated to a Husserlian or Heideggerian reading – indeed all three explicitly push against this – but it is telling that each rejects the necessity of ordering psychoanalysis under the auspices of the hard sciences, on account of this influence.

⁵⁸ Few contemporary psychoanalysts have attempted to follow the path suggested by Ferenczi, but amongst them one could name Anzieu, whose work on “the skin-ego” makes repeated (albeit limited) reference to Abraham’s reception of Ferenczi’s thought. From a position more closely following Abraham, Anzieu’s work perhaps errs in confining itself to a single, relatively direct line of symbolization – that of the skin as carapace defending an interior from external excitation; the work of figuration and of multiple determination is set to the side. For an introduction to Anzieu’s extensive writings on the “skin-ego” see Anzieu 1985 (2006).

⁵⁹ Abraham, introduction to the French translation of Ferenczi 1924 (1977), 16.

nonetheless they pass between generations.⁶⁰ Others, particularly one's parents, may well traumatize a child through inadvertent displays of their own failures of representation, as Ferenczi had noted in his studies of the children of depressed mothers in "The Unwanted Child and His Death Instinct," and "The Confusion of Tongues Between Adult and Child"; it is not, in these pieces, a matter of a direct transmission, but rather what he termed "the terrorism of suffering," where the child attempts to make himself nurse to the mother, figuring in his (or her) psyche the absence of sense presented by the parent, in order to address it and attempt to cure it.⁶¹ The child receives those lapsus that call for symbols, or symbols that let show the disintegration that threatens, and takes it upon himself to recast them; in such cases, success is perhaps rare, and the effects of a trauma may prolong themselves, in greatly varying symbols, long after all its first victims have ceased to be otherwise remembered. Yet, he argues, the symbolic expressions that result from traumatic experiences are not necessarily pathological; indeed, most are not. With the presence of a supporting environment, the traumata of childhood may be weathered without lasting harm. Nevertheless, for Ferenczi, all development would be impelled by trauma, all psychic operations the result of the figuration of an excitation without quality, or, in other words, symbolization. As he writes in a 1931 note, "Aphoristically expressed: intellect is born exclusively of suffering... Paradoxical contrast; intellect is born not simply of common, but only of traumatic suffering. It develops as a consequence, or as an attempt at, compensation for complete mental paralysis."⁶² Faced with an excitation that

⁶⁰ It is precisely the theme of the transmission of trauma that Abraham's later and better known papers, co-authored with Maria Torok, turn. The topic has achieved notable contemporary interest, albeit often without explicitly returning to the early works of Freud and Ferenczi; for a survey of some contemporary positions, see the papers gathered in Fromm 2012.

⁶¹ Ferenczi 1933 (1955), 166.

⁶² Ferenczi 1931 (1955), 244.

it initially cannot master, the psyche fashions symbols, which is to say that it fashions means where none were previously available.⁶³

It is this line of thought that Nicolas Abraham follows in his reflections on the symbol, attempting to give an account of the symbol in its relation to the affectability of the psyche.⁶⁴ As he remarks of the symbol at the outset of “*Le Symbole, ou l’au-delà le phénomène*,” a set of notes that were left unpublished during his lifetime, it presents itself to the psychoanalyst as “a ‘thing’ bearing a sense.”⁶⁵ This is, not, however, to reduce the symbol to the statute of a linguistic signifier, or it is at least to say that it is not only a signifier; accordingly, the sense that it bears is not merely encoded, such that it would readily avail itself had one only the correct key. As Abraham writes, there are two aspects to the symbol:

⁶³ See his criticisms of Rank’s theory of birth-trauma in Ferenczi 1927 (1955), 64-65.

⁶⁴ Historical circumstances have conspired such that the connection between Ferenczi and Abraham, whose writings represent the most rigorous and extensive approach to Ferenczi’s work yet undertaken, has been largely unacknowledged. Abraham’s work is, in the Anglophone world and likely more widely, less known amongst psychoanalysts than it is amongst scholars in the humanities, who encountered it as a result of two texts written by Jacques Derrida (see Derrida’s introduction to Abraham and Torok 1976, and the essay of the same year “Moi – la psychanalyse,” included in Derrida 1998). The work of critics in the tradition of deconstruction has largely portrayed Abraham and his collaborator Maria Torok as radical innovators of Freudian theory, influenced to some extent by Melanie Klein. The portrait is inaccurate; while their work is indeed original and compelling, in its theory and method, as well as by Abraham’s repeated admission, it is in keeping with a line of thought that passes via Ferenczi and Imre Hermann. This misconstrual is owed in part to the fact that Ferenczi’s writings only became fully available in the 1980s, after Derrida’s texts were written, the removal of Abraham’s texts on Ferenczi from the collection translated into English as *The Shell and the Kernel*, and the continued obscurity of Hermann, whose works are only partially available in French and all but untranslated into English. The revival of interest in Ferenczi within psychoanalysis has passed over Abraham, which is not surprising given the one-sidedness of the contemporary presentation, which ignores Ferenczi’s metapsychological writings in order to facilitate a caricature amenable to the ideals of relational psychoanalysis.

⁶⁵ Abraham in Abraham and Torok 1987, 26. As the title of Abraham’s text indicates, his writings on the symbol are inflected by his training, previous to becoming a psychoanalyst, in Husserlian phenomenology. Much of his early work situates itself at the intersection of these two fields, transposing psychoanalysis into the language of phenomenology, thereby not so much domesticating the former as radically transforming the latter. Despite Husserl’s importance to the *Le Symbole, ou au-delà le phénomène*. I here leave aside the engagement with phenomenology. For the most explicit statement, see Abraham’s *Reflexions phénoménologiques*; the version published in Gandillac et al. 1965 contains extracts from the discussion that followed the presentation of the paper, which are of notable interest.

*Ici s'impose donc une première distinction, d'une part le symbole-chose considéré comme hiéroglyphe, ou texte symbolique, le symbole morte en tant que symbole et, d'autre part, le symbole inclus dans un fonctionnement, c'est-à-dire le symbole opérant, animé du sens et supposant des sujets concrets, considérés comme un ensemble en fonctionnement. Interpréter un symbole consiste à convertir le symbole-chose en symbole opérant.*⁶⁶

Of the two sides to the symbol, the first is the more familiar; as symbol-thing, the symbolic formation may be understood as a signifier, a visual or verbal element that serves to indicate a given referent. It is “dead” insofar as this relation may be regarded as relatively fixed across its various iterations. To illustrate this conceptualization, Abraham calls upon a rote example, a phobic symptom attached to the figure of a serpent. The image of the serpent calls up displeasure, insofar as it serves to disguise a repressed desire for the phallus. Through the displacement from the phallus to the representation of the serpent, the symbol disguises from consciousness the underlying desire to take the phallus; overt desire is converted into avoidance. This transformation is motivated by a conflict at the level of unconscious phantasy; the desire for the phallus is contradicted by another desire, pinned to a parental *imago* and its prohibitions. Between the two, the “serpent” emerges simultaneously as an object of fascination and of disgust. The desire for it accordingly gives way not so much to a simple fear as to an immobilization of the threatening impulse.⁶⁷ It is this psychic formation, where the equivalence serpent=phallus may be posed, that Abraham refers to as the symbol-thing; in its function, it is not so different from those distorted representations produced in dreams and phantasies under

⁶⁶ Abraham in Abraham and Torok 1987, 27. Emphases original.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

the influence of the primary process, save that it emerges as a comparatively stable product. In this operation, the symbol serves to synthesize the operation of differing operations within the psychic apparatus. The erotic desire for the phallus, stemming from the sexual drives, is fused with a contrary desire that is pinned to a parental *imago*; in the language of ego-psychology, one could say that the former corresponds to an id-impulse that finds counterweight in the function of the superego, or of superego precursors. The symbol serves to bind together these two “subjects” – as Abraham indicates, he understands the “subject” not along grammatical or Cartesian lines, but as a given ensemble of functions and desires psyche that are not determined by an “objective” exterior. By subjects, he does not necessarily mean “persons,” though a person is indeed an ensemble of desires and functions, albeit one composed of a great number of other such subjects. Here again it is not merely a matter of translation, where a common measure between two languages may be presupposed, but rather a matter of forging a link between psychic functions of heterogeneous orders. Abraham describes it thus:

*La symbolisation ne consiste pas à substituer une “chose” à une autre, mais à résoudre un conflit déterminé en le transposant sur un plan où ses termes incompatibles subissent une in-détermination apte à les harmoniser dans un fonctionnement nouveau jouissant d’une nouvelle détermination.*⁶⁸

In the conversion of the phallus to the serpent, the representation of the phallus first undergoes a work of indetermination, relative to the visual component. Other attributes are placed in a relative abeyance, such that it can be linked to the similarly undetermined visual figure of the serpent. The two may then accordingly be linked in the condensed presentation phallus + serpent. This composite is subsequently re-determined via an

⁶⁸ Ibid., 30.

action of splitting, whereby the representation of the serpent remains available to consciousness while that of the phallus undergoes secondary repression.

All of this is to indicate that one should not and cannot do away with the notion of the symbol as signifier, where the equation serpent=phallus holds good. But were one to remain at the level of this “lateral” translation, where one representation is exchanged for another, this would be to ignore the operative character of the symbol. In this latter case, it is a matter of a “vertical” translation, where a conflict is transposed from an inferior level of psychic functioning to one superior, following the model that Freud had laid down in his letter to Fliess, discussed above. In displacing the conflict upward, the work of symbolization makes possible a synthesis of functions that cannot be accomplished at the anterior level. In this sense, the symbol is an operative relay. The “sense” that animates the symbol, from this perspective, would not be one that is already representable. Rather that of an excitation that is not currently representable demands expression where none immediately avails itself at the level of functioning to which it is native – as such, it reflects the *agieren* that Freud saw in transference, not a simple reproduction of a given experience or meaning, but the attempted recreation of what cannot be represented. Abraham describes this operation as such:

Les deux niveaux à distinguer ici sont celui de la motricité agie [the desire to take the phallus and be excited by it, the counter-desire forbidding this pleasure] et celui de la motricité verbale. On comprend dès lors que le mot, puis l'image qu'il inspire, puissent ouvrir la voie vers un fonctionnement exempt de conflit, d'autant

*que la manipulation conflictuelle de l'objet cède la place à la manipulation sans danger du mot-image.*⁶⁹

The work of symbolization thus displaces of a conflict that is found at the level of thing-representations to that of word-representations (Freud's *Sachvorstellungen* and *Wortvorstellungen*), where the conflict may be elaborated in such fashion that allows its greater binding. Ambivalent as the relation to the serpent-phallus might be, the symbol is nonetheless "unthreatening" insofar as it serves to bind together two levels of motor functioning whose simultaneous accomplishment would be impossible, save through this displacement upwards. Each desire finds a partial fulfillment. As unsatisfying as the result may be, it nonetheless involves less unpleasure than if both were left entirely unaccomplished. Through symbolization, an unworkable contradiction at the motor level gives way to a dynamic tension at the level of representation. Symbolization is thus an integrative function. It is the negation of not merely contrary, but heterogeneous, impossible impulses that exert themselves upon the psyche – at the lower level of organization, there is no possible negotiation between them. Hence the invention of a synthesis at a superior level, which allows the repression of the incommensurability at the lower level, which would here be an operation of primary repression. The instantiation of the conflict at the higher level of functioning operates the repression of the "same" conflict at the lower level, by representing it. Were this process not to succeed, the result would be a radical failure of integration.⁷⁰ The symbol would thus be a compromise formation forged at the level of verbal representation between two terms which, at the "lower" level of unconscious phantasy, know no possible compromise. The symbol

⁶⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁰ Abraham's exposition here relies on Ferenczi's 1926 paper "The Problem of Acceptance of Unpleasant Ideas – Advances in Knowledge of The Sense of Reality," collected in Ferenczi 1950, 366-379.

would then correspond to a lapsus that would occur at the prior level of functioning, the irreconcilable “gap” between two contrary impulses. As Abraham remarks, symbolization would inevitably respond to such an interval, where functioning at the inferior level would otherwise not be able to progress.⁷¹ To put it in a schematic way, the conflict X, which is located at the inferior level of functioning and which consists of impossible demands is translated “vertically” to the superior level of functioning, where it finds as its representative the condensation figure A+B; this composite will then be split, and a “lateral” translation between A and B then becomes possible.⁷²

Thus considered, the symbol serves to dramatize a conflict belonging to an inferior level of functioning. Yet, following Abraham’s example, one would not be justified in simply finding only two levels, one of word-representations and one of thing-representations. For the phallus, too, is a symbol. The argument stems from Ferenczi who, in the *Attempt at a Theory of Genitality*, takes up the problem of those “partial drives” that Freud had earlier identified in relation to the manifestations of infantile sexuality, and their relation to genital sexuality. As Freud had already remarked in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, adult coitus does not dispense with infantile erogenous zones, but rather makes use of them for the purpose of providing what he terms forepleasure, which consists of raising the level of tension to that necessary for genital discharge.⁷³ Ferenczi argues that the genitalization of eroticism rests upon the binding together of previous forms of eroticism – principally anal and urethral, tending

⁷¹ Abraham in Abraham and Torok 1987, 28. Abraham never attempts to give a comprehensive list of how many levels of functioning there are – they are likely innumerable. Nonetheless, several may be identified in his work – the Somatic, the Id, the Unconscious Ego and Conscious Ego. Each of these could be internally subdivided manifold times.

⁷² Again, this is a manifest simplification of the process – as Abraham outlines, a symbolization of two symbols will retain conflictual elements from each of its sources. The complexity of such formulations quickly becomes practically unmanageable. See *Ibid.*, 44-46.

⁷³ Freud 1905b, *SE* VII 210-214.

respectively to withholding and expelling – within the (male) genital function. He proposes that there is a qualitative difference to be found between the eroticisms that appear with the partial drives – this is less an innovation than a gesture towards a distinction already implicit in any reference to an “oral eroticism” or an “anal eroticism.” Phallic eroticism demonstrates the “amphimixis” of infantile forms, in which the multiplicity of erogenous zones undergo subordination to a single organ, to which adult sexual desire is (ideally, but never finally nor completely) fixed.⁷⁴ The eroticisms linked to the partial drives and to infantile sexuality, tied as they are to erogenous zones, organs incapable of discharge, the expressions of which are incompatible, are transposed onto the genital, allowing for the lowering of total tension via orgasm. In this sense, the phallus, *qua* organ, is made to serve as the representative for the divergent eroticisms operative in infantile sexuality. The symbol of the serpent would then be a supplementary symbolization, worked upon the product of previous symbolizations (it could be shown that the *imago*, too, is a symbol) that are themselves incongruous with one another with one another. Such, as Abraham asserts, following Ferenczi, would encompass the development of organic and psychic functioning writ large; as Abraham puts it, “*toute operation symbolique suppose d’autres operations symboliques comme fondement.*”⁷⁵

Were one to leave the matter there, the door would be left open to a *mise-en-abyme*, and the instauration of a useless mystification at the heart of the psychoanalytic enterprise. In order to avoid this, Abraham thus turns to a study of originary symbolism. Like those other originary elements within psychoanalytic theory – primary repression,

⁷⁴ Ferenczi 1924 (1938), 6-11. In their correspondence (Ferenczi and Groddeck 2002, 87-88), Georg Groddeck accuses Ferenczi of failing to attribute the source of his interest in organic symbolism. Whether or not this accusation is warranted, Groddeck’s 1923 paper, “Vision, the World of the Eye, and Seeing Without the Eye,” in Groddeck 1977, is an essential complement.

⁷⁵ Abraham in Abraham and Torok 1987, 34.

the primal scene, Ferenczi's primary transference – its manifestations are never directly given to observation, whether in the clinic or otherwise. It is a reconstruction derived from observable phenomena, illustrative of the dynamic functioning of symbolization at a minimal level. As Abraham remarks:

On se rappelle que le symbole contient toujours et nécessairement un plus par rapport au symbolisé. Ce plus tient précisément à la survenue d'une inhibition incluse dans le nouveau fonctionnement. Lorsque nous revenons en arrière à partir d'un symbole donné, nous ne pouvons manquer de trouver moins dans les symboles inférieurs et antérieurs. Ce serait là l'itinéraire classique allant du complexe au simple... Le symbole premier, l'Arche, doit donc présenter le maximum de simplicité et le minimum d'indétermination.⁷⁶

The attempt to retrace a primary symbolization, must reconstruct the operation in a minimal state; if, with each successive act of symbolization, the complexity of functioning increases, primary symbolization would take place where psychic functioning appears at its most basic. This point Abraham designates the *Archē* (after the Greek ἀρχή – beginning, origin, or principle) – it is an extension of psychoanalytic theory, not a moment native to the history of an individual, to the species, or to life taken most generally; accordingly, it belongs to the epistemology particular to psychoanalysis, not to properly biological concerns.⁷⁷ Here he follows after the work that Freud had already begun in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, with the myth of the genesis of life in a

⁷⁶ Ibid., 35-36.

⁷⁷ On the issue of the particularity of a psychoanalytic epistemology, distinct from those of the sciences, see the eponymous essay of *L'écorce et le noyau* in Abraham and Torok 1987, 203-226.

unicellular organism that is already prey to the life and death drives.⁷⁸ For Abraham, the operations of the symbol do indeed hold to the model of the repetition compulsion:

Il est évident qu'à faire abstraction de l'aspect quantitatif, trauma et conflit ont la même structure : l'inhibition d'un fonctionnement. De même, la reproduction des effets du trauma en absence de celui-ci exige la constitution d'un instrument d'itération. Nous avons là, précisément, la structure même du symbole que Freud a maintes fois décrite à propos de la conception psychanalytique du symptôme et l'on peut montrer sur tous les exemples cités par Freud (névrose traumatique, jeu du « fort-da », névrose de destinée) que la répétition compulsive est toujours répétition symbolique.⁷⁹

This is, in a concrete sense, to return to the notion of symbolization that Freud had outlined in the *Project*, albeit extending it to the generalized notion of trauma that later emerges with the death drive, and with it the universality of the repetition compulsion. In Abraham's reading, the division of the life and death drives is itself already a symbolization, the attempt to come to terms with a state that would have existed "*avant le commencement*," which he terms Primary Anxiety.⁸⁰

This Primary Anxiety, Abraham writes, is a "*sinon un nouveau mythe mais du moins d'une expression métaphorique pour figurer, par analogie, l'impossibilité d'être ou, si l'on préfère, le non-être actif, en tension vers l'être*"; it is, as he specifies, a limit-idea, akin to a mathematical zero, unobservable and indeed nonexistent, but nonetheless

⁷⁸ See Freud 1919, *SE XVIII*, especially chapter five and following.

⁷⁹ Abraham in Abraham and Torok 1987, 36.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

essential for the development of the understanding of the operations of the psyche.⁸¹ As he further specifies,

*L'impossibilité d'être, l'Angoisse originare, est impensable et non verbalisable. Elle est cependant le fondement de l'être et de la pensée. L'être, c'est le même, c'est l'identique, c'est l'itérable ; il "résulte" d'une constitution, d'un acte constituant, surgi dans l'Angoisse. Acte instaurateur originare, aussi inaccessible que l'Angoisse elle-même. Pour nous, le commencement, l'Archè, ne sera ni l'Angoisse, ni l'Acte Créateur mais l'Etre premier. Or l'avènement de l'être ou l'identique n'est possible que sur le mode symbolique.*⁸²

Thus construed, Primary Anxiety would be something like the maximal state of the affectability outlined by Freud; it is the active manifestation of an excitation that is absolutely alien to any representation. It therefore knows no qualification. Being, as Abraham defines it, is dependent upon this gesture of qualification via representation; it is what may appear as the "same" across a series of iterations. In each case, this sameness is the product of a judgment that rests upon the qualities that appear only with representation, in the reappearance of a given set of qualities that is referred back to a previous presentation. The contrast between Primary Anxiety and Being would, however, not be one of a simple difference established at the lateral level, the qualities that are given at two successive moments in time are held to be divergent; such would be the work of the "lateral" translation outlined above. Primary Anxiety would be the impossibility of any qualification whatsoever, the imposition of a quantity that cannot be determined. As such, it bears no relation to any representation. It is not so much different

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 38.

from Being as the two orders are entirely heterogeneous, absent any point in common. The originary operation of the psychic apparatus would be to negate this radical negativity. It would deny the unrepresentability of Anxiety, thereby displacing it to the level of possible representation.⁸³ That is to say that the *Archē* would be the instatement of primary repression; what is repressed is not an idea, not an object, but rather affect, as what is unrepresentable. This originary symbolization would then open the path to distinctions drawn between differing representations, at whatever level they may take place, whether verbal, visual, phantastic, or otherwise. And with the *Archē*, the genesis of the ego is entailed, for as Abraham writes:

*La fonction de l'Ego consiste donc à figurer en lui ce qu'il n'est pas, en opérant et en maintenant un clivage, propre à arracher l'être à l'angoisse originnaire. En d'autres termes l'Arche-Ego est à la fois symbole de l'angoisse et symbolise avec l'Autre dont il est en quelque sorte le négatif. L'acte fondamental de l'Ego consiste à se discriminer de l'Autre. L'être de l'Ego consiste en l'affirmation indéfiniment itérée de l'altérité.*⁸⁴

The ego, as he defines it, exists in and as a play of differentiations: in the representations that it operates at its conscious and unconscious levels, and also as the product of the primary symbolization, where the Archē-Ego is paired with an Anxiety that is now construed as its other. That is to say that what is produced in this symbolization is the repression of what cannot be represented; in its place, there is determinate negation – the judgment of the absence of particular qualities, always relative to Being – which serves as the figure for the negativity of affect at the level of the representative functioning of

⁸³ See, of course, Freud's 1925 paper "Negation," (*SE XIX* 233-240) and Ferenczi's further elaborations on the theme in his "The Acceptance of Unpleasant Ideas" (in Ferenczi 1950, 366-379).

⁸⁴ Abraham in Abraham and Torok 1987, 38.

the ego. With this symbolization the genesis of the basic distinctions that structure the ego is found: that between internal and external worlds, self and other, and the temporal sense according to which iteration can be recognized.⁸⁵

This is to say that the alterity that is operative in the figurations of the ego is itself a figure for the ego's alterity with reference to the Anxiety that impels its development. Yet this is not to posit a unitary position that would be proper to Anxiety, whether it be named the real or anything else; this would be, as Abraham remarks, to lose the dynamic, aleatory aspects of symbolization by enclosing them within a descriptive structuralism. The ego, as Abraham describes it following Freud's *Project* is both a structure and a structuring dynamic; it is the occasion for the auto-elaboration of the psychic apparatus. With each symbolization, the psychic apparatus affirms the presence of affect that continues to impinge upon it. It symbolizes because it has been affected, and will continue to be so. Just as an idea subjected to secondary repression continues to agitate, so too the affect that lies under primary repression. Any psychic functioning would thus be an attempt to figure, by whatever means and with increasing sophistication, an unqualified affect. This elaboration would not, however, result from a single occasion, insofar as there are a multiplicity of *Archai*. Primary Anxiety would not respond to a specific occasion, be it the instantiation of life, or any other, but refers to the affectability of the psychic apparatus, which will have been touched by what it cannot immediately assimilate on any number of occasions. No matter what symbols may be crafted, how it is affected, the psyche remains affectable, and will be affected anew, again and again.

⁸⁵ At an ontogenetic level, the beginnings of a temporal sense would be the result of the alternation between the infant's satiation and the sensation of hunger. The experience of hunger initially seem to threaten annihilation; it is mitigated by the development of a rhythm of anticipation and retention, whereby the infant is able to endure the unpleasure of hunger because of the anticipated return of the mother. A more developed example is found of course in the "*fort-da*" game.

These may return to events within the historical life of the individual, those traumas that Freud had discovered in his hysterical patients, but there is also the “traumatic” element endemic to normal development; insofar as the invention of the capacities of the psyche depends upon symbolization, their unfolding would be the result on an unassimilable experience at a lower level of organization. However, as with the case of ideas submitted to secondary repression, the primary repression of affect does not mean that it does not continue to agitate the ego, threatening it with disintegration; subsequent acts of symbolization continue the vertical displacement of the disquieting presence of affect. The raising of the excitation to a higher level, where defense becomes possible, only serves to cover over, to repress the previous level to which the conflict is native; that is to say that with regard to the representation of the conflict at a given level, through however many relays, there would remain that which is unassimilated and unassimilable – the “internal foreign body” that Freud had designated as the catalyst of traumatic symptoms.⁸⁶ Any psychic functioning would thus be an attempt to figure, by whatever means and with increasing sophistication, the affect that signals the continuing presence of this foreign element that cannot be itself bound.

Some concluding technical remarks; the reflections of the Hungarian school on the symbol are chiefly pertinent to clinical practice as they pertain to the transference. The significance of the symbol, Abraham notes,

est appréhendée... par la résonance propre à l'écoute psychanalytique, telle qu'elle a lieu dans la relation dite transférentielle. Elle se manifeste alors comme un moment du fonctionnement imaginal du sujet, moment dont le révélateur est le “non-engagement” (et non pas, bien entendu, non-résonance) de l'analyste. Or,

⁸⁶ Freud 1896, SE III 290.

*précisément, l'inconscient induit par la résonance nous livre le conflit imaginaire qui a donné naissance à l'aspect conscient de la solution symbolique. Dans la situation privilégiée de l'analyse, la signification du symbole éclate comme une allusion à sa genèse.*⁸⁷

This is to say that analytic listening is set a twofold task; the first aspect is the deciphering of the symbol at the level of representation. Through the symptom, the connection is redrawn from a conscious idea to a repressed idea. Thereby the symbol-thing is reconstructed and the desires and prohibitions that have given rise to the conflict are brought to consciousness. This tracing of a “lateral” translation must also be accompanied by a consideration of the “vertical” dimension, which is to say of the symbol as operative, conveying a conflict from another level of functioning. The symbol alludes to its genesis, not through what is represented in it, but insofar as it serves to convey something of the affect that motivates its instauration. To thusly turn the ear would not be to engage in deciphering. It would be rather the contrary; it would be to lend the ear not to what the analysand attempts to articulate and fails to do so, but to the appearance of a radical absence of sense in their discourse. To attempt to treat this radically negative manifestation demands interpretation of another sort; as Abraham remarks, it must open the path to a further symbolization, to the creation of a new conflict at a level of functioning that is, of yet unachieved. This is, in a sense, to return to a classical definition of the analytic cure; to aid the analysand in reestablishing a capacity for sublimation, via the symbol.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Abraham in Abraham and Torok 1987, 31-32.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 76.

Abraham's writings on the symbol devote only occasional lines, quite general, to clinical application; to illustrate what he conceives, one of Freud's early metaphors on the transference may serve. With the befalling of the transference,

There is a complete change of scene; it is as though some piece of make-believe had been stopped by the sudden irruption of reality – as when, for instance, a cry of fire is raised during a theatrical performance. No doctor who experiences this for the first time will find it easy to retain his grasp on the analytic situation and to keep clear of the illusion that the treatment is really at an end.⁸⁹

I note only a few pertinent features of this striking image, the importance of which Scarfone has underlined.⁹⁰ As Freud depicts it, before the transference manifestation, the analyst is as if a spectator in the theater. The analysand's discourse, his or her associations, everything that he or she represents to the analyst, is positioned as a bit of make-believe on a theatrical stage. The befalling of the transference, its *agieren*, appears as an interruption of the scene, one which does not belong to the goings-on of the stage, and the representations that take place there. The cry of fire brings to a halt the show; it does not belong to the space of discourse provided by the stage; the attention of the spectator gives way to panic, the performers cease to act. And this would be the case even when there is no fire, the cry is enough. Between the shout and what transpires on stage, there is no relation; the former does not reference the latter. It is not an allusion to the theatrical plot. It does not foreshadow anything, it does not reference any previous scene. Faced with this irruption, the performers and the spectators alike will find themselves at a loss, and the desire to flee. Beyond the immediate danger, that one party or the other

⁸⁹ Freud 1915a, *SE* XIII 162

⁹⁰ Scarfone 2012, 10-13.

would end the treatment, there is another; it would be an absurd gesture on the part of the analyst, were he or she to attempt to explain the shout of fire with reference to what had transpired on the stage. To account for an affective state according to the representations offered by the analysand, whether those present or those of his or her history, would be no less perverse. This is not to say that one could afford to ignore them – it is of course only according to their interruption that one might recognize the radical failure of representation that the affect would bring with it. The symbolization that analysis would aim at would, like any symbolization, aim at transposing the interruption to another level; to follow the terms of the Freudian image, one could indicate that there had been a theatrical performance, that it was interrupted. In one way or another, the violent breaking of the play will have had an aftermath, even if it is not on the same stage, or at least not on the same night. This would not be to ascribe sense to the affect, to assert that it really did represent something, but to give an account of the failure of representation as such. This would require a mode of representation that would allow the affect to maintain its silence, for indeed, one could only reach it according to the means provided by the stage. That is to say that it would call for what one might call, not without a hint of the frustration that could only be necessary, a post-traumatic theater. For Abraham, this is a species of poetry, it does not merely represent, but attempts to speak its own affectedness, to speak a silence. To grant him the final word:

De ce qui n'a jamais été, le divan se souvient. Comment cela? l'Oreille perçoit bien ce qui est « dit, » conçoit aussi ce que est « tu »... Mais n'est point cela qu'elle entend. Pour tout dire, ne lui parviennent que lambeaux, fragments, pièces détachées; ce qu'elle sait à l'avance est cependant capital: chaque

morceau forme à lui seule un œuvre, partie d'un œuvre plus vaste, son mode de morcellement y compris. Une œuvre, oui, parce qu'elle porte en elle ce dont elle est née: désirs, confits, souffrances. C'est ceux-là qu'elle écoute, l'Oreille, selon son postulat. Or, par définition, l'œuvre, présumée telle, était vouée à demeurer, muette, illisible. Mais à force d'écoute, il arrive que, peu à peu, des vers, des strophes, voir le poème entier prennent corps, se détachent de leur créateur et le libèrent enfin vers de nouveaux ouvrages. Le poème déchiffré cède la place à la poésie incessante. Tel est le travail d'analyse.⁹¹

⁹¹ Abraham in Abraham and Torok 1987, 336.

Gorgias I: Affecting the Λόγος

οὐκ ἔστι Πειθοῦς ἱερόν ἄλλο πλὴν λόγος
καὶ βωμός αὐτῆς ἔστ' ἐν ἀνθρώπου φύσει.
(Persuasion has no temple other than the *logos*,
and her altar is in the nature of man.)

- Euripides, *Antigone*

I. Decadence

Of Gorgias of Leontini, the historian Philostratus writes, “It is said that Gorgias lived one hundred and eight years, his body was not destroyed by old age, and his senses (αἰσθήσεις) were those of a young man in the prime of life.”⁹² The great sophist of the fifth century before our era, in whom Philostratus finds the wellspring of the intellectual and oratorical activity that dominated the culture of the classical Greek world, presents an unsurpassed figure. Remembered principally for his skill at argumentation, his ability to improvise on any subject that was proposed to him, the flexibility of the skill with which he wielded the *logos* stands in apparent contrast to the fixity of his body.⁹³ The deftness of Gorgias’ mind belongs to a body that, in spite of its great age, refused to decay. In contrast to those philosophers contemporaneous to him, who preached the mistrust of the senses in favor of the ideal, of logic or of being (amongst whom Plato, author of a dialogue against the sophists named for Gorgias, is the major figure, but no less Parmenides and in a somewhat more nuanced fashion, Aristotle), the sophist is here

⁹² Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* I.494. This and all other Greek translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, I.482.

defined according to an undiminishing sensuality, a capacity for *aisthēsis* that the historian announces in defiance of expectation. One is left to marvel at Gorgias' body, or the account thereof, perhaps no less than his contemporaries are said to have marveled at his discourse.⁹⁴ Even at the point of his death, Gorgias is made to be a figure for the aesthetic as it presents itself both in activity and passivity; his faculty with the *logos* is tied to the strength of his senses and his capacity to be moved by sensual presentations. Gorgias influences his audiences precisely insofar as he is here presented as capable of being moved. His talent, as Philostratus identifies it, lay in his capacity for *ex tempore* (σχεδῖος) oratory, through which he humiliated his contemporaries who relied upon fixed compositions, bending his *logos* to meet the demands of the moment, of the singular set of conditions that presented themselves to him.⁹⁵

Philostratus' presentation is, of course, one that relies on the set of tropes, already long established by the fourth century CE, regarding the figure of the sophist. Gorgias

⁹⁴ Contemporary scholarship has, for the most part, accepted the account of Gorgias' longevity, in the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary. That being said, Philostratus' accounts in the *Lives of the Sophists* follow the general tendency of ancient biographers to dwell less upon what today would be counted as historical fact in favor of presenting those details and anecdotes that best represent the presumed *ēthos* of its subject. Ancient biography, quite unashamedly, was written according to that textual dialectic criticized by Foucault in "*Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur ?*," (2013, 789-821) wherein it is assumed that the work must reflect the intentions and details of the author's life, which are derived from the text and then read back into it in order to further explicate the written work. The results of this process were not written with an objective historical accuracy in mind, but rather to offer a subject for imitation, where the admirable mode of life depicted in the biography was presented to the reader as a model for one's own conduct. The pretense of providing an objective account of the subject's life thus was subordinated to the display of the specificity of a consistent character; a symptom of this is found in Diogenes' Laertius tendency to recount multiple and differing narratives of the same event without judging one version to be authoritative. Although they might vary, they nonetheless serve to display aspects of the same character or *ethos*, and as such could be admitted alongside one another. That is to say that the subjects of the ancient lives are no more than literary figures themselves, the functions of written texts that emerge and operate within the field of textual meaning as it is received. Cf. Lefkowitz 2012, 2-5.

It is thus that I have largely dispensed with discussing the testimonia in my treatment of Gorgias, or at least from indulging in the pretense that one can derive a more or less reliable historical background that would serve as a necessary support for Gorgias' text. I have no conviction that one could derive the "real" Gorgias from the fictive model of the exemplary Greek orator that Philostratus, writing some seven centuries after Gorgias, aims to create.

⁹⁵ Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* I.482.

appears at the head of that mass of invading bodies and mercenary discourses that, in the mind of Plato and those who came after him, was worthy of only the greatest contempt. The sophist, according to the account of the philosopher is a hunter of men, one who traffics in mere appearance rather than truth, is one who deceives in making the weaker argument the stronger, an insidious tribe working seduction by means of their persuasive art.⁹⁶ In granting a central place to Gorgias' capacity for *aisthēsis*, Philostratus touches upon the classical denunciation of the sophist as one who traffics in images rather than realities. An artisan of words, the sophist crafts mere resemblances instead of representing things such as they are, he is deceived by his passions and deceives others in order to acquire that which he desires. His is a domain of images, likenesses that are not fashioned according to the constraints of the things that they purport to represent, but rather in order to affect their audiences, inflict upon them feelings of pleasure or of disgust; he opens a field for the passions to play, his own and those of his hearers, and thereby to work effects. It is not Gorgias alone who is tied to this domain of the aesthetic. The most notorious culprit is of course Protagoras, whose declaration that "man is the

⁹⁶ This is to summarize the principle list of accusations levied against them in Plato's *Sophist*. Here and across Plato's dialogues, the distinction between the philosopher and the sophist is often unsteady, and much of Plato's invective against the sophists must be attributed to the very difficulty of drawing a distinction between the philosopher and the sophist. The two figures, as is acknowledged near the end of that dialogue, are those which belong properly to the domain of the dialectic; the sophist dwells in the darkness of non-being, feeling his way about by habit, while the philosopher gazes into the blinding light of being. A curious distinction, to say the least, if only because a certain anesthesia is attributed to both figures; what is at issue is not one is blind as opposed to one who sees, but rather the division rests upon the conditions of this blindness and the divergent modes of not seeing (253e-254b). The conclusion of the *Euthydemus* (304c-306a) hints at a similar indistinction, insofar as Crito presents the words of an unnamed interlocutor who condemns verbal disputation outright, drawing his net in such fashion that neither the philosopher nor the sophist escapes condemnation. The wholesale condemnation of oratory that is found in the *Gorgias* is tempered in Plato's later *Phaedrus*, likely on account of the arguments of Isocrates, the two figures are nonetheless agreed that rhetoric cannot serve as an end in itself, it is not the art that Gorgias and the other sophists might have made of it (De Romilly 1976, 47-58). In subsequent Greek writing, the rhetor stands in contrast to the sophist, as the responsible practitioner of oratory against the irresponsible one who argues for the sake of argument. Despite the revival of the positive valence of the term "sophist" in the first to fourth centuries CE, in what Philostratus terms the "Second Sophistic," it is the condemnatory connotation first coined by Plato that has lasted to this day.

measure of all things, as they are insofar as they are and as they are not insofar as they are not,” was interpreted by Plato and by Aristotle as opening the way to a completely chaotic and self-refuting relativism.⁹⁷ The danger that the sophists pose, according to Plato, is that they stand to overturn not only the proper constitution of the realm of knowledge, in substituting the appealing image of what can be represented as likely in place of what is, but no less the civic constitution and its proper order.⁹⁸ These, as Plato will depict them, (and curiously, as Philostratus will later reiterate) are men who transgress all boundaries, moral and political no less than geographic.⁹⁹ The sophists, as Plato will name them, represent a descent of foreign, impassioned bodies upon the city of Athens, a contagion that threatens the philosophical ideal with disintegration; amongst those sophists of the fifth and fourth centuries whose names have come down to us, Antisthenes stands as the only native in what is otherwise a group of men from the Greek colonies and from other minor cities, and even he is said to have had a foreign mother.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ The arguments against Protagoras voiced by Plato and Aristotle are found respectively in the *Cratylus* and the *Metaphysics*. Given the paucity of evidence for Protagoras’ own writing, it is difficult to reconstruct precisely what he meant by his (in)famous dictum; a strikingly different interpretation from those of the classical philosophers appears in Sextus Empiricus and it is not clear that either Plato or Aristotle represent their opponent carefully or generously. Certainly the role of the aesthetic and its deviations did play a central role in Protagoras’ thinking, but this need not imply a complete relativism; Sextus attributes to the sophist the thesis that the principle of non-contradiction cannot hold because reality itself is inherently contradictory. See Bett 1989.

⁹⁸ According to the views put forth by Polus in the *Gorgias* and Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, as well as the unnamed sophists and/or philosophers of a presocratic bent mentioned in book ten of the *Laws*, each asserting that right and wrong, the just and the unjust, are merely relations of force and the laws matters of convention, against the Platonic view that the νόμος must have a cosmic and thus absolute foundation.

⁹⁹ Cf. Kemezis’ “Narrative of Cultural Geography in Philostratus’s *Lives of the Sophists*,” in Schmidt and Fleury 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* IV.6.1. There remains in the contemporary literature the question of whether those who we now know by the appellation “sophist” (σοφιστής) would have referred to themselves as such. The term σοφός was used as a general appellation of praise from the sixth century, and it is probable that it may have been applied to those speakers whom we now know as “sophists.” Whether the term was recognizable as referring to the sophists as a coherent social group before the Platonic condemnation remains uncertain. If there is a unifying trait to be found across the lot, it likely refers to their mode of operation – as itinerant orators, teachers, ambassadors, performers rather than to anything held in common in their doctrines, at least to judge from their own surviving writings. Plato and Aristotle alike are prone to conflate them in terms of their supposed teachings. See Schiappa 1991, 3-12.

Philosophy, as the project inaugurated by Plato, is born of a reaction against the figure of the sophist, defining its other as aligned with the seductions of the aesthetic, the bodily, and those desires that break with an ideal order that rests upon the bulwark of being.¹⁰¹

The term “sophist” has remained in usage to this day, retaining the pejorative valence that continues to attest the alleged victory of the philosophers; its usage, however, is not merely historical. To call one a sophist is to partake in a certain policing of language itself. The threat that the sophist presents has not been done away with and stands always to reemerge, perhaps even within the heart of rational discourse. If philosophy is a labor of love, there is always a measure of doubt that belongs to the lover’s craft; one may have always been seduced, deceived by the presentation of some foreign element wearing the guise of wisdom, a mere appearance calculated to lead its victims astray. Philosophy anchors itself, as Plato indicates, in the light of being, and its truth, while admitting the danger that there may be deceptive false lights that must be identified, challenged and eradicated.¹⁰² This is to say that the “sophist” is to a certain extent a function of philosophy, the name for that which philosophy must defend itself against. No less must it always suspect itself of potentially being “sophistical.” Ironically, it is through the writings of Plato and his heirs that Gorgias remains best-known today, despite the survival of two mostly complete texts – *The Defense of Palamedes* and *The Encomium of Helen* – along with a pair of paraphrases of a third and various fragments

¹⁰¹ This is not to ignore the importance of presocratic philosophy, but rather to acknowledge that the appellation was applied only retroactively to those thinkers whom the tradition, nascent with Plato and Aristotle, wished to claim for itself. For Plato, Parmenides, Pythagoras, and Zeno are of prime importance, and the canon is later expanded by Aristotle to include the list of names whom we now recognize as the “presocratics.” In the context of the fifth century, following those texts that have survived, the distinction makes little sense. If anything, the arguments of Gorgias, of Antisthenes and certain other of the sophists take their point of departure as a radicalization of certain elements within the Eleatic tradition, ironically to the detriment of the hegemony of being. See Cassin 1995, 43-54.

¹⁰² Plato, *Sophist* 254a.

and testimonia. The figure of the sophist is, perhaps ironically, one that has been best preserved by the philosophers, even as they attempt to exclude it; the sophist is the ever-present threat to philosophy, one that demands perpetual vigilance lest it insinuate itself within the sphere that philosophy calls its own. The memory of the orator has been maintained as an example of what is excluded from philosophy, insofar as the sophist reveals that aspect of the *logos* that cares little for truth, instead crafting clever snares with the word, working his own desires and those of his hearers. This figure turns the word from truth to make it a work of art, substituting allure for the steady guide of truth, calling into question whether the philosopher's own truth is naught but another trap laid for the unwary. The sophist belongs properly to philosophy as its antithetical image, the sign of an anxiety endemic to its project. These ancient orators, as they appear in the writings of the philosophers, are made to stand for what is contrary to the ideals of conduct and of argumentation that philosophy poses for itself. An accurate portrayal is not their goal. It is a matter of staging the sophist as what is to be refused, of tendencies that must be rooted out. Via the sophist, philosophy poses a self-interrogation as to whether indeed it has taken possession of itself, precisely in refusing the sophistic.¹⁰³ The work is never completed, the threat of the sophist ever lingers – through the figure of the seducing sophist that philosophy finds itself affected, afflicted with an irreducible anxiety that admits no resolution. The sophist cannot be done away with once and for all; this figure can only recur as something to be defended against, warded off, and driven out.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Cassin 2000, 105-106.

¹⁰⁴ One should not be surprised that it belonged to the imperial pretensions of a Hegel to inscribe the sophist into the history of philosophy, as the inventor of the subject to be matched and sublated with reference to philosophical objectivity (1816 (1892), 352-384). This project of annexation, which does not lack for contemporary heirs, is but another means of defense; it treats sophistic discourse as if it were a deficient mode of philosophical discourse, one in need of refinement. In place of the violent denial, one finds here a

Nietzsche, who remains one of the most keen observers of the sophists, exactly insofar as he does not attempt to sublimate the tension between the philosopher and the sophist and thereby assimilate the latter to a history of philosophy, phrases it thus:

The “Sophist” is still completely Hellenic – including Anaxagoras, Democritus and the great Ionians – but as a transitional form. The *polis* loses faith in the uniqueness of its culture, in its right to rule over every other *polis* – One exchanges cultures, i.e., “the gods” – one thereby loses faith in the sole prerogative of the *deus autochthonus*. Good and evil of differing origin are mingled: the boundary between good and evil is blurred – this is the “Sophist” – The “philosopher” on the other hand, is the *reaction*: he desires the *old* virtue. He sees the grounds of decay in the decay of authority: he seeks new authorities (travels abroad, into foreign literatures, in to exotic religions –); he desires the ideal *polis* after the concept “*polis*” has had its day. [...] They are interested in all tyrants: they want to restore virtue by *force majeure*. [...] Two decadence movements and extremes run side by side: (a) sensual, charmingly wicked decadence, loving art and show, and (b) gloomy religio-moral pathos, Stoic self-hardening, Platonic slander of the senses, preparation of the soil for Christianity.¹⁰⁵

disavowal of the specificity of the affected *logos*, treating it as if it were readily amenable to philosophical standards of judgment – in Lyotardian terms, ignoring and bypassing the *différend* that lies between them.

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche 1906 (1967), § 427. My references to the position of “philosophy” and of “the philosopher” in this chapter follow the portrayal here sketched by Nietzsche, as unflattering as it may be. In the case that Nietzsche’s depiction of the position of philosophy here is not consistent within his corpus, and this particular fragment presents the dichotomy between in the philosopher and the sophist in a highly attenuated, perhaps hyperbolic form. While my presentation makes use of Nietzsche’s rhetorical distinction, I am of course aware that this bit of antiplatonic vituperation does not apply to the entirety of the tradition of philosophy.

The declaration here is certainly counterintuitive; Nietzsche names the period that followed the end of the Persian war, in which the classical age of Greece that has so long served as an ideal, to be the inauguration of twin currents of decadence. It is to the sophist that this age belongs; with the victory over the empire that had been a mortal threat to the cities of archaic Greece, comes a collapse of boundaries which the vagabond orator signals in a paramount way. The sophist appears at a moment of indefinition. Authority gives way, bringing with it a certain laxness and an openness to experimentation born of the love of strife, the desire for conflict and envy of victory that Nietzsche names as the essential drive of the Hellenic.¹⁰⁶ In the absence of an external foe, the ἀγών (contest) loses its proper place and becomes generalized, giving rise to the eristic mode of sophistic argumentation; one argues so as to win the dispute, and this desire for victory gives rise to the invention of new forms, new means, and the abandonment of those judged to be outmoded. The gratification derived from the contest is not, however, limited to the victor alone – the audiences no less find appreciation in the deployment of these forms and do so in the abeyance of the authority of the concepts that once stood over them with a judgment held to be immutable. If the native god loses its place, this is not to say that the divinity that could proffer a last word becomes absent; the gods become exchangeable, there are heterogeneous modalities each announcing their own last word without one to stand over them and force a synthesis.¹⁰⁷ In keeping with

¹⁰⁶ See the essay “Homer’s Contest” in Nietzsche 1872 (2005). One notes, however, that his depiction of Plato in this earlier essay differs significantly from that found in the note quoted above; in the earlier text, Plato is cited admiringly for his adeptness in his contest with the sophists, and precisely according to his ability to mimic their modes of argumentation. As he is presented there, Plato becomes a sophist precisely in order to conquer the sophists with means that they have not yet themselves foreseen.

¹⁰⁷ Taking his point of departure from this passage in Nietzsche, Lyotard declares of the sophists, Megarans and Cynics with reference to the bounds of the *polis* that defines its exterior: “*Mais pour eux ce dehors n’est pas un dehors, parce que le dernier lieu, le dernier mot, le référentiel ultime, l’absolu – justement n’ont nulle valeur positionnelle. Pour eux pas de dehors, parce que pas de dedans, pas d’en-soi : l’en soi*”

this drive for new forms, to produce a turn of the *logos* that the opponent can neither foresee nor counter, these concepts are specifically targeted and overturned. It is thus in the subsequent note that Nietzsche designates the sophists as undertaking the first critique of morality, with their discovery of the multiplicity of moral value judgments and that anything can be dialectically justified.¹⁰⁸

The philosopher, by contrast, is presented as a figure of another sort of decadence. It is his place to restore the old values; yet, as Nietzsche indicates, there is a kind of invention still at work here. The philosopher goes in search of additional sources of authority to stop the gap, those which can yet be wielded in the absence of the collapse of the local authority, ideas which may still bear with them the force to silence the opponent, the dissident, once and for all. What is at stake is not the content of the old ideas, insofar as these must be modified, if not abandoned to fit with what is brought in from outside, but the violence that once served to undergird them. The philosopher's struggle against the sophist stands as a kind of participation within the sophistic ἀγών, but precisely as one who enters into the contest in bad faith.¹⁰⁹ Bearing no appreciation for

comme prétendue intériorité tombe immédiatement dans l'extériorité. Il n'y a que de l'extériorité. Ou mieux: il y a de l'extériorité" (1976, 6). It is through these figures that Lyotard comes to define the notion of the "pagan," of principle importance to his work during the late 1970s. The "pagan" is a stance taken with reference to an ethical position rather than to a specific belief (hence why he can name the Hassidim depicted by Martin Buber pagan, while Plato is not), in which the plurality of "language-games," with their various ends is not unified under an Idea that would erase the distance between them by forcing a judgment that would be final for all of them. Between language games, there is only dispersion without a center, a *pagus* without an *urbs*. Authorization than thus only ever be local, and justice lies in respecting this irreducible heterogeneity.

¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche 1906 (1968), § 427. When the sophists put this capacity to justify any subject on display, it is very often with a sense of humor, one that makes manifest the tension between the δόξα and the content of what is being argued without resolving it. Gorgias' *On Nature or On Non-Being*, in which it is announced that communication is impossible belongs to the genre, as does his *Encomium to Helen*, discussed in the next chapter. This sort of play is even more apparent in the titles of his student Alcidas' speeches, which are unfortunately lost: *The Encomium of Poverty*, and *The Encomium of Death*.

¹⁰⁹ Gorgias seems to mark the position of the philosopher with a certain bemusement in his *Encomium to Helen*, refusing to acknowledge that there is a difference between the philosopher's discourse and those other arts of the *logos*; the philosopher's pretention to speak from a position guaranteed by being is but one strategy in his eyes and not to be privileged over any other. Paragraph thirteen of the *Encomium* names the

the art of argumentation displayed by the sophists, the demonstration of skill that lies in making the weaker position to be the stronger, the philosophical position, according to Nietzsche, is that of retrenching the lines; there is a better argument, and its superiority is anchored in an absolute which is not to be transgressed. New gods are set in place of the old, gods who can establish the finality of this judgment. In the wake of their installation further exchange is to be held unlawful and perhaps punishable by death. Hence philosophy's predilection for tyrants – Nietzsche certainly recalls Plato's presumption of serving as advisor to that at Syracuse, if not the political program presented in the *Republic*, and perhaps also Aristotle's service to the Macedonian tyrant – it demands the position of a third capable of bearing the authority to further debate, and forcibly silencing those who refuse to adhere to its command. This move, which Lyotard names terror, a terror born of the determinate use of a Kantian Idea (as distinct from a concept), in which one is forced to adhere to a finality that is held to be absolute, or to be silenced in one way or another.¹¹⁰ This terror is the product of an unspoken imperative that manifests within philosophical discourse: one must speak in the name of the authority that the philosopher poses. If not, one's utterance is deemed to be outside the bounds of the *logos*, and accordingly may be freely disregarded. It is terror insofar as it forces silence upon those who do not consent to the authority it poses. The expansion of modes, of means for argumentation that the eristic aims of the sophists requires, is thusly arrested by the introduction of a third who will always be granted the last word. The chaos of the

philosopher an artist of persuasion different in his mode and not in essence from the astrologer or any other (including Gorgias himself). For the significance of persuasion, as understood in Gorgias, see below and the following chapter. Further, one of the testimonia records that upon reading Plato's damning portrait in the *Gorgias*, the sophist is said to have praised Plato as a superb author of iambs – iambic poetry being the traditional form adopted for works of abuse. See Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, XI 505.

¹¹⁰ Lyotard 1979 (2006), 190.

sophistic aesthetics, the work of the image and the allure that it exerts over its hearers must be eliminated, a labor that is attempted in name of the absolute Idea and the more or less inflexible concepts that it draws to itself, an idea that finds itself instantiated in Plato and his followers through the notion of an ontology that is capable of regulating and excluding what does not own up to its standards.

It is perhaps not surprising that Nietzsche's writings on the sophists, which aim at reawakening that anxiety constitutive of the philosophical genre, have enjoyed relatively little posterity. Amongst those few to have taken them up, the most sustained engagement belongs to Jean-François Lyotard; for Lyotard, who has perhaps gone the furthest in following after the interrogation of the sophists opened by Nietzsche, the sophist is a figure of resistance to the terror invoked by the philosopher who claims to speak in the name of an absolute truth.¹¹¹ The decadence of which the sophists are a symptom must be worked and extended against the judgment of their opponents, one that aspires to be univocal. It is not merely a matter of affirming the sophistic position against that of the philosopher, as if these were opposed on the same field – the sophist, as one who traffics with images *as images*, without taking them for objective realities, marks a suspicion of any position that claims to speak an unequivocal truth. As he writes,

La décadence est faite d'un double mouvement, d'une hésitation permanente entre le nihilisme de l'incrédulité et la religion du vrai. Elle n'est pas un processus de pourrissement, processus univoque qui provient d'un modèle biologique du social, ni non plus un processus dialectique dans son sens marxiste

¹¹¹ It is of course the case that this sort of terror is not the province of philosophy alone, nor is it ubiquitous within that discipline – what is at stake is a particular relation to a truth that enforces itself through the determinate use of the Idea. Plato is, through Nietzsche, cast as the primary example, but there are others found in Lyotard's texts dating from the latter part of the 1970s: amongst these are Robespierre, Soviet Marxism, and the religious position that invokes the divine as providing the last word.

*le plus raffiné. Nietzsche indique plutôt un mouvement sur place qui d'un côté exhibe le nihilisme jusque-là caché par les valeurs, et en même temps recouvre ce nihilisme avec d'autres valeurs.*¹¹²

Sophistic decadence, as it is here presented, is not the reversal of a process of growth, whether understood biologically or in terms of the development of a set historical narrative; it is a position that hesitates between nihilism and the credulous. The givenness of a set of values, and the related sense of truth are interrupted by the revelation of the nihilism that takes hold of them when their merely positional character is revealed; but this nihilism too is interrupted, and is not allowed to itself become absolute. There are values and there are means to invent them, whether these belong to the art of argumentation, or any of those others that are capable of asserting them aesthetically and thus produce a sentiment of conviction. These convictions are, however, only provisional and may always be overturned, and it is the place of the sophist to work this overturning, inventing new values only to discard them when their practical necessity or merely the interest that one has in them disappears. As Lyotard notes, the sophist plays with the $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$, as the present but unstable alignment of opinions held by his audience, anticipating it and perhaps overturning it. In the absence of a knowledge that could provide the last word, there are only dispersed positions, perspectives, opinions.¹¹³

¹¹² Lyotard 1977, 122.

¹¹³ It should be noted that Lyotard's interest in the sophists falls off sharply in the writings that follow *Le Différend*: they are invoked only obliquely through a citation of Cassin in *Moralités postmodernes* and in a reference to the state of the ruin of the old orator, the ineffectiveness of all of his means in the face of the question of affect, in *La Confession d'Augustin*. The shift appears to take place according to the renunciation of the commitment to a certain Nietzschean experimentalism that runs through the writings from *Economie libidinale* to this point, one that believes the development of means for expressing affect is potentially possible (see Lyotard 1983, §22). The return to the question of affect that is inaugurated with *La phrase-affect* poses issue of the *différend* otherwise; it is no longer a case of attempting to find means resolve it, but in respecting it in its very unsurpassability. As he phrases it in the article "*Intime est le*

II. Malediction: Metalanguage and its Ruin

The philosophical war declared against the sophists is one in which the *logos* is profoundly at stake, but it is also the means by which the conflict is waged. The goal is the instantiation of a third that will anchor speech, forcing the *logos* to refer to a given reality, thereby sweeping away the allure of the insubstantial images to which the sophists are devoted. The terms of the attack worked by Plato and Aristotle after him are summarized by the Neoplatonist Proclus Diadochus:

The orators too have a certain form of discourse that they call “truth.” Antisthenes used to say that it is impossible to contradict, because every statement, he says, expresses the truth. For when a man speaks, he speaks something [ὁ δὲ λέγων τι λέγει]. When he speaks something, he speaks what is. And when he speaks what is, he expresses the truth. Our response to Antisthenes must be that falsity too exists and nothing precludes one who speaks what is from speaking a falsity. Moreover, when a man speaks he speaks about something [περί τίνος λέγειν] and he does not actually speak something.¹¹⁴

The challenge posed by Antisthenes, one of the students of Gorgias and also associated with the Cynic tradition, bases itself upon the conventional definition of truth, the foundation of which was laid by Parmenides: to speak truth is to say what is. The assertion attributed most famously to Antisthenes runs thus: contradiction is impossible, because in speaking one can only speak what is. Therefore there is no falsehood, and no grounds for contradiction; the apparent disagreement of two statements cannot imply that one of them is false. The paradox founds itself upon the ambiguity in the expression “to

terreur,” it is a matter of respecting the very margin of opacity that the problem of affect bears with it (Lyotard 1993b, 173).

¹¹⁴ Proclus Diadochus, *Commentary on Plato’s Cratylus*, 37.

say something” (λέγειν τι) and awarding it a double significance. In speaking, one speaks a statement; the statement indubitably exists, and therefore one has spoken what is. All statements are therefore true. Antisthenes, however, conflates the existence of the statement itself with that of its content, such that all propositions declare truth; two statements may appear to contradict by seemingly presenting the same referent in differing fashion, but this is merely illusory. Insofar as they are different qua statements, there is nothing in common between them, they do not share a referent, and thus they cannot be held to contradict. Through the displacement that conflates the existence of the statement with the existence of its referent, the sophist confounds the referential function of the *logos*.¹¹⁵ The utterance can only be considered in its singularity, not as a representation, but as a presentation. That which it says, that which it makes apparent through the saying is; it is not a matter of reference but of style, a kind of poetics inherent to every utterance. The *logos* gives its referent detached from any reality in the mode that the statement gives it, which is to say that the issue of the specificity of the utterance cannot be overcome. Its *what* cannot be distinguished from its *how*; the referent is merely the effect of the arrangement of the utterance and the linguistic modes that it mobilizes in

¹¹⁵ The paradox, as it is reported here, is that which is most commonly attributed to Antisthenes. It is however important that Diogenes Laertius records an anecdote that presents him as arguing the opposite position. According to the historian, Antisthenes encouraged the people of Athens to vote that all donkeys are horses. Faced with their incredulity, he asserted that there was ready precedent for this in their past elections of their generals (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* IV, 6.8). This assertion of a radical conventionalism betrays that Antisthenes was more than capable of tailoring his argument to present purposes, and did not hold the views attributed to him by Aristotle as a matter of conviction. Diogenes Laertius’ biography is for the most part a collection of jokes, suggesting that the Stagirite took Antisthenes’ dictum far more seriously than the sophist himself did.

crafting its referent. It is a matter of putting the force of the *logos* on display, its ability to affect its hearer and to present objects through the aesthetics of style.¹¹⁶

From the perspective of the philosopher, such a perversion of the *logos* cannot be left to stand, the offense that it works is declared to be senseless. The denial of the λέγειν τι indicated by Proclus stems from the additional condition set down by Aristotle in his attempt to elude the paradox of Antisthenes. As he asserts, one does not merely “say something,” but rather one “says something (a statement) according to something (an object or a state of affairs)” (λέγειν κατὰ τίνοϛ).¹¹⁷ Thus construed, one speaks a statement about some thing whose existence is not dependent on the utterance. One speaks in propositions that maintain a relation to this real ontological exterior, and the truth or falsity of the proposition is determined according to their correspondence. The *logos*, construed in this way, is primarily a means of representing what presents itself to observation, a realm which, for Aristotle, is that of being. Through being fixed to this ultimate reference, the *logos* is established as an *ontologos*. Being, which is held to be in common and for all, itself immune to contradiction, is made to serve as the ground for communication. Propositions are exchanged between interlocutors, stabilized by an ontological necessity, as is made manifest in the axiom of non-contradiction, and the forces of convention that determines a more or less concrete sense of what is said; “The

¹¹⁶ Cf. the Antisthenes Notice in Lyotard 1983; his take is different, insofar as he reads the paradox not in the light of aesthetics *per se*, but with regard to linguistic designation. The emphasis is different; need I say that we do not contradict?

¹¹⁷ Proclus, in his commentary, has used the Platonic formula rather than Aristotle’s, despite the latter being the one to dismantle the Antisthenean paradox: he gives περί τίνοϛ instead of κατὰ τίνοϛ. Judged lexically, the difference is minor, but nonetheless does reflect the distinct approaches to reference taken by the two philosophers. In keeping with the neoplatonic ambition to show that there is an essential harmony between Plato and Aristotle, Proclus elides the difference; if I do the same, it is not to follow him in this, but because the distinction at stake here is that between the philosophers’ positions and the more pronounced difference with those espoused by the sophists.

starting point [of the *logos*] ... is to signify something to one's self and to another."¹¹⁸ That is to say that the final word is not given to language itself or to those who speak it, but to the world and the objects that occupy it as manifestations of an ontological substrate. The operation of the *logos* is thus determined by the mode of *apodeixis*: one forms propositions that take things as their point of departure and the sense of the word is governed by what is given by things. It is of course, this apodeictic mode that announces itself at the center of the phenomenological project inaugurated by Husserl, but no less in the sciences, or any other field of philosophy in which the capacity of the *logos* is bound to the authority of an external guarantor.¹¹⁹ Aristotle deploys this constraint precisely to deny that the sophistic utterance has any sense; it is rather the case that these men present a mere appearance of the *logos*. The sophist, as Aristotle depicts him, is one who speaks senselessly, for the pleasure of speaking alone, defying a proper communicative seriousness that is signed in the gesture of presenting one's statement to another and leaving it open to dialectical contestation. Aristotle's move, which Cassin terms a "transcendental exclusion," establishes the *a priori* conditions for an utterance to constitute itself as such, and relegates those instances of *logos* that fall short as being nothing at all. As she writes,

Autrement dit, puisque la dialectique, qui constitue pourtant l'élément même de la réfutation, fait à elle seule pétition du principe, il faut envisager un passage à la limite : quelque chose comme une réfutation au degré zéro de la dialectique. On

¹¹⁸Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1006a. It is noteworthy that Aristotle does allow for the use of *logos* that does not signify in the case of prayer (*On Interpretation* 26), but only according to a displacement of the problematic. What is at stake in the metalinguistic assault of the sophists that is the fourth book of the *Metaphysics* is what he takes to be the primary sphere of the *logos*, that of the communication between speaking beings that allows for the human community to take shape. What is spoken to the gods is exempted from constraint precisely insofar as, if there is communication, it is something of a different order than communication with other humans.

¹¹⁹Cassin in Enaudeau *et al.*, 2008, 172.

*peut la nommer, parce qu'il y va avec elle des conditions de possibilité du dialogue et du langage lui-même, réfutation transcendantale.*¹²⁰

This “refutation” is *a priori* and absolute, founded not on the content of the statement, but on its mode of presentation; it judges based on the criterion whether the other has allowed for the position of the third or not. Admission to the community of speaking, rational beings is made contingent upon the adherence to those axioms that are laid down by the philosopher, which are placed beyond the reach of argumentation. Aristotle thus defines the limits of the sphere of rational discourse, condemning those who do not obey his axiomatic dictum to a silence that is without appeal – that is to say, precisely according to the philosophical use of *force majeure* diagnosed by Nietzsche. One is compelled to speak properly, and those who disobey are denied the acknowledgement that they have spoken at all. Less than a speaking being, less than even an animal with a voice that can express pleasure or pain via its cries, Aristotle declares the sophist to be no better than a plant, his speech condemned to be nothing whatsoever: “If he makes none [that is, no argument that conforms to the fundamental axioms laid down by Aristotle], it is ludicrous to seek an argument from one who holds no argument whatsoever, insofar as he has none. For such a man, insofar as he can be called a man, is like unto a vegetable.”¹²¹

This dismissal of sophistic speech is founded upon the drawing of metalinguistic borders, such that attempts to deny the dual taking of position that appears in Antisthenes’ paradox, a feature common to sophistic discourse. The absurd play that the

¹²⁰ Cassin 1997, 13. As Cassin indicates, this violence is endemic to any model of the use of language that places founds itself upon the idea of communication, even those that profess a fidelity to democracy and inclusion. Her targets in this broadly polemical essay are Habermas and those analytic philosophers who have adopted communication as their watchword (which Lyotard would identify as an Idea wielded in a determinate sense); despite the alleged openness of the society that Habermas and the others advocate, it is founded on an inexorable demand: make sense, according to the present canons of sense, or be silenced.

¹²¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1006a.

orators carry out is stopped by Aristotle through two assertions: 1) reality is itself not contradictory, and 2) the language that must represent reality must thus avoid contradiction. The axiom of non-contradiction is not merely to be applied to reference, it must likewise be instantiated within the workings of the *logos* itself, in the form of metalinguistic criteria. The logical problem presented by Antisthenes' λέγειν τι belongs no less to the famous "Liar's Paradox" attributed to Eubulides of Megara, one that has troubled philosophy since Aristotle, the assertion that "I lie." The problem is thus: if I assert that I lie, and I do in fact lie, then I have spoken the truth regarding my statement. The "lie" is thus no lie at all, but neither can it be taken as a true proposition. If I have spoken the truth in declaring myself to be lying, my lie was not a lie at all, and the statement is false. The paradox, resting as it does on a lie that describes itself truthfully, appears caught in a suspension that defers any attempt of the logician to take hold of it and force a definite sense upon it. The truth-value of the utterance, taken by itself, is thus left undecidable; one is presented with the apparent logical absurdity of the truth of the lie, or a lie which lies truly. The problem here, as it is identified by the philosophers, is that the Megaran does not speak κατὰ τίνοϛ, there is no external referent to anchor his utterance. He makes the *logos* fold back upon itself, insofar as the paradox voiced by the liar takes itself as its own referent. As with Antisthenes, it is merely a λέγειν τι, where the τι occupies a dual position, it is at once the statement that is itself uttered, and the referent of this utterance. Doubly constructed, the statement forces a judgment where it is both true and false – it cites itself in such fashion that either it is true as currently uttered and false as cited, or the other way around. And whichever of these two positions is taken, the

other appears as a necessary corollary; a definite judgment of its sense and its correctness thus cannot be proffered.

This anomaly, this instance of discourse that does not signify, must be stopped if the project of the philosophers is to proceed according to the terms laid down by Aristotle. Of those who have commented on it, Lyotard singles out the contribution of Russell as particularly significant amongst those who have been scandalized by the paradox:

Bertrand Russell est l'un des plus sympathiques de ces démineurs, parce qu'il ne cache pas son jeu derrière des motifs métaphysiques (et pour cause) et que sa réfutation se donne presque crûment pour ce qu'elle ne peut manquer d'être, à savoir une décision. On sait qu'elle consiste à dire: distinguons des énoncés de type 1, qui portent sur des objets quelconques, et des énoncés de type 2, qui portent sur des ensembles de type 1. Le paradoxe d'Eubulide "si tu dis que tu mens et si tu dis vrai" doit être décomposé en un énoncé de type 1: "je mens" et un énoncé de type 2: "je dis vrai que," lequel porte sur l'ensemble formé par l'énoncé 1 quelle que soit la valeur accordée à sa variable propositionnelle (je mens quand je dis ceci, quand je dis cela, etc.).¹²²

According to Russell's argument, the Megaran has joined together two logical moves in an illegitimate fashion; for the paradox to be admitted to the domain of proper sense, it must be decomposed into two separate propositions. The two clauses of the "I say truly

¹²² Lyotard 1976, 8. Cf. the similar account of Russell's logical formation against sophistic modes of argumentation, found in the Protagoras Notice in Lyotard 1983. There the problem remains the same, but is more explicitly formulated in terms of time – Protagoras assails his student with a lawsuit that rests upon a paradox that rests upon the use of reference in such way that buried temporal distinction. It is left to the logician to invoke the axiom, separate the instances, and to order them in such fashion that their relation is stabilized.

that I lie” are made to belong to separate orders, and treated independently. The first of these, the simple assertion, “I lie,” belongs to the category of statements that refer to some external object, hence to that external guardian established by the *ontologos*; one passes judgment on a statement that is in some way given. The latter statement, the “I say truly that,” belongs to a second type that takes as its referent statements that belong to the first type through presenting them in the mode of citation. The flaw in Eubulides’ statement, as Russell identifies it, is that he seeks to have it both ways – it is both the representation of a state of affairs, and a second-order judgment upon that representation. For the logical monstrosity to be cleared up, these two types of statements must be kept apart. The paradox can only be eluded insofar as these imposed metalinguistic boundaries are respected, that there should be no confusion of the two sets of utterances, as manifests in the statement of the Liar. Russell’s gesture establishes itself through the Aristotelian imposition of the axiom of non-contradiction upon the workings of the *logos*, affirming it as the necessary condition of sensible speech. A given utterance cannot be taken belonging to both types, cited and current at the same time. Accordingly, the statement must either be of the first type, referring to an external state of affairs, or in the case of the second type, treating a previous statement that, taken up as cited, is itself established as the external referent of the current statement. The reference to reality is maintained directly in the first type, and indirectly in the second, where the correctness of the cited proposition is judged according to its accord or lack thereof with this exterior. When these metalinguistic boundaries are maintained, the ability of the *logos* to make a species of sense that the philosopher respects is assured. However, as Lyotard points out, a difficulty imposes itself. The statement of the rule can only occur as an imposition that

attempts to define the boundaries of these two types, but the utterance which sets these limits cannot belong to either of them. For non-contradiction to be respected, the statement of the rule with regard to the two types cannot belong to either of them. The declaration of the rule, which takes statements of the second type as its referent, cannot be admitted to this type if the schema laid out by Russell is to be respected; it must thus belong to another group of statements. The invocation of this rule as axiomatic attempts to foreclose what might become an infinite proliferation of types of statement; the metalinguistic rule, as an axiom, is placed beyond debate. It regulates the movements of other utterances while asserting itself as exterior to them. In the statement of the axiom, the *logos* gives itself its own ἀρχή, it performs the rule that will have governed it from the first. The *logos* hence constitutes itself through the invocation of a rule that will be proclaimed to be outside of its proper bounds, and those utterances which do not respect this rule as unimpeachable are judged to be mere appearances of sense, devoid of any proper communicative matter. According to the dictum of the one who wields the axiom, they are made to be silences in an *a priori* fashion, nothing at all.

Such is the sentence passed by those who name themselves the lovers of wisdom, those too crafty to be deceived by those paradoxes, offensive to good sense, that are styled by the sophists. The judgment that is passed, according to which this mode of speech is but silence, rests however on a certain incapacity to hear. This anaesthesia is signaled by Gorgias in a paradox reported by Plutarch:

As Gorgias says, the one who deceives [ἀπατήσας] is more just than he who does not deceive, and he who is deceived is more wise [σοφώτερος] than he who is not deceived. The deceiver is more just, for he has said what he has undertaken to do.

He who is deceived is wiser, for that which is not anaesthetic [τὸ μὴ ἀναίσθητον] is easily lead by the pleasure of words.¹²³

The form manifestly recalls that of the liar's paradox while complicating it, shifting the problematic from that of the truthful proposition and that of the lie to the thematic of deception. The difficulty here is that deception need not tie itself to the binary structure of truth and falsity – it is certainly possible to deceive one's interlocutor with a statement that is technically truthful, by omitting details, in threading misleading implications, in refusing an apparent context, and so on. It is not, then, simply a matter that calls for a logical judgment alone. The thematic of deception demands that one be attentive to the tactics of the moment, the relative positions of the interlocutors, everything that one might attribute to the situation of the utterance that lies aside a simple correlation of the referent of the utterance with a state of affairs. More than this, the paradox breaks the connection that might be thought to be an ethical commonplace: that speaking the truth should be aligned with justice. For Gorgias, it is the one who deceives who emerges as more just, insofar as he has only done what he has set out to do. The one who deceives, and who admits to having done so, speaks what is not and thereby works a cheat, but a cheat that manifests a kind of honesty with regard to the operation of the *logos*. The honesty of the liar lies in the fact that he marks his position with respect to the work of dissimulation. It is thus that one who admits it emerges as more commendable than the one who does not. It is just to admit that I deceive, because I cannot avoid working deception, regardless of my intention, and there is an apparent note of honesty in marking that deception. And this would be the case, even if, in the same fashion as Eubulides'

¹²³ Plutarch, *De Gloria Athenensium* 5. For Gorgias' texts, I have made use of Untersteiner's edition, in *Sofisti*, vol. 2.

paradox, the honest declaration that “I deceive” becomes logically undecidable. Certainly there is a deception there, such that resists judgment, but one cannot locate it clearly and say what the deception was in a determined fashion. This remains at least better than the position of the one who purports not to dissemble. In purporting to tell the truth, this one lies twice – his *logos* is deceptive, insofar as it can only be (for the paradox to function, this must be assumed; the grounds upon which this assumption rests must be excavated with care, and will emerge as the chapter unfolds). He then redoubles the deception by alleging that there has been no deception. If it is a matter of doing justice via the *logos*, the problem appears doubly paradoxical – insofar as I can only deceive, it is just to indicate the deception worked in my *logos*, even though this too will be misleading. Justice then, is not a matter of dispensing with deception, of speaking what is, and thus assuring a communication that rests on good faith; it is in knowingly and suspiciously working with a *logos* that inevitably will have lead one astray. It may well remain the case, as Aristotle presents it, that the *logos* serves as means for deliberating upon the just and the unjust.¹²⁴ Gorgias nevertheless insists on the aesthetic substrate that, even for Aristotle, lies before the production of speech, befalling as never as universal, but ever as singular. It is, the sophist contends, unjust not to attend to that from which the *logos* ever finds issue.

This element of the paradox might as well be a rejoinder to those philosophers who claim to speak in the name of truth, but it is left to the second part of the dictum to gesture towards the position of this dissimulation. Here, another dimension of the *logos* opens, one which breaks with the criteria laid down by the philosopher who attempts to legislate, to set limits to the workings of language. It is wiser, the sophist asserts, to let

¹²⁴ Aristotle *Politics*, 1253 a15.

one be deceived, insofar as “that which is not anaesthetic is easily lead by the pleasure of words.” The double negation here points to a deliberate refusal of the position of anaesthesia that would appraise the *logos* simply according to the strictures of a formalized logic; it is a matter of giving one’s self over to the aesthetic force of the *logos*. This rhetorical move refuses the classification and division of the *logos* worked by Russell – the aesthetic force of the *logos* appears alongside and in defiance of the judgment that would make it merely a means for the signification of what is. Wisdom, for Gorgias, lies in the capacity to be affected by the word, even as it deceives. This rejection of the anaesthetic position of the logician who merely computes the veracity of propositions attests the aesthetic force of the word, its capacity to move its hearers.¹²⁵ The *logos* of the sophist is not merely what is said, τὰ λεγόμενα, but comports also its performative valor, its capacity to work effects, effects which precisely escape the bounds of sense. Wisdom is here not aligned with an initial position of mastery, but rather with a kind of surrender to the aesthetic force of the *logos*, such as it appears relative to the passions. If a position of mastery is possible, it is only secondarily, following after the exposure to the aesthetic; that is to say, mastery lies in receiving it and working with it,

¹²⁵ While I have adopted the vocabulary appropriate to the word as spoken, this is not to imply that the written word would differ significantly accordingly to Gorgias’ thinking of the *logos*. The activity of reading in the ancient world was, with rare exceptions, one that was undertaken orally, and terms denoting orality are attested throughout classical reflections on text. In contrast to Plato’s well-known apprehensions about writing, there is no evidence that an opposition between the spoken and written dimensions of the *logos* was of great concern to the sophists. Alcidamas’ *On Those Who Write Speeches, or On Sophists* argues against the use of written speeches in public performance, but this is because *ex tempore* oratory, when carried off well, is more impressive to an audience. Improvisation allows the orator to tailor his speech to the reactions of his audience as they arise, he need not fear losing his place, and is not tied to a given flow if his opponent introduced unforeseen arguments. *Pace* Porter (2010, 335-346), Alcidamas is quite clear that the issue is not with written speeches as such, but that in the context of public performance adhering to a written text distracts the orator from being attendant to the καιρός, thus hindering his ability to achieve the greatest possible effect upon his listeners. The surviving speeches of Gorgias and Alcidamas were display pieces, circulated in written form to display the orator’s talent to potential students who may not have had the opportunity to hear him in person; as Alcidamas claims, he is more impressive live, but as examples of his persuasive technique the written work is not without its own force.

not meeting it with denial. It is thus praiseworthy, as Gorgias states, to accede to this dimension of the word. And this, as he notes, is a kind of surrender to deception. The *logos* is not merely what is said, τὰ λεγόμενα, but it also comprises all of those phenomena that the logician strips away: it is a matter of delivery, of the tone and rhythm of the voice, of the style of delivery, the specificity of the vocabulary, all of the material dimensions of the word.¹²⁶ It is this aesthetic dimension of the *logos*, which departs from τὰ λεγόμενα, that the logician attempts to repress. It is left to the wiser man, the σοφώτερος, to acknowledge that the word does not merely represent, but bears with it the means to affect an audience. There is a deception inherent to the *logos* insofar as it purports to be a mere vehicle for communication, one alleges that one merely signifies in speaking, and yet one cannot divest the word of this aesthetic element.¹²⁷ As Gorgias presents it, there is deception because the *logos* never simply refers. It moves its hearers (even if, in the worst case, it moves them merely to indifference), it can make the appealing repulsive or vice-versa, it awakens the passions alongside what it represents. One is deceived by this element superadded to representation, which works and unworks representation; the *logos apophantikos* never simply shows but makes feel in such fashion that what is shown never appears in a neutral manner. The *logos* is never, even in

¹²⁶ The sophists Protagoras and Prodicus were noted for their attention to linguistic precision; while little enough survives of the former, fragments of the latter's work suggest that much of his interest was lexical. Plato notes in the *Cratylus* (391b) that the sophists were said to be experts in ὀρθότης ὀνομάτων, "the correctness of names." It seems likely that this interest in vocabulary was not, *contra* Bett (1989, 156) founded in an interest between a natural correspondence between words and the things that they represent (a view which would be extremely difficult to import to Gorgias – see section V below). Rather, as I would suggest, the sophistic interest in the lexicon arose from an interest in the specificity of terms, and the rhetorical effects that one might generate with them, mapping each according to its domain of reference and its ability to be manipulated by the orator. Rhetorical effect depended on the composition as a whole, built as it was upon each word, and thus moving according to the κайρός would demand that one have the right word for the occasion.

¹²⁷ Shaffer is correct to identify the stakes of deception in Gorgias as distinct from the lie: "Hence, *apatē*, resulting from the gap between words and things, is not an outright lie but a distortion based on the interference of the medium of representation" (1998, 255); one must insist, however, that the word is also a thing for Gorgias, and that the problem is not merely manifest between the sense of the word and sensation.

its most banal instances, a mere presentation of sense, but is always the bearer of a force that stands to reinvent, if not overturn any attempt to render a clear, common sense. Faced with this inexorable aesthetic work, it is thus better to simply accede to it, for as Gorgias indicates, there is a pleasure to be found there, in allowing one's self to be moved. So much the worse for the logician who aspires to anesthesia.

This deceptive work of the *logos*, its capacity to affect, integrally belongs to the understanding that the term bore in the fifth century BCE; it is only with Plato that the difference between a *logos* deemed to be proper and the offshoot that is rhetoric comes to be drawn. It is in the dialogue *Gorgias* that Plato stages his broadside against the sophistic *logos*, one that attempts to repress the aesthetic character of the word. The philosopher cleaves the *logos* in twain, admitting only the proper transmission of sense to the category of the *logos*, while its other, that which the orator claims as his art, is relegated to the category of rhetoric (ῥητορικὴ).¹²⁸ Thrust from the realm of the *logos* and compartmentalized, rhetoric is declared to be a nothing, a mere garnish, something that is inessential, a mere image without substance. Plato thus stages himself in direct opposition to the earlier understanding of the *logos*, one that considered the work of *πειθώ*, of persuasion, to be integral to the movements of the word. It is by no means a question of a linear opposition between the philosopher and the sophist here.

Despite his acknowledgement of the work of deception in all representation, Gorgias does not deny the signifying aspect of the *logos*, a move which would demolish entirely the orator's craft and the *logos* along with it. His gesture is merely to indicate that deception that the *logos* cannot escape; it deceives in generating effects in excess of a

¹²⁸ cf. Plato, *Gorgias*, 463a-c. The term "rhetoric" (ῥητορικὴ) is first attested in this dialogue – although the question remains open, there is strong reason to suspect that the term may be a Platonic neologism. See Schiappa 1991, 40-48.

sense ostensibly given, one awakens the passions that stand to warp the sense of the word. Gorgias indicates here something the philosophical project cannot tolerate: a *logos* that is from the first, affected and affecting, one that makes feel, and which is not isolated from πάθος but precisely allied to it. This aesthetic force of persuasion precedes and upsets the workings of sense, a sense which is only ever the provisional result of the movements of style that constitute and exceed τά λεγόμενα. As Lyotard notes, πειθώ is not a matter of producing demonstrative proofs in order to reach an agreement with the hearer; it is rather that the sophist's persuasive art rests upon the ability to produce effects in the audience.¹²⁹ These “effects,” are not necessarily controlled by the orator, at best one can say that they are “calculated” to a certain extent, but the precise impact upon the hearer or the reader of this *logos* cannot be determined precisely, either by the orator or by his audience. That is to say that the orator musters the force of the word and presents it in such a fashion that it will affect an audience.¹³⁰ This aspect of the *logos* does not lend itself to dialogue, where questions would be returned to the speaker and a pedagogical end posited between the parties, one upon which a common ground can be asserted. In short, this affected *logos* is the province of literature. It is a matter of the word's capacity to generate effects, to comport and transform affect, to arrange the word without reference to a given reality, to precisely perform effects in an unconstrained fashion.¹³¹

¹²⁹ The active and passive forms of this verb correspond more or less with the sense of the English “persuade.” The middle voice marks what is a curious departure from the contemporary understanding of the term, typically translated as, “to trust,” “to believe.” The work of πειθώ awakens a sense of conviction, one that the archaic sources admit as the source of knowledge in general; persuasion is not divided from other means by which one comes to knowledge.

¹³⁰ Lyotard & Thébaud 1979, 28-29.

¹³¹ Lyotard 1973, 136-137.

The sophist, Aristotle declares, is one who “speaks for the pleasure of speaking.”¹³² The statement of Gorgias reported by Plutarch does not belie this claim. The one who deceives by means of the *logos* cannot be separated from the one who is deceived. The one who deceives is one who has been deceived previously, exposed to the pleasures inherent in language from the first, moved by the force of the word and the aesthetic movements that the *logos* iterates through the very exposure to language. One can only speak as one who deceives and as one who has been deceived by the *logos*. The position marked by Gorgias is one of a *logos* that is always affected and affecting. In the act of speaking, one serves as a relay for this aesthetic dimension of the word, without ever having been in a position where one might claim ownership over it. This is not to say, however, that one merely transmits the affective dimension of the word in a straightforward way, so that the deception would merely reproduce itself as identical. This would, in a fashion, be to assume that the logic of deception mustered by Gorgias could be contained by the articulation of sense within the *logos*. Gorgias’ utterance places itself upon a terrain that is ever-shifting, where truth is only ever an appearance posed upon a *mise-en-abîme* of deception. Only by means of this assured position could one claim to know where the terms of deception lie. This is not the position taken by Gorgias; he names the deception, but does not reduce it to something which could be presented as a case. The judgment that claims to have identified the deception does so by forgetting the deception that it must inevitably work itself. What appears under the heading of deception marks the capacity of the *logos* to affect, to inflict πάθος upon those who are exposed to it, precisely in a fashion that will ever elude any attempt of articulated discourse to capture it.

¹³² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1008b.

Hence he who is deceived is more wise, insofar as the efforts of the philosophers to be done with the affected *logos*, setting it apart and declaring it to be no more than the work of a literature that intrudes upon the proper workings of the *logos*, are staged as naïve. The attempts to constrain the *logos* and to divide it against itself through the imposition of a metalanguage are themselves only instances of *logos*, themselves subject to deception. Here, at least, one could provisionally identify the deception, albeit in part: the philosophical *logos* deceives precisely in claiming that it is free from any disturbance. Πειθῶ intervenes no less in the creation of a category of “rhetoric” as separate from the *logos* proper, or the setting of axioms, insofar as these rely not on logical argumentation, but on the authority that these operations of the *logos* accrue for themselves. This authority is both the means and the product through which the “transcendental exclusion” comes to be constituted, condemning any discourse that does not accede to its ideal to muteness. In silencing these discourses with an enacted violence, the contingency of its authorization is forgotten. It is placed beyond possible dispute. Adherence becomes habitual, claiming to be natural. Thus construed, argumentation becomes a field closed by axioms that force the hearer or the reader to accept certain statements as ineluctable, beyond argumentation. The sophist mounts resistance to this closure, gesturing towards the persuasive effect that the philosopher presents at the outset of the logical apparatus even if it is later occluded. What is at stake is the epideictic usage of the *logos* that the sophists valorize, its “performative” valence; in contradistinction to the apodeictic, the epideictic does not move away from the referent, but to it. One does not argue from things as the philosopher would have it, but the epideictic argumentation of the sophist argues the thing; the referent of discourse is not a stable position that can be identified as

exterior to the *logos* but is an effect of the word itself.¹³³ That is to say that it is a matter of a general movement a *logos* that is at once unbounded in terms of its potential effects. The *logos* is itself a means of an aesthetic presentation, it affects its audience. Its objects are merely effects of style, as they appear both in their conceptual valence and in their affective tenor.

To declare the *logos* to be performative is here to recall the understanding of the term that appears in *Le Différend*. It is not, as it was for J.L. Austin, a matter of designating the performative as a specific class of statement that would be opposed to constative utterances, determined by their context. As Lyotard writes,

*“La phrase: La séance est ouverte n'est pas performative parce que son destinataire est le président de la séance. Le destinataire est le président de la séance pour autant que la phrase en question est performative. L'équation présidence-performativité est indépendante du contexte. Si la phrase est performative alors que le destinataire n'est pas président, il le devient; et si elle n'est pas performative alors que le destinataire est président, il cesse de l'être.”*¹³⁴

The determination as to whether the phrase is performative is not given by the phrase itself, but according to its linkage – it will have been performative if the phrases that link onto it affirm that a session has been opened, and not if the linkage should occur otherwise. That is to say that the performativity of any given phrase does not lie in the phrase itself, nor in the universe that it presents, but in the effects that it generates. Further, as Lyotard points out, the authority that underwrites the phrase as performative does not belong to the person of the addressor, but hinges on a subsequent judgment, one

¹³³ Cassin in Enaudeau *et al.*, 2008, 172-173.

¹³⁴ Lyotard 1983, 125.

that bequeaths authority to the addressor of the phrase that preceded it. That is to say that an authority that would already rest as established cannot be the criterion upon which a judgment of performativity could rest.

There is a complication here, however, one key to the epideictic discourse of the sophists. The affirmation that a phrase was performative supplied by the phrase that links onto it, implicit or not, can always be called into question by further phrases that link onto those which precede: – *The session is opened.* – *First order of business is the review of the previous session.* – *Wait, X does not have the authority to open the session, it belongs to Y to do so.* The first phrase in this sequence is performative according to the implicit judgment found in the second, but the third asserts that the phrase was not performative. The third phrase of the sequence denies the efficacy of the first through the declaration that this phrase was, in fact, a silence. The pole of the addressor of the first phrase, accepted by the second, is called into question and negated by the third (it also calls into question the sense of the second and declares it to be impossible and thus null). Further phrases may link onto these, taking this addressor pole as a referent and attempt to establish or negate its validity, or they may declare the subsequent phrases to have been silences in a parallel fashion. Insofar as there is no last phrase, the judgment of the performativity of a particular phrase can only ever be held to be provisional.¹³⁵ In epideictic discourse, the referent of the phrase is independent of external verification, it is produced, performed by the statement that presents it, and it is held to command assent from one's interlocutors as long as it is not refuted, that is, as long as some other phrase that is linked to it does not negate one or more of its instances. Hence the eristic bent of sophistic argumentation; for lack of a final term, the use of the *logos* is always matter for

¹³⁵ Ibid., 27.

contention. It is an art of the modes of presentation available to discourse, and the ways that phrases can potentially be linked, referents asserted and called into question.¹³⁶ There is no end to it, but it is an attempt to navigate the constraints that have been asserted and imposed by previous instances of discourse and in overturning them.

The ability to overturn an established relation of forces, which underwrites the agonistic bent of sophistic discourse, is dependent on the *καῖρός*, the “critical moment” that occupies a central place both in the understanding of oratory and of medicine in the writings of the archaic period. Although the term's etymology is uncertain, the association with *κρίσις* is apparent already in Pindar, apparently derived, perhaps by a superficial similarity rather than a common descent, with adjectival invocation of the term in Homer, indicating “decisive.” The *καῖρός*, is that moment which stands outside of any theoretical apprehension, but which calls for an unconditioned judgment on the part of the orator, or the doctor, whose knowledge is not certain but only probable. As Trédé-Boulmer notes:

¹³⁶ An illustration of the sophistic epideictic use of the performative is found in Plato's *Euthydemus* (287a-d). Having proffered a version of Antisthenes' argument that contradiction is impossible, the sophist Dionysodorus calls upon Socrates to refute the argument. The philosopher objects that the demand that one respond cannot be met – if it is, as the sophist has shown, the case that it is impossible to speak falsely, and thus to contradict, then no counter-argument can be mustered. Nor would it be necessary that one speak, or teach at all. Socrates asks if the sophist truly believes in the impossibility of contradiction, a question which Dionysodorus refuses to answer. The difference between the two pertains to the modes of their discourse – Socrates' expectation is that the sophist's argument rests upon a correspondence with reality that can be tested, and that the existence of contradiction is, perhaps, so obvious that it is absurd that one would argue otherwise in the face of overwhelming evidence. That Dionysodorus can assert the non-existence of falsehood, and thus of contradiction rests upon the performative mode of engagement upon which eristic discourse rests. It is not a matter of the reality of the referent, but here of the referent as an effect that is generated by the sophist's *logos*, without admitting a position of a third according to which a final judgment as to the verity of the statement could be judged. The contest is one of the artistry of argument – if Dionysodorus refuses to answer Socrates, it is because Socrates attempts to impose this third. According to the eristic mode of engagement, the situation is thus: Dionysodorus has performed the situation whereby contradiction is impossible; the non-existence of contradiction is contingent on their not being a phrase which would link onto it that would declare it a silence by asserting such an existence. As the product of a performative utterance in which the referent is understood to merely be a referent of discourse it is thus provisional, always susceptible to being overturned by further phrases; because it is not held to be anchored in anything immutable, for the sophist, the statement that there is no contradiction may yet be contradicted.

Tel est le paradoxe du καιρός: tout en dénonçant une lacune de la connaissance – l'absence de règle universelle – il permet d'en triompher. Il intervient lorsque, du fait du grand nombre des facteurs en jeu ou de leur enchevêtrement complexe, le savoir ne peut être coextensif au réel.¹³⁷

The critical moment is that in which there appears a lapsus in the knowledge relative to a situation, and thus the conditions of judgment cannot be given in a determinate manner, but one judges all the same. The work of judgment is however, dual. One judges in the critical moment, but one must also be able to identify the lapsus, and judge that a given moment is, in fact, καιρός; outside of any field of knowledge, unforeseeable, fugitive, and tied to an opportune occurrence that cannot be manufactured intentionally. One seizes upon the proper circumstances. In oratory, the term refers to the point where the argument conventionally held to be the weaker can be deployed as the stronger – this sense is related to that which the term acquires in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*. According to its usage in those texts, there is no universal rule according to which the doctor's craft is to be carried out; one must be attendant to the rhythms of the patient's body, the particular movements of the humors and the accounts that he gives of his pains, precisely in order to identify the moment at which one should intervene in order to interrupt and reorient these movements for the sake of a cure. Καιρός, in this sense is closely aligned with τέχνη and with μῆτις, art and ruse, insofar as these are arts of reversing a given arrangement of forces, diverting them from their “natural” paths, from the constraints imposed by those phrases previously given.¹³⁸ If Gorgias was, as Dionysius of Halicarnassus indicates, the first to write a treatise on the καιρός (one which is,

¹³⁷ Trédé-Boulmer 2015, 19. For more on the notion of the καιρός, see the fifth chapter of this dissertation.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

unfortunately, entirely lost to us), there is something of this movement of the critical moment, precisely as it defies judgment and leaves it in the suspense that is put in play by the paradox.¹³⁹ The invocation of the tension of forces responds to an aspect of the *καίρως*, insofar as it brings a halt to any attempt to subsume the case under a general rule. Here, the position of the third is defiantly cast aside; if the philosopher assumes that apodeictic discourse is the “default” state of language and epideictic merely an exceptional case, here the relation is staged otherwise. Epideictic discourse is, for the sophist, not distinct from apodeictic; the latter is merely a genre of the former, one that works its own species of *πειθώ*. The condemnation of persuasion is no less itself a species of persuasion, one intended to produce a sentiment of conviction (*πειθεσθαι*) in its addressees. This conviction, founded as it is upon the imposition of axioms, presents itself as ineluctable, undeceiving and undeceived; it is a position of strength that the sophist, staging the *καίρως* here, aims to overturn. The paradox sets judgment in retreat, according to an alignment of forces that turns upon and overturns itself. The paradox is not without its sense, whatever the judgment of the philosopher may be, but all the same, it presents sense in retreat, such that one is left affected by the presentation that the paradox is. And this is so whether one encounters it with the disdain of an Aristotle, or the wonder at the clever play that is made manifest there. The paradox reveals the very instability of its referent, shows it as constructed, precisely insofar as the stylistic forces that are set to work here are arranged in such fashion that it fails to completely cohere. The work of deception is shown precisely insofar as it stages the referent not as the object that one might take it for, but merely as an effect of style. It calls reference itself into question, all the while mobilizing the aesthetic, affective dimension of the word. Not that

¹³⁹ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Literary Composition* XII.

one would remain unconvinced or unmoved, but one would be persuaded knowing well that one is only ever convinced provisionally, and that there will be further moves, further effects to generate in response to the deception that the *logos* presents.

III. *Promotor Fidei*: Conviction and Conversion

The sophistic paradox, as Lyotard names it, is a *petit dispositif diabolique*: it presents an arrangement of forces, mobilizing logic and the aesthetic dimension of the *logos* in their tension.¹⁴⁰ The paradox confounds the pieties of the philosophers and their metalinguistic boundaries, and indeed, it acknowledges them in order to defy them. Contrary to the proclamation of the logician, the paradox is not senseless, and is certainly not a silence; it has its ability to move the hearer, whether to laughter at the apparent absurdity, wonder at the ability of the *logos* to generate contrary opinions in a form though the appearance of logic, or the contempt that is manifest in Russell. The sophist interrupts an allegedly neat progression of sense with a carefully crafted arrangement of the *logos* that makes manifest the retreat of sense and the affective dimension that is always there, but which only becomes apparent in this abeyance.

An affectively neutral presentation of sense cannot be taken for granted, for sense itself is but an effect of the *logos* and the imposition of a particular style upon it. And if the reaction of the hearer cannot be assured, and indeed, manifests itself in multiple

¹⁴⁰ The term “*petit dispositif diabolique*” occurs in Lyotard’s essays “*Sur la force des faibles*” and “*Apathie dans la théorie*” (1976 and 1977b, respectively); in neither piece is a definition given. The closest that one comes to an exposition of the term is found in the unpublished seminar “*La Logique qu’il nous faut*,” which also treats the Liar’s Paradox, albeit in the variant attributed to the lyric poet Simonides: “*C’est ça la dissimulation que j’appelle la méta-dissimulation, c’est effectivement qu’il y a un index de dissimulation initiale qui vient de ce que l’énonciateur, pris dans le sujet de l’énoncé, est un énonciateur qui ment, c’est-à-dire qui est en principe dissimulateur. Non pas dissimulateur au niveau des énoncés explicites, mais méta-dissimulateur. Chaque fois qu’un énoncé est donné, l’opérateur de méta-dissimulation fait qu’on est obligé de passer de cet énoncé à l’énoncé inverse, et donc cette méta-dissimulation est en même temps le moteur de cette machine. C’est une machine qui a vraiment la duperie comme moteur,*” (Session of April 17th, 1975).

fashion, this is because there is no way in which the effect could be judged in a determined fashion, and sense restored in a unilateral fashion. Gorgias indicates deception through a paradox that itself dissembles; the statement that declares the universality of deception can only itself be deceptive, even if one cannot precisely say how. Such is the *diablerie* inherent to the sophistic paradox; it dissembles itself in working an infinite regress of sense. If it offers a stable position, it is only to reverse it immediately and without end. The phrase does not lead to another, it turns about itself in endless succession; it does not lend itself to the temporal mode of a “before” and an “after,” it progresses infinitely about itself, contravening any clean succession of phrases. The mode of Eubulides’ statement, as with Gorgias’, is one that, at least at first, appears to be defiant, transgressing the canons of good sense and received wisdom.

Yet the apparent simplicity of the opposition gives way to the undecidability of the content of the paradox. As Lyotard writes, the *petit dispositif diabolique* is “*diable par le pathos, et à la fois advocatus diaboli par la parodie, ou bien l'inverse. En tout cas il appartient au diable d'avoir un avocat: le diabolisme se dissimulant en diablerie. Ou l'inverse.*”¹⁴¹ The devilry manifests in two modes. The simpler is that of the *advocatus diaboli*, the church functionary who speaks in opposition to an established opinion not out of conviction, but for the sake of giving the counterargument its fair due. It is he who demands further proofs, who challenges the faith out of loyalty to it; the argument is undertaken for the sake of strengthening its contrary. Yet its place is one that already tilts towards the *diablerie* that Lyotard indicates; the name *advocatus diaboli* is but a popular appellation given to the position officially designated *Promotor Fidei*. It is given to the agent of the devil to promote the faith, or the one whose task it is to assure Christian

¹⁴¹ Lyotard 1977, 27. Emphases original.

belief must speak in the name of the devil. As the 1911 *Catholic Encyclopedia* quite tellingly phrases it, “Owing to his peculiar duty of antagonizing the proofs put forward on behalf of persons proposed for saintly honours, the Promoter of the Faith is commonly referred to, half jocosely, as the devil's advocate.”¹⁴² Jocosely, but only halfway so; the humor of the appellation dissimulates itself, leaving one uncertain as to whether the joke is in fact a joke, or an assertion of the verity that the devil is in fact the best to promote the faith. The logic of opposition gives way to humor, to the *diablerie* that is proper to the pathic work of the paradox, in which the terms can no longer be defined on account of the logical regression worked by the sophist. These two modes of devilry fold one upon the other; the logical reversal of diabolism, which remains in good faith, and the uncontrolled anarchic humor of *diablerie*, which refuses the categories that are presented to it. The two modes dissemble themselves, one into the other, leaving undecidable the question whether the paradox is spoken in the inverted but nonetheless authentic good faith of diabolism or the impassioned perversion that is this *diablerie*. This tension is the very indication of the *logos* as a site of multiple, contrasting, undefined dynamisms that are set to play. Gorgias’ paradox indicates this affective force, diabolical with reference to the articulated *logos* insofar as it warps it, overturns it, transforms its sense into something other than what might be intended according to a regime of communication. Yet it presents it in dual fashion, in the humor, the ruin that it casts upon the modes of an argumentation deemed “proper,” and in the apparent lightness in which one could take it, as a mere parody of philosophical discourse. The affected *logos* dissembles itself, as that which is afflicted with *πάθος*, a curse for articulation, and as a merely affected play, the

¹⁴² Fanning, W. 1911. “Promotor Fidei,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved June 19, 2014 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12454a.htm>.

display of that art of persuasion that Gorgias brings. One dissembles itself as the other, leaves in question whether the gesture is a parody, a mere plaything, or something that strikes with an impassioned severity.

Gorgias, in his utterance on deception, reveals this aesthetic force of the word, its capacity to move, in its very undecidability. The motif of deception is generalized, attributed even to those procedures that take it upon themselves to judge the *logos* and assure that it makes good sense, thereby revealing another sensibility of the word. There is the sense of the utterance, one that is aberrant with respect to the perspective of the δόξα: that justice should be aligned with the one who deceives and not with truth, and that wisdom belongs not to the one who sees things as they are, but to the one who gives himself over to the duplicity of the *logos* for the sake of pleasure. If the philosopher declares that Gorgias has spoken poorly, that his speech is in fact devoid of sense, this is not entirely wrong, even if it misses the point. The sophist puts on display a collapse of sense that is made sensible: one which appears in those sentiments that it inflicts, the pleasure and the pain that it can work, in the joy that there is something yet to be said and in the discomfort that one might feel at the ruin of established opinions that had been taken for true. Gorgias names a pleasure brought about by the word even as his phrase is shocking in light of received wisdom. If there is pleasure there, it is precisely in the mode of the reversal that the orator is able to work, in making the stronger argument the weaker, taking the audience by surprise, in working the art of persuasion. He deceives, but also indicates the deception that his *logos* bears by interrupting his own argument, inviting the hearer to doubt him. That the statement is structured as a paradox is not an error in reasoning, but a demonstration of his technique as a technique. Gorgias'

performance indicates to his hearers the very technique that he mobilizes in order to craft the feelings of conviction that he produces. It is as if a stage magician were to aim to enchant an audience not with his tricks alone, but by demonstrating the technique by which they were produced and inviting the audience to wonder at both at once. The demonstration of technique, which one could take as a kind of disenchantment, is also allowed its own capacity for enchantment; one could marvel at the orator's command of the *logos* no less than the effects that he thereby produces. As Porter notes, "Gorgias often seems to stand outside his own projects and to look back on them with a detached irony;" his works are at once presentations of a theory of performance and a performance of theory.¹⁴³ It is a matter of an argumentation that both functions as such, but which also displays itself as a meditation on that argumentation itself. Gorgias' work thus stands doubly with reference to the *logos*, abolishing the distance between language and metalanguage; there is no distinction to be drawn between first-order utterances and a second consisting of instances of *logos* reflecting on the first. The work of theory is no less a work of persuasion than any other. He deceives while marking that he does so, and in this marking he opens a space for reflection upon deception, a reflection that cannot stabilize itself, anchor itself with reference to an exterior that safeguard his *logos* against duplicity. The demonstration of the method is itself naught but another ruse, another means of capturing and taking hold of those who are exposed to the *logos*. The paradox presents the ruse as unavoidable. One will always have been caught by the affective power of the word, removed from sense as it is, but nonetheless one proceeds, goes on speaking. The sophist does not escape from this bind, but, as Gorgias indicates, he works within it.

¹⁴³ Porter 2010, 276.

This use of epideictic discourse to deploy what is undecidable is a strategy that belongs to the very origins of sophistic argumentation. The mode is known as εἰκός argumentation: in the absence of the ability to establish what had been the case, one relies on what is “seeming,” “apparent,” or “probable.” The development of this mode, attributed by the tradition to one of two Sicilian orators, Corax or Tisias, proceeds according to probabilities that are multiply structured.¹⁴⁴ The form of εἰκός argumentation, as it is presented schematically in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, appears thus: Corax's client is accused of assault. If his client is a weak man, Corax will argue that in the absence of other factors, it is improbable that his client was the one to have beaten the plaintiff, since it is apparent that the weak man is not one easily capable of carrying off such an attack. This argument, at least, is admissible in the eyes of the philosopher, because it rests on what is likely given the circumstances at stake in the proceedings of the trial. Where Corax departs from proper use of the *logos* is in the opposite case – if Corax's client is a strong man and quite capable of carrying out the assault, the position taken by the orator is otherwise. He asserts that it is not likely that his client would have committed the deed, because he would have been able to anticipate that he would be accused of the crime. This given, it is the weak man who should in fact be suspected of the assault, since, although it may have taken him more planning to carry it off, he may do so in relative safety, knowing full well that he is unlikely to be convicted on account of the presuppositions of the judges. The objection voiced by the philosopher is that the

¹⁴⁴Plato attributes the form to Tisias in his *Phaedrus*, 273a-c, while Aristotle names Corax as the originator at *Rhetoric* II, 24. The difference matters little – the two orators are together credited as the authors of the first handbook of oratory, and there is reason to doubt that the figures can be adequately distinguished. It is possible that Corax – “crow” – was but a nickname of Tisias, and that the tradition became later confused, reading them as two different men. In any case, given the paucity of the evidence, it hardly matters. See Tindale 2010, 69-70.

sophist has departed from a proper investigation into what was the case, founded as it is on a deciphering of reality, and has moved to the eristic position where the third is rejected. To put it bluntly, Corax's objective is to win, pertaining to the stakes that are presently at hand, which are not that of a past case of reality, but rather those of the court case before him.

Accordingly, his strategy rests on a logic that moves from a mere engagement with past circumstances to the current situation of courtroom and its dynamics, in which the δόξα is the central consideration. He must anticipate what the judges themselves anticipate, presuppositions that will motivate their verdict. He calculates the expectation of the judges and moves to counter the argument that is likely to be posed. It is here a matter of an engagement with the δόξα, as the more or less constituted body of received opinion in order to play it. There is a threefold work of calculation here: first in ascertaining the expectation of the judges, in that the weak man is unlikely to have committed the assault, secondly, the second-order anticipations of both weak and strong men, in that they tailor their actions with reference to the expectations of the judges. The third is the calculation of Corax, which allows him to take either side of the argument. In the case of the defense of the weak man, the δόξα may simply be asserted, and agreement achieved thusly. In that of the strong man, Corax anticipates the position of the judges, asserts circumstances whereby the defendant undertakes a calculation relative to this opinion and devises his actions accordingly (whether or not this was actually the case, for the purposes of the defense, does not matter). The orator presents a defense based upon the image of a case wherein the δόξα was already accounted for – the true culprit would have acted in such a way that the judges are likely to be deceived – and this will serve to

refute the accusation. It is thus that the weaker argument becomes the stronger; the ontological grounds upon which the relative strength of a given argument might be universally ascertained is undercut, and what appears in its wake is a diffusion of tactics relative to the δόξα and the means of presentation that avail themselves. The strength of the argument is to be ascertained relative to the exigent circumstances of the present situation – the καιρός – and the ability of the δόξα to always be overturned. The sphere of the δόξα knows no stable field of reference, it is an alignment of forces that may be anticipated, and one plays the logic of anticipation in order to destabilize this sphere and to attain the desired result. It is not a matter of demonstration, but of tactics, of knowing which discursive effects to work in the face of the alignment of expectations, of the forces of opinion that are manifest in the present situation.

All three of Gorgias' defense speeches that have come down to us (*The Defense of Palamedes*, *The Encomium to Helen*, and *On Nature, or On Non-Being*) avail themselves of εἰκός argumentation. In each case, the stakes of the speech are to assert the non-existence or non-occurrence of something. The defense does not have the privilege accorded to the prosecution, who must merely prove that the event took place; it is ostensibly the part of the defense to show that the same event did not take place. Given the impossibility of demonstrating (a) nothing, Gorgias' argumentation shifts from a regime of determination of existence, to a mode of εἰκός, here specifically marked in its aspect as probability. In short, the form is thus: for the crime to have occurred, condition A would have been necessary, but the occurrence of A, even if it cannot be disproven with certainty, can be established to be improbable. Even so, the possibility of A is not entirely dispensed with, so the argument must redouble itself: even if A were the case,

then B would also be necessary, and B too is improbable. The argument at B relies on the concession of A, the argument at C will rely on the concession of B, and so forth. To dismiss of Gorgias' texts as absurd, or at least as feeble attempts to present a defense, common amongst modern readers, is to adopt, overhastily, the position whereby the details of the affair are to be established with certainty. The stakes of Gorgias' play with the probably are thereby ignored; to insist that there be certainty when the sophist's interest does not surpass the probable is to judge his work by an alien standard. If they appear weak, this has its own performative value. The proclamation of the disjuncture between the tasks demanded of the prosecution and the defense – the establishment of the case and the establishment of a non-case – is announced precisely in order to demonstrate the relative disadvantage of the defense and to evoke the sympathy of the judges. This is, of course, quite foreign to the mode adopted, at least ideally, in modern legal defenses, which operate according to the assertion of an alibi – that one can establish that something occurred that is at odds with the account brought forth by the prosecution, and that these two narratives are incompatible, thereby assuring the victory of the defense. That is to say that modern defenses take the side of the philosopher against the sophist, in ruling out (at least provisionally) such arguments from probability based on the ground that they do not rest on reality. With respect to reality, the sophist plays in bad faith, at least according to the standards of the philosopher who imposes the place of the third. The sophist gives mere appearance in an eristic mode – he aims to win a combat in which there is nothing but images.

This refusal of the third allows for an ethical position foreign to that of the philosopher depicted by Nietzsche, one founded upon the interrogation of values

themselves. The position of a Plato or that of the Aristotle of the *Metaphysics* is clear – the other is to conform to the strictures that are invoked in the name of the third.¹⁴⁵ To disobey them is to forfeit one's position as a possible interlocutor. Means which depart too far from the established procedures of verification are *a priori* disqualified; argument is allowed only insofar as the interlocutors accept those rules that are instantiated not through consent but by force. The position of the sophist is otherwise; argument is undertaken in the absence of a stable point of reference, with the aim of defeating the opponent. It matters little whether the result of one's arguments conform to the δόξα, determined as it is by its very instability. The body of received opinion is not a stable and fixed canon, but a system of disparate, relatively fixed, but likely incoherent positions of which one makes use. The orator cannot avoid it, inasmuch as one must give the hearer a reference point from which the argument can be heard, but at the same time he is free to play with it and even to oppose it, whether to establish a counterfactual or simply to display his talent by establishing a point that is well-crafted while remaining in defiance of common sense. The δόξα consists of the set of rules that govern all disputation, but these rules are not set apart from the disputation itself. That is to say that the sophist *plays with rules*; the dispute is provisionally conducted according to the set of rules that presents itself, but these rules themselves may become objects of play. They are open to modification, contestation, and whatever transformations that the sophist may inflict upon them. This is not to say that one could not insist on the rule, but that such insistence could

¹⁴⁵ The Aristotle of the *Nichomachean Ethics* appears to differ greatly, at least in principle, from that which appears in the *Metaphysics*. Ethics, in that text is founded on a judgment that is unconstrained, there is no rule that can be applied to a given case readily. Lyotard reads this Aristotle along with the sophists, as one who at least in this matter, actively denies the position of the third. Justice can only be enacted in a case-by-case basis, in terms of a judgment relative to the specificity of each; it is not adherence to a code, but rather an exercise of singular judgments. See Lyotard & Thébaud 1979 (2006) 68-70.

itself only be another tactical move, an invocation of tradition deployed against an opponent who can be shown to have transgressed it. If eristic dispute is won by forcing the opponent to be silent, this silence occurs in a mode that differs radically from that enforced by the philosopher. The sophist argues the opponent to silence by presenting an argument that cannot now be refuted, which the opponent has no means against, but this is not to say that the thrust of the winning argument may be counted as a true proposition, merely as one that has not yet been countered.¹⁴⁶ Eristic argumentation proceeds not according to a progressive movement of consent to propositions, but to a diffusion of argumentative strategies, of means to establish a point. To lose is to be provisionally deprived of means, but only ever provisionally. One is not silenced once and for all, but only until new means are developed by which one might return to the contest.

Beyond allowing the opponent the privilege of speaking until he can do so no longer, there is no universal regulation of the contest; there are sets of rules in their dispersion, there is a multiplicity of δόξαι. As the sophist Antiphon notes, “justice is not to transgress the laws of the city where one citizens.”¹⁴⁷ His *On Truth*, or what few fragments remain of it, aims to refute the attribution of a universality to the νομός – there are laws, customs, opinions that belong to the conventions of each city, and which have nothing to do with the law of nature, a law which is without content. Nature is merely that which escapes the formations of the political.¹⁴⁸ Accordingly, as Antiphon indicates, there is no distinction to be found between Greek and barbarian, or if there is, it belongs merely to the received wisdom of the Greeks, reflecting no difference that could be

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Note 41 above.

¹⁴⁷ Antiphon, *On Truth*, Fragment B.

¹⁴⁸ Cassin 1995, 168-170.

posited as essential.¹⁴⁹ In the absence of constraints that could firmly be posited as natural and thus immutable, there is no possible means of excluding the other from the sphere of politics in an *a priori* fashion. What remains is the possibility of interlocution with respect to the doxic positionings that are manifest in a given situation. This does not mean that consensus is necessarily the aim of Antiphon's politics; conflict is no less potential here. But without the possibility of the transcendental exclusion, one engages with one's interlocutor, whether as a partner or as an opponent with the very instability of the δόξα in view – it is hence that Lyotard sees in Antiphon something of a transformation of a Kantian formulation, where the δόξα is maximized in place of the idea.¹⁵⁰ This maximization is one without fixed content, and even lacks any stable position; it is rather to recall the instability and the locality of received opinion. The sophist traffics in images that lack universal validity; he responds to specific situations in their dispersion with the tactics that are appropriate to each. That is to say that he proceeds without axioms, without bowing to the position of a third whose finality would be generally applicable. Instead he play with local rules that one obeys to a certain extent, even if it is only to acknowledge them in order to overturn them; if these rules have a foundation, it is one that is founded only upon habit. They are but the deposits of past instances of persuasion and the sentiment of conviction that have been left behind, one that might always be challenged anew.

IV. Εἰκόξ and its Relation to the Unconscious

The foregoing reflections upon the sophists and their use of the *logos* have thus far neglected to address the most famous of their number, one not usually acknowledged

¹⁴⁹ Antiphon, *On Truth*, Fragment A.

¹⁵⁰ Lyotard & Thébaud 1979 (2006), 165-171.

by classicists: the unconscious itself. Freud, in his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, devotes a section of his analysis of the *Witz* to the specific class of instances of faulty reasoning that betray a work of the unconscious connected to the image of the sophist. What is at stake are those instances of argumentation that, despite their apparent absurdity, give the appearance of logic (*Der Schein von Logik*), flimsy as it may be from the perspective of the analyst. Although, as Freud claims, it is uncertain whether the sophism (*Sophisma*) can properly be termed a joke, it nonetheless stands as an indicative psychic phenomena insofar as it produces comic pleasure.¹⁵¹ The most famous of these sophistries is, of course, that of the borrowed kettle, which is invoked as an example of a logic of omission, where several propositions are deployed without synthesis into a whole. As Freud writes:

The same omission is the core of another piece of sophistry which has been much laughed over, but whose right to be called a joke might be doubted: A. borrowed a copper kettle from B. and after he had returned it was sued by B. because the kettle now had a big hole in it which made it unusable. His defense was: “First, I never borrowed a kettle from B. at all; secondly, the kettle had a hole in it already when I got it from him; and thirdly, I gave him back the kettle undamaged.” Each one of these defenses is valid in itself, but taken together they exclude one another. A. was treating in isolation what had to be regarded as a connected whole [...]. We might also say: ‘A. has put an “and” where only an “either – or” is possible.’¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Freud 1905a *SE* VIII, 204-205.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 62.

The diagnosis of this anecdote as a sophism is particularly apt; one readily recognizes in it the εἰκός argumentation of the ancient orator. As with the ancient form, what is at stake here is the denial of an occurrence, one that does not proceed through positing an alibi. Instead it multiply attempts to negate the accusation that the kettle was returned damaged through the positing of three different cases: 1) the kettle was never borrowed, 2) it was borrowed already damaged, 3) it was returned undamaged. As Freud notes, the three defenses appear to be mutually exclusive, and the comic effect of the anecdote lies in the apparent absurdity of the defense. Overcome with the need to deny the accusation levied against him, A. moves too quickly, putting forth incongruent modes of defense, any of which, taken on its own might form the basis for investigation. Placed together, they mutually undercut one another. Freud notes that the problem is one that is introduced by the paratactical structure here – A. has linked his statements with “and,” where, according to Freud, only an “either-or” is possible. With reference to the arguments of the ancient sophists, however, this is not necessarily correct; Freud has taken the position of the philosopher in demanding a stable presentation of the referent that does not contradict. This need not be the case: according to the logic of probability set for in εἰκός argumentation, one might assert in place of the “and” an “even if.” Reconfigured thus, the structure of the defense would be: “The kettle was not borrowed. Even if it were borrowed, it was borrowed damaged. And even if it were borrowed undamaged, it was returned in the same state.” Staged sequentially in this manner, the burden of proof belongs to the prosecution alone; unable to assert what was not the case, the defense works a logical regression that allows its snares to be set multiply. The prosecution must first meet the challenge of demonstrating that the kettle was borrowed. If this is

overcome, then an additional challenge is brought forth: prove that the kettle was not damaged beforehand, and so on.

That is to say that Freud's claim that the sophism is the result of a faulty reasoning devoid of proper logic may be contested. Certainly, the line of defense taken by the sophist is incoherent if the defense is burdened with refuting the claims of the prosecution by showing what was the case and that this was otherwise than what the accusation asserts. There is, however, another sort of logic at work here, which rests only upon images and their ability to produce conviction. In the absence of being able to establish proofs for a non-occurrence, the accusation is decomposed into its component assumptions and each of these is individually attacked. For it to be shown that the kettle was returned damaged, it must first be established that the kettle was borrowed in the first place; this being established does not preclude that it was lent undamaged, and it being lent undamaged does not rule out that it was not returned in such condition. From the perspective of the defense, it does not matter which of these instances is called into question, any will serve to counter the accusation. Although the instances may be contradictory, they may nonetheless be made to work together – it is only a matter of causing the judges to doubt the accusation enough that they do not affirm it in their ruling. That is to say, if the aim is to bring the judges to a “reasonable doubt,” the undercutting of conviction can be taken as cumulative across the differing conditions, even if they are incongruent. One can be brought to doubt that all of the elements necessary for the offense to have taken place could come about together, given the improbability of each. The accusation is not negated as such, but is rendered such that one would be foolish to believe that it came about, given how doubtful the whole thing is.

That this sophistic logic appears in the unconscious is of no minor import. As Freud asserts, this sort of argumentation is fundamental to its workings:

This mutual cancelling-out by several thoughts, each of which is in itself valid, is precisely what does not occur in the unconscious. In dream, in which the modes of thought of the unconscious are actually manifest, there is no such thing as an ‘either-or,’ only a simultaneous juxtaposition. In the example of a dream, which, in spite of its complication, I chose in my *Interpretation of Dreams* as a specimen of the work of interpretation, I tried to rid myself of the reproach of having failed to relieve a patient of her pains by psychical treatment. My reasons were: (1) that she herself was responsible for her illness because she would not accept my solution, (2) that her pains were of organic origin and were therefore no concern of mine, (3) that her pains were connected with her widowhood, for which I was evidently not responsible and (4) that her pains were due to an injection from a contaminated syringe, which had been given her by someone else. All these reasons stood side by side, as though they were not mutually exclusive. I was obliged to replace the ‘and’ of the dream by an ‘either – or’ in order to escape a charge of nonsense.¹⁵³

The reference is, of course, to the dream of Irma’s Injection, that which opened the “royal road” to the unconscious.¹⁵⁴ The unconscious plays at εικός argumentation precisely insofar as, as one knows from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, it is incapable of negation.¹⁵⁵ The idea (*Vorstellung*) that is objectionable to consciousness is denied, but it

¹⁵³ Ibid., 205.

¹⁵⁴ Freud 1900, *SE* III 118-119. The anecdote about the kettle is again mentioned here as an analogue for the various modes of denial that appear in the dream; it is not, however, there referred to as a “sophism.”

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 317.

cannot be simply negated and pushed aside. Instead, what occurs is of the order of the kettle logic; assertions of improbability take the place of a simple negation. In the dream, as it is summarized in the quotation above, there is no simple denial of Freud's responsibility, but the assertion of a number of contraries that are likewise incongruous, but which nonetheless serve the censorship in displacing the repressed idea in a multiple form. Several modes of denial are attempted, precisely in the matter of the sophistic argumentation: her continued illness was on account of her refusal to follow the prescribed treatment, even if this were not so, the illness was biological, not psychic, even if this were not so, it was on account of her widowhood, for which Freud could not be blamed, and even if this were not so, they were on account of a unsanitary injection performed by someone else. None of these conditions is strong enough to absolve Freud on its own, but taken together, one has grounds for denial based upon the cumulative doubt accrued across the set of excuses. Like the sophist, the unconscious cannot assert the non-occurrence of the event, or in this case, the idea; it is instead a matter of working a negation of a different order, in the assertion that the idea is improbable, even laughable. This dream logic, trafficking in visual and auditory images that are without reference to reality, puts on display the psyche in an affected state. Threatened by the occasion of an idea charged with unpleasant affect, the work of the censorship sets in; the idea must in some way be allowed to come to presentation but only as suitably disarmed, transformed by the operations of the dream-work. In the case of the anecdote of the kettle, the unpleasant idea is of course that of the accusation being true. The hinge upon which the defense rests is the word "kettle," which is able to support the "same" referent in those three different, perhaps exclusive, instances. As a real object, the kettle could not

be at the same time borrowed and unborrowed, received damaged and undamaged, returned whole and punctured. The play here, which gives rise to the apparent absurdity, is that the referent of the *logos* has been detached from the ostensibly given function of reference to an actual object. The word itself is more than capable of sustaining these three instances and it is here that the comic effect of the anecdote is to be found. The “sophism” of the kettle mobilizes the tension between the epideictic function of the utterance and its purported apodeictic function in a way that flies in the face of common sense. The defense is nonetheless to a certain extent effective, or potentially so, provided that one does not insist that there be a real referent, a demand that is entirely foreign to the operations of an unconscious that is able to treat the idea only at the level of phantasy and of transference. It is a matter of psychic reality, as it pertains to the idea charged with unpleasant affect and the defenses against it, not one of a reality deemed “objective.”

The operations of condensation and displacement, as they are here manifest, betray the position of an affected *logos*; what it articulates, it articulates precisely in order to prevent an unpleasant idea that impinges upon consciousness from manifesting as such.¹⁵⁶ A single line of defense is not sufficient to ward off this idea, hence the multiplication that emerges as the idea is worked over by the censorship. The psychic presence of the unpleasant affect forces its presentation, but without determining the terms of this presentation – one recalls that the affect is linked to a given idea only in a contingent fashion, as Freud had already noted in his 1895 *Project for a Scientific*

¹⁵⁶ References are slight, but there is evidence that the sophists practiced some form of “talking cure” that was particular to them. The presocratic philosopher Empedocles, whom Diogenes Laertius names as the teacher of Gorgias (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 8.2.58), is said to have cured maladies by means of the *logos*. The sophist Antiphon likewise, and by means of dream interpretation; he is said to have set up a tent in the agora and to have interpreted the dreams of his clients for the sake of their well-being and for the sake of their money. One might well accord him the honor of being the first to go into private practice. Sadly, what fragments remain of his *Interpretation of Dreams* do not grant much insight into his method. For a summary of the extant evidence, see Cassin 2012, 79-86.

Psychology.¹⁵⁷ It is thus that the presentation is transformed by the dream work, rendered in such a way that is palatable for the psyche; it is linked to an idea that may be denied, though the terms of this denial may be multiple. This is not to say that the tension is resolved. As Freud notes, the comic effect that one finds in kettle logic is tied to its ability to make manifest the tension that impresses upon the psyche; the hurried defenses of the defended betray a certain psychic automatism, an impulse to deny whose forcefulness gives rise to a haste that dispenses with good logical sense.¹⁵⁸ This symptomatic display of a tension would belong no less to the apparent absurdities of the dream work. However, in the case of the kettle logic, and of sophistic εἰκός argumentation in general, the problematic is to a certain extent shifted. Even if, as Freud admits, the mechanisms of condensation, displacement and indirect representation belong to the *Witz* no less than they do to the work of the dream, one must yet account for the fact that in the case of the joke, they are deployed in waking life, in relation to consciousness. This is not to assert, however, that the *Witz* belongs simply to consciousness. As Freud writes:

We speak, it is true, of “making” a joke; but we are aware that when we do so our behavior is different from what it is when we make a judgment or make an objection. A joke has quite outstandingly the characteristic of being a notion that has occurred to us “involuntarily.” What happens is not that we know beforehand what joke we are going to make, and that all that it then needs is to be clothed in words. We have an undefinable feeling, rather, what I can best compare with an

¹⁵⁷ Freud 1895, *SE* I 322-327.

¹⁵⁸ Freud 1905a, *SE* VIII: 64-65.

“*absence*,” a sudden release of intellectual tension and then all at once the joke is there – as a rule ready-clothed in words.¹⁵⁹

The emphasis indicates the introduction of the French “*absence*” in Freud’s German text, a term which must be read according to the etymological importance of the “*ab-*.” What is important is not so much a void, but a departure, a move from the realm of what is properly sensed. In the *Witz*, an absence mobilizes itself within discourse, something appears that cannot be simply reduced to a logical movement, but appears according to the tension that it makes manifest. Neither this nor that, the affect signals itself by forcing an irresolvable tension; if the joke avails itself to consciousness it does not do so directly. Rather, it is a matter of letting play this tension that is already latent in the psyche. That is to say that the joke emerges insofar as the psyche is already in tension, and if there is pleasure to be found in its comic effect, it lies in making this tension manifest to another.¹⁶⁰ The tension is let to play. The idea of “play” is a key one, insofar as Freud emphasizes the regressive character of the logic that appears in jokes. The “word-play” that defines the *Witz* has an analogue in infantile play with words, according to the indistinction between word-representations and thing-representations (*Wortvorstellungen* and *Sachvorstellungen*) that one observes in infantile modes of thought.¹⁶¹ Words, in this infantile mode, do not have a representative function, but themselves serve as means to the presentation of an affect. Disconnected from and indifferent to any function of real

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁶⁰ Freud makes an additional distinction between the dream and the *Witz*, insofar as he holds that the joke must be communicated to another, whereas the dream does not communicate. The assertion that dreams do not have a communicate function has been challenged by later authors; there is reason to suspect that there is a class of dreams that is, in some sense, addressed to another. See Ferenczi’s 1913 note, “To Whom Does One Relate One’s Dreams?,” in Ferenczi 1926 (1980), 349 and the discussion of this note in Laplanche 2006, 75-77. This is not to assert that dreams are simply addressed to another in the manner of interlocution, but that the enigmatic affective kernel that motivates certain dreams calls for interpretation, and avails itself of the use of another in procuring interpretation.

¹⁶¹ Freud 1905a, *SE* VIII 169-170.

reference, what occurs here is a play of words that are themselves objects according to which pleasure may be procured, or pain given a kind of voice. In this play, the modality in which words are invoked remains unstable; they may serve as signifiers of a referent, as objects themselves, or may be invoked in both manners at once. The sense of the word is anything but given, it is always undercut (albeit to a varying extent) by the aesthetic presence that will have continued to resist it.

It is in this mode that the sophists, those clowns of ancient Greece, invoke the *logos*. Plato's dialogue *Euthydemus* stages the following interchange, after Socrates asks the sophist Dionysodorus to clarify his previous statement:

D: Which of the two have the power of sense, things that have *psychē*, or things without a *psychē*?

S: Those things with a *psychē*.

D: Do you know any phrase that has a *psychē*?

S: My god, I do not know of one!

D: Then just why did you ask me what the sense of my phrase was?¹⁶²

¹⁶² Plato, *Euthydemus* 287d-e. Despite the common portrayal of Plato as a critic of the sophists, serious to the point of being dour, that permeate much of the literature that seeks to do justice to the sophists (Nietzsche and Lyotard in particular, and I have perhaps overly indulged here in the same), the *Euthydemus* and certain of the other sophistic dialogues are quite humorous. It is perhaps only those who came after him – Isocrates and Aristotle readily suggest themselves – who were keen on taking Plato at his word on the condemnation of the sophist. For Plato himself, the condemnation of the sophist never escapes an aporia, insofar as the sophist can never be definitively identified. Most telling is the analogy found in the *Sophist* 231a, where the stranger claims that the philosopher resembles the sophist as the wolf does the dog, the most fierce of animals does the most tame. As Cassin (1995, 9) has perceptively noted, the grammatical formation of the sentences is ambiguous: one could just as well read the philosopher as the wolf as one could find the sophist there. However, the ambiguity is not merely syntactical; it also emerges in the polyvalent symbolic positions that each animal served. Particularly in the archaic period, the wolf could well be invoked positively against the dog. Although the wolf is an enemy to humans, it may yet be admired for its straightforward determination and its ability to accomplish its goals with violence and cunning. One knows where the wolf stands, in contrast to the dog; the latter is perhaps unique amongst the animals in that it is φίλος to man, but therein lies a danger. The dog may be a false friend, flattering and manipulating its master to its own ends, the affection that it offers is never, for the Greeks, above suspicion of pandering. In fragment 30 of Solon, the nomothete declares himself to be above the treacherous conspiracies of his fellow citizens, likening himself to a wolf amongst dogs. For the dog as flatterer, see

The sophist plays the senselessness of sense, again, not to deny it but to demonstrate the *logos* in the uneasy relation between the demand that it serve as means for communication and the aesthetic force that is able to awaken sentiment at the very moment that it transgresses good sense. The sophist is, as Gorgias admits, one who plays deception as deception, displays his illusions as illusions. The point where the philosopher takes umbrage puts on display the most fundamental of illusions, one that philosophy cannot do without: the presumption that the *logos* can make sense. Certainly it appears to, but this is only a matter of appearance. All of the artfulness of sophistic discourse is deployed precisely in order to make tangible that *absence* that Freud named as fundamental to the *Witz*, the point where the *logos* is made to deviate from itself under the pressure of affect. One speaks in order to put on display this aesthetic element of the word, that which the philosophers aim to forget, not in order to name it, but in gesturing towards it and making it felt, whether through laughter or through discomfort. The deception that lies at the heart of the *logos* is not an obstacle to be surmounted; one cannot surmount it, but its implacable character does not mean that it cannot likewise be made use of. One might never conquer it, one will always have been deceived, overcome by it before one opens one's mouth. But this is not to say that one cannot, to a certain extent, move with it, and mobilize the space of play that its very indifference to representation allows. Related to the sense of the word only contingently and obliquely, it is the aesthetic dimension of the word that allows it to become the object of play, in defiance of the demand voiced by the philosopher.

Franco 2014, 129-137. While Plato links the figure of the wolf to that of the tyrant in the *Republic* (565e-566a), it nonetheless remains unclear as to whether, in this context, the dog is indeed the figure to be favored against the wolf, since the "most tame" of animals does not ever escape the suspicion of only falsely allying itself with man – much as the sophist portrayed by the philosopher.

V. Τό Ἐκτός: The Displacement of Discourse

It is in keeping with his tendency to put on display the rhetorical construction of his speeches that Gorgias takes up explicitly this relation between the aesthetic dimension of the *logos* and its sense. To do so is a move no less elusive than those paradoxes which have preceded; in making the aesthetic the referent of his discourse, he can only present it in a mode that is foreign to this element from the first. This counterintuitive play, in which the word sets after that which escapes it, is taken up most explicitly in what is the most challenging, perhaps even absurd, of the sophist's texts to have come down to us: his *On Nature, or On Non-Being*. As befits a work bearing such a title, it has not survived. Known through two paraphrases – one in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Melissus, Xenophanes, Gorgias*, and the other in Sextus Empiricus' *Adversus Mathematicus* – the text is Gorgias' playful prose rejoinder to the poem of Parmenides. As was alluded to above, the Eleatic philosopher's *On Nature, or On Being* was of key importance to the sophists, if only for his dictum that “What there is to be said and thought must be; for it is there for being, but non-being is not.”¹⁶³ This proclamation, which Parmenides endows with the authority of the goddess who voices it, finds its corollary in a previous fragment, in which it is declared that it is not possible to speak non-being.¹⁶⁴ For the Eleatic, the necessity of being forbids non-being absolutely; it is not a privation, nor is it the opposite of being, insofar as this would imply a higher logical order that would stand above being, uniting it with its opposite. This first attempt to establish the ontological grounds to which the *logos* could be bound is at best troubled, if not a travesty. The problem, as has already been made manifest through Antisthenes' paradox, is that Parmenides' poem

¹⁶³ Parmenides, Fragment DK 28B6. Translation Kirk, Raven and Schofield, lightly modified.

¹⁶⁴ DK 28B2.

does nothing to secure the *logos* to an ontological exterior, a third according to which the utterance could be grounded. If anything, the sophist takes the statement quite seriously. If what is said and what is thought necessarily is, then “being” has nothing whatsoever to do with an ostensibly given objective reality, insofar as it is manifestly possible to speak and to think things that have no empirical correlate. Antisthenes, along with Gorgias and certain of the other sophists, plays the part of an Eleatic, albeit one who radicalizes the positions taken by Parmenides.¹⁶⁵ If “being” is a necessary correlate of every instance of the *logos*, then “being” itself is but merely an effect of language.¹⁶⁶

Gorgias’ *On Non-Being* takes this radicalization a step further than does Antisthenes; as the title indicates, it makes a display of speaking about that which Parmenides forbade as a potential referent of speech. The motivating gesture behind the sophist’s text is initially quite simple: despite his apparent seriousness, in declaring the impossibility of speaking of non-being, Parmenides has lost himself in a paradox worthy of Eubulides. The utterance that declares one’s incapacity to speak of non-being

¹⁶⁵ For the sophists as radical Eleatics, see Cassin 1995, 28-43. My presentation here attaches itself only to those lines of Parmenides’ poem that are of immediate import, but the extent to which some of the sophists may be read as Eleatics depends, of course, on the interpretation taken with respect to this nearly inscrutable presocratic text. Cassin provides a reading of Parmenides through the lens of his sophistic followers that is at once highly unorthodox with respect to the philosophical reception and greatly suggestive. What is at stake for her is the poem as an epic, specifically in its use of allusions to the *Odyssey*. More could be said on the scenography of the opening fragments, which directly recall the topology of Tartarus in Hesiod’s *Theogony*.

¹⁶⁶ Plato’s *Sophist* witnesses the close connection of the sophists to Parmenides’ poem. It is in this dialogue, with its aim of defining the sophist in order to refute him, that the Eleatic Stranger must beg forgiveness for what he names as an act of parricide, attempting to overturn the arguments of Parmenides (241d-242c). The issue in that dialogue relates precisely to the passages at stake here, in which Parmenides rigidly separates being from non-being, insofar as this distinction opens the space for the objectionable views of the sophists. The solution, as the Stranger argues, is to adopt a differential model, in which beings partake both of being and non-being relative to their possible attributions. A being which is not large does exist, but partakes of non-being insofar as it is not large, according to a model where being is to be thought of as sameness and non-being as difference. This correction is necessary, if change is to be accounted for within a classical reading of Parmenides, the foundation of which is Plato himself. Lest one be tempted to adhere to the distinction between the philosopher and the sophist too rigidly, it is worth noting that the result of the parricide of Parmenides is a position that appears to find parallel in the latter clauses of Protagoras’ *homo mensura* doctrine. Plato’s opposition to this sophist, who unlike Antisthenes and Gorgias, seems not to be connected to the Eleatic, does not here prevent him from adopting a parallel position against those others.

demonstrates this very capacity. There is, at least in terms of the situation of the utterance, potential means of escape: the poem stages itself as a work of inspiration, the goddess (who is probably but not certainly to be identified as ἀληθεία) speaks with authority to the young man who has passed beyond the mortal realm, and the poem carries her pronouncements to its hearers.¹⁶⁷ Gorgias' opening move denies the philosopher this recourse; being and non-being are held to be the same, insofar as they are both referents of the epideictic discourse that performs them as such. Likewise the goddess: she too is merely a function of the poem, and any authority that is granted her at face value is the product of a deception. It is the persuasive force of Parmenides' poetic *logos* that is able to form its divine third that can regulate the functions of discourse from a position beyond interlocution; the poem establishes the position of this third, and claims its prior existence. As Lyotard puts it,

Le logos, l'argument en se construisant, ruine la phrase démonique, la révélation sur laquelle ouvre le poème de Parménide. Il ne la réfute pas, il en fait une famille de phrases. L'ontologie, la poièsis, est permise, c'est un genre. Ce genre n'a pas les mêmes règles que le genre dialectique (au sens grec). En particulier, la déesse n'est pas un interlocuteur sujet aux règles de la réfutation. Il suffit que Parménide indique que deux voies sont ouvertes à la pensée, celle du est et celle du non est, pour que Gorgias fasse de l'une et l'autre une thèse et une antithèse argumentées par des partenaires dans une dialectique d'où la déesse est absente

¹⁶⁷ An obvious point, but one forgotten in much of the criticism: there is no indication in the surviving fragments that the κοῦρος of the poem is to be identified with Parmenides himself, any more than there is reason to identify Homer with Odysseus. Poetry, in the archaic period, was thought to be divinely inspired, giving access to knowledge that one could not possess otherwise, as is apparent from Hesiod's *Theogony*. On the place of archaic poetry, its relation to the divine, and its work of impossible remembering, see Detienne 2006, 59-84.

*et les donne à réfuter l'une par l'autre. La dualité des voies est insupportable à l'ontologie, elle implique la contrariété, et elle autorise une dialectique négative.*¹⁶⁸

In his *On Non-Being*, as with his other surviving texts, Gorgias takes to arguing with poetry. He does so in order to undercut the privilege which it enjoyed as the inspired discourse of a truth guaranteed by the divine. Against the philosophical and poetic positions of the third, conjoined as they are in Parmenides' poem, Gorgias makes a demonstration of the simple force of the *logos*, detached from any external anchor in demonstrating that one may yet argue against the authority that attempts to foreclose discussion. The mode of his discourse is once again εἰκός argumentation, working according to a logical regression. In summary form, it proceeds as follows: 1) non-being has being, insofar as the two are equally referents of discourse, or if non-being is not, then being also is not. Either way one cannot distinguish the two. 2) Even if there is being as distinct from non-being, it cannot be known, since whatever beings are, they are distinct from objects of thought. This, because if objects of thought have being, then every absurdity that could be thought is. 3) Even if beings can be known, they cannot be communicated, since we do not communicate things, but words.¹⁶⁹

It is in the course of the third argument, as it appears in Sextus' rendering, that Gorgias directly thematizes the affected *logos*. In spite of its apparent removal from things, the *logos* is nonetheless not maintained as autonomous sphere of pure *epideixis*, a creative performativity. It is rather the case that the *logos* emerges as anything but self-

¹⁶⁸ Lyotard 1983, 33.

¹⁶⁹ The two paraphrases of *On Non-Being* are largely convergent, though there are several difference that, while minor, are of significance to the argument. I have largely followed Sextus' version here, if only because it is his more substantial summary of the third argument that is of interest for present purposes. For the differences between his version and that of *MXG*, see Cassin 1995, 43-48.

enclosed. As Gorgias presents it, speech is always motivated by the aesthetic, the signal of an affected psyche. As the skeptic summarizes the argument:

Logos, he says, constitutes itself from things befalling us from outside (ἐξόθεν), that is, things sensed. Thus it is from the encounter with the flavor of the affairs (πραγμάτων) that the *logos* emerges in us, emitting according to that quality, and in the case of color, according to color. If it is thus, the *logos* is not the commemorative sign (παραστατικόν) of the outside (τό ἐκτός), but the outside becomes the indicative signal (μηνυτικόν) of the *logos*.¹⁷⁰

The genesis of the *logos*, according to the presentation of the argument here, is to be found in events of *aisthēsis*. Sensations befall from an outside that is indefinite, not yet composed of things, but rather of quantities that impinge upon the psyche through the effects that they work upon the organs. For all of the power of the epideictic *logos* to fashion its referent, what here appears as primary is the passivity of the one who is made to speak; one is affected by those qualities that are peculiar to the affair of sensation and is made to speak accordingly.¹⁷¹ These qualities impose themselves and force an instance of the *logos*, in spite of the difference that is maintained between these qualities and what

¹⁷⁰*Adversus Mathematicus* VII, 85. My translation from the Greek, after the French given in Cassin 1995, with modification.

¹⁷¹ I have chosen to translate *πραγμάτων* here as “affairs,” a translation that is admittedly dissatisfactory. The term stretches a range from “act” to “affair,” or “matter” (in the sense of something attended to, not matter as substance), to a tertiary sense of “concrete reality,” “thing.” “Matter” might be better, in the sense of “present matters,” but I have avoided it for fear of inviting confusion with ὄλη. The implication in this passage refers to the act that is worked upon the sense organs, according to which particular qualities become manifest. That reference is made to “affairs” in the plural indicates that this action is not simple, but perhaps to the multiplicity of effects worked at once in an event of *aisthēsis*. Here, *πᾶγμα* is to be held distinct from “things,” in the sense of “objects,” which Sextus refers to as ὄντα in his summary of the previous argument, pertaining to their inapprehensibility.

While Sextus leaves unanswered the question of how these excitations impinge, the passage on *aisthēsis* in Gorgias’s *Encomium to Helen* suggests that they afflict the *psychē* in a fashion that could be called, without much in the way of deformation, traumatic. What appears in a discrete event of *aisthēsis* leaves an affective trace that continues to motivate one’s behaviors. For a full discussion of this motif, see the following chapter.

is said; if it is an affair of the color red, one indicates it by means of the word “red,” but the word “red” is of course not itself of that color. What emerges in the utterance is the transformation of those excitations worked upon the psyche through sensation, a transformation that does not imply an identity of the aesthetic input and the linguistic output. The distance is maintained, the *logos* is merely an after-effect of the event of *aisthēsis*, an attempt to come to terms with those qualities that impinge upon the sensorial apparatus; as Cassin indicates, the *logos* appears here *après-coup*, a term that needs be read in relation to the sense it is granted in psychoanalysis.¹⁷² And the *logos* itself, as grounded upon the material substrate of the voice or a surface of inscription would not be exempted from this movement; one is affected by the material qualities that impose themselves again and otherwise, perhaps always in a singular fashion, undermining any apparent neutrality of the semantic field.

These sensory qualities befall not from objects, but from what is here termed “the outside,” τὸ ἐκτός, a term which in no way designates a world. As Quignard notes,

*Ce que nous nommons réel est l'extase insaisissable où nous tombons lors du deuxième monde [that of objects and the representations that constitute them]. Le réel est proche de ce que les anciens Grecs nommaient ektos. Les terreurs ne ressemblent pas aux bêtes qui les provoquent. Les affects n'ont pas les traits des ouragans dont la menace les effraie. Les blessures ne ressemblent pas aux armes. Les tristesses ne ressemblent pas à des mots.*¹⁷³

The vagueness apparent in the use of the term τὸ ἐκτός within *On Non-Being* is not a deficiency; “the outside” is defined by its very indefiniteness. There are excitations,

¹⁷² Cassin 1995, 74.

¹⁷³ Quignard 2005, 175.

instances of the psyche being affected; these befall “before” they are apprehended by the *logos* and referred to objects that can be designated as their source. “The outside” is simply that; it is what remains exterior to designation, the non-location, the non-place that remains external to the reach of the *logos*. This exterior is likewise in no way self-identical, it would occur each time, with every event of *aisthesis*, singularly, according to the specific set of qualities that constitute the affair. That being said, insofar as the *logos* is the transformation of the qualities that appear in this excitation, it bears the traces of τό ἐκτός, but following Quignard’s analogy, these traces resemble the outside no more than a wound does the weapon that inflicted it. This disjuncture between the excitation and the utterance is marked in the second part of the passage quoted above, where Sextus writes, “the *logos* is not the commemorative sign (παραστατικόν) of the outside (τό ἐκτός), but the outside becomes the indicative signal (μηνυτικόν) of the *logos*.” The terminology here, which draws from the theories of the sign developed by the stoics, is certainly Sextus’. To impute it to Gorgias himself could only be an anachronism, but nonetheless what is here depicted is in keeping with the presentation of *aisthēsis* found in the sophist’s extant writings. The distinction between the two terms here used to denote the types of sign is not at all indifferent. The first, as Cassin outlines, παραστατικός, in Sextus’ text, designates those signs that refer to things that are “occasionally non-evident;”

il ne fait que relier deux perceptions dont on a déjà souvent observé la connexion, et dont l’une, qu’on se remémore alors, est temporairement absente, selon d’ailleurs n’importe quelle modalité de temps (la cicatrice, signe d’un passé,

*rappelle la blessure; la fumée, signe d'un présent, évoque le feu; le coup au cœur, signe d'un futur, annonce la mort.*¹⁷⁴

That is to say that the commemorative sign is rooted in the association of two observable phenomena, where one is taken to imply the other. For Gorgias, this is not the relation of the *logos* to the outside, insofar as the qualities that are imposed through sensation are not, in themselves, observable objects. Qua objects, they appear only *après-coup*, after the *logos* has transformed the affect and has allowed for identification.

With the *μηνυτικός*, the indicative signal, it is otherwise. Cassin defines it thusly:
*Il contient en lui toute la monstration, puisque ce qui est signifié est par nature non-observable en soi, si bien que "c'est directement à partir de sa nature et de sa constitution propres, presque en émettant un son de voix, qu'il est dit signifier ce dont il est indicatif." Ainsi les mouvements du corps sont-ils des signes indicatifs de l'existence de l'âme par nature, quant à elle, ne tombe pas sous nos sens.*¹⁷⁵

The indicative signal is that which, by contrast to the commemorative sign, indicates something that falls outside the bounds of possible observation. Its object, as with the existence of the soul that is signed by the body's movements, is not given but is rather inferred. Sextus has, however, replaced the standard stoic term for such a sign, *ἐνδεικτικὸν* (an "indicator"), with *μηνυτικός* ("something significant"), a term that likely derives from the sphere of ancient prophecy.¹⁷⁶ This derivation shifts the signal away from the regime of a direct communication of a signifying content to one of a gesture; to

¹⁷⁴ Cassin 1995, 71.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. The nested quote is from *Adversus Mathematicus* VIII.3.

¹⁷⁶ The best etymological suggestion is that the word derives from *μηνύειν*, "to reveal what is secret." Ibid., 562-563.

recall a fragment of Heraclitus, “The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither speaks nor conceals, but signs.”¹⁷⁷ The modification in terminology betrays a transformation in the relation to this sign; it is no longer a matter of a logical inference of the inapparent, but of a passage into a significance that remains uncertain and obscure. The oracular decree, as will be well familiar to readers of ancient tragedy, is not a direct transmission of what it means to say; it neither makes this manifest, nor does it conceal it, but shows it obscurely, leaving room for interpretation and for inference. The decree gestures towards something which is not manifest, indicating that there is that something, without necessarily defining what it is; the enigmatic character of what is signaled is by no means done away with. It is here, on the point of the *μηνυτικός*, that Gorgias’ text becomes itself most counterintuitive for the modern reader. It is not the *logos* that indicates the outside. It is *τό ἐκτός* that is the indicative signal of the *logos*.

This is to say that, for Gorgias, the *logos* itself is not amenable to observation; it is no more apparent than the soul is. One can only infer it from the movements of *τό ἐκτός*; thus rendered, the *logos* itself is no more than an affectation. The distance between this portrayal and the ideal of the unaffected, self-possessed *logos* could not be greater. One might believe that one has encountered an instance of *logos*, but this perception is never immediate, it is derived from the excitations that impose themselves through the aesthetic. And this would be the case not only in encounters with objects, but likewise in those with instances of *logos*; what is “communicated” is not the sense of the word, but rather the excitations that are brought about in speech, which in turn produce excitations and their effects in the interlocutor. It is here that *πειθώ* is set to work, as the transformation of affect between interlocutors that precedes any transmission of sense. To

¹⁷⁷ Heraclitus DK B93.

emphasize the point, an example: A. senses a grey shape moving amongst others consisting of tones of brown and green. Immediately struck with fear, he calls out to his companion B., “there is a wolf nearby!” The sense of this utterance is not immediate to B. What he senses is the material of the voice, its uneasy rhythm, its fearful tone, and so on, and it is this material that produces an excitation in B. This latter excitation may be fright, it may be laughter at A.’s overactive imagination and his cowardice, or any other state that one could imagine here. The statement will be apprehended as if it had meaning, but only in the wake of this progression of excitations, each incommensurate with the others. That there is communication between the two is not given, but is inferred from the movements of A.’s voice as perceived by B. If they are speaking the same language, the familiarity of the sounds would allow B. to transform this excitation into an expression that makes sense – though always along with the aesthetic complement that threatens a neutral communication. If they are not, B. might recognize A.’s utterance as *logos*, but one unfamiliar, of which he cannot make sense. And this is not to rule out the possibility that B. might simply mishear, that the aesthetic movements of the voice would be interpreted in a way that would serve as an impediment to communication. In any of these cases, the *logos* is not given, it does not appear to the senses, but is derived from the excitation that is borne by the voice. There is no unaffected *logos* precisely insofar as the *logos* is only ever the product of that which is affected. Thus there is no communication in the sense of a transmission of messages whose meaning would be assured, merely a progression of excitations that remain incommensurable one to the other even as they are unknown in themselves. This movement of excitations can be grasped only obliquely, belonging each time to that “outside” that escapes the *logos*.

Obviously, this presentation cannot be taken at face value; the utterance that declares that communication is impossible is no less paradoxical than those discussed previously. Gorgias' argument displaces itself, undercutting itself as means for communication, in order to gesture towards the affective dimension that undergirds the word. But no more has he named it than he has lost it, if words are not commensurate with the excitations that demand them. Gorgias betrays himself here, in order to signal the betrayal that is always inherent in the *logos*. An utterance, a sentence, betrays the excitation that has made one speak even while the position of the *logos* betrays its aesthetic substrate in setting it aside and denying it, asserting that it is merely the vehicle for communication. The *logos* as communicative means, as Gorgias indicates, is merely inferred. This inference, drawn from an uncertain, if not enigmatic sign, does not indicate something that can be experienced. It is here that we may return to the thematic of deception; one is deceived in believing that one has said to another what it is that one has sensed, and one is likewise deceived in thinking that the other has heard what one intended to say. Such is not to deny communication outright; there is, after all, nothing more banal, and for practical purposes one can readily say that of course there is communication. From a pragmatic standpoint it occurs regularly, *but merely as semblance*. Through the aesthetic dimension of the *logos*, one is brought to the conviction that there has been communication, in spite of the impossibility that Gorgias has indicated. In keeping with *On Non-Being's* implosion of ontology and of metalanguage, one might say that there is and is not being, there is and is not *logos*, there is and is not *aisthēsis*. Gorgias's text arrests itself in the tension between these oppositions and maintains itself there. For any of these referents, either position may be argued and there

is no final determination according to which the contradiction may be resolved. Through persuasion, one may be brought to conviction either way, and yet this is not what Gorgias' text does. In structuring the paradox around a readily apparent absurdity, the sophist demonstrates the retreat of conviction. The opposition between being and non-being cannot be foreclosed in the manner of Parmenides, nor can it be simply upheld through the imposition of the axiom of non-contradiction; these too are simply means of closing off the question that is indicated by τό ἐκτός.

Thus construed, the *logos* is only ever affected, it only ever appears in the mode of a *Witz*. Gorgias' discourse puts on display the paradox that lies at the heart of the *logos*; the sense that it bears is mere appearance. This sense does not arise in relation to a world of objects about which one could form propositions. It rather emerges in response to the exigency of an excitation that inflects the *logos*, but this affect, sensed but senseless, is not expressed in what is said. Absent from the *logos* and exterior to it, it nonetheless becomes manifest in the *logos* through the aesthetic, material dimensions from which the word cannot be divorced. And through the aesthetic factors, further excitations are produced upon the hearers, which in turn will call for additional instances of the *logos*. This exterior dimension cannot be domesticated by the sense of the word, even as it maintains itself in a relationship to this sense that signs itself only as a tension. Gorgias does not attempt to find a way out of this collision of forces. He makes a display of the tension that is made to manifest in the apparent but unworkable oppositions that he evokes – between being and non-being – in order to let play the forces that appear here, which are precisely not bound to this binary structure. It is here that the *diabolisme* turns to *diablerie*. It is precisely because the *logos* cannot close itself off, cannot free itself

from this disturbance that unexpected effects can be produced through the word. The instability of a *logos* that lacks an external foundation is not for the sophist, a flaw to be redressed – it is here that the very possibility of the play of discourse is to be found. This is not to say that foundational claims cannot be made; Gorgias does not shy from engaging with Parmenides and, with the dictum on deception, he perhaps offers a kind of foundational claim of his own. What is not admitted is that these axioms be held apart from argument, granted the position of a final word, and it is thus that he takes to arguing with poetry; the assertion of authority is but another instance of the *logos*, and as such it may yet be called into question.

If, according to his assertion of the preeminence non-being, Gorgias has sometimes been claimed as a nihilist, this description may be apt, provided that one does not attribute to him a doctrine that asserts an absolute vacuum of meaning. His position is rather along the lines suggested by Nietzsche in his definition of the term: “What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer.”¹⁷⁸ This is not to assert that there are no values, but rather that founded as they are on the instability of excitations that can only be misrepresented, that any assertion of value contains within it the seeds of its own dissolution. They are always open to contestation. There is no final value, no final reason that can be given as a justification that cannot yet be challenged, but the lack of absolute value does not mean that there is absolute lack of value. It implies that values are at once both positional (the authority that Parmenides derives from the sphere of inspired poetry is lacking when the terrain is shifted to that of ancient eristic argumentation) and transitory, insofar as they may be overturned and give rise to other assertions, other values. That the *logos* and its

¹⁷⁸ Nietzsche 1906 (1967), §2. Emphasis original.

products are a matter of mere appearance is, for Gorgias, not reason enough to reject them; indeed, even if to adhere to them is a matter of letting one's self be deceived, one may nonetheless derive pleasure from them. One appreciates them for what they are worth – that is, as deceptions that may be pleasing, comforting, or whatever else – but there is likewise enjoyment to be found in their overturning, in the indication that the *logos* will always remain agitated by affect. This implies that there is yet room to maneuver, new assertions to make within the sphere of a general eristics. And if the universality of this deception too may be contested, what of it? It too is founded upon a *logos* that is but the product of an affect that will always have unfounded it.

Gorgias II: Helen, the Pleasant Malady

τέρας γὰρ ὁ βίος καὶ τὰ πράγματ' ἐστὶ μου,
 τὰ μὲν δι' Ἥραν, τὰ δὲ τὸ κάλλος αἴτιον.
 εἶθ' ἐξαλειφθεῖς ὡς ἄγαλμ' αὖθις πάλιν
 αἴσχιον εἶδος ἔλαβον ἀντὶ τοῦ καλοῦ,
 καὶ τὰς τύχας μὲν τὰς κακὰς ἅς νῦν ἔχω
 Ἕλληνες ἐπελάθοντο, τὰς δὲ μὴ κακὰς
 ἔσφζον ὥσπερ τὰς κακὰς σφζουσί μου.

(For my life and my deeds are a sign,

In part caused by Hera, in part by beauty.

Would that I be wiped out, as an *agalma* in turn,

The image of shame taken up instead of beauty!

And the events and the evil which I bear,

Let the Greeks forget, not preserving the evil,

Even as they now maintain me an evil.)

- Euripides, *Helen*

I. The Truth of Seduction

In his *Encomium to Helen*, one of only two of his texts to have been preserved more or less intact, Gorgias turns to Helen of Troy, a figure wrapped in a tension from which it cannot be extracted. As its title indicates, the text positions itself as a work of

praise that takes Helen as its object; yet from the first this is a task that cannot be carried out in a straightforward manner.¹⁷⁹ As Gorgias opens:

Fitting order [Κόσμος] is to a city the goodness of men [εὐανδρία], to a body beauty, to the psyche wisdom, to deeds virtue, and to the logos truth [ἀλήθεια]. The opposite of these is disorder [ἀκοσμία]. It is necessary to give to men and women, word and work, city and deed, the honor to which they are due according to the worth of each and the blame due to the unworthy. For it is equal fault and ignorance to disparage the praiseworthy and to praise the blameworthy. It is incumbent for man himself to speak rightly and to confute those who blame Helen, a woman of whom there is a belief, univocal and unanimous, amongst the hearers of the poets; the speaking of her name has become a memory of misfortune. I want, binding calculation to what is said [λογισμὸν τῷ λόγῳ δοῦς] to bring a halt to evil accusations, to demonstrate the deceitful slanders and to monstrate the truth [μεμφομένους ψευδομένους ἐπιδείξας καὶ δείξας τὰληθές], to bring a halt to the ignorance.¹⁸⁰

Helen cannot simply be praised, given the circumstances of the speech outlined by the sophist. Prevailing opinion (δόξα), in which his hearers are likely to partake, has so execrated the name of the woman that to offer her acclaim can only appear as the actions of a madman. Thus staged, Gorgias presents his case as a corrective to the perversion of the δόξα; it is an attempt to redress an error that has become so pervasive that it might as well be universal, even though it is contrary to the fitting order of things. The sophist

¹⁷⁹ It is possible that the title is not Gorgias' own, and may have been added by a later editor. It is, however, entirely in line with the surviving text; the last line of the speech describes the work as an encomium to Helen.

¹⁸⁰ Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen* 1-2.

names this agreement of opinion as “univocal and unanimous” [ὁμόφωνος καὶ ὁμόψυχος – the translation as “unanimous” must be read with emphasis on the *anima*], a concord not merely of manifest assertion, but of sentiment no less; far from being appreciated for her beauty, Helen has become an object of revulsion. While Gorgias might be accused of exaggeration, given the extant evidence from the period, the disgusted, forceful repudiation of Helen is nonetheless recognizable from contemporary sources. The sophist here marks his own place as one of a counterposition; he presents himself as an advocate for Helen. This stance cannot be taken up in a straightforward manner; she cannot simply be praised, because there is, according to the speech’s narrative, no audience that would be receptive to his arguments. The δόξα must first be demolished, both in terms of established common knowledge and as the concomitant hostile sentiments that predispose the audience to a rejection of Helen. That is to say, that for Helen to be praised the established field must be cleared so that there could be a possible receptive audience for the discourse. The *Encomium* must itself create the very conditions according to which its aim could be accomplished.

Ironically, it is this very task that, according to the judgment of his contemporaries, drives the *Encomium* outside the proper bounds of the genre. Gorgias reneges on his initial promise of offering praise; despite its title, the text is not an encomium at all. The criticisms voiced by Isocrates, an orator of the generation following Gorgias and the author of another encomium of the woman, found in his own *Helen*, are apt:

Wherefore I praise especially the one who wrote wishing to speak well concerning Helen, because he recalled a woman such as this, who excelled over

others in birth, in beauty and in renown (τῆ δόξῃ). Yet even he neglected a small thing; for he claims to have written an encomium concerning her, but it happened that he spoke an apology for her actions. For this speech is not of the same forms nor of the same actions, but is entirely otherwise. For it is fitting to offer apology concerning one who comports the cause of injustice, while [it is fitting] to offer praise to those excelling in some good quality.¹⁸¹

The designation of the speech as an encomium breaks with the conventions of the form that were set down within ancient oratory. The initial deviation into apology deforms the work.¹⁸² The *Encomium* announces itself as such only to undertake the work of apology; what is signaled in this deviation is not accidental. It belongs to the transience of Helen herself, and to seduction. The speech does not deliver what it initially promises, but instead offers forth something else, as Gorgias is compelled to first answer the shadow of blame that has inextricably attached itself to Helen's name. As Gorgias outlines it, to render a proper encomium as Isocrates defines it, as a straightforward act of praise is perhaps impossible in the case of Helen, given the overwhelming force of opinion that has been deployed against her. If his hearers are indeed unanimous and univocal in condemning her, to merely praise her would be an absurdity not to be admitted within the realm of respectable discourse. The speech misleads its hearers, which is to say that it seduces, in the sense of the Latin *seducere*. It promises the impossible and delivers

¹⁸¹ Isocrates, *Helen* 14-15. The redoubling of the "it is fitting" does not appear in Isocrates' Greek, but the addition is necessary to clarify the passage in translation. Isocrates' complaint may be a bit anachronistic, insofar as it is uncertain that genres of rhetorical discourse had been strongly delimited before the fourth century, but it is nonetheless the case that even with a more general measure, Gorgias does not deliver what he promises, and more than once over. See Shaffer 1998, 244-247.

¹⁸² One might, however, blame Isocrates for much the same. His own *Helen* opens with a meditation on genre, and then shifts to a defense of Theseus before lauding Helen; even as he takes issue with Gorgias, he cannot avoid confronting the issue of the fault, displaced as it may be. The defense of Theseus is addressed to a limited extent below.

something ulterior, both with reference to its own announced project and with reference to δόξα. Gorgias makes use of a calculated incoherence – his own aberrant oration is introduced in order to destabilize received opinion and thereby to demonstrate the incoherence that has always been imminent to it, however it may have been disguised.

This overturning of the δόξα is a matter of justice that goes beyond Helen herself; the current state of affairs is one that is unbecoming [ἀκοσμία] in general; that the woman has not received her proper due is but a signal of a greater disorder that implicates the Greeks as a whole. “It is equal fault and ignorance to disparage the praiseworthy and to praise the blameworthy:” in indicting Helen, they indict themselves, at least as far as the fitting order extolled by Gorgias is concerned.¹⁸³ The poets are named as those chiefly responsible for the corruption of the δόξα, even if one could perhaps hold no poet solely culpable; the works of these inspired singers have so charmed public opinion as to assure the repetition of this injustice. As with his *On Nature, or On Non-Being*, Gorgias takes to disputing with poetry, though here it is a matter of the poetic tradition as a whole (encompassing not only epic, but likely lyric and tragedy no less). The stakes of this

¹⁸³ One notes a similar move whereby the question of justice is displaced to the position of the judges' own actions in the other of Gorgias' texts to have been preserved in a more or less complete form, *The Defense of Palamedes*. Like the *Encomium*, it is aimed at the possible rehabilitation of a mythic figure; in Palamedes' case, he was put to death for treason, despite his innocence, on account of the machinations of Odysseus. Palamedes' whose voice Gorgias takes up directly, asserts that the charge of death that is levied against him is nothing, for nature has already ordained a judgment of death against all men – what is at stake in the trial is the question of honor or dishonor as it pertains to those who judge him, insofar as a correct judgment will bring them honor, but an incorrect one will bring shame upon their heads. This is, he asserts, particularly an issue when the matter is a case of life or death, and thus irreversible. Palamedes opens the possibility of a reversal of the judgment to come, one that could potentially come about regardless of whether he is put to death; in sparing his life, the judges will likewise be able to spare their own reputations. Two questions of justice are folded on top of one other, or the question of the past injustice allegedly committed gives way to the question of the justice of the question presently at stake, and which can only remain a question in face of the lack of evidence that either party is able to mobilize. Gorgias' performance of *Palamedes* introduces a similar oscillation – the best of the Greeks were deceived and acted unjustly, precisely because they were not open to the possibility that they may have been deceived, and thus sentenced the hero to die. Curiously, one notes the same rhetorical strategy used by the Socrates of Plato's *Apology*, a text which, in its formal characteristics, neatly resembles that of the *Palamedes*. See Tindale 2010, 121-125.

argument are not in any way minor. It is through their poets – principally, of course, the works of Homer, but no less those others who served as cultural commonplaces – that the Greeks have come to know themselves, their histories, their genealogies and their traditions. Helen is centrally positioned relative to this tradition; it is, after all, for her sake that the conflict narrated in the *Iliad* came about. She is intimately allied to their self-understanding. If not for Helen, if not for the sake of Helen, there would be no Greeks. According to Isocrates, the debt owed to Helen is echoed in their own proper name. As he phrases it:

Apart from all the arts and knowledges [τεχνῶν καὶ φιλοσοφιῶν] and other boons that one attributes to her and to the Trojan War, it is fitting that we acknowledge that Helen is the cause [Ἑλένην αἰτίαν εἶναι νομίζοιμεν] that we are not slaves to the barbarians. For we find that for her the Hellenes worked in one mind [ὁμονοήσαντας] and with common campaign against the barbarians, and it was then that Europe first stood a trophy over Asia.¹⁸⁴

That the Hellenes exist as a people, that they are possessed of arts and forms of knowledge gained in the course of the disastrous war with Troy, they owe to Helen and to the conflict at Troy that she, wittingly or unwittingly, incited. Yet these gifts are nonetheless equivocal, as is apparent in the *Odyssey* and the tragedies; these benefits came only through the great sufferings endured by the assembled heroes. It is not entirely out of order then, that Helen's name could be disparaged by Gorgias' contemporaries, safely installed as they are in the aftermath of the war. However, as Isocrates' oration indicates, it is only because of the victory won for Helen that the Hellenes are able to

¹⁸⁴ Isocrates, *Helen* 67. I have rendered φιλοσοφία as “knowledge” rather than “philosophy,” in keeping with Isocrates' tendency to use the term in what we might now judge to be an improper fashion. On the issue of the name, cf. Cassin 2000, 27.

occupy a position where they might impugn her character. If not for her, the Greeks would be but slaves to foreign peoples, lacking their own traditions and the autonomy to debate them. Gorgias' discourse presents its moment as one in which the autonomy signed in the ability to debate is on the wane; received opinion has all but effected an abdication of the further questioning that this autonomy allows. In staging his *Encomium* as an attack upon the prevailing δόξα through attacking the grounds upon which it rests, Gorgias' discourse sets out to invite strife. If his audience is as ill-disposed to hear him as he indicates, there will doubtless be those who reject his arguments, and even if not, those who have not heard Gorgias will nonetheless not be swayed. The sophist seeks to break the unanimity of the discourse surrounding Helen and thereby to reopen a question that he names as all but closed.

Thus construed, Gorgias' self-positioning might well be in accord with the portrait of the sophist familiar from Plato and Aristotle at least to a certain extent. Those great figures of the anti-sophistic reaction of the fourth century BCE class their predecessors as those who speak for the pleasure of speaking alone, who argue trivialities for the sake of the argument itself. Gorgias presents his *Encomium* as a work whose reparative function is exigent, but from the standpoint of his audience it might readily appear superfluous, if not actively harmful. If Helen were ever a real woman – and this perhaps open to doubt, even for the ancients – she is long departed, and the injustices visited upon her might well bear none of the urgency that he attributes to the cause. Gorgias flagrantly defies the common sense of the δόξα and thereby poses a challenge to ὁμονοία (typically rendered “concord,” but more literally translated as “like-mindedness”), the political virtue held central in fifth century Greece. This gesture is not

born of an innate sophistic disposition towards the contrarian. Gorgias, like Antiphon and other sophists, was the author of a now-lost speech *On Concord*, a particularly important theme in the period when resistance against the Persian threat demanded unity amongst the disparate Greek city-states. In the *Encomium*, dissent of a sort is invited as a demonstration of the persuasive power of the sophist's *logos*, where even what is most unappealing can be made otherwise, and as a means to further the circulation of possible discourses. Gorgias refuses to let the poets have the final word, in revealing what may still be argued, and indeed, that even an initially abhorrent position may too seduce, may come to command the consent of its hearers.¹⁸⁵

It is at the end of the second paragraph that Gorgias first articulates the aim of his discourse (though as we shall see, it is one that will itself be made unstable through the introduction of others); his goal is to μεμφομένους ψευδομένους ἐπιδείξας καὶ δείξας τᾶληθές, “to demonstrate the deceitful slanders and to monstrate the truth.” One must approach this passage with care; within the context of the Greek language of the fifth century, there is no binary opposition between truth and deceit. The ψεύδης of Helen's detractors is not necessarily to be thought in as a contrary to Gorgias' own ἀλήθεια. As Detienne remarks:

1) *L'opposition fondamentale n'est pas de pseudès et alètheia plutôt de pseudès et apseudès. Pseudès ne signifie pas le “mensonger;”* 2) *Notre notion de mensonge*

¹⁸⁵ Gorgias' speech, an encomium taking as its subject something generally unappealing, belongs to a genre that seems to have been somewhat common in sophistic practice. One needs only examine the titles of his student Alcidas' encomia to find more of the same: *The Encomium of Poverty*, *The Encomium of Death*, *The Encomium of Nais* (a notorious prostitute), *The Encomium of Proteus the Dog*. The genre was revived in the second sophistic, with Fronto's *Encomium of Negligence* and his *Encomium of Smoke and Dust* as examples. Gorgias' *Encomium to Helen* is, however, not so simple as those authored by subsequent sophists, insofar as unlike the sordid or indifferent subjects taken up by later authors, Helen is an essentially unstable figure – she cannot simply be reversed. Whatever the value judgment of Gorgias' contemporaries might have been (and one doubts that it was a simple as he portrays), Helen remains seductive, however much one might disparage her.

est inadéquate pour caractériser la diversité du vocabulaire grec. On retiendrait plutôt la notion de tromperie qui couvre aussi bien le dolos, la mètis, l'apatè que le pseudos; 3) Dans les emplois archaïques de pseudès, on peut reconnaître deux significations solidaires: pseudès signifie d'abord la parole qui cherche à tromper, mais, puisque l'une des caractéristiques de ce type de parole (et plus généralement de toute apatè) est de présenter les "apparences" de la réalité, sans être le réel, pseudès peut aussi signifier la parole "sans accomplissement," dépourvue d'efficace, sans réalisation.¹⁸⁶

The aim of Gorgias' *epideixis* binds together the two senses of the term – in demonstrating the words of the detractors of Helen to be nothing more than deceptions, he aims to render them ineffective according to the second sense, to reduce them to silence, as is the goal of the eristic mode. Though the statements of the poets might be deceptive, this does not mean that they are lacking in ἀλήθεια. It is in no way a matter of “truth” thought as what is factually the case, but rather the stakes pertain to the force of discourse, its ability to demand the consent of its hearers. The statements of the poets concerning Helen may indeed be “true” insofar as they elicit conviction and are thus held to be factually true within the δόξα, but this does not mean that they are not deceptive. Thus far, nothing of Gorgias’ presentation is foreign to the archaic understanding of ἀλήθεια. Detienne remarks that:

D'une part, le “Maître de Vérité” est aussi un maître de tromperie: posséder la vérité, c'est aussi être capable de tromper. D'autre part, les puissances

¹⁸⁶ Detienne 2006, 86-87.

*antithétiques Alètheia et Lèthè ne sont pas contradictoires: dans la pensée mythique, les contraires sont complémentaires.*¹⁸⁷

Nothing separates the force of the discourse mobilized by the “master of truth,” from deception; indeed, to establish what is said as inevitable may well depend on inflicting a forgetting or a concealment (λήθη) of contrary positions, of potential sites of confusion. Gorgias’ task, to demonstrate the deceits of the poets, thus relies on exposing this contrary work of λήθη within ἀλήθεια and bringing it to light. This being accomplished, the *logoi* of his predecessors will cease to command belief, and will lose the character of ἀλήθεια, one which is only ever positionally ensured. The slanders deployed against Helen are, like any other utterance, only “true” insofar as they have provisionally not yet been overturned; Gorgias’ discourse establishes its own ἀλήθεια through a calculated refutation of those which preceded him. This in no way implies that his own discourse will not contain its own deceptions.

¹⁸⁷ Detienne 2006, 147-148. This capacity of ἀλήθεια duplicity appears at the opening of Hesiod's *Theogony*, voiced by the figures of the Muses. As they are made to say: “Field-dwelling herdsmen, you disgrace, mere bellies, we know how to speak many ruses resembling the truth, but we also know, when we desire it, how to sing ἀλήθεια,” [ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, ἴδμεν δ’ ἐὺτ’ ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι] (26-28). The distinction between speaking [λέγειν] and singing [γηρύσασθαι] occupies a key position here, insofar as *logos* is inserted in one of the infernal genealogies within the *Theogony*; by contrast to inspired poetry, *logos* is held to be something akin to “idle chatter,” which does not maintain a connection to ἀλήθεια.

The use of this poetic trope in the classical period is, however, not unique to the sophists – one sees it recur in what is perhaps the strangest of Plato’s dialogues, the *Hippias Minor*. Contrary to what one would expect of the Platonic Socrates, he there argues against the sophist Hippias of Elis that Odysseus is to be judged the better man than Achilles, precisely insofar as the former’s ability to knowingly deceive rests upon a capacity to manipulate ἀλήθεια. Achilles’ guideless honesty, on the other hand, betrays an inability to deceive; he is not to be praised as virtuous, but blamed for his weakness. Socrates’ argument, which avails itself of many of the same turns that the sophists portrayed elsewhere in Plato’s dialogues extends itself further, ending on the point that the man who voluntarily acts unjustly is better than he who unwittingly conducts himself with justice. The numerous questions posed by this curious text deserve fuller interrogation than what can be provided here, but it is notable that the position of the antagonists mirrors that of the mythological figures under discussion, with Socrates playing the part of Odysseus; he makes the weaker argument the stronger, confounding the champion of the Olympic competitions in oratory.

There is nonetheless a significant divergence here, one that rests upon the very invocation of ἀλήθεια in the opening line of the speech. “Fitting order is to a city the goodness of men, to a body beauty, to the psyche wisdom, to deeds virtue, and to the logos truth [ἀλήθεια];” what is proper to the *logos* in general is this force that awakens consent. This propriety is framed, in the series that Gorgias proposes, in terms of what is fitting, or becoming – κόσμος. There is a certain sense of pleasure that is bound to this notion of the well-ordered; it approximates the beauty that is said to be the virtue of a woman, but no less what is proper to the *polis*, the character of the men who govern it. It belongs to the poets to have disrupted this order, no matter how pleasing their songs might be; Gorgias attempts a turn in discourse that will bring about another sort of aesthetic pleasure, in opposition to that of poetry. In his confrontation with the poetic tradition, Gorgias claims for his own discourse that which, in archaic Greek thought, was held to be the exclusive property of three figures: the sovereign, the poet, and the oracle. In each case, their mastery of ἀλήθεια refers to the force of their discourse, its ability to bear a certain authority that is linked to the divine. The poet's pronunciations come from the muses and their mother, Memory, which is not to be understood as an individual memory, but the ability to recover what might be lost from the grasp of forgetting (λήθη) and to recall the glories of those who have passed. It is similar with the oracle, save the utterance pertains to the future. However obscure his or her words might be, they bear with them a force and an effectiveness that breaks with the ordinary abilities of human speech. The oracular proclamation gestures towards a knowledge that escapes the bounds of mortal knowledge, yet which might still be voiced from a human throat. The prophet is not the master of his own words, indeed, he may not understand them himself.

Nevertheless, the force of his utterance, guaranteed by the god who stands behind it, serves to authenticate its truth, even if it fails as a communication; it may remain obscure, be misinterpreted, or otherwise ignored. And with the sovereign, it is a matter of his ability to pronounce; his word bears with it an authority that is at once his own and underwritten by the gods.¹⁸⁸ In each case there is a displacement of the position of the addressor, one does not merely speak from one's own position, but gestures towards another, which escapes articulation, but nonetheless bears the force of authority and demands the conviction (πίστις) of its hearers.

While it is the case that the speech of these three masters of truth belongs to the category of epideictic discourse, insofar as their speech does not depend upon a real referent but rather performs it, their discourse nonetheless differs from that of the sophist insofar as it crafts for itself the support of an external authority. This notion of truth remains distinct from that of the philosopher in that its authority is not derived from reality, but from the gods, who speak through the person of the master. Their speech names itself as deriving from the divine sphere, and thus imbues itself with the force that it enacts, a gesture familiar in the invocation to the Muses at the beginning of the Homeric epics. Effectively, the speech that names itself as emerging from the divine authorizes itself by claiming itself as inspired. As a performative utterance, poetic discourse creates for itself the foundation from which it pretends to emerge. This does not indicate that their utterances will be transparent; precisely the opposite, in keeping with the double play between ἀλήθεια and λήθη. What is revealed might yet call for interpretation, the force that is derived from the divine yet masks itself behind the human

¹⁸⁸ For these three instances see, respectively, Detienne 2006, 59-64, 89-91, 100-102.

voice that mobilizes it, and one might always yet misinterpret what is given in the poem or the oracle (a problem which is familiar enough with Oedipus).

This model of discourse appears at the moment of its dissolution with the sophist; in claiming for the *logos* entire the privilege of ἀλήθεια, Gorgias partakes in what Detienne calls a “secularization” (*laicisation*) of the *logos*, one that precisely refuses the presence of this divine element of speech. There is, as the sophist demonstrates, no external support upon which the authority of an utterance might be assured, but it is itself merely an effect of the *logos*. The logic of the poet is exposed; the speech which claims to be divinely inspired names itself as such, the authority that it comports is merely an affair of style. The force that it bears is no more than an effect of πειθώ, the ability of the aesthetic *logos* to evoke the sentiment of conviction, not the gods.

The problem of the *logos* itself is intimately linked to that of Helen; the work that brings about conviction by means of the word is always a matter of seduction, of forcing assent. Behind the guise of a simple communication, one who speaks cannot avoid in the passionate play of the aesthetic that manifests alongside his or her discourse. This seduction, incarnated in the figure of Helen, is one that pertains to both sides of the *logos*, the position of its alleged addressor and its addressees alike. The rational side of the argumentation, be it as it may, what is here at issue is the *logos* as a means of working sentiment. The orator styles a presentation such that it elicits feelings of conviction in the hearers and, if the performance is to be assured, in giving the appearance of such conviction in himself. It is not unconstrained, but works with material already given, those narratives, turns of phrase, rhythms and other modes, to which the speaker and hearer alike have some sentimental relation, and arranges them so as to produce a desired

effect. It is not a matter of dispensing with the dimension of that ἀλήθεια, but rather in monstrating this force. For Gorgias, *Alētheia is seduction*. No less than that of those earlier “masters of truth,” the sophist sets to play the authority of a *logos*, which is staged as sovereign. As Gorgias writes, “*Logos* is a great dynast, able to bring about the most divine effects by the smallest and most invisible of bodies” [λόγος δυνάστης μέγας ἐστίν, ὃς σμικροτάτῳ σώματι καὶ ἀφανεστάτῳ θεϊότατα ἔργα ἀποτελεῖ].¹⁸⁹ This sovereignty, as we have seen though, is already called into question by the very outset of the *Encomium*. Gorgias indicates the sovereignty of the *logos* alongside its very weakness. The force that it musters lies in its ability to overturn itself, to resist a final positing, that there might yet be new means, new opinions to be formed, new contrafactuals to set out despite the appearance of a closure. The force of the *logos*, the ἀλήθεια that is here at stake, does not belong to the linguistic content of what Gorgias states, but rather the work of seduction that is mobilized in and through the *logos*; he opposes the seduction of the poets with another. The correspondence of the proposition that Helen is blameworthy with a given reality is dispensed with entirely. Gorgias’ discourse does nothing to position itself apart from this seductive power of the *logos*; it does not pretend to itself be anything other than another turn of the same play of granting and destroying authority. The theme of the *Encomium* is this contrary work of seduction, as befits a text devoted to Helen. It at once enacts it and gestures towards it, putting its seductive operations open to display.

This conflict of seductions between the poet and the sophist is perhaps not surprising, given the familiar critiques of both of these figures levied by Plato. The two alike are those who traffic in appealing images, designed to seduce their hearers, to

¹⁸⁹ Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen* 8.

awaken pleasure and thereby to inspire their conviction, regardless of what the actual case might be. As the figure of the utmost beauty, one who cannot but seduce, Helen comes to stand for the force of the *logos* which is proper to the literary work. Eschewing the philosophical condemnation – one which is entirely too pat, if indeed Helen is to be placed at the root of the Greek tradition, and all of its knowledges, including philosophy – *The Encomium* is nothing if not a discourse and a demonstration of literary seduction. It puts to the test those alluring deceptions worked by the poets, but its prose expression is itself no less seductive in character, even though its mode differs and is perhaps less immediately obvious. As pertains to Helen, it is of course always a matter of seduction, whether as active agent or passive victim. And through her the poets have seduced their hearers; she is at once the motive force for their seductions, insofar as the epic tradition finds in her its point of departure, and the object of the deception that they have wrought. As a corrective, Gorgias' *Encomium* is but a gesture of counterseduction, one which attempts to clear the name of seduction itself. But it too will not escape the double bind imposed upon it. The object cannot be separated from its means, cannot become an object of any detached theory. Indeed, through the epideictic, literary use of the *logos*, the object is constituted by the very operation of seduction. Through Helen, the *logos* is deprived of any possible self-possession, and the sophist is not the master of his language. The *Encomium* is nothing more than another turn in the movement of discourse brought on by this figure.

This work of seduction cannot be shown, it can only be gestured to, as Gorgias indicates with the divergence found between demonstrating (ἐπιδείξας) what is deceptive in the poets and monstrating true things (δείξας τᾶληθές). The first of these goals is to be

accomplished at the level of Gorgias' argumentation; it is a matter of procuring persuasive statements in her defense. The latter is more elusive. As an effect of discourse that is not necessarily bound to the content of the statement, ἀλήθεια can only be indicated. Gorgias gestures towards it, only ever obliquely, in those moments where the *Encomium* plays with its hearers, failing to deliver what is promised, perverting its own logic, refusing to remain consistent even with itself, all in the name of awakening a newfound respect for Helen. Not, of course, that it would be a matter of respect alone; that would merely be the sublimated form that masks the desire that the sophist aims to rekindle in coming to her defense.

Whether or not Gorgias' audience was actually as settled on the question of Helen as he proposes, the surviving contemporary texts that treat Helen belie the claim. Certainly there are those whose condemnations of Helen are unequivocal, if not vehement: the *Odyssey*, the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, the *Orestes* and the *Trojan Women* of Euripides, and a notorious work of Stesichorus known only second-hand are the most notable examples. Yet there are others that attempt to absolve the woman of these accusations of wrongdoing, principally the *Palinode* of Stesichorus, the *Helen* of Euripides, the sixteenth fragment of Sappho, and, ostensibly, the works of Gorgias and Isocrates. Between the wretched condemnations in Aeschylus' work and the denial of any wrongdoing whatsoever in the *Palinode*, there is no consensus. Far from being settled on the question, the poetic tradition cannot avoid confronting, again and again, the question of Helen's potential culpability for the vast sufferings that accrued not only on the fields of Ilium, but those which befell the returning heroes in the aftermath of the conflict. Regardless of how she is judged, she is never rises above a certain degree of suspicion;

the heartless, manipulative seductress could always have been the victim of the violence of others or the indifference of fate, and no less could the pity that she evokes simply be another means of seduction. As the tradition attests, the figure of Helen cannot be taken up without the intimation of a certain crime left unpunished, whether it is to be attributed to her or whether it was in fact inflicted upon her. Even if Isocrates attempts to elude this line of questioning, by confining his proper encomium to a Helen that, he claims, will have nothing to do with anything that others have spoken of her, it nonetheless signs itself in the very refusal of the question.¹⁹⁰ Gorgias, on the other hand, foregrounds this question of the fault, insofar as it is here that the work of seduction may be indicated, only ever as a question. If he pretends that his interlocutors deny the question, it is only to underscore its obscure nature; one might debate the details of the case furnished by Homer and by others, but seduction itself has been either taken for granted or denied, never taken seriously in itself. It is around this question that the *Encomium* will circle; but before turning to this movement, it is necessary to address directly its manifestations in the works of the sophist's predecessors.

II. Νέμεσις: On the Antecedents of Seduction

“I will not say who and for what reasons, and how, being overfull of *erōs*, seized Helen; for to tell those who know what is known is credible, but does not bear delight.”¹⁹¹ Despite the ostensible aim of engaging with the poets, it is a curious feature of the *Encomium to Helen* that the sophist leaves aside the narration of her history. The declaration that the events of her abduction by Alexander need not be retold because they are common knowledge is manifestly an evasion, at least from the standpoint of a

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen* 5.

positivist argument. It is precisely upon this point that the entire question of Helen's guilt or innocence with regard to the Trojan War must rest, as it emerges in the epic tradition and those texts which follow.¹⁹² Gorgias declares to be known precisely that which his audience does not know; the δόξα might render a general agreement that declares that she went willingly with Alexander, but the epic tradition leaves this point open to question. The sophist will not recite the details of Helen's departure to Asia, whether it was under duress or not, yet insofar as the speech is a defense, it concerns itself with nothing other than this. His silence is, however, in keeping with the sophistic strategies of εἰκός argumentation; he does not argue what was the case, opting instead to absolve the woman on the grounds of the improbability of her culpability.¹⁹³ Accordingly, the defense will be presented four times over, according to differing and not entirely mutually coherent registers; Helen's accusers will be disabused if she were influenced by the gods, if she were taken by force, if she were persuaded, or if she were in love. These four arguments, intended to refute the anticipated logics mobilized by those who decry her influence, are already found in differing forms amongst those texts that precede Gorgias'; it is not a matter of establishing what in fact was the case with this mythological figure (as if that were a possible line of defense), but rather refuting the cases that appear in the works of the poets as if they were presented before a court. What is at stake in the *Encomium* is a making manifest of the tension that drives those discourses about Helen, one which allows for a perpetual reversibility.

¹⁹² The Homeric epics may allude to Helen's abduction, but they do not supply a coherent narrative of the sequence of events; indeed, as will be shown in this section, the accounts are contradictory. The flight of Helen and Alexander may have been narrated in the *Cypria*, but the relevant sections of the poem have not survived. In any case, this poem, like the other non-Homeric members of the epic cycle failed to achieve canonical status; however the scene may have been staged, it was not treated by later writers as authoritative.

¹⁹³ For more on this form of sophistic argument, see the preceding chapter.

This tension which allows no simple resolution is present with the first appearance of Helen in the epic tradition. She first manifests in the surviving literature in the third book of the *Iliad*, one that is profoundly concerned with the question of beauty and the interrogation of the cause of the catastrophic war. It is this text that inaugurates the questioning as to who or what is to be blamed for the war and the disasters that it brings, an investigation that is intimately linked to the figure of Helen. Already with Homer, a satisfactory answer cannot be procured; the book presents four arguments, each identifying a different culpable party. There is no resolution within the epic, each of the four, with its own respective perspective and logic, is left to stand in opposition to the others; the poem betrays something undecided that remains at the origin of its narrative, something which continues to haunt its present. The first of these accusations is voiced by Hector against his brother Alexander, after the latter has fled from the front at the approach of Menelaus:

But, seeing him, Hector railed against him with shaming words/ “Unhappy Paris, best in appearance, deceiving gynomaniac,/ would that you were never born or were killed unwedded!/ I might even wish it so, much better it would be/ than in this way, your disgrace so conspicuous to others. Even now the long-haired Achaeans exult/ thinking you to be the best and foremost because of your beautiful/ appearance, but there is no strength in your heart, no courage. Were you like this when in sea-passing ships/ you sailed the sea gathering together faithful companions/ having been mixed with foreigners, and you carried off a beautifully appearing woman/ from a distant land, kin to spear-fighting men,/ to your father a great calamity and to your city and all your people,/ a source of joy to enemies, a

source of dejection to yourself? And now you would not stand fast against Menelaus, beloved of Ares? You would thus know of the man whose wife you hold./ The cithara would be of no help to you then, nor the gifts of Aphrodite,/ nor your hair, nor your appearance when you are mixed with dust. But rather the Trojans are cowards, or already/ you would have been clothed in a chiton of stones on account of the evils you have worked.”¹⁹⁴

Even before Helen is introduced the themes of beauty and of sexuality are already called to account through the figure of her abductor. According to Hector’s argument, it is indeed these forces that brought about the war, but the fault does not lie with Helen, it belongs to Alexander. It is his seduction, Hector argues, that is the root cause of the conflict. Alexander posed as a deceptive figure, masking his craven character behind the attraction of an appearance that causes the Achaeans to believe that he is the finest of the Trojans. The portrayal here is one that is consistent with the epic’s wider characterization of Alexander; he is the weak-willed, effeminate antithesis of the proper ideal of the warrior-hero. Led on by woman rather than love of glory, he is a passive figure, lacking entirely in courage. Even if he might appear brave, even foolhardy, in taking Helen from the home of Menelaus, this is but mere appearance, a fault hiding behind the mask of virtue.¹⁹⁵ It is no strength of his that allowed him to take the woman. Rather, as Hector

¹⁹⁴ Homer, *Iliad* III. 38-57. These lines appear are picked up by later accounts of Alexander’s history; the now-lost *Alexander* of Euripides presents the narrative of his exposure as an infant and his later return to Troy. The tragic action does not culminate in a disaster depicted during the play, but rather is found in the fact that he repeatedly eludes death at the hands of his own family, who have been warned of the consequences if he is to live. His recognition by Hecuba nonetheless preserves his life.

¹⁹⁵ The abduction of Helen is more than just a matter of potential adultery – it transgresses the bond between ξένοι that is of a sacred importance in the milieu depicted in the epic. The exceeding importance of hospitality is indicated in the sixth book of the *Iliad*, in the encounter between Diomedes and Glaucus. The two meet on the field, intending to do battle, but recognize that their grandfathers were ξένοι after reciting their respective genealogies. Rather than fight, the two exchange gifts on the battlefield before departing to seek other opponents. Adultery alone would be a serious legal offense, but he is all the more

phrases it, the abduction of Helen was accomplished according to Alexander's weakness, one that is identified in a speech rife with sexual connotation. The force [βίη] that he is declared to lack is one that may specifically denote the force used in sexual violence – however the abduction of Helen was accomplished, Hector hints that it was not a case of rape, insofar as he is incapable of this. Moreover, the declaration that he has been “mixed” with foreigners appears to bear with it a plain sense, the passive invocation of a verb that is a common Homeric euphemism hints at another sense – read otherwise, the statement could well be taken to say that Alexander has been fucked by foreigners. The implication is clear: a seducer he might be, but only because he lacked the fortitude to resist Helen's charms. Any action that he might have undertaken is only the result of an initial position of deplorable passivity. He lost himself to her beauty, found himself unable to resist her. This is no fault of Helen (Hector bears her no malice in the interactions depicted in the epic); Alexander should have been able to resist her charms and to comport himself honorably.¹⁹⁶

It is in the wake of this judgment that Helen is called onto the scene. Alexander, shamed by Hector, is forced to meet Menelaus in single combat in a dual that is intended to bring a definite resolution to the decade-long conflict. From here the narrative shifts to

culpable for having besmirched Menelaus' hospitality. It is to avenge this latter, more serious crime that Menelaus, as depicted in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, waged war against the Trojans: “I came to Troy not, as it may seem, on account of my woman, but after the man, a treacherous guest, who plundered my wife from my home,” (*Trojan Women* 864-866).

¹⁹⁶ A similar argument but more explicit argument is used in Hecuba's accusation against Helen in Euripides' *Trojan Women*. Exhorting Menelaus to kill the recovered Helen for her infidelity, Hecuba names her culpable for having fled willingly with Alexander, desirous of his beauty and of the wealth of Troy. The fallen queen leaves her son undefended – the two are together marked with shame, having mutually seduced one another. It is worth noting that Helen, in her defense, plays the sophist, arguing for the incoherence of the accusation through εἰκός argumentation. See *Trojan Women* 914-1032.

the dignitaries of Troy, gathered upon the city's walls to bear witness to the conflict.¹⁹⁷ It is here that Helen will first come into view. This appearance traces the stakes of revelation of this figure to others, presenting a problem already present to those within the narrative to the hearers of the work. From the first sight of her, the question of blame is on the lips of the Trojan elders, even if it is only to deny it:

It is no fault (νέμεσις) of the Trojans or the well-greaved Achaeans/ to suffer ills for such a long time for the sake of such a woman./ Dreadfully her face is like that of an immortal goddess./ But even all this, let her depart in the ships,/ as remaining she would be a calamity to us and to our children hereafter.¹⁹⁸

Helen appears with a double visage, at once alluring and dreadful. The elders see in her a calamity that lies in wait, yet already present in the violent passions invoked amongst those who have taken the field for her sake. Yet the elders refuse to acknowledge that there is any fault in it, despite its readily apparent character. The Greeks and Trojans alike suffer for her, and suffer foolishly but gladly, even unto ruin. She is caught within

¹⁹⁷ It is of course the case that the duel does not end the war; after numerous minor interventions intended give her favorite the upper hand against Menelaus, Aphrodite is forced to whisk him from the field entirely, bearing him to the safety of his bed and to the attentions of a decidedly unwilling Helen who is coerced by the goddess. This is only the first occasion in which Aphrodite interrupts the fighting; she twice rescues her son Aeneas from death at the hands of an attacker, from Diomedes and later from Achilles. Her activity invites the wrath of Athena, who grants Diomedes the ability to wound her in the fifth book, an act which incites the theomachia of that book. Despite her repeated appearances, the battlefield is not her place; while she is no less terrible than the other gods and commands no less force, the violence that is found there is one that is held apart from her own. The goddess of love, she is not in control of her own affections and suffers on account of them.

¹⁹⁸ Homer, *Iliad* III 156-160. Gumpert (2001, 3-4) takes this scene as a moment of the poem's reflection upon itself – the elders appear as critical readers within the text who pose the question of Helen. It is not as if this judgment renders any kind of decision upon the question of what Helen is, insofar as their utterance appears to immediately undo itself. They are able to assert that there is no fault precisely because they are before the face of Helen and seduced by her, a position that those readers who are not positioned within the narrative of the poem cannot, of course, occupy. It is clear that they have been seduced by Helen, but not so clear that the reader who does not see her has not been likewise – her face, after all, is not a face, but an effect produced by the poem. One cannot but be drawn in by the seductive work of the poem – precisely that which Plato condemned in his *Ion*, calling it a madness – and the question becomes double. One wants to judge the culpability of Helen and those who gathered to fight for her, but there is no assurance that, like these figures, one will not have likewise been seduced, that there could be a position whereby an objective judgment could be rendered.

the walls of Troy, the terror of the city's destruction is already written in her face, it is there apparent for the elders of Troy to read, and yet they assert that it is nothing. The wiser course is discarded in favor of that which passion demands. She is at once beauty and destruction, and if the elders deny the possibility of a fault, this by no means resolves the question. It merely sets it aside. She might well be blameworthy, or if not her another, but the question is not to be asked; her beauty seduces, and so demands an end to the interrogation.

The derealization of the impending catastrophe is tied precisely to the negation of the fault. They name the catastrophe that is to befall Troy, and do so accurately, but merely in the form of an unreflective recitation that remains without definite impact; though the statement will show itself to be accurate, it remains *pseudos*, ineffective. This reticence turns about a fault that is not a simple legal question – the elders claim that there is no νέμεσις, specifically a wrong that demands that retribution be visited, precisely the right which the Achaeans have invoked as justification for the violence that they have brought to Ilium. The term bears a triple signification – it is at once the fault itself, the righteous indignation of the one who has suffered wrong, and the retaliation to which he or she lays claim. This compound signification is indicative of the structure of repetition that is inextricable from the term; as with any blood feud, revenge killings too must be answered, leading not to an accounting for the fault, but rather its perpetual compounding. The denial of the elders does not merely negate the present circumstance, nor that to come, but no less does it involve a forgetting of the potential precursors to the war. Set aside entirely is the issue of Menelaus' potentially violated hospitality, as is the potential violence that Alexander has inflicted upon Helen, as well as the host of other

responses that might be posed against the assertion that there is nothing presently wrong.¹⁹⁹ Faced with the plethora of questions that could be entertained, the elders elect to take up not one.

The denial of the elders does not put an end to the question of the disaster; in refusing it, they in fact open it. They are accordingly not the only figures upon the Trojan walls to take an interest in the question that looms about Helen. “You are not the cause of this, in my estimation, even now to me the gods are the cause,/ those who stirred up the lamented war of the Achaeans:” such is Priam's estimation of the situation, addressed to Helen.²⁰⁰ That there is blame to be doled out appears certain, insofar as none of the parties that are depicted there can avoid making reference to it. If Priam attempts to deflect the blame from the woman to the gods, it is in anticipation of what will follow. Helen, for her part, blames herself, curses herself in response to the king's estimation: “Would evil death had been my pleasure/ when I followed your son hither, quitting my chamber kin,/ my dear child, and lovely girls my own age.”²⁰¹ However it is articulated,

¹⁹⁹ Ancient Greek has no word that specifically denotes rape – from what scant evidence is available, almost entirely from Athens, cases of sexual violence were prosecuted either generically as assault, with no specific allowance for sexual violence, or as adultery. In the former circumstances, any male citizen might have brought the matter to trial (women could not bring their own petitions in Athens, which does not seem to have been the case in the wider Greek world), while in the latter, the right was reserved for the woman's *kurios*. While the Greeks were able to conceptually distinguish between sexual violence and adultery in which the woman was complicit, the distinction was functionally quite porous. The question of whether or not Helen was party to her abduction by Alexander betrays a wider source of anxiety about women's sexual behavior amongst ancient Greek men; see Cole 1984. This is not to say, however, the sufferings of women so victimized were completely ignored by the ancients. The fragment of the *Cypria* discussed below takes up this theme, as do *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and Euripides' *Ion*, to name but two of the prominent texts. One notes that in all these cases, the wrong done to the girl occurs as displaced from the physical violation. Tragedy befalls Persephone not with her abduction by Hades, but before, when she is seduced by the narcissus that her father has had placed in order to awaken sexual desire in her. In the case of Creusa, she is metaphorically violated by Ion; the language of sexual violence pervades his extraction of the confession that she was seized by Apollo and that he is the product of this rape. The so-called happy outcome of the tragedy only comes about through the recognition acquired through the repetition of the crime.

²⁰⁰ Homer, *Iliad* III. 164-165.

²⁰¹ Homer, *Iliad* III.173-175.

the question of the fault looms, even if it cannot be assigned definitively, such that it might cease to recur in an unsettling fashion. And as with Hector's wish that Alexander had been stoned, and echoing the elders' indifference to the ruin to come, Helen renders a clear judgment: better to be dead than to find one's self in the shadow of this fault. Nonetheless, it is there, however deficient in its definition. The question of the fault is opened in four ways: either to negate it, as the elders do in denying that there could be a wrong in light of the radiance and the terror of Helen, or in the three cases of those who find an agent for the disaster, each time different. Priam blames the gods, Helen herself, Hector Alexander. The interrogation floats between the instances, neither of them entirely satisfying. That there is a wrong or at least the possibility of a wrong is all but certain, but it appears precisely as a question, something not yet defined, and thereby devoid of any ready answer.²⁰² Helen's beauty, evoking, the greatest desire, invariably bears with it something else, ill-defined, the mere signal of disaster. The interrogation in the *Iliad* resolves nothing; it is the opening of a problematic that will plague the Greek tradition's encounter with Helen. Her beauty cannot be detached from its correlate, from the violence that accompanies her. There is a seduction, signed perhaps in the ambiguity that plagues any attempt to identify a coherent causation, overturning any attempt to come to

²⁰²The question of the fault is no less apparent in *Odyssey* 4, where Telemachus presents himself as a guest in the home of Menelaus. The aftermath of the war may have decided the question of where Helen dwells, but it is clear from the king's narration that the suspicion of a fault remains, one for which no forgiveness has been earned; in his account of the Trojan Horse, Helen seeks to lure the Greeks from their hiding place before the appointed time, speaking with the voice of each man's wife; later accounts of the fall of Troy (Euripides' *Trojan Women* and Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica*, for two) linger on the question of whether it would have been just for Menelaus to kill Helen after the war. Beyond this, the lyric tradition twice occupies itself with the question of the blameworthiness of Helen, in Fragment 16 of Sappho and the accounts of the otherwise lost *Palinode* of Stesichorus. Similarly in tragedy, the figure of Helen is blamed in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, the *Orestes* and *Trojan Women* of Euripides find fault with Helen for being the cause of the events which they present – if not for the scandal of the Trojan War, of which she is the origin, the contemporary disasters would not have taken place. Euripides' *Helen*, following the path opened by Stesichorus, who declared that it was not Helen but merely her image that went to Asia takes up the question from the other side, aiming to absolve her of these accusations.

terms with it. Helen, carried off by Alexander, is perhaps no less the victim of a seduction than she is its agent, but it is this “perhaps” that the tradition finds itself unable to surpass – this is the figure of Helen.

The interrogation of Helen’s potential culpability begins with the first line spoken of her in the *Iliad*, with the elders’ denial that there could be a νέμεσις; the irony is of the utmost brutality. The familiar genealogy, which proclaims the woman to be the daughter of Leda masks another account, one of which only scant traces remain. The epic cycle holds Helen to be the daughter of the goddess Νέμεσις. While the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* do not name Helen’s mother, only her descent from Zeus and her kinship with her brothers the Dioscuri, the *Cypria* recounts her birth from the goddess of retribution, a parentage quickly set aside by later texts. About this poem, little can be said with certainty. It is known only through citations from later authors and the disparaging remarks of Aristotle.²⁰³ While one can say that it was composed roughly contemporaneously with the Homeric epics, its authorship, provenance, and the scope of its narration are all open to question.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, it was called upon as the source for the prehistory of the Trojan conflict, and it is as such that it recounts the conception of Helen, the product of the violation of Νέμεσις. The relevant passage is cited in Athanaeus:

After them, third she bore Helen, a wonder for mortals/ when fair-haired Nemesis was united in intercourse/ with Zeus, king of the gods, she bore from force of necessity. She fled not being willing to mix in intercourse with father Zeus, son of

²⁰³ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1459b.

²⁰⁴ Burgess (2002) reviews the ambiguity of the available evidence; despite Proclus’ positioning of the poem of as the first of an episodic epic cycle, it seems as if its narration did overlap with those works that were deemed to be “later.”

Kronos. She was oppressed in her mind by scandal and indignation [αἰδοῖ καὶ νεμέσει]. Through earth and barren black water/ she fled. Zeus drove her on. But he was longing in his heart to seize her./ At one time down the waves of the loud-roaring sea/ she appeared a fish bounding much open waters/ At another along the Ocean streams and the boundaries of the earth/ Then on the fertile earth, becoming every/ animal that the famed earth bears so as to flee him.²⁰⁵

Helen is born of the scandal that is her mother's rape at the hands of the king of the gods. She is the product of the conjunction of sexuality and violence. And yet it is not she alone that is engendered of the trauma inflicted by Zeus. In the wake of this trauma, Νέμεσις comes into her own, becoming the incarnation of the fault perpetrated on her and the desire for vengeance it evokes. Even before she is physically caught, she is entrapped in shame and rage. "She was oppressed in her mind with shame and indignation," ἐτείρετο γὰρ φρένας αἰδοῖ καὶ νεμέσει. The wrong inflicted upon her, the sentiment of righteous indignation and the desire for retribution that it provokes crystallize, becoming her proper name.

Forced to become the goddess of vengeance on account of the violence of another's desire, Νέμεσις will be denied retribution. Since the attacker is the king of the gods, there is no possible tribunal that she might petition for redress. She is overwhelmed and done violence by Zeus, and yet the authority that he bears does not allow for the expression of the wrong that he inflicts upon her. All that remains is the shame that she must bear, and the sentiment of an indignant rage that pushes against this silence but cannot lead to a just retribution. The νέμεσις of Νέμεσις is deficient, at least as far as she

²⁰⁵ *Cypria*, fr. 8, as cited in *The Deipnosophists*, VIII.10. We owe the survival of the passage not to a preoccupation with the narrative, but in the author's interest in the use of ichthyic imagery in literature.

is concerned; a fault, certainly, and the concomitant indignation, but there will be no vengeance. Nevertheless, in the aftermath, she is the wronged personification of retribution. But it is no more than a matter of furnishing just retribution for the sake of others. The only satisfaction that she is allowed is one displaced, and perhaps thereby all the more unsatisfying; through her, others might be avenged against those who wrong them, but never the goddess of vengeance herself.

Helen is the product of this violation. She incarnates the wrong inflicted upon the mother, even as the tradition represses it, forgetting Νέμεσις in favor of Leda. The posthomeric tradition transposes Helen's birth; she is depicted as the child of the wife of Tyndareus, a woman likewise raped by Zeus. The fault is not thereby denied, but it is mitigated, insofar as in the absence of the figure of Νέμεσις, the wrong will not be named as such. This displacement offers nothing in the way of recompense; it serves to further the rage of Νέμεσις by compounding her silence. Yet this silence will continue to make itself heard. The hatred engendered by the rape of Νέμεσις reappears obliquely in that series of abductions that the daughter will be made to suffer.²⁰⁶ Every one of the abductions that she suffers recalls the fate of her mother, the violence, the humiliation, and the vehement rage that Νέμεσις bears. Alexander is but the best known of the men who carry Helen off. Before him, there is Theseus. Isocrates recalls the scene:

First Theseus, called the son of Aegeus, but born from Poseidon, saw her not yet in her maturity, but already surpassing others. He, being accustomed to use force

²⁰⁶ Apart from Alexander and Theseus, there are a number of men who attempt to lay claim to Helen. Euripides' *Helen* sees her threatened by Theoclymenus, king of Egypt. The *Trojan Women* depicts her capture by Menelaus, which is anything but a happy reunion in that her husband is initially of a mind to kill her (a scene that is repeated in numerous other texts that treat the end of the Trojan War). The tragedian's *Orestes* likewise sees Helen pursued and taken by the titular character of the play, albeit not out of desire to possess her, but to avenge himself upon her. After Alexander's death, the Trojans briefly marry her to another of the sons of Priam, while the epic cycle likewise reports that most of the prominent figures to have taken the field at Ilium were at one time her suitors.

against others, was overcome by such beauty, though possessing a great fatherland and certain rule, believed life in the presence of these goods to have no worth without possessing her. Since he was unable to take her from her lords, for they awaited the maturity of the child and the oracle of the Pythian, scorning the rule of Tyndareus and disdaining the might of Castor and Pollux, taking no heed of the terrors of all those in Lacedaemon, taking her by force, he placed her at Aphidna in Attica.²⁰⁷

Here, at least, the question of Helen's complicity is not posed. Seized as a prepubescent girl by the lord of Athens, Helen is raped by Theseus in a sordid replay of the rape of her mother. Isocrates' ostensible aim, to praise Helen, and to praise Athens through her – since of all cities they were the first to “claim” her – cannot conceal his manifest discomfort. Theseus is not presented as the agent, but as the victim of Helen's beauty, a beauty that does not yet exist. Not yet mature, not yet possessed of her fatal allure, her beauty is nonetheless presented as the agent of seduction here. It appears in an untimely fashion, overwhelming Theseus. He is overcome, made the lesser (ἡττήθη) by a sexual allure that should not by right exist. Helen makes of Theseus a mere possession, his faculties are violated, he forgets himself entirely, losing himself to the desire that is impressed upon him.²⁰⁸ As for this desire, it reproduces the mad desire of the father,

²⁰⁷ Isocrates, *Helen* 18-19. Although absent from Homer's depiction of Helen, the myth of Helen's abduction by Theseus was apparently known from the *Cypria*, as one of the scholia to the *Iliad* attests. (Scholion 3.242). One notes that Athens here becomes the image of Troy, in the version of the myth presented by Stesichorus and by Euripides in his *Helen*; the city is sacked for her sake, although she is not there – if Stesichorus and Euripides must insist that there was an image of Helen present at Troy, it is to reconcile their accounts with that of Homer. In their attempt to “correct” the story, it yet becomes a greater tragedy and a greater madness – the Helen who stands as originary for the Greeks is not a woman, but only an image, but one that evokes the greatest passion.

²⁰⁸ On this point, it is important to again insist that Helen is a mythological figure. She is the occasion for the Greeks to think the aesthetic at its limit, linked as it is to questions of femininity, sexuality and violence. She is not a real woman, and if reading the myth requires that one be attentive to the suspicion of

Zeus, though in modified fashion. Reproduced via the mother's position, it reemerges only with a veneer of erotism; from the position of the victim, the attack is read as an act of the utmost hatred. This hatred will be met in kind. Stricken with an unbecoming desire, Theseus forcibly abducts Helen – again the term is βία. She will be violated, the injustice inflicted upon the mother visited once more upon her. And again, there will be no retaliation.

Nevertheless, this is no simple reproduction of the scene. Isocrates presents Helen's rape as the consequence of the violent, ravishing force of her beauty. Her aesthetic or erotic appeal is not neutral, much less comforting. It annihilates that which it captures, in the name of claiming the right of Νέμεσις, her indignation and her hatred. There will be a desire awoken in another, but merely as a weapon towards the irremediable violation to be returned to the attacker. Via Helen's beauty, the hatred of Νέμεσις finds its object in Theseus. However deserving he might be of this hatred, given the injustices he has visited upon other women, he is not the one who inspired this wrath. He is an occasion, nothing more: an approximation for an attacker who will inevitably be found again, and again, if only by proxy. And in this approximation, the sorrows redouble, time and again. So too is Helen. Stricken with the force of seduction, Theseus strikes at the girl who is not its agent, only its vehicle. In turn the Dioscuri wreak havoc upon a city where Helen is not, finding neither Theseus nor the girl until after destroying

complicity that runs through the texts devoted to her, this is in no way to legitimate assigning blame to the victim in actual cases of sexual abuse. As Marder (1992, 153-156) has argued, to hastily conjoin the literary figure with real circumstances flattens the difference between text and world, deprives literature of its proper specificity. Her reading of Ovid's account of the rape of Philomela, in which the disarticulation of the body and the emergence in its wake of an incommensurate language of rage are thematized, presents a suggestive parallel with the case of Νέμεσις described above.

Athens' people.²⁰⁹ Each time, acts performed in the name of a claimed right to vengeance are perverted from their aim, landing upon a new victim, and thus inviting further retaliation.

At least on the surface, Gorgias does not indicate Helen's descent from a divine mother; he follows the dominant narratives of Helen's birth that attempt to simply bury the fault and the dynamics of vengeance that it engenders. The *Encomium* names Leda as Helen's mother, though only in passing. Its focus is instead on the position of Helen's father. As Gorgias writes:

This *logos* turns about the woman [ἡ γυνή περι ἧς ὅδε ὁ λόγος], by nature and by birth first amongst the first of men and women; this is not inapparent, nor only to few [οὐκ ἄδηλον οὐδὲ ὀλίγοις]. For it is apparent that her mother was Leda [δῆλον γὰρ ὡς μητρὸς μὲν Λήδας], and her father by nature of the gods, by what is said of mortals: Tyndareus and Zeus, of whom one was reputed through being [διὰ τὸ εἶναι ἔδοξεν], the other had been decided by what is said [διὰ τὸ φάναι ἠλέγχθη], one the strongest of men, one the lord of all.²¹⁰

Her parentage, as it is here recounted, is anything but straightforward, and indeed, rests not upon any certainty, but upon the agreement of the δόξα. The logic that is set forth does not rest on certainty, but on appearance. Helen's own majestic bearing makes it obvious that she was born from the best of progenitors, while it is apparent to all that the

²⁰⁹ Isocrates omits this detail from his account, as befits a speech delivered in Athens and devoted in part to the glories of that city. Dio Chrysostom recounts the aftermath of the abduction, but not the seizure itself, in his *Oration* XI, 44.

Although the case is more contained, one can perhaps read another displaced gesture of retaliation in the other daughter of Νέμεσις, Helen's twin sister Clytemnestra. She unlawfully takes a husband of her own choosing and murders Agamemnon, a figure known for helping himself to women, upon his return; one could well take this as another case of an attempt at restaging and reversing the wrong inflicted upon the mother.

²¹⁰ Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen*, 3.

mother was Leda. The position of the mother is here declared to be a question not worth asking.

The use of Leda to suppress the position of Νέμεσις brings about a different distortion of Helen's lineage. The failure of representation that surrounds Νέμεσις reasserts itself in Gorgias' juxtaposition of Helen's two fathers. Their presentation follows a redoubled chiasmic structure, alternating between (A) Zeus and (B) Tyndareus as follows:

“(A) her father by nature of the gods, (B) by what is said of mortals: (B) Tyndareus and (A) Zeus, (A) one of whom one was reputed through being; (B) the other had been decided by what is recounted, (B) one the strongest of men, (A) one the lord of all.”

The question of the father is made a matter of appearance alone, between what is reputed to be, διὰ τὸ εἶναι ἔδοξεν, a term of course attached to the same root as δόξα, and what has been decided by others according to what has been recounted, διὰ τὸ φάναι ἠλέγχθη. The apparent repetition of the chiasm nevertheless hints at a moment of doubt. It might well be that Tyndareus was the father according to nature, while others posit that only Zeus himself could have brought about a child as remarkable as Helen is. And while the tradition has decided otherwise, the source of this decision is the work of those very poets whose mendacious character Gorgias decries. Between what is apparent and what is recounted, there is a hesitation and the possible breakdown of the chiasmic structure. Both of these terms, what is apparent and what is recounted, could be taken to refer either to Zeus or to Tyndareus. To reframe it accordingly:

“(A) her father by nature of the gods, (B) by what is said of mortals: (B) Tyndareus and (A) Zeus, (α) one of whom one was reputed through being; (β) the other had been decided by what is recounted, (B) one the strongest of men, (A) one the lord of all.”

As such, it is open to reversal and the second chiasmus may be no chiasmus at all; α and β apparently correspond to A and B, but this is not certain. It too is a matter of appearance. Despite this indeterminacy, Gorgias provides means for eliding the question; the first chiasmatic apposition of terms lays the ground for an anticipated second, the tropological repetition serves to disarm the suspicion that the sense alone justifiably elicits. The neat division between the two fathers, each with their own unconfused role breaks down, gesturing towards that element of the genealogy that remains unstated, the omitted divine mother.

Gorgias’ presentation of Helen’s genealogy betrays an operation of splitting that is unsurpassable. It belongs to this figure from her very genesis. Whether it is a question of the redoubled mother, or that of the father, the recitation of her parentage indicates the duplicity that is constitutive of this figure. Though her origin, she is divided against herself. The sophist’s ambivalent twisting on the question of the father betrays the legacy of that denial that found itself first upon the lips of the elders of Troy: there is no Νέμεσις. The wrong visited upon the mother is forgotten, its existence foreclosed, but not without a certain cost, signed in the deformation of the narratives of her genesis. The product of a parentage rendered uncertain, she too will remain in defiance of any singular definition. The seductress and the victim, the benefactress of the Greeks and the cause of their ruin, Helen is the bearer of a duplicity and an ambivalence that will have remained

unsettling. She is at once her own and the possession of her mother's rage, she will be dispossessed of herself and the constant source of the dispossession of those who seek to claim her for their own. Forever in flight, lacking definition in her origin and in the nature of her conduct, Helen is that which unsettles the *logos*, the figure of an aesthetic force that undoes any determination that it might attempt to work. One could well be horrified at her, at the violence she wreaks, but that is of course not all; it is thus that Gorgias displaces his discourse, gesturing towards yet another Helen.

III. Helen, the Pleasant Malady

Helen is bound intimately by the violence that lies at her origin, but there is more to the figure. She is, for Gorgias and perhaps for the Greeks in general, the limit case for the thinking of the aesthetic. As such, to focus simply on the destruction that she wreaks is to take a rather narrow and disparaging view. There is yet another aim to the *Encomium* indicated in the passage where the sophist passes over her history: "I will not say who and for what reasons, and how, being overfull of *erōs*, seized Helen; to tell those who know what is known is credible, but does not bear delight (τέρψις)." ²¹¹ Seduction does not produce destruction alone, it also arouses a feeling of pleasure. It is this latter that is certainly the more common response, but as Helen shows, the seductions of pleasure are never potentially without an edge. Gorgias' refusal to recount details that his audience already knows is in line with the general ideal of the work of art that emerged in classical Greece; expectation is not to be met, but defied. In this defiance, in the deception of the audience, there is delight. The works of consummate artists were valued precisely according to their ability to deceive, to bring about a *trompe d'oeil*. This ideal is

²¹¹ Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen*, 5.

most famously related, although after the fact, through the narrative of the contest of the painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius, found in Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis*. Zeuxis' offering, a painting of a child carrying a bunch of grapes, was accomplished in such a natural fashion that birds were drawn to the image of the fruit; he was however outdone by his rival. Vexed by Parrhasius' apparent refusal to unveil his work from the curtain that shrouded it, Zeuxis demanded that his opponent show his work, only to realize that the curtain was in fact itself painted.²¹² As Porter has remarked, the anecdote related by the Roman historian indicates a deception that is integral to the art of painting; while it may appear to conceal something, it deceives only via this appearance. In fact, it conceals nothing.²¹³ Similar gestures were apparent in the other arts; the geometric regularity of large structures and the correct proportions found in colossal sculpture were merely apparent, in fact resting upon the necessary deviations to produce a harmonic appearance from the perspective of the height of the viewer.²¹⁴ The sentiment of pleasure that is to be found in such deceptions does not lie in correspondence between the thing and its representation alone; the wonder emerges precisely at the point in which appearance is detached from a grounding in reality, the appearance of what is "real" shown to be no more secured than that of what merely "represents." This pleasure, however, can only emerge when the viewer realizes that he or she has been deceived, in spotting the ruse worked by the artist. Here the εἰκόσ of the painter and that of the sophist are found to correspond, as a play with the expectation of the audience. The artist must anticipate the likely reaction of his public in order to mislead, he dissembles the δόξα in order to deliver something else, perhaps contrary, and it is in having been deceived that their pleasure

²¹² Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* XXXV.4-6.

²¹³ Porter 2010, 444-445.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 449.

lies. The greatness of a work of art, for the classical Greeks, does not lie in its relation to an ideal form (whatever may have been said in the nineteenth century), but in the transgression of form, in striking the audience unexpectedly and in monstrating to them that they are struck, thus indicating the work of seduction.

Seduction has a disruptive effect, introducing a rupture with what came before and what is expected, but it also serves to unify through the sentiments it awakens. Helen is not merely the subject of the poetic narratives or of the sophist's oration. She is also their model, insofar as her aesthetic allure brings about both unanimity and strife.²¹⁵

Gorgias follows the recitation of her genealogy thusly:

Born from these, she carried beauty equal to the gods, she was seizing [λαβοῦσα] and not unseen. She produced great erotic desire in a great number, in one body she lead together the bodies of men, thinking grand things in their grandeur, some great in wealth, others of good reputation for ancient nobility, more for their own bodily force, still more held the power of additional wisdom. And all came, pushed on by *erōs*, the love of conquest, and unconquered love of honor. I will not say who and for what reasons, and how, being overfull of *erōs*, seized [λαβών] Helen; for to tell those who know what is known is credible, but does not bear delight.²¹⁶

Helen's seductive effect is not limited to Alexander and to Theseus; all of those who gathered to fight for her are thus afflicted. She is said to be seizing and she is one who is

²¹⁵ Diogenes Laertius, in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (VIII, 56) claims that Gorgias was a student of Empedocles; The dual forces of *erōs* and strife that Helen manifests, as working respectively unification and dissolution, do bear some resemblance to the economy of forces laid out in the fragments of Empedocles; however, as one notes here, there is no real opposition. *Erōs* itself brings madness, strife, and dissolution in its wake even as it unifies.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

seized by Alexander – a phrasing each time marked by a form of λαμβάνειν. The verb, usually translated in its active sense as “to capture,” or “to apprehend,” attests the ambiguity of Helen’s multiple positionings; this seizure is at once a military capture, the place of one overtaken by his or her passions, and the more neutral apprehension of perception and cognition. Ensnared by desire for her, inflamed by the passions that are made to take her as their object, the heroes set out to capture her body. Overtaken by their passion, their individual distinctions wane; whatever virtues they may have possessed, they are formed into a single body for the sake of Helen and the *erōs* that she evokes. Yet if they are a single body, this is not to say that its parts exist in a harmonious relation to one another. There are, after all, two bodies, two armies assembled for her sake, each risking death for the possession of Helen. And these bodies are less unified than they appear; Gorgias indicates that all of the men who fought for her were afflicted by desire for her. The Achaean army’s apparent unity, fighting for the sake of Menelaus and the honor of the Greeks, is staged as the product of a displacement; as secondary retellings of lost elements of the epic tradition confirm, most of the noted figures of the *Iliad* had at an earlier time vied to claim Helen’s hand in marriage.²¹⁷ Their desire is thus transformed; having once struggled to possess her, they take up the task again if not for their own, then at least for a member of their cohort. In their desire to conquer her, they set about conquering one another, setting in motion a progression of miseries that extends well into the aftermath of the war. There will be new victims, new wrongs inflicted, and new cries for vengeance. The seduction is not a singular event, but finds itself reiterated indifferently in those whom it affects. Nevertheless, in this forced indefiniteness, the memory of Helen and of those who fall victim to her seduction is assured; following the

²¹⁷ Dio Chrysostom, *Oration XI* 52.

Iliad, countless tertiary figures are recalled on the tragic stage, each one ruined by the woman, even if indirectly.²¹⁸

That Gorgias should invoke Helen as a model for the aesthetic is not surprising, even given the traumatic character of this figure. The fourth defense of Helen proffered in the *Encomium* asserts that there is no legal culpability if Helen followed Alexander out of love; nonetheless, here the aesthetic emerges as somewhat less than innocent, and indeed, inherently traumatic even in its most quotidian occasions. As Gorgias writes,

I recount the fourth cause in the fourth *logos*. For if *erōs* was that by which these things came to pass, it is not difficult to escape her becoming the cause of a so-called fault. For that which we see does not have the nature which we wish them to have, but that which each time occurs [ἃ γὰρ ὀρώμεν, ἔχει φύσιν οὐχ ἣν ἡμεῖς θέλομεν, ἀλλ' ἣν ἕκαστον ἔτυχε]. Through appearances the *psyche* is stamped with respect to its ways [διὰ δὲ τῆς ὄψεως ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τοῖς τρόποις τυποῦται]. For example, whenever one sees hostility and hostile bodies ordered in warlike armaments of bronze and iron, either of defense or of attack, the gaze is agitated and agitates the *psyche*, insofar as one's senses are left in shock, one often flees from imminent danger as if it were present. For the ἀλήθεια of the *logos* is made to dwell in the soul through fear, the same sight which made pleasure to come when it is judged beautiful according to custom and good according to justice.

Fear drives out and extinguishes thought. Many vain maladies, and terrible

²¹⁸ To name only the most notable: Iphigenia, sacrificed so as to secure the Achaeans' passage to Asia, Hecuba, the queen of Troy, doomed to lose her children and her freedom, Andromache, similarly deprived of her son and taken as a slave, Polyxena, sacrificed on the tomb of Achilles, the daughter of Chryses and Briseis, notable amongst the multitude of women seized by the Achaeans only for being named, Cassandra, raped by both Ajax and Agamemnon, Polydorus, murdered and left unburied when the fall of Troy made him politically useless, Astynax, a baby thrown from the walls of Troy for fear that he would grow up to avenge his father Hector. The list might well go on to the point of tedium, even in spite of the horror presented by each individual case. For a discussion of these figures on the tragic stage, see Loraux 1985.

burdens and incurable manias thus befall. Thus the eye inscribes images of things seen in the mind and many terrifying things are left to remain; these things that remain are of equal valence to what is said [οὕτως εἰκόνας τῶν ὁρωμένων πραγμάτων ἢ ὄψις ἐνέγραψεν ἐν τῷ φρονήματι. καὶ τὰ μὲν δειματοῦντα πολλὰ μὲν παραλείπεται, ὅμοια δ' ἐστὶ τὰ παραλειπόμενα οἷάπερ [τὰ] λεγόμενα].²¹⁹

The central point of this defense is simple; if Helen fell in love with Alexander, it is a “crime of passion” and the woman is not to be blamed. Whatever desire she may have had for him is not the product of her intention. Desire is imposed on one from the outside; in that sense, it is always a seduction. Gorgias links *erōs* to *aisthēsis*, to the event of sensory perception: “For that which we see does not have the nature which we wish them to have, but that which each time occurs.” What appears before our sight is not governed by desire; it is simply what befalls. This is to say that there is no inherent stability to objects, precisely because they cannot be truly isolated from the occasion in which they present themselves; one is moved by the presentation that affects the senses. What contingently comes to the senses marks the psyche indelibly, stamping an affective trace – an image – upon it. This image, as Gorgias argues, is closely aligned with the affective tenor of the event of *aisthēsis* and not to a neutral object of knowledge. The sight of soldiers armed for war (“ordered in warlike armaments of bronze and iron”) will be taken as hostile, the indication of a present or imminent danger, and will provoke a terror that brings rational thought to a halt. Yet the same soldiers, viewed on another occasion – say, on parade - will be thought beautiful and good, awakening feelings of security and

²¹⁹ Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen* 15-17. The translation is on the whole my own, although I have needed to consult others here (Cassin's French, Untersteiner's Italian, Donovan's English), given the difficulty of the language and the uncertainty of the surviving text in paragraph 16. My rendering of paragraph 17 follows after Untersteiner and Donovan; Cassin's version is markedly different.

admiration. The sentiments evoked in perception do not occur alongside objects. It is rather that they occur before any objective presentation is found (as is argued in Gorgias' *On Non-Being*, discussed in the previous chapter). And as he indicates, in the case of a particularly terrifying experience, there may be no objective presentation, one simply loses one's composure before the shock delivered to the senses and the agitation of the psyche.

The "image" that is imposed upon the psyche – Gorgias first uses the metaphor of a stamp, and then one of writing – is not a representation of the object. It is a trace of the affect that is evoked by the aesthetic presentation. These images are at once impressions, static images of the affective affairs that have presented themselves to the eye (εικόνας τῶν ὀρωμένων πραγμάτων) but also active agents that work across the *psyche* and the *soma* alike, giving rise to madness, to diseases and other such maladies long after they are initially "written" upon the mind.²²⁰ As Segal notes in his seminal treatment of the *Encomium*, Gorgias' presentation of *aisthēsis* confounds the physical and the psychic, the matter of perception and the affect inflicted:

Thus just as the affects of the psyche are described in physiological terms, so those of the more immediately physical *opsis* are described in emotional and psychological language. There is thus no strict demarcation between "subjective" and "objective." The psyche exists on an equal level with the physical world and is closely related to it. Its processes are explicable in terms of physiological

²²⁰cf. Heraclitus DK 115: ψυχῆς ἐστι λόγος ἐαυτὸν αὔζων (By *psychē*, understand the *logos* accumulating itself). This understanding of the *psychē* appears to find a parallel in Gorgias' *Encomium*, the psyche is that which is driven to produce the *logos*. It is but the accumulation and transformer of excitations, such that furthers the aesthetic work done by the *logos*, the effects that it works with reference to itself, in its petrification and the dispersion and dissolution of these fixed forms. For the translation of πραγμάτων as "affairs," see note 78 in the previous chapter.

analogies and it may undergo a change of state through the almost physical *dynamis* of *logos* and persuasion.²²¹

The psyche is intimately bound to the material excitations that are registered upon it through sensation. As Gorgias argues, it is, in a sense, the repository for these excitations. Although related to temporally past events, as inscribed, they continue to influence the movements of the psyche, its behaviors and its habits (ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τοῖς τρόποις τυποῦται). The images are not mere remnants; they continue to act upon the psyche. The excitement that is linked to the initial shock that manifests in the event of *aisthesis* does not confine itself there. Inscribed precisely at a moment of agitation, the image will continue to agitate. This activity is not, however, simply linked to malevolent sentiments – pleasure too works a kind of trauma, one that is manifest in the work of the artist. The passage continues:

But whenever painters bring to completion one body from many colors and many bodies [πολλῶν χρωμάτων καὶ σωμάτων], the gaze is delighted. The creation of sculptures and the work of ἀγαμάτων present to the eye a pleasant malady. In this way what is afflicting and what is desired afflicting are brought to the eye [οὕτω τὰ μὲν λυπεῖν τὰ δὲ ποθεῖν πέφυκε τὴν ὄψιν]. Many desires and afflictions of many for many are made of affairs and bodies [πραγμάτων καὶ σωμάτων]. If the eye of Helen took pleasure in the body of Alexander, and transmitted in her psyche ready desire and the contest of *erōs*, what wonder is it? If *erōs* is a god, how could one inferior thrust away the divine power of the gods and ward it off? If it is a human malady and an ignorance of the *psyche*, she is not to be blamed as

²²¹ Segal 1962, 106.

guilty, but accounted unfortunate. For what happened happened, by making prey of the *psyche*, not by learned design, by the necessity of *erōs*, not by artful preparations.²²²

Here the dynamic of the impression of the image reverses itself in order to further its work. The work of the artist, the painter or the sculptor brings to the eye what imposes a desire on an affliction upon him; the artist incarnates the image that has imposed itself upon his *psyche* through fashioning it again from raw materials. The artist gives body and form to an image that has neither, he returns it to perception, allowing it to be perceived anew, by himself and by others. This is to say that the work of art is thought here not as the work of mimesis, insofar as the image itself has no fixed form. Rather the painter's representation is an attempt to present once more the excitation that the image is through granting it body. This work allows for the perseverance of the work of the image – through the work of art, it will come to affect others. This is no mere transmission, one that would produce the “same” affect in each viewer; rather the form granted to the image puts it at variance with the original, and it will affect its audience in differing ways. The work of art is always a transformation of the image. The repetition of themes in painting, in sculpture or in other art forms does not serve to bind the image; in their variations, across periods and across artists, they serve to recall those images that affect collectively, though singularly each time. Whatever pleasure one might derive from it – and Gorgias insists upon this pleasure – the work of art remains a malady, and twice over. It is deception, and it is the trace of an affliction that afflicts those who view it, imposing

²²² Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen*, 18-19.

images upon them.²²³ Beautiful as it may be, it is never without an edge, or without risk, however: the *erōs* imposed by the image may always be a species of madness.

Helen is herself only an image. She is never precisely identical to herself, even though the proper name that brings together her apparitions in various works of art draws these presentations together. Each time she appears seductively, in paintings, poems and other media that continue this work of seduction. She draws the Hellenes together and divides them against one another; they are the people of the singular seduction that is called “Helen,” in all of its deviations. She will never show her face, will never reveal herself except through forms that, judged mimetically, are deceptions. They do not demonstrate Helen, but only gesture towards the ἀλήθεια of seduction through the affect that they awaken and force upon others. She is intimate, inescapable and alien; the works that present her, as Gorgias indicates are ἀγάλματα – votary objects. The term conventionally refers to statues of the gods, or objects given to the dead; they do not represent, for their referent is something no longer or never presents itself. All the same, they manifest the affective hold that the dead one or the god exerts over the living. The representations of the woman, each attempting to capture her beauty anew by giving it form, will ultimately have failed to force her to take shape. As the trace of an affect, she will always have escaped any final representation, and thus new efforts must always yet be undertaken. The seduced seducer writ large, she is a figure for the Greeks themselves. She is at once the means to express the deception integral to quotidian *aisthēsis*, and the

²²³ This relation between the image and the form recalls, at least in part, that between the *figure-matrice* and the *figure-forme*, as outlined in Lyotard 1971. If I have avoided the use of his terminology in spite of the parallels, it is on account of the linkage *figure-matrice* and primary repression. While it is certainly the case that a tie between the image and primary repression could be posited and perhaps must be, it is nonetheless the case that a number of problems introduce themselves there; these being beyond the scope of the present writing, they must be left aside. For a take on the relation between the two that avoids the issue of primary repression, see Kahn 2012 88-152.

fixations which are thereby produced. The unity of the Hellenes is itself a deception, but it derives from their fixation upon the woman, apparently, but only ever apparently, held in common.

IV. Παίγνιον

The argumentation of the *Encomium to Helen*, as it is presented above, could serve as a respectable, if performative and idiosyncratic, piece of theory. This would imply that one could discern the effects of seduction from a position exterior to it, as unaffected. The third argument in Helen's defense, thus far omitted, asserts the impossibility of any such stance. However convincing Gorgias' argument may be, it too is only a turn in the work of seduction. The sophist denounces the effects of persuasion, as force, deception, and indeed, as violence. As he writes:

But if the *logos* persuaded and her psyche was deceived, in light of this it is not difficult to refute and thus to acquit her of being the cause. For *logos* is a great dynast, able to bring about the most divine effects by the smallest and most invisible of bodies. For it is able to pause fear and to take away pain and to awaken joy and to increase pity. I will show that these things are thus. For it is necessary to monstrate to those hearing by means of the δόξα. I consider and name all *logos* bearing meter to be poetry. Shuddering in great fear and much-weeping pity and mournful regret come upon those who hear it, and the psyche suffers through the *logos*, particular passion at the good and ill fortunes of the deeds and bodies of others. Come, I shift from one *logos* to another. For inspired songs, through the *logos*, bring on pleasure, and banish pain. For the power of the song, meeting the δόξα of the psyche, enchants and persuades, transforms by

means of sorcery. Two arts of sorcery and magic [γοητείας δὲ καὶ μαγείας δισσαὶ τέχναι] are to be found, which are errors of psyche and deceptions of δόξα. Many persuade many about many things, and by means of persuasion they shape deceptive *logos*. For if all had memory of the past concerning all things, consideration of things present, and foresight of the future, such *logos* would not be suchly. But there is neither knowledge of things passed, nor examination of things present, nor easy prediction of the future. Thus most, concerning most things, take on the δόξα as counselor to the *psyche*. The δόξα, being slippery and unsteady, surrounds those who consult it in unfortunate slipperinesses and unsteadinesses. [Accordingly what cause hinders Helen ... praise-hymn came ... similarly would ... not being young ... just as if ... means of forcing ... force was abducted. For the mind of Persuasion was able ... and even if necessity ... the form will have ... it has the same power.] For the persuading *logos* compels the soul which it persuades, to be convinced by what is said and to consent to what is worked. The one who persuades, as working constraint, is unjust, but she who is persuaded, evilly hears without sense. That persuasion, traversing the *logos*, impresses [ἐτυπώσατο] itself upon the psyche just as it wishes.²²⁴

One notes immediately that the seductive power of πειθώ is not weighed according to the character of argumentation. The terms according to which Gorgias describes the work of persuasion are analogous if not identical to those found in the argument on *aisthēsis*.

²²⁴ Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen* 9-13. The brackets mark a section where the extant text is fragmentary and uncertain. While the translation is on the whole my own, I have borrowed Donovan's minimal rendering of this fragmentary passage. Cassin emends the first sentence of this passage only: "*Quelle cause empêche donc, que, de la même manière, Helene aussi, qui n'était pas jeune, fût, comme un lieu pour la violence, par la violence ravie?*" Untersteiner attempts a full rendering of the passage, but the reconstruction is doubtful.

“Persuasion, traversing the *logos* impresses itself upon the psyche:” the notion of impression recurs in the use of the same verb, and through these impressions, there is again the imposition of a lasting compulsion. Although the arguments concerning persuasion and *aisthēsis* are distinct, the similarity in their forms might well allow them to be combined. As Gorgias stages it, the *logos* is an aesthetic phenomenon first and foremost. It awakens an imposed sentiment in a fashion that is twice likened to forms of activity that transgress normal notions of causality: the divine, and “the two arts of magic and sorcery” (γοητείας δὲ καὶ μαγείας δισσαὶ τέχναι).²²⁵ Like one cursed, the one subjected to the work of *πειθώ* may not know of its source, its effects, be they immediate or impending, or even the motivation behind them. Even if this work is not readily apparent to one’s consciousness, it will have an impact, be it upon the body or upon the psyche.

However, this argument goes beyond the argument on aesthetics, insofar as here it is not only a matter of imposing sentiment but of transforming it as well.

For [the *logos*] is able to pause fear and to take away pain and to awaken joy and to increase pity. [...] I consider and name all *logos* bearing meter to be poetry. Shuddering in great fear and much-weeping pity and mournful regret come upon those who hear it, and the psyche suffers through the *logos* particular passion at the good and ill fortunes of the deeds and bodies of others.

The leveling of poetic and prose *logoi* is here made explicit; poetry is not a distinct category of utterances to be divided from and appraised over others. Poetry is *logos*, albeit with the addition of meter. This aesthetic supplement is not made to be the operative element of its affective force – the psyche is made to feel through the *logos*.

²²⁵ De Romilly 1976, 11-15.

Whether or not speech is arranged metrically, there will always be a material, rhythmic element to the unfolding of the *logos* through the element of the voice or writing. The work of the “pleasant malady,” the imposition of the image is here presented as potentially curative, at least with regard to a movement from a state of unpleasure to one of pleasure. The inscription of a new image is placed in relation to others (whether as extension, opposition, or any other means of connection), and through this reconstellation of images, new states can be wrought.

Yet one must approach this passage with some care, given that the *logos* awakens passion in the psyche of its hearer “at the good and ill fortunes of the deeds and bodies of others.” These deeds and bodies must be understood twice over – first as those of the figures represented through the *logos*, but also and perhaps more prominently as those of the performers who represent. To attribute the work of seduction to the body of Agamemnon or of Orestes would at best be a dubious claim; it is insofar as these figures are incarnated on the tragic stage in the body of an actor, or through the materiality of the poet’s voice that they are brought to affect an audience. The performer is but the occasion for the materialization of the image and again, through this materialization, the image will imprint itself upon its audience anew. To speak or to write is always an act of formation, of giving form to an affect that has its own peculiar valence, but which cannot be represented. And having been received by others, the *logos* inflicts its own quantity of excitation on them. This is, however, not a simple repetition of the “same” affect, insofar as it strikes in relation to its specific transformation in the presentation and the relation to the singular psychic dynamics of the auditor. These dynamics are each time themselves modified by the new imposition of affect, able to work effects on the body no less than on

the mind.²²⁶ This ability to bear an affective valence and to inflict it on others thus is referred back to the extralinguistic elements of the utterance as the sophist indicates through the reference to music. The aesthetic power of the word may be heightened when it is drawn into connection with other arts, but that is not to say that it needs these in order to take on this aesthetic role. If the word is able to bind humans together into something that resembles a community, it is through its capacity to bring about a *συμπάθεια* (sympathy, literally a suffering together), one which, as in the case of Helen, is just as likely to bring about dissent as it is to serve as grounds for consensus. Helen is the founder of a community of seduction, one that traverses the word, passes from mouth to mouth, body to body. It moves from a speaker, who is each time already seduced and seducing, to those who will be seduced anew and who will come to serve as further transformers for the affect that she is. One speaks seduction only because one has already been awakened, animated by this work of affective seduction. It thus transforms what is radically formless in order to transmit it.

There is a name for the lingering products of this communal seduction; it is the *δόξα*. Persuasion works upon it, making use of its unstable character. As Gorgias indicates, although it is in a sense foundational, it is nonetheless wanting. It is flimsy, unreliable, a shoddy substitute for an actual knowledge of things. Described as “slippery and unsteady,” and surrounding those who depend upon it in “slipperiness and unsteadiness,” the *δόξα* is always the potential victim of *πειθώ*, which works constraint upon it. Gorgias describes it thus:

²²⁶ For Gorgias, the *logos* is a *φάρμακον*; for the significance of this term see Cassin 2000, 85-112, and, of course, Derrida 1972, 77-214.

For the persuading *logos* compels the soul which it persuades, to be convinced by what is said and to consent to what is worked. The one who persuades, as working constraint, is unjust, but she who is persuaded, evilly hears without sense.

The *logos* imposes constraint upon the hearer, it seizes the psyche of the hearer through the δόξα and bends it to its will. While the text that opens paragraph twelve is uncertain, this operation is apparently there described as βία ήρπάσθη – “having been ravished by force.” However appealing it may seem, there is an aspect of πειθώ that rapes the psyche, imprints its image upon it and forces it to feel, regardless of what the desires or the intentions of the auditor may be. While this violence may be masked by the pleasure that a discourse brings, Gorgias nonetheless asserts it to be fundamental to the operations of persuasion. Which, of course, includes his own. The highly stylized condemnation of persuasion is only a demonstration of its inherent duplicity; the πειθώ is all the greater in that it can disguisedly turn against and denounce itself while losing nothing of its force. In drawing out this manifest contradiction and letting it remain at the level of paradox, Gorgias gestures towards what remains unassimilable in seduction; it will have always taken one by surprise. If the four arguments set forth by Gorgias are divergent and perhaps mutually exclusive, they are nonetheless drawn together through this image of sexual violence. The language recurs in three of the four, excepting only that on the aesthetic where it is there by implication. “But a god is superior to man in force in wisdom and other qualities...” (θεὸς δ' ἀνθρώπου κρεῖσσον καὶ βία καὶ σοφία καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις), “if she was seized by force, unlawfully forced upon, and unjustly mistreated...” (εἰ δὲ βίαι ήρπάσθη καὶ ἀνόμως ἐβιάσθη καὶ ἀδίκως ὑβρίσθη); no matter how one takes it

up, it is a matter of seduction, of a violent capture and an awakening of sentiment, whether the pleasure of the work of art or the suffering of the victim.²²⁷

The discourse interrupts itself with the argument on persuasion. It loses itself in a paradoxical opposition of tensions. The alleged attempt to do justice to Helen becomes an act of violence directed against the *Encomium*'s audience. Through Helen, they will be subjected to the violence of the aesthetic by Gorgias himself. Yet Gorgias is a victim no less, already seduced by Helen – he speaks in her name, for her benefit, giving form to her image in the speech because he has been swayed by the image presented by the poets. No less than Helen herself, Gorgias is a seduced seducer, an occasion in the seductive transmission of the image. He will not have uttered the last word regarding this figure, any proffered resolution will be undone by the irreducible tension of this figure, born of the disjuncture between the formless affective image and the form which it is made to bear. The discourse, on one hand so carefully controlled in its style and in the progression of its argumentation, otherwise shows itself to be moved by something that will have remained radically uncontrolled in the gaps that are left to show. The arguments set forth themselves contain the seeds of their own dissolution; one could take any of them up in defense of any of the other figures who have done violence to Helen. If she can be absolved through asserting that she was forced to act as she did, the same argument can be made in defense of Theseus – indeed, this is what Isocrates does in his *Helen*. So too with the other defenses: “But if Alexander were in love, or if the gods forced him to act as he did...,” “But if the poets were persuaded...,” or if the audience were persuaded, they would be under the same constraint. Less than proving the innocence of Helen, the argumentation taken as a whole inflicts a division on the question of responsibility.

²²⁷ Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen* 6 and 7, respectively.

Gorgias shifts the blame from Helen, but the consequences of his argument likewise prevent it from being assigned to any of the other figures that appear around her. All of them, including Helen, are potentially complicit in bringing about the disaster through their actions; nonetheless, not one of them may be said to be the origin. The fault lies about them, always staged and displaced, never having taken place. This repetition is, of course, intimately allied to repression; the origin is always to be forgotten, the event must be reenacted so that it will have finally taken place, divested from itself and the fault that is inscribed there. The work of seduction, tied to an utter exposure to the aesthetic, is inextricably bound to a certain violence. Before one can defend one's self against it, make sense of it, it has already struck with captivating force.

Helen, as the extreme case of the aesthetic, in both of its passive and active senses, figures the unavoidable, interminable work of seduction. Through her, the very question of guilt and innocence is in a sense foreclosed, or at least left in a space of irresolvable tension; like her, one will have been forced to produce actions under the force of the aesthetic, its enchantments, the necessities that it lays upon the psyche. The case of Helen will remain forever undecided and undecidable, presented by the sophist in such a way that suspends the criteria of philosophical judgment.²²⁸ The *Encomium* ends on a note that echoes this suspension, with a move that at first appears to be flippant:

²²⁸ Porter (2010, 298) remarks that this duplicitous structure operates according in the face of what is apparently the obvious nature of the case – Gorgias' arguments, as he notes, are patently false. As he argues, Gorgias' strategy, far from being persuasive, operates at a level of “dissuasion,” where the *sensus communis* of seduction is presented as such. Gorgias' speech is certainly a ruse, but it cannot be asserted to be false, according to the terms laid out; this would be to take the position of the philosopher, who occupies himself with a possible third position where a definite judgment could be rendered. Gorgias' discourse does evoke this position, it is true, but only to place it in the same kind of tension: for Gorgias, philosophy and the science of the astronomers are but other species of *πειθώ* (*Encomium* 13). Gorgias' speech is indeed a “game,” as Porter notes, but a game which knows no exterior upon which it might rest, but merely that which provokes it. Beyond this, it is perhaps difficult to assert that there is anything “shared” about the communal illusion that is made manifest in the *δόξα*; the Greeks might be affected alike by her, but even as

I took away blame from a woman by means of the *logos*, I remained within the law which I set out at the origin of the *logos*, it was attempted to remove unjust slander and the ignorance of the δόξα, I wanted to write a *logos* of encomium for Helen, a plaything for myself [ἐμὸν δὲ παίγνιον].²²⁹

The speech, working duplicity at every step, stages its final word as a mere “plaything,” or, to be overly literal in rendering the term, a child-thing. Whatever pretensions may have been announced before, as a matter of justice, of correcting the δόξα, of discoursing on the nature of the aesthetic, the speech reveals itself here under another aspect. It is not thus reduced to nothing, nor does this gesture neutralize the oratorical force. Helen is made to reveal herself in another light; the grand seductress and the pitiable victim are set aside, what is left in their wake is a mere unfeeling object, the plaything of the *logos*. For all that she is made to command within the epics, tragedies, and orations devoted to her, the figure cannot be detached from these works. Insofar as she is bound to the force of the *logos* and its ability to work appearances, she is nothing but the product of the work of literature. Her body is constituted from the corpus of textual bodies that devote themselves to her. She acts as she is made to act; she is, after all, not a real woman. However she might impact the psyches of those whom she is made to confront, she has none of her own. She is merely the object of the poets, or of the sophists, or of the others who use her as an occasion to mobilize the work of seduction. This is a possible reading, convincing in its own way, one that grants the place of privilege to the author who would

Helen produces that consensus by which they call themselves Hellenes, she remains what cannot be shared, that which one would kill or die to possess. Her misfortune is to bear a seduction that sets in motion an *erōs* whose effects are each time singular, subjected to transformations that are not in accord with one another, but which through the work of perversion that this sexual excitation is, undercuts any possible taking of position that would be in common, save, perhaps, the deception that there is something held in common.

²²⁹ Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen*, 21.

speak of Helen. It is complicit in the violence done to and with this figure. It forgets the originary fault that belongs to all *aisthēsis*.

To speak of this fault is to return to the issue of the rape of the mother and its cruel restaging in Helen's childhood abduction at the hands of Theseus. Afflicted by seduction, the king and the girl alike are taken up as things, forced to play the parts in the reiteration of the trauma. In the grasp of seduction, one is only ever an instrument put to an alien purpose. Gorgias does not recall this scene directly, but this element is recalled in the very style of his speech – the “plaything” merely gives a name to a dynamic endemic to his style. To cite again the fourth paragraph, which is emblematic of the aesthetic arrangement of the *Encomium* as a whole:

ἐκ τοιούτων δὲ γενομένη ἔσχε τὸ ἰσόθεον κάλλος, ὃ λαβοῦσα καὶ οὐ λαθοῦσα ἔσχε· πλείστας δὲ πλείστοις ἐπιθυμίας ἔρωτος ἐνειργάσατο, ἐνὶ δὲ σώματι πολλὰ σώματα συνήγαγεν ἀνδρῶν ἐπὶ μεγάλοις μέγα φρονούντων, ὧν οἱ μὲν πλούτου μεγέθη, οἱ δὲ εὐγενείας παλαιᾶς εὐδοξίαν, οἱ δὲ ἀλκῆς ἰδίας εὐεξίαν, οἱ δὲ σοφίας ἐπικτήτου δύναμιν ἔσχον· καὶ ἦκον ἅπαντες ὑπ' ἔρωτός τε φιλονίκου φιλοτιμίας τε ἀνικῆτου.

(Born from these, she carried beauty equal to the gods, she was seizing and not unseen. She produced great erotic desire in a great number, in one body she lead together the bodies of men, thinking grand things in their grandeur, some great in wealth, others of good reputation for ancient nobility, more for their own bodily force, still more held the power of additional wisdom. And all came, pushed on by *erōs*, the love of conquest, and unconquered love of honor.)

The passage puts on display the materiality of its language, through Gorgias' repeated use of figures characteristic of his style, homeoteleuton, parison, and polyptoton – rhyme at the end of successive phrases, equal length of phrases, and the use of words from a common root differing in their endings.²³⁰ “Πλείστας δὲ πλείστοις ἐπιθυμίας ἔρωτος ἐνειργάσατο, ἐνὶ δὲ σώματι πολλὰ σώματα συνήγαγεν ἀνδρῶν ἐπὶ μεγάλοις μέγα φρονούντων:” the description of the unification and oppositions worked by Helen is made apparent in the vocabulary of the passage, which is characterized by polyptoton. Terms are repeated in close proximity to one another, differing in their grammatical case and accordingly their referent. This lexical homogeneity stands in an apparent tension with the variation that emerges from it, putting on display the indifference of the word to what it is made to express. This dimension likewise points to the materiality of language, its phonic construction, a move underscored in the description of Helen as “seizing and not unseen:” λαβοῦσα καὶ οὐ λαθοῦσα. Here the two terms, *labousa* and *lathousa*, do not derive from a common linguistic root – they are respectively participles of λαμβάνειν and λανθάνειν. The distinctness of their sense rests upon the substitution of a single consonant alone. The conclusion of the passage likewise rests on a play with the construction of the *logos* through the permutation of elements across compound words. Those who fight for Helen are said to be motivated by “love of conquest and unconquered love of honor,” [τε φιλονίκου φιλοτιμίας τε ἀνικῆτου], where the first term displaces itself into the two that follow; the prefix of the first term is repeated in the

²³⁰ While Gorgias is not a materialist in the conventional sense that might be attributed to certain of the presocratics, he nonetheless appears to make use of a materialist understanding of what the *logos* is, insofar as it is identified as a transformer of bodies. The word, as an aesthetic phenomenon finds its operation tied directly to and indissociable from its sonic substrate (which, in the ancient world, would have equally belonged to the practice of reading). See Porter 2010, 206.

second, and its suffix will again appear in the latter.²³¹ It is perhaps no wonder that Dionysius of Halicarnassus was to deride Gorgias' style as "childish" [παιδαριώδη]; Gorgias does not depart from the materiality of language.²³² To borrow from the language of psychoanalysis, the sophist plays with words as if they were things, in a conscious parallel to the regressive infantile play that is manifest in the dream-work.²³³ While the word is not deprived entirely of its character to signify, its aesthetic character is allowed to show itself here; the word does not only point to a referent, it also is itself a nonsignifying thing. This play with words consciously puts on display the work of condensation and displacement essential to Freud's dream work and the *Witz* alike; under the pressure of repressed affect, these operations of combination and decomposition allow what is repressed to be indicated as repressed. Here, as with the issue of the *Witz* discussed in the previous chapter, it is a matter of putting on display the *logos* as already affected by what remains outside the bounds of sense.

"I wanted to write a *logos* of encomium for Helen, a plaything for myself:" if the concluding statement is indeed a reflection of Gorgias' intention, he has failed to live up to it. The speech is not, technically construed, an encomium. It is something else. No more than an encomium is it an apology; it addresses the possible means of defense while keeping silent on the alleged crime. The declaration rings hollow, casting upon the speech itself the sort of thingly character indicated in the language. Here, of course, it is less a matter of the material construction of the discourse than of the resistance to any simple categorization that is manifest in it; it defies both the expectations of genre and

²³¹ Kennedy 1999, 34-35. For a broader survey of the use of stylistic devices across all of Gorgias' surviving writings, see Spatharas 2001, 17-42

²³² Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Isaios*, 19.

²³³ Freud 1915b, *SE* XIV 227-229.

Gorgias' own announced aim. What he has claimed to do, he has not in fact done; what he has done is otherwise, difficult to pin down precisely. Gorgias has deceived his audience and he has deceived himself. There is enough resemblance to the proper model to catch the inattentive unawares, one could be satisfied with the claim that the speech belongs to the genre. All of this is to cast doubt upon the second clause, which claims that it is a mere trifle, a "plaything." With every oratorical snare left visible, with every interruption of silence into the discourse, Gorgias has shown that the speech is not to be taken for a faithful account of the "actual" events of Helen's abduction. But all the same it will have affected its audience in a way that the sophist himself cannot exactly foresee. His apparent repudiation of *πειθώ* and its magical effects is itself but another species of sorcery.

Gorgias could only assert without irony that the *Encomium* is a plaything if none of the claims of the violence of discourse and of the aesthetic in general asserted in the text were admitted. He plays Helen, no doubt, but only because he is but a plaything seized by the seduction that she figures. In declaring the speech to be a plaything, Gorgias shows himself as seduced. His oration attempts to come to terms with the impassible image of the woman, one already stamped upon him. This attempt at formation will have been left incomplete; something of her will have escaped, she will always have fled once more. Accordingly it is left to others, to the auditors, to take up the formless excitation of the image and craft it anew. Wanting though the argument may be, there are nonetheless opportunities for delight; there will be new pleasures wrought by seduction for one who will accede to them. There is likewise something joyful about the possibility that there remains something to be said of her, inviting the fashioning of new

forms that will comport her beauty. But there is the other side to this work. The violence of the aesthetic is not merely a metaphor, and this the daughter of Νέμεσις will not elude. The goddess of vengeance is, of course, herself only a figure. She is not the origin, but she points to the originary violence that lies beyond any representation. This violence lies at the root of the aesthetic, the unasked for imposition of excitation that is received as a violation. The daughter will take form, or a progression of forms, each successively a rendition of the image. With the mother, there are no means to disguise the forcing of form onto the affect that resists it. Afflicted by Zeus' desire, the formless goddess is forced into a fixed form from which there is no escape. This is a kind of catachresis left exposed as such, the disjuncture remains apparent. Catachresis, yes, but the Latin idiom is preferable – it exposes what the Greek disguises. To speak of Νέμεσις is an act of *abusio*.

Νέμεσις figures what remains unsexed. The violation that awakens sentiment is simply an attack, nothing more. And it demands to be met in kind. She concedes nothing to the playful renderings of the image that attempt to restage the wrong done her, and thus appease her. Before her indignation, her rage, they are nothing but insults, parodic caricatures of a justice that remains undelivered. Each of these mockeries in turn is deserving of its own retaliation. The seductions of Helen will not have escaped this hatred, a hatred that falls upon all of those enamored of her. This forever unsatisfied rage is their origin, and it will have continued to drive them on, one after another. Those who are caught up in the work of seduction are themselves playthings, unrelated, unprepared, but nonetheless seized for the occasion in the attempt to allay this hatred. But before Νέμεσις, incapable of distinction between those seduced, there is no potential

forgiveness. Their complicity, however forced, is crime enough. For the seduced seducer, there will be retaliation. How fortunate then that there is no cause, no victim, and as Gorgias argues at the manifest level of his discourse, no fault. All of this has nothing to do with anyone.

Lyotard: On Apathy, On Grace

Adfectus nostri in nostra potestas non sunt.

-Junius Gallio

I. *Apathēmata*

*“Et pourquoi faudrait-il qu’un sentiment oublié (refoulé) revienne nécessairement? Faut-il admettre l’hypothèse, fumeuse aux yeux mêmes de Freud, d’une compulsion de répétition? D’un éternel retour du même?”*²³⁴ The question stands as a provocation, one central to Lyotard’s later work on affect. There is a hesitation here, a reflection of the disarming position that affect inflicts upon theoretical discourse, whether philosophical, psychoanalytic, or any other. A pause, perhaps unavoidable, afflicts any attempt to come to terms with affect, whether that found in Lyotard’s essay “The Affect-Phrase,” where the question is posed, or those that might seek to follow. What returns with affect, or the question of affect, brings a halt to the simple application of received discourses. The return that is posed here is not the recurrence of an object or a motif that could be tracked. Rather, faced with what lies beyond their bounds, the interruption worked by affect forces these knowledges – whether philosophy, psychoanalysis, or any other – to return upon themselves. Before the question of affect, philosophy, or any other genre of discourse, finds its own authority called into question and thereby is forced to once more

²³⁴ Lyotard 2000, 106. One notes, however, that even if Lyotard poses this question – to which one must admit that the answer is perhaps no, it is perhaps not necessary to make reference to these notions, and indeed desirable to discard them a stock theoretical gestures, a matter of comfortable habit – this is not to dispense with Freud’s “return of the repressed,” or Nietzsche’s “Eternal Return of the Same.” Both notions continue to appear in Lyotard’s late works, most notably *Chambre sourde*, but also “Emma,” “*C’est à dire le supplice*,” and others, albeit in such a fashion that no longer conforms to their original articulations. It is not a matter of rejecting these positions as conceptually lacking, but rather to reopen the questions to which Nietzsche and Freud had addressed themselves.

interrogate its own constitution, to attempt to account for the disturbance that has been inflicted upon it, and thus to give an account of its own limits.

It is as such that “*La phrase-affect*” can be said to manifest a kind of return. The subtitle of the text – “*D’un supplement au Différend*” – announces it as marking what had been left unaddressed by the earlier work. It is in that work that Lyotard lays out his philosophy of the phrase, a deliberate attempt to break with his own earlier work as it had appeared in *Economie libidinale* and the texts preceding. Dispensing with the motif of libidinal *dispositifs* that had characterized his works in the 1970s and before, which he would later deride as yet attached to a “metaphysics of forces,” *Le Différend* takes as its motif a pragmatics of events of presentation, which he terms “phrases.”²³⁵ Despite the immediate association to which the term might well lead, the phrase is not necessarily a linguistic formation in a spoken or written language, though particular phrases might well be. To put it in its most simple form (though, as we will see, the notion is anything but simple): a phrase happens, it is the minimal instance of an event, what presents itself as the case without reference to any pre-given framework. The phrase is, within *Le Différend* and also in those works that follow, the most elementary unit of analysis; that there is a phrase lies beyond doubt. Geoffrey Bennington summarizes the notion thusly:

What is indubitable about a [phrase] is not its meaning, nor even its existence, its reality. Simply that there is a [phrase] is indubitable. That there is a phrase is presupposed in saying anything at all. In this conception, neither reality nor the subject stands prior to and in principle independent of a [phrase].²³⁶

²³⁵ Ibid., 60.

²³⁶ Bennington 1988, 124-125. Simply for the sake of consistency, I have replaced his rendering of the French *phrase* as “sentence” with its English cognate; the term has been translated both ways in the various editions of Lyotard’s works in English.

The search for what remains beyond doubt, a gesture that Lyotard borrows from Descartes, nonetheless remains almost parodic; although it offers the basic unit of the analysis that runs through *Le Différend*, the phrase is in no way a stable foundation upon which any certain knowledge might rest. It is rather to the contrary. The phrase presents, but what it will have presented – in other words, what it furnishes for representation – is left in abeyance, it is dependent upon further phrases that link onto it. As Lyotard writes, “*qu’il n’y ait pas de phrase est impossible, qu’il y ait: Et une phrase est nécessaire. Il faut enchaîner. Cela n’est pas une obligation, un Sollen, mais une nécessité, un Müssen. Enchaîner est nécessaire, comment enchaîner ne l’est pas.*”²³⁷ A phrase, insofar as it is said to have been articulated, will have given a “phrase universe” constituted by four poles: those of its addressor, its addressee, its sense and its referent. The linkage of phrases presupposes of the “prior” phrase that someone (addressor) will have said something (sense) to someone (addressee) about something (referent). These poles, as Lyotard remarks, are closer to transcendental conditions of articulation than they are to empirical facts; an everyday phrase, such as the command “get out,” remains entirely comprehensible according to this framework, despite not explicitly marking three of the four poles.²³⁸ Any of these four poles may serve as grounds for the linkage of phrases, either individually or together. Some examples, linking to the aforementioned command: “You can’t tell me that!” (addressor), “who, me?” (addressee), “that is an imperative” (sense), “get out of where, exactly?” (referent). Or, of course, one might simply leave, implicitly affirming at least one, if not all four, of these poles. In each case, the former

²³⁷ Lyotard 1983, 103.

²³⁸ Lyotard 2000, 46.

phrase is taken, through whichever poles, as a referent of that phrase which links onto it. The presentation is thereby represented, albeit via an important transformation; it is no longer a matter of the “it happens” of a current phrase-event, but the “what has happened” that the latter phrase determines through the response that it formulates. As one sees from the examples given, the multiple ways of linking onto a phrase show that there are multiple (and indeed, probably innumerable) ways in which this determination might take place, each yielding a different representation of the prior phrase.

This is to say that the presentation does not, in itself, determine the mode or the content of the latter phrase that represents it. That a phrase presents a universe at all is not necessarily given in the mode of its presentation; the four instances that constitute the universe are themselves only determined by the representations that are furnished by subsequent phrases that will have linked onto it. To further draw upon the same example; B stands to leave the room in response to the command, “get out,” addressed by A; the linkage here affirms that A has addressed this phrase to B, its sense is clear, and its referent is the room that the two currently occupy. Seeing B head for the door, A then says, “I wasn’t talking to you, I want C to leave.” This third phrase undercuts the representation of the initial phrase that it discovers in the second phrase (leaving the room) – the representation of the first phrase given by the second is held to be incorrect, and another is rendered in its place. It is important to note that it is, as Lyotard declares, not the case that the second phrase would have misrepresented the universe of the initial presentation; there is no last phrase, no final word that would belong to a “reality” somehow given where presentation and representation would be set in accord, such that

might serve as a universal and final determinant for judgment.²³⁹ Absent such a rule, there is only the interminable work of determination that is operated by the linkage of phrases, one that knows no ultimate finality; presentation and representation are radically heterogeneous modes. While the representation of a given phrase might claim, implicitly or explicitly, to reproduce a given presentation “faithfully,” there is something of a ruse here; as Gérald Sfez remarks, “à chaque fois, l'événement arrive ou non et le temps ne garantit rien. On est toujours au temps apparent de la première phrase et au temps réel de la deuxième.”²⁴⁰ The reconstruction is only ever fashioned belatedly, in the manner of the psychoanalytic *Nachträglichkeit*, important to Lyotard's works following *Le Différend*, yet already pertinent in that book, though not explicitly marked. While the instance of a phrase remains indubitable, its happening in no way renders beyond doubt the representation of what has happened. As Lyotard writes:

*il y a des événements: quelque chose arrive qui n'est pas tautologique avec ce qui est arrivé [...] Le cas, der Fall, serait qu'il arrive quelque chose, quod, plutôt que ce qui arrive, quid. [...] Le cas n'est pas ce qui est le cas. Le cas est: Il y a, Il arrive. C'est-à-dire: Arrive-t-il?"*²⁴¹

Despite the work of representation, the presentation remains in abeyance, in the lingering question that accompanies all determination. That there is this remainder is indicated by the fact that the poles which a given phrase presents remain open to dispute; it may yet be argued that there have been instances of misinterpretation and the question reopened as to who addressed a given phrase to whom, what it might have meant, or what its referent may have been.

²³⁹ Lyotard 1983, 27.

²⁴⁰ Sfez 2000, 91.

²⁴¹ Lyotard 1983, 79.

Nevertheless, there remains the necessity that linkage be furnished; although presentation leaves its inevitable remainder, this does not by itself interrupt the linkage of phrases. The lack of a universal criterion does not imply that there are not local criteria belonging to genres of discourse, in their heterogeneity and their multiplicity. These genres serve to determine the linkage of phrases, each according to its own particular mode. These genres direct the linkage of phrases of different regimes (cognitive, interrogative, descriptive, etc.) towards a particular pragmatic end, according to which certain modes of linkage are deemed pertinent, and others not.²⁴² These genres, as Lyotard argues, provide means to link together phrases of different regimes, which are not translatable one into another, by subordinating them to a common purpose, be it to educate, to know, to persuade, and so on; the number of genres of discourse is perhaps, at least in principle, infinite.²⁴³ However, precisely according to the heterogeneity of phrases, conflicts will arise; this is inevitable. It is here that the notion of the *différend* emerges:

A la différence d'un litige, un différend serait un cas de conflit entre deux parties (au moins) qui ne pourrait pas être tranché équitablement faute d'une règle de jugement applicable aux deux argumentations. Que l'une soit légitime n'impliquerait pas que l'autre ne le soit pas. Si l'on applique cependant la même règle de jugement à l'une comme si celui-ci était un litige, on cause un tort à l'une d'elles (aux moins, et aux deux si aucune n'admet cette règle.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Ibid, 51-52.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 9. As Gérard Sfez points out, the nature of the *différend* is such that even this formulation stands to consume itself. One cannot, perhaps, even identify a case of a *différend* without reproducing the wrong inflicted upon at least one of the genres of discourse. As he writes, “*Il apparaît d'emblée que présenter le différend – ce qui fait nécessairement selon une règle du jugement ou dans un genre de discours, une langue, un idiome –, c'est déjà s'exposer à faire du tort à l'une des parties prenantes, sinon aux deux, et à*

A *différend* marks a certain discord in the process of the linkage, where the heterogeneity of phrases is not respected. It does not imply the cessation of this process; this would be impossible. Rather, it is that a phrase that links onto a prior phrase fails to do the former justice, in discounting the singular nature of its idiom. If there were a tribunal, or a third party to which the conflict could be referred, this would merely be a litigation; it would be a matter of considering the damage inflicted upon the phrase in the course of its violent translation. The *différend* is otherwise, in that such a rule of judgment does not avail itself; the damage is accompanied by the loss of means to articulate this injustice.²⁴⁵ The idiom in which the damage could be asserted is disqualified *a priori* from the idiom in which it would necessarily be taken up, presenting a double bind. If the damage cannot be asserted because it entails the loss of the means to articulate this damage, then there is no damage. Lyotard terms this privation a wrong; there is a lack of a means where one should avail itself.²⁴⁶ Lyotard further elucidates it:

Le différend est l'état instable et l'instant du langage où quelque chose qui doit pouvoir être mis en phrases ne peut l'être encore. Cet état comporte le silence qui est une phrase négative, mais il en appelle aussi à des phrases possibles en principe. Ce que l'on nomme ordinairement le sentiment signale cet état. "On ne trouve pas ses mots," etc..²⁴⁷

Although the *différend* lends itself to no immediate articulation, as Lyotard indicates, it nonetheless signals itself at the level of sentiment, in a degree of pain, of frustration, or

méconnaître le différend," (Sfez, "Les Ecritures du différend," in D. Lyotard, Milner and Sfez 2001, 12). The inability to present a case of a *différend* in a "neutral" or "objective" fashion stands to confound even the attempt to provide a stable definition for the notion. This is not, however, to dismiss the notion as incoherent; rather it is to pose it as a problem that can only be approached through a plurality of idioms, where the aporia that the *différend* is will appear each time singularly.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 18.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 29.

the vague sense that something has been left unsaid. This state refers to another mode of linkage, one that is in principle possible, even if it is not presently so, in which this unsaid might be brought to articulation. Despite the conflict between idioms, there remains the possibility that another means of linkage, one not yet available, might arrive to resolve this conflict or at least to allow for its litigation. In short, the lack of a means of linkage does not imply that linkage is impossible; as Lyotard indicates in the quotation above, it is not yet available. The pain that indicates a case of *différend* signs a deprivation with regard to a linkage that, in principle, ought be possible. This does not imply any practical guarantee of a result that could be made universal and the concomitant progressive unfolding of the capacities of linkage. Hegel remains one of the principal opponents of *Le Différend*; borrowing from Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, Lyotard asserts that this transcendental possibility of saying what remains yet unsaid might simply be to report upon the singularity of the case.²⁴⁸ Nonetheless, it is important to note here that the *différend*, as it is theorized in the eponymous work, depends upon this projection of a possible means of linkage that would do justice to those entangled in a state of *différend*. Lyotard remarks that a break in phrasing that disavows the possibility of linkage to another idiom is not a *différend*.²⁴⁹

“*La phrase-affect*,” then, marks a return to the notion of the *différend*, as a supplement to the earlier work; moreover, the title under which it was originally delivered, “*L’Inarticulé ou le différend même*,” can only strike one as contradictory, if not bizarre. What is at stake in the later piece is not only an expansion of the notion of the *différend*, the *différend* itself, but also another kind of *différend*, precisely at the point

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 130-133.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 157.

where it refuses any sort of accord with itself, at the level of that sentiment that Lyotard had, in the earlier work, taken as the sign of a case of *différend*. The title, which Lyotard confesses to having modeled after that of Duchamp's *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, in its own way lays bare the problem of the linkage between presentation and representation through the difficulty it presents for any translation.²⁵⁰ The *même*, the "itself" of the title is equivocal, lending itself just as well to a reading of its sense as an "even so," where what was the same is already no longer the same. The title forces upon the translator a decision that necessarily leaves something unsaid; one decides upon the sense of the title (in various contexts, one might render *même* "itself," "the same," "exact," "even," "very," leaving aside a host of idiomatic constructions) and leaves other possible readings in abeyance. The mode here is, of course, the mode of affected language that Freud had discovered in the *Witz*, the doubling, duplicity or intimation of sense through which the workings of the unconscious are indicated, while remaining themselves inarticulate. It is a matter of what presents itself within the domain of articulation while remaining heterogeneous to it, what presents itself apart from representation, and, in this sense, Lyotard reopens the problem of presentation and its linkage through the Freudian problematic of affect.

Affect, as Lyotard declares, is a phrase. However, this class of phrase, the "affect-phrase" of the essay's title, presents itself in a way that is little amenable to the analyses put forth in the earlier work. In contrast to those phrases that will have articulated a universe according to those four poles, addressor, addressee, sense and referent, the affect-phrase appears as deficient; in presenting, it will have not furnished a universe.

²⁵⁰ Brügger, in Brügger 1993, 141-142. On the *même* of this title, see also Geoffrey Bennington's "The Same, Even, Itself," in Bennington 2005, 43-64.

This is to say that it has no addressor, no addressee, no referent, and, from the standpoint of articulated discourse, it has no sense. Lyotard describes it thus:

*Une phrase peut être plus ou moins articulée, ses polarisations plus ou moins marquées. Mais la phrase-affect n'admettrait pas ces gradations. Inarticulée signifierait: cette phrase ne présente pas un univers de phrase; elle signale du sens; ce sens est d'une seule sorte, plaisir et/ou peine ("ça va, ça ne va pas"); ce sens n'est rapporté à aucun référent [...] enfin ce sens n'émane d'aucun destinataire (je) et ne s'adresse à aucune destinataire (tu). Le signal qu'est la phrase-affect est tautégorique: aisthēsis, Empfindung, elle est à la fois un état affectif et le signe de cet état, ce que Kant écrivait du sentiment esthétique. Et Freud séparait les affects des représentations de chose ou de mot: ils sont des témoins qui ne représentent rien à personne.*²⁵¹

In contradistinction to an articulated phrase, the affect-phrase says nothing about any referent. It does not pass from any sender to any receiver. It is, like any phrase, an event, but one signaled only by the sentiment of pleasure and/or pain. But it would be overhasty to say that it is something felt. Precisely insofar as it has no addressee, the affect-phrase is not felt by anyone or anything, be it a subject, an organism, a consciousness. There is an excitation and concomitant pleasure and/or pain; that is all that one might say; to assume that it has a context, even a minimal one, is already to presuppose a ground that could be furnished only by the linkage of articulated phrases that here remains foreign. That is to say that the affect occurs, it excites "before" there is yet anyone or anything who could

²⁵¹ Lyotard 2000, 47-48.

claim it as something undergone or experienced, who could claim to have felt it.²⁵² Thus divorced from articulated discourse, the affect-phrase implies nothing; it belongs to no regime of causality, nor to the schema of temporal unfolding that would undergird these regimes. As Lyotard indicates, “*le temps du sentiment est maintenant.*”²⁵³ This now is not one that belongs to the mapping of chronological time, which is the product of articulated phrases; it is the now of presentation, which remains otherwise than the now that is indicated by those phrases that attempt to represent it. This now is what is lacking in the movement of articulated phrases, which can only map temporality according to their linkage, designating a before and an after. Even as a “now” can be articulated, and is necessary to the establishment of chronology, this articulated “now” is not coterminous with the now of the affect phrase, insofar as what is articulated only appears “after,” belatedly, according to the *nachträglich* determination of representation.

Divorced from the linkage of phrases and their temporality, affect could be construed to be indifferent. As Lyotard remarks,

*La capacité de sentir plaisir et douleur, l'affectivité, l'aisthēsis, est indépendante de son articulation possible. Elle ne l'attend pas (c'est le logos qui déclare qu'elle l'attend) elle n'en a pas besoin pour se parfaire (ce que dit Aristote). Elle est peut-être indifférente à l'articulation.*²⁵⁴

It neither presumes nor seeks an interlocutor, it neither responds nor does it await a response. It simply happens, apparently without regard to what precedes and what follows. Yet the phrase that declares the affect-phrase to be indifferent takes this affect-

²⁵² For a greater exposition of the consequences of the inarticulation of the affect-phrase, see Nouvet in Nouvet, Stahuljak and Still 2007, 107-113.

²⁵³ Lyotard 2000, 49.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

phrase as referent, after all, and thus should give pause. But just the same, that it should be brought into relation to articulated discourse is inevitable. Nevertheless, the model that Lyotard proposes in “*La phrase-affect*” differs in a significant fashion from that set forth in the earlier text, precisely insofar as what is here at stake is no longer a conflict between modes of articulated discourse. He writes:

De ce que la phrase-affect est inarticulée il résulterait plusieurs traits remarquables. En voici trois: 1. La phrase-affect paraît ne pas se laisser enchaîner selon les règles d’aucun genre de discours; elle paraît ne pouvoir au contraire que suspendre ou interrompre les enchaînements, quels qu’ils soient; 2. La phrase-affect fait injure aux règles des genres du discours; elle crée un dommage; 3. Ce dommage donne à son tour lieu à un tort. Car le dommage subi par le discours peut être argumenté dans les règles, mais cette argumentation est inappropriée à la phrase-affect en tout cas, s’il est vrai qu’elle ne donne pas lieu à un genre et ne saurait s’argumenter. Le dommage que la phrase-affect fait subir aux genres du discours se transforme ainsi en un tort subi par la phrase-affect. – Phrase articulée et phrase-affect ne peuvent se “rencontrer” qu’en se manquant. De leur différend, résulte un tort. Si articulation et inarticulation sont irréductibles l’une à l’autre, ce tort peut être dit radical.²⁵⁵

As inarticulate, the affect-phrase does not furnish other phrases with means by which it might be linked; its occurrence merely serves to interrupt or to suspend the process of linking phrases that might otherwise occur. These interruptions might be the imposition of silence, or the work of deformation that affect inflicts on articulated discourse, whether in the form of the *Witz*, of parapraxis, or other instances in which discourse shows itself

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 47.

to be affected, animated by something other than what one wanted to say. But where Freud, or at least a certain Freudianism, would there inaugurate a work of translation whereby it could be asserted that the affect is but a deformed instance of articulation, Lyotard does not turn in this direction. As he notes, affect inflicts a damage upon the rules of the genres of discourse; it does not inflict a wrong. This is to say that, following the definition set out in *Le Différend*, this is not yet a case of *différend*. The damage inflicted upon articulated discourse does not in any way impede its ability to argue the case, since any argumentation can and will be carried out at the level of articulated discourse. The damage inflicted on articulated discourse is only a damage because there is no deprivation; indeed, the disturbance worked by affect will, in its own way, incite argumentation, even if only in the manner of a “what was that?” It is only in the third movement outlined in the passage above that the *différend* is introduced. The discourse or discourses, whatever they may be, that attempt to give an account of the occurrence of the affect-phrase necessarily wrong it. This is not, in any way, because the affect-phrase is silenced by articulated discourse; indeed, the affect-phrase is already silent. It gives nothing to be heard, it does not demand a response. The *différend* emerges precisely at the point where articulation presupposes that the affect-phrase, despite appearances, does indeed intend something, signifies something. The case becomes a *différend* insofar as the affect is made to “speak,” treated as if it furnished material for articulation. Whereas the relation between affect and articulated discourse is only “initially” a damage inflicted upon discourse, it becomes a wrong when discourse attempts to treat affect in this way – in effect, articulated discourse deprives the affect-phrase of its very silence.

Thus construed, the status of the *différend* between the inarticulate and articulated phrases appears in a somewhat different light than Lyotard had developed in *Le Différend*. Where, in the earlier work, perhaps owing to the legal framework that permeates many of its examples, one could say that something sought to be phrased, signaled by the frustration that something had been left unsaid; with affect, it is otherwise. Affect does not “want” to be heard. It remains indifferent to articulation. The wrong that is inflicted by articulated discourse dishonors this very indifference. It cannot let the remainder rest; a double bind emerges precisely at that point where articulated discourse goes after the affect-phrase, according to the necessity that linkage be furnished, in spite of the lack of means provided by the affect-phrase. To do justice to the affect-phrase, to respect its own impossible idiom, it would perhaps be necessary not to link onto it; this, precisely, is something that is not allowed to articulated discourse. There is, and indeed must be an attempted “transcription” of affect into articulated discourse. As Lyotard writes:

Il semble que cette transcription soit inévitable, ne serait-ce que parce que la phrase-affect est inopportune, malséante, et même inquiétante dans l'ordre des discours. Il serait montré que votre gaieté, votre souffrance venaient malgré tout en leur temps, quelles avaient leur légitimité, qu'elles ne dérangent que parce qu'on méconnaissait leur “logique.” On dirait presque que la phrase-affect demande à être articulée de cette manière, et même argumentée – comme si le scandale qu'elle procure au discours n'était pas supportable. Le discours ne

*semble pas pouvoir longtemps supporter qu'un reste inarticulé et inargumenté demeure hors de ses prises.*²⁵⁶

One could almost say that the affect-phrase demands to be articulated, but this demand is not imposed by the inarticulate phrase. It is attributed to that phrase by the articulated discourse that can neither admit nor tolerate this remainder that speaks nothing. The “nothing” that the affect speaks is, as Lyotard indicates, manifest within the order of discourse, as that disquieting presence that intrudes upon articulated discourse and disrupts it thereby attesting that which remains outside the grasp of any articulation. Though there is a *différend* between affect and articulated discourse whereby affect is wronged, affect is in no way troubled by this *différend*. It is rather the opposite. It is the *logos* that suffers the presence of affect, and which finds the presence of this remainder to be insufferable. As Jacob Rogozinski notes, articulated discourse is made to suffer a situation in which all of its possible means are found wanting. It is confronted with the possibility of the impossible, the presence of “*ce qui ne pouvait pas arriver, en aucun cas, et qui arriva cependant.*”²⁵⁷ That the affect-phrase should befall, in the manner of a presentation, does not in any way serve to dispel the sense in which it remains impossible according to the regimes of representation. In happening, it does not enter the register of events that may be identified, described, and known. Rather, its occurrence is the occurrence of the impossible *qua* impossible.

The suffering of the *logos* nonetheless does manifest itself through these disturbances within the movements of discourse, not as an articulation of sense, but in those breakages where the voice is let to show through. This voice, Lyotard argues, is to

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 48.

²⁵⁷ Rogozinski 1989, 68.

be read in the manner of the Aristotelian *phōnē*, as distinguished from articulated discourse, the *logos*. The human, as the well-known definition goes, is the animal endowed with *logos*, but like other animals, it also possesses *phōnē*. This voice, as Aristotle indicates, “is itself the sign of pain and of pleasure,” means by which the tautegorical signal of affect is presented.²⁵⁸ Thus construed, the voice serves as an immediate signal of affective states – *παθήματα* – that owe nothing to signification. Its mode of presentation is aesthetic, indicating via tone, tempo, and rhythm. Moreover, these phonic presentations, according to Aristotle, are *τέλεια* – perfect, entirely accomplished – insofar as they befall absolutely, without reference to what might come before or after; Lyotard accordingly notes that they await nothing.²⁵⁹ It might be said then, that the *παθήματα* are themselves apathetic, indifferent to articulation, its chronology, and its sense; they stand unmoved by any possible term of temporal or positional relation. Moreover, they want nothing, suffer nothing, enjoy nothing, and, in a sense, are nothing. Faced with this nothing, the *logos* tries to make something of this nothing; in the attempt, it undergoes a disturbance that remains anterior to any logic.²⁶⁰

Lyotard calls the mode of the affect-phrase, its impossible presentation, *infantia*, infancy. It lies anterior to representation, remaining outside of its means. Following its etymology, the infant is *in-fans*, unspeaking – the term serves to mark a state that the Aristotelian definition evokes, but nonetheless elides. The human might well be the

²⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Politics* 1253 a15; the translation follows the rendering in Lyotard 2000, 50.

²⁵⁹ Lyotard 2000, 50.

²⁶⁰ It is here that Lyotard marks his difference from Derrida. As he notes in an interview with Richard Beardsworth 1994, (100-101), entitled “Nietzsche and the Inhuman,” “My notion of the remainder (*le reste*) is not quite that of Derrida for whom the remainder is the ‘always deferred.’ ... What is missing from his reflection is that there *comes* a moment when *you have to decide (trancher)*: you are either coming or not coming. And that’s the working-through of conflict. In other words, there’s no longer a place for negotiation. One has to decide, and one’s decision is guided by the feeling of *the least unjust*. This ‘lesser evil’ indicates that a remainder has resisted ‘subsumption.’” (emphases original).

animal that is endowed with *logos*, but it is not so gifted from the moment of its birth. Lyotard gestures towards a dimension anterior to the human, an inhumanity that remains, or will have remained, constitutive of the human: the infant is born to affectability, not to the *logos*. This infancy is not to be construed as a historical childhood – such would be already to displace infancy in making it the referent of articulated phrases belonging to the narrative genre. Lyotard instead relates the term to the Freudian notions of primary narcissism and the polymorphous perversity of infantile sexuality; it indicates a state that stubbornly remains anterior to and outside the domain of the *logos*, adult genital sexuality, and the modes of linkage and relation that are there implied. Nonetheless, Lyotard sounds a note of dissatisfaction with this portrayal. The question demands also another approach; the Freudian depictions of infancy “*reste anthropologique. Il s’agirait d’élaborer le statut transcendantal de l’infantia.*”²⁶¹ Infancy designates what remains unlinked from articulation and the concomitant domains of the human and of possibility. This is to say that the notion of *infantia* cannot be derived from an empirical approach, whether in the conventional sense, or the extended one in which analytic observation might be included. *Infantia* does not yield itself to observation. It must be derived about the constitutive aporia that is found in the *logos*’ *différend* with affect; however one might formulate the role played by affect, it remains within the umbra of its unyielding impossibility, giving nothing to representation. The affect-phrase neither knows nor cares for any interlocution, nor any *telos*. It does not communicate anything, but all the same it makes itself heard. The infant, for lack of the *logos*, does not speak the affect-phrase, but via the *phōnē*, such phrases are nonetheless signaled in the tone of a cry of pain and/or pleasure. As Lyotard indicates, this cry does not communicate anything; that would

²⁶¹ Ibid., 54.

require that the affect-phrase be addressed. It signals, to no one, and from no one, the nothing of affect.

Removed as they are from representation, the παθήματα cannot be construed as bodily states, in which pain and/or pleasure is the effect of some cause inflicted upon a body conceived in terms of physiology or biology. As Lyotard writes:

Il n'y a pas de corps que comme le référent d'une ou plusieurs phrases cognitives, et qui est attesté par des procédures d'établissement de la réalité. Il y a plusieurs sortes de corps, selon la nature de la connaissance recherchée. Le corps comme existence suppose donc le logos. Seul l'animal logique a un corps. – La phōnē n'a pas de corps puisqu'elle n'est pas référentielle. Les plaisirs et les peines éprouvés à l'aventure par l'infans ne sont attribués à l'excitation de telle ou telle zone érogène que par le discours articulé des adultes, qui prend l'organisme en référence. – Il faut élaborer le statut du monde ou du chaos incorporel associé à l'affect, le statut de la Chose. [...] Freud peut s'obstiner à nommer l'affectivité infantile sexualité, il est pourtant certain qu'elle ignore complètement la polarisation liée à la différence sexuelle.²⁶²

Deprived of the *logos*, the infant does not have a body; the assertion of such possession depends upon the body being the referent of an articulated phrase. The presentation of the infantile affect-phrase is rather associated with an “incorporeal chaos,” unmapped and unmappable, without position (which is to say not even the body of physics), the absolute site of affectability. This chaos does not belong to a world. It is rather the nothing of affect. Borrowing the term, though perhaps not the exact sense, from Lacan, Lyotard refers to this affective “nothing,” the negated universe that it presents, as *la Chose*.

²⁶² Ibid.

Nevertheless, the pleasures and pains that the *infans* undergoes will be explained according to the phrases of adults, which attempt to link onto them, positioning the infant's cries according to a regime of causality that would allow it to be heard as if it were articulated. Despite the inarticulation of the affect phrase – it is unaddressed, and without sense or referent – the *logos* of the adult takes it as if it were a report on a bodily state that the infant addresses to another. The adult rationalizes the infantile cry, taking it as if it were an articulated phrase (albeit one that is articulated quite badly, in a rudimentary fashion) along the lines of, “I, the infant, ask you, the adult, for relief of my discomfort.” In a quotidian fashion, this inevitable work of translation serves to preserve the child's life; nonetheless it mistakes the nature of the affective cry, thus inscribing the *différend* between *phōnē* and *logos*. The *logos* sets itself to work, “correcting” the affect-phrase. A phrase-universe is imputed to the affect-phrase, no matter the wrong.

One might well say, transforming the epicurean dictum, “If my infancy is, I am not; if I am, my infancy is not.” Even so, the “I” of articulation will be inserted into narratives of origin, and will thus link itself to an infancy that is “mine.” The infantile pleasures and pains that belong to no “I” are claimed, belatedly, by an “I”; they thereby constitute it through instating an account of its origin. The one who declares “I was indeed that child,” errs in the assertion, but only up to a point. I was not that infant, but, in narration, I will have been the infant who rejoiced and who suffered; identity is asserted via the pronoun. Where I should not, could not have been, beyond the limit where the “I” is able to identify itself, recognition is nonetheless forced. In this equation, the “I” makes itself accountable for the excitements of infantile sexuality. The “I” discovers itself responsible for the infantile, for all the sordid pleasures and humiliations

of its sexuality. These excitements, as Lyotard indicates, are “obscene” – they do not lend themselves to the stagings proffered by the *logos*, the attempts at representation that would make them apparent, understood, or even understandable. The movements of the *logos* cannot contain them.

Accordingly, the presence of affect inspires a constitutive disquiet, a state from which one does not depart. As Lyotard writes:

La phōnē infantile est innocente non pas parce qu'elle n'a pas fauté, mais parce que la question de ce qui est juste et injuste lui est inconnue puisque cette question exige le logos. Cette question ne se pose qu'avec des phrases qui peuvent présenter des référents, des destinataires et des destinateurs – toutes instances nécessaires à la pensée de la distribution, de l'égalité, de la communicabilité des noms propres, sure les instances de la destination, qui permet le débat et l'argumentation. L'enfance, comme le premier Adam, ignore qu'elle est nue. Et pour autant que le logos recouvre la phōnē (la revêt, ou la vêt) plutôt qu'il ne la supprime ou même ne la domestique, cette innocence éhontée pourra toujours surgir dans le cours des phrases articulées, de façon impromptue. – Mais alors on lui fera honte d'être nue. L'impudeur de l'affect sera coupable. Innocence et culpabilité arrivent ensemble, sous le nom d'angoisse.²⁶³

The infant, Lyotard notes, is innocent. Unable to know relation, it necessarily ignores the question of what is just and what is unjust. It is not innocent in the eyes of the law; it is innocent of the law, precisely insofar as this knowledge depends upon articulate *logos*. Remaining outside of and anterior to the law, it would be impossible for the infant to submit to the dictates of articulated discourse. Only belatedly, when it learns to articulate,

²⁶³ Ibid.

does the human acquire the knowledge of good and evil; as Lyotard indicates, with this knowledge, there arrives a concomitant shame. With articulation, one discovers one's own supposed sins of the past, of having been unaware, of having openly flaunted the sordid pleasures and pains of infantile sexuality, and, accordingly, of already having transgressed. Shame arrives in arrears, shame at having been incapable of shame when it was called for; therefore one is guilty of shameless transgression. Lyotard indicates that, like that first Adam, the infant is insipient, not knowing its own nakedness. Seduced by the serpent, and called to account by the divine, this Adam is introduced to articulation as already culpable, for having been an infant who paraded about nakedly. This nakedness is perhaps not one of a body, but the crime of having put infantile sexuality openly on display, of having flaunted before the *logos* its intolerable other. For this, the "I" will be held culpable, no matter its absence from the occasion of the purported crime; this is cause enough for anxiety. Accordingly, the *logos* vests (*vêt*) the infantile with an intention to which the *phōnē*, in its apathetic indifference, is entirely foreign. But, as Lyotard notes, it also revests the infantile. The verb *revêtir* may designate the clothing of what is naked, but also the granting of a function. With the supposed intention that is granted to the infantile, a legitimation of sorts is granted; genres of discourse will interpret the infantile cry as if it related to one *telos* or another. Affect is taken as if it could be made to serve, its indifference ignored. Thus its obscene nudity is covered over, one pretends that it had always been clothed. In attempting to cover over the infantile affect-phrase, the *logos* claims responsibility for it, and thus becomes culpable for its obscene crimes. The "I" is made guilty, by association to that which knows no sociation.

Thus the infantile affect persists in spite of its articulation by the *logos*, its attempt to domesticate it. It will not have been treated by articulated discourse, it will not have been done away with; as Anne Tomiche remarks, “affect is excluded inside; it inhabits articulated discourse while being its radical other. The Thing and the affect-phrase name an otherness that can never be assimilated, an irreducible otherness that inhabits articulated discourse while being its radical other.”²⁶⁴ The affective thing persists as that impossible remainder, because of which one will have always remained an infant, party to affect. The human bears with its affective remnant, even as it would try to master it, or to forget its unruliness by articulating it; this unspeaking, animal, or inhuman remainder persists as integral, even constitutive of the human. The voice, as voice, never ceases to comport something of a cry; it is never a pure medium, it remains sonic matter that stands to give way to something other than the movements of articulation. This matter, signaled in the aesthetic, which is to say affective, movements of the voice remains singular, removed from the exchanges of signification; as Claire Nouvet argues, “the *phōnē* is neither the absolute other nor the absolute outside of articulated language. It can inhabit articulated language, but as a squatter, a clandestine guest, an ‘outside within,’ the presence of which articulated language does not even suspect.”²⁶⁵ This suspicion is deferred so long as the affected voice does not reassert itself through interruption, in the breaking of linguistic sense, announcing itself as an obstacle to the articulation of good sense. Though one might never anticipate its impossible befalling, affect stands always to assert itself in the progressions of articulated sense, thereby leaving one who presumes to speak once again exposed.

²⁶⁴ Tomiche 1994, 59.

²⁶⁵ Nouvet in Nouvet, Stahuljak and Still 2007, 114.

No matter what attempts might be made to dress over the affect-phrase, the presumptions of the *logos* are never realized. Articulation is made to suffer the failure of its means in the face of the anxiety provoked by the unrepresentable affect, and the humiliation of the discovery that its means have again proved fruitless. The *logos* suffers from the frustrations worked by the impossible presence of the affect-phrase, which remains outside any regime of possibility. Articulation here finds itself shaken, and made to differ from itself on account of its encounter with this other, an other that remains for it a source of the shame and imagined mockery that continually torment it. In this “meeting” of affect and the *logos*, culpability emerges, and articulated discourse becomes accountable for the disturbance. No matter the attempt, it can only reinscribe the wrong that it inflicts upon affect, at every turn. It is here, that one – or call it an “I,” if you wish – emerges as inextricably responsible for the activity of that which does not belong to it, and which demands no response.

II. *Coups de grâce*

To rest upon a citation: “*Attestés, la souffrance, l’indomptable sont comme déjà détruits. Je veux dire: en témoignant, on extermine aussi. Le témoin est un traître.*”²⁶⁶ These lines, the closing words of *The Inhuman*, bear upon the difficulty of witnessing to affect, in speech, in writing, in any mode of articulated discourse. In spite of the most noble intentions, in striving to bear witness, one will have wronged affect yet again, always. The task that Lyotard explicitly sets himself in his last writings is that of attesting to the debt to affect, even as it remains unattestable by articulated discourse. There is necessarily a double bind here, the product of articulated discourse’s *différend* with inarticulate affect. One must take seriously the challenge that Lyotard poses with this

²⁶⁶ Lyotard 1988b (2014), 204.

statement. In attempting to bear witness to affect, one inevitably wrongs it. And yet the phrase refuses any simple reading. “The witness is a traitor,” is not a canonical dictum issued from one of the *auctores* of philosophy, to be received, repeated, and perhaps critiqued. To take it thus would be not to have heard what is there said. Should one lend credence to the witness who reports that witnesses are traitors? The statement belies its own authority.

In its form, the statement “the witness is a traitor” recalls the famed “Liar’s Paradox” attributed to Eubulides of Megara, which Lyotard analyzes in his 1976 essay “*Sur la force des faibles*.” To briefly recapitulate: he borrows Cicero’s articulation of the paradox: “if you say that you lie and you say so truly, then you lie.” The converse is also the case: “if you say that you lie and you are lying, you do so truly.”²⁶⁷ The paradox arises where the statement takes itself as its own referent; if the statement that declares itself to be false is false, it is true. If it is true, then it is false. The difficulty presented here is not, for the logician, insurmountable. Lyotard invokes Russell’s proposed dissolution, where the statement “I lie” is decomposed into two distinct operators: “(I say truly that) I lie.” Taken thus, the two clauses are set into distinct groups and treated independently. The first of these, the simple assertion, “I lie,” is assigned to a category of statements that refer to objects. The “I say truly that,” is relegated to a second class that takes as its referent statements that belong to the first type. These domains of reference are declared via axiom; statements of the first class must take objects as reference, and the second, statements about objects. The paradox is thus apparently dissolved; statements are forbidden to take themselves in reference. Lyotard nonetheless identifies a

²⁶⁷ Lyotard 1976, 8. Lyotard’s reading of the Liar’s Paradox is discussed at greater length in the second chapter, above.

problem that lies in the imposition of this axiomatic division. The statement of the axiom must either belong to the class of statements that refer to other statements, in which case the paradox reasserts itself at the order of metalanguage – it would be a statement referring to a statement about statements, thus disobeying itself – or it belongs to a third class, that could only be shored up with reference to a fourth, inflicting an infinite regress. Lyotard comments:

*En un sens, tout cela n'est pas bien grave. On fera un méta-axiome pour arrêter cette régression, on reconnaîtra bonnement que les valeurs de vérité ne peuvent en effet être arrêtées sous la condition de cet axiome. Mais en un sens, cela est bien grave; car cet formalisme, voir cet artificialisme est justement ce que les maîtres cachent. Où est leur autorité si elle ne prend pas modèle sur un ordre qui lui est antérieur, si elle est décrétée par elle-même?*²⁶⁸

The danger for the logician is that without fixed, authoritative axioms, one risks anarchy. “*Sur la force des faibles*” celebrates this not as an end, but as means by which minor discourses might come to assert themselves against those which are dominant. This anarchy is that which Lyotard asserted, in his “pagan” period, as a means of a potential political resistance to master discourses; the rules by which these discourses operated could always be themselves made objects of play and their authority thus reversed. It is undoubtedly not the same anarchy that is characteristic of affect in the later writings, insofar as “pagan” anarchy yet relates to the domain of the practical, to politics and to ethics. The anarchy that emerges as characteristic of affect maintains no relation to the possible; it is unable to acknowledge any rule, even as reversed. Nonetheless, it is significant that the later work on affect sees the return of a gesture where argumentation

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 9.

undercuts itself and reveals the authority it purports to wield as fractured. Lyotard well remains an *auctor*, but one who will have exauthorized himself, will have presented his witness in a certain bad faith. This is not a flaw; the question of affect allows no alternative. The logical bad faith, manifest in the declaration that the witness is a traitor, is itself a gesture. It betrays itself in order to indicate, through this very betrayal, something of affect and its work upon articulated discourse.

Lyotard's late writings on affect will have, after a fashion, attempted to say nothing. The writings on affect strain to allow the unrepresentable "nothing" that signals the presence of affect to be heard. Inevitably, he will not have said this nothing in a "pure," "immediate" state, as if this could be imagined. The task of witnessing to affect precisely demands that one not dispense with the established discourses that have attempted to treat it – whether it be philosophy, psychoanalysis, literature, the visual arts, or any of the others that are invoked in his writings. That means that one will have continued to evoke the authorities, but precisely in that mode in which Lyotard sets himself with the paradox on witnessing; authority must be denuded if the suppression of affect is to be unworked. It must be allowed to retain its claims while these claims are shown to be troubled by what escapes them. Lyotard opens his essay "*La mainmise*" on this note:

Je ferai seulement quelques observations. Le lieu d'où elles auront été faites, j'aurai et j'aurais, du mal à désigner. Ce n'est pas, je le présume, celui du savoir, du supposé savoir. Car de ce que j'ai à dire, je n'en sais rien. Ni de cet amour de savoir et de sagesse que les Grecs nous ont inoculés sous le nom de philosophie.

*Car il me semble que je n'ai aimé que ce qui ne se laisserait pas savoir ni assagir –
comme beaucoup.*²⁶⁹

Philosophy, as he here represents it, is a received discourse, administered by a tradition that claims classical Greece as its point of origin; with it, its inheritors have been inoculated against what cannot be represented or known. Philosophy presents a potential danger; it might serve to ground the question, in a certain sense, declaring thinkable what remains outside the bounds of thought, what cannot be linked. The unrepresentable does not belong to philosophy, which remains a discourse, even if it poses as its highest value an ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, a “beyond being.” This claim would assert a kind of mastery over the nothing to which Lyotard refers, forcing it to become a term, a value, even if an ultimate one. Secured with a term that lies beyond argumentation, but which is the possession of a few, mastery is asserted with the name of the love of wisdom:

*les amis de sagesse, Platon, Aristote, cherchent à établir des rapports magistraux,
à fixer un référentiel non référable à déterminer un terme qui échappe à la
relation et qui domine tous les relations.*²⁷⁰

Lyotard rejects this position of mastery; affect is what cannot be mastered. All the same, it is not a matter of dismissing philosophy out of hand; only a rival position of mastery could authorize this. It is rather a matter of taking up philosophy against the grain, where the security provided by an imagined final term does not avail itself. The emphasis is no longer on this or that doctrine, but on the trace that it may well indicate. Of affect there is no trace; nevertheless, the discourses that have served to inoculate against it may yet

²⁶⁹ Lyotard 2000, 119.

²⁷⁰ Lyotard 1976, 5.

indicate something of it, however minimally. Scarring, after an injection performed upon a child.

Such an approach to philosophy is no longer the self-assured project of Plato, but it remains a work of love. As Lyotard indicates in the passage quoted above, this antithetical love makes no claim as to knowing its object. It is not able to name it with any singular magistral name, even that of the ineffable. As he continues, “*peut-être n’est-ce même un lieu. En tout cas, pas un lieu-dit. Et pas plus une utopie. Je lui accorderais plutôt le privilège du réel.*”²⁷¹ He does name it after a fashion, here designating it the real, one of many names under which affect will pass in the later writings, but offers these names only as placeholders. They indicate what cannot be named with any confidence, what cannot be transformed into a concept; where it intervenes, one is at a loss. There is a risk here; the argumentation might well turn along Socratic lines, where authority is claimed on the basis of knowing one’s relative lack of knowledge. This danger cannot be avoided. Nonetheless, Lyotard’s writing attempts to resist this assimilation, deciding upon the name of “the real,” here a borrowed one, stripped of its specificity, deployed in full awareness of its weakness. He decides upon a name for that affective nothing, proceeding with it without attempting to apologize for this decision. It will have been a wrong – articulating it can only wrong the inarticulate – but it marks the point where a decision must be rendered if one is not to ignore the issue entirely. He does not announce anything; as Kent Still notes, his writing performs its exposure.²⁷² He styles weakness within his argumentation; the love that is here declared cannot serve as any basis for a genre of discourse. The position of philosophy becomes otherwise; it is no longer exactly

²⁷¹ Lyotard 2000, 119.

²⁷² Still in Nouvet, Stahuljak and Still 2007, xii.

a discipline, or a genre of discourse. It becomes a mode of writing. The “sybilline” writing of Nietzsche or the late Heidegger is, Lyotard claims, still too assured in its prophetic mode, but:

Wittgenstein, Gertrude Stein, Joyce ou Duchamp paraissent de meilleurs têtes “philosophiques” en regard de Nietzsche ou Heidegger – je veux dire par meilleurs: plus aptes à prendre en compte le néant sans issue dont l’Occident accouche en ce premier quart du XXème siècle; et par “philosophiques,” j’entends: s’il est vrai que philosopher est affaire de “style,” ce que Valéry, à sa manière néo-classique bien française, conclut dans Léonard et les Philosophes.²⁷³

A philosopher, but then two (perhaps three or four) writers of literature, and a visual artist: philosophy becomes an affair of style insofar as in writing, thinking, or art, it finds itself already overtaken by that “exitless nothing” that emerges in the wake of the abeyance of faith in those “grand narratives” that Lyotard diagnoses in *The Postmodern*

²⁷³ Lyotard 1993b, 29-30. One should take care here not to take this dismissal of philosophy *qua* announcement as a dismissal of Nietzsche *tout court*; the essay from which it is drawn, “Zone,” is in part a later rearticulation of certain motifs which Lyotard drew from his engagement with Nietzsche in the 1970s, most particularly that of an “active nihilism” as a mode of resistance to what he calls “the system” (on this nihilism, see the first chapter of this dissertation, and Gaillard in Gaillard, Nouvet and Stoholski 2016 for its specific invocation in “Zone”). In his seminar of 1975-1976, “*La logique qu’il nous faut*,” Lyotard invokes a Nietzsche whose writings are not to be taken as a promise of the overman to come, but rather as a fiction, a movement of style that denies the totalizing gestures of the system. As he there argues, Nietzsche’s argumentation dispenses with the notion of a measurable, progressive time, upon which the dialectical logic of the system rests; Nietzsche, as Lyotard portrays him, dispenses with notions of culpability, of finitude, and the “not yet” – in sum, he dispenses the notion of delay that is fundamental to the system, insofar as it seeks the overcoming of this condition. As one reads, “*C’est ces valeurs là avec lesquelles Nietzsche essaye de rompre, et si on rompt avec ça, il est bien évident qu’il faut abandonner l’idée du retard et donc l’idée d’une horloge. Cela veut dire qu’effectivement il n’y a pas de horloge. [...] Mais nous savons bien que tout cet espace, toute cette logique, tout ce temps sophistiqué ou paradoxal, si vous voulez, elle est toujours prise dans l’autre, c’est-à-dire dans la pensée du système, dans la pensée des rapports de force, dans la mécanique et dans la logique des contradictions*,” (Session of April 4, 1975). While the notion of delay is a central one in Lyotard’s late writings on affect, and there remain important tensions between this work and that of the 1970s, the preoccupations of the earlier writings on Nietzsche yet remain fruitful for an interrogation of affect – while the *logos* is always *en retard* with respect to affect, it should be recalled that the affect-phrase, ignorant of any temporal framework, knows nothing of delay, a point that would perhaps fit with Lyotard’s emphasis on Nietzsche’s style rather than his pronouncements as such.

Condition. Philosophy finds itself in a position where it will have nothing any longer to say. It discovers that it always will have had nothing to say. What remains is style, the matter of tone, rhythm, plastic form; in short, the aesthetic, such as it reveals one's affectability, exterior to any discourse that might be articulated. This does not provide means to escape this "nothing." One plunges headlong into it, to show one's self as already affected by what lies outside of any accounting. All that one can do is to struggle to at least provide a glimpse of the suppressed affective nothing.

This approach remains a betrayal of philosophy as it is traditionally construed. Yet love and this betrayal are not contraries. In the final pages of *The Inhuman*, some paragraphs before Lyotard declares the witness a traitor, love appears as sedition, masking a certain bad faith:

*La solitude est sédition. L'amour est sédition. Tout amour est criminel. Il n'a aucun soin de réglage des services, des places, des moments. Et la solitude de l'adolescent dans la domus, elle est sédition parce qu'elle tient dans le suspens de sa mélancolie tout l'ordre de la nature, et de la culture. Dans le secret de sa chambre, il inscrit sur rien, sur l'intimité de son journal, l'idée d'une autre maison, de la vanité de toute maison. Comme le Winston d'Orwell, il inscrit le drame de son incapacité devant la loi. Comme Kafka. Et les amants n'ont même rien à raconter. Ils sont voués à la deixis: ceci, maintenant, hier, toi. Voués à la présence, dénués de représentation.*²⁷⁴

Love, as it is here depicted, is a species of sedition. It demands that one become apathetic to a certain extent. One must turn a deaf ear to the imperatives that demand that one perform, whether they are social, disciplinary, or any other. Yet, as Lyotard notes, this

²⁷⁴ Lyotard, 1988b (2014), 189.

love is solitary, it entails no relation to another. It occurs in the suspension of every imperative that might bear down. It is sedition, but it is not self-serving, nor does it neutralize the law. Rather, one betrays one's self as being incapable before the law, as always having been incapable before the law. This writing is moved by something else, the presence of an affect that no articulated imperative can master, an affect that continues to impose itself and to demand its own account. One betrays what one was supposed to have kept hidden away, one's infancy, and thereby confesses that one was never quite the rational animal that the law presumes of its addressees. Not that this buys any respite – the law will not yield on this question. *Infantia*, infancy, is inevitably interpreted as *infamia*, infamy.²⁷⁵ The double bind remains: one betrays the law, thus rendering one's self infamous, in order to betray something of one's affectedness. Insofar as this betrayal does not depart the domain of articulation, it will yet disserve affect, no matter how ostensibly subversive. All that the gesture may aim for is to indicate something of the affect that remains unaccounted, unaccountable.

To attest to affect, then, involves dispensing with notions of accountability, of ends allegedly necessary. To bear witness to that which speaks nothing, one does not address a testimony. The diary of the adolescent that Lyotard depicts in the passage addresses itself to no one, it addresses only its solitude, bought at the price of an affected ignorance of every legitimated end. Attempting to bespeak the presence of affect, it speaks in deictics, at the limit of representation. It signals presence without defining it. This, here, now; in writing, one addresses no one, yet poses one's self as responding to one's own affectedness. It is not "I" who writes, who assumes the position of the author. It is the event, the disturbance that affect is, unaccountably writing itself. Hence the

²⁷⁵ Lyotard 1993, 28.

necessary distancing from imperatives: at the level of writing or of the voice, before the grammarian intervenes, *sed itio* is *se ditio*. One must go away, depart from the canons of the law if the event is to obtain of its own domain. This is, strictly speaking, impossible. Affect will have remained improper. Thus the task emerges as interminable, it knows no progress. One must undertake it again, once more; as Claire Nouvet writes, “Writers ... know this debt that cannot be acquitted once and for all, but which can only be endlessly acknowledged in writing.”²⁷⁶ This interminable task of writing that bears no result is anathema to the regime of performativity. It is a “waste of time,” offering no return. In this, at least, it is a labor of love.

Commenting on Lyotard’s “hypobiography” of Malraux, *Signé Malraux*, Philippe Bonnefis remarks,

*nos fables décidément sont à récrire, nos belles fables, les jolis contes de notre enfance. A soumettre, l’un après l’autre, à l’épreuve de hypocritique de l’infamie, dont il apparaît, en toute de compte, que c’est bien d’elle, et d’elle seule en définitive, que, tous autant qu’ils sont, ils tirent l’autorité qu’ils exercent encore, si avant qu’elles soient entrées dans l’âge sur les grands personnes.*²⁷⁷

The labor of criticism takes over the examination of works, renders judgments upon them, discovers in them what they meant to say or what they said without saying. If one should hear a note of hypocrisy echoed in the work of “hypocritique,” this is not at all unwarranted; be it a labor of love, the *différend* remains, turning against what remains unsaid in any attempt to say it. This is not at all an excuse to be done with criticism, to replace it with a cheap cataloguing of aesthetic forms and their particular effects, such

²⁷⁶ Nouvet in Nouvet, Stahuljak and Still 2007, 121.

²⁷⁷ Bonnefis in D. Lyotard, Milner and Sfez 2001, 49.

that they might serve as commodities, economic or cultural. Not that this could necessarily be avoided entire. In one sense, it belongs to the work of this hypocritique that before we came to read the fables, they were already read to us, or read for us. They were organized into canons, transformed into received ideas before we were there to receive them. The proper names of writers become those of *auctores*, tokens passed around and ensuring passage towards legitimation. This is not the entirety of reading, of course, but such is the ground on which the cultural imperative to read is enshrined; few commence otherwise. All the same, it remains that our fables need rewriting; not because they might be found unworthy according to this or that criterion, but because they have not yet been written, those who wrote were never quite the *auctores* that they are taken to be. Underneath the vested authority with which they parade, they remain naked; they too were and are afflicted by something infantile that does not depart their works. It is the place of literature, as Lyotard construes it, to incline to affect, to be animated by it. In so doing, the author is exauthorized. Seized by the muteness of affect, he or she bears no authority, is no authority with regard to what is written. This sort of writing does not pertain to whatever dictum. It is a matter of the aesthetic that appears alongside but at a distance from signification, a question of style. “*Le style invente des formes pour attraper l'inouï*,” Lyotard writes; it attempts to give voice to the silence of affect, attempts to force a passage for the impossible.²⁷⁸ What cannot be written, what cannot be named, nonetheless sounds off in writing. What is written is traversed by a presence that it cannot encompass; affect unsettles every account that articulated discourse might offer. The debt to affect remains unsettled, and thus one takes to writing again, as if it might finally be brought to term in articulation. The presumption will have wronged affect; nonetheless,

²⁷⁸ Lyotard 1993, 99.

this presumption serves to indicate the hold that affect asserts over infancy. One undertakes this labor all the same, out of a certain love, a love for the works that moved one in one's childhood and that continue to do so. It is fidelity surpassing what appears on the page; it gives itself to what remains unwritten upon pages. Out of this fidelity, one takes to write again, for the sake of the unwritten. It is a gesture worthy of Eubulides: one aims to write the unwritable, as it manifests itself in what has already been written. And if this is hypocritical, a betrayal of good sense, for all that it is no less love. It is not as if love has been ever known for its obedience to dictates.

The love that manifests in writing is not simple. Nor is it without its conflicts. Lyotard remarks that:

*Il y a une haine de la littérature dans l'écrivain, de l'art dans le peintre, elle est l'amour de ce que l'art et la littérature re-cèlent en le représentant et qu'il faut présenter encore, donc re-présenter, et celer à nouveau. On essaie d'écouter et faire l'affection secrète, celle qui ne dit rien, on se dispense, on s'épuise.*²⁷⁹

It is not surprising that writing, as a work of love, should be hated by the writer. The task of presenting a witness to one's infantile affectability is interminable, forever unaccomplished, a source of frustration without end. The debt cannot be acquitted, the affect will have been wronged once more, and one will have shown one's self unworthy of the task. One must expend all of one's means in an attempt to gesture to the affect that lies beyond their reach. Utterly exhausted, one is nonetheless doomed to a certain failure; writing is "*toujours mal formulé du simple fait d'être formulé,*"²⁸⁰ Lyotard remarks. Rhetorical skill, the art of figures, avails nothing:

²⁷⁹ Lyotard 1988a, 65.

²⁸⁰ Lyotard 1993, 138.

Comment faire sentir la présence, qui est l'inconscient non représenté, si l'on s'en tient au maniement des "figures," destinées à persuader, et qui ne peuvent être que des compromis représentationnels où la présence se fait figurer et par là méconnaître? L'aisthēsis ne peut que refouler la vérité du pathos (qui n'est pas pathétique) comme les fastes de l'Eglise refoulent Jésus présent au cœur. Contre-réforme, jansénisme, mouvement vers la pauvreté pour s'approcher de l'insondable misère. Jésus n'est pas vrai parce qu'il est beau. Il n'est même pas sensible, son incarnation n'est pas sa présence au monde, elle est nos larmes jaillies de la joie. Comment peut-elle être présente en chaire si le prédicateur ne fait que parler d'elle? Ce n'est pas à lui de faire pleurer. On pleure selon la grâce.²⁸¹

What there is of the presence of affect does not give itself through forms, through any possible articulation. It appears in the tears of one utterly abandoned, tears manifesting the presence of affect. This is neither an articulated response, nor is it the result of calculation. The weeping itself is grace. It is a tautegorical signal, both the signal of the state of being affected and this state itself. It is necessary not to take the theological framing here at face value – Christian discourse being no less apt than any other to escape necessarily wronging the inarticulate – but nonetheless the inflection that Lyotard gives to this grace, in aligning it with Jansenism, is significant. It is not that of the Jesuit, for whom sufficient grace has been provided to all, such that they can obey the commandments. Neither is it that of the Lutheran, secure in faith despite the impossibility of obeying them. Rather, following Pascal, the commandments are impossible to obey; nonetheless it may happen that one may, on occasion, act justly. Yet this justice is not rote adherence to the law as it is written; the inability to obey the commandments might

²⁸¹ Lyotard 1988a, 66.

well entail the inability to interpret them correctly. This justice gestures to something else, to the debt to the unwritten. This is grace: what is impossible happens, without ceasing to be impossible.²⁸² The act of grace can only appear as a transgression of all possibles, where the impossible delivers a *coup de grâce* to the table of calculation upon which possibilities are inscribed. In its wake, there is only a body or a soul unmastered, given over to weeping convulsions. For Pascal as for Lyotard, it remains unaccountable; as impossible, this fleeting instant cannot serve as a foundation upon which new calculations might be proffered. It belongs neither to the reason, nor to the understanding, but to the heart, which Lyotard was to place aside the Kantian sentiment of the beautiful and the sublime, at the level of affectability.²⁸³

Literature – which would include philosophy, if we are to take seriously Lyotard's appraisal – attends to this grace. It does not will it, much less effect it. Grace, after all, might not be granted one who prays earnestly.²⁸⁴ Grace is indifferent to whatever desire one might impose upon it, or impute to it. One might say that it demands indifference of the writer, but this is not precisely the case. Apathy and solitude are perhaps necessary if one is to attend to its silent passings, but grace itself asks nothing. As Anne Tomiche notes, Lyotard depicts the task of literature as "*témoigner de la 'présence,' à l'intérieur du discours articulé, de la non-articulation, de ce qui rend l'enchaînement problématique.*"²⁸⁵ This presence passes silently in writing, showing itself only where the seams of articulation begin to come undone, where language does not signify, but signs itself affected. Lyotard depicts it thusly:

²⁸² See the first of Pascal's *Provinciales*, in Pascal 2000, 589-597.

²⁸³ Lyotard 2000, 122.

²⁸⁴ Pascal 2000, 596.

²⁸⁵ Tomiche, in Enaudeau. *et al.* 2008, 114.

C'est notamment que, comme dans l'écriture, la grâce du mot qui a l'air de venir tout seul est suspecte et doit être suspectée, au nom de cela même qui vient avec ce mot, dans la parure de mot. Ici aussi on voudrait restituer à la chose qui venait [...] avec ce mot sa candeur exacte. Sa nudité. On s'obstine à respecter une franchise, à faire franchir, à la pensée naissant le travestissement de son inscription en langage.²⁸⁶

The word moved by grace, he notes, appears to come of its own accord, without regard to what it may mean. It has no regard for the demands of the linkage of phrases. This is only a suspension of the law, not its abolition. This interruption does not prevent a return, one that regards the moment of grace as suspect. To honor this act of grace, Lyotard argues, is to acknowledge the resistance that it mounts to its inevitable capture by articulated discourse. For the law cannot comprehend the impossible befalling of grace as such. The word will be interrogated, for certainly it meant to say something. Interpretations will be offered, argumentation introduced, the act of grace thereby forgotten. One thus attempts to restore to the act of grace its candor, the naked state in which it means nothing, shows nothing save the nothing of affect. Only thus does thought own up to its own infancy, to the affect that set it in motion. Hence the interest in the paradoxes of Eubulides, the sophists, or even Pascal; the “absurdities” that they inflict upon the word force sense into retreat, while leaving the word its capacity to move the hearer, whether with wonder or pain. One might fault these figures for yet relying upon argumentation, however subverted. This is the case, but the *différend* cannot be overcome; what is offered to the affect remains articulation. One will not have ceased colluding with the *auctores*.

²⁸⁶ Lyotard 1993 137-138.

The passage above cited concerns itself with writing, but the object of the essay from which it is drawn, “Directions to Servants,” concerns itself with translation. This labor, taken at face value, would seem to involve a greater degree of collusion than in composition, but, as he depicts it here, this is not necessarily the case. It is not a matter of approximating an equivalence of sense, as best one can, between two languages. Such would be already to position one’s self on the side of the law, accepting the statements of the *auctor* as definitive and thereby to close off the event of grace, receiving what is written as authoritative utterance that is owed only rote obedience. To restore the word the candor that Lyotard indicates, the ill-formed “nascent thought” of the text is to return to what animates it, what the writer him or herself has betrayed in the very act of writing. And translation will do no less; because of the practical fallibility of translation itself, but no less because the movement of grace signs itself only in a resistance to transcription. Translation, in this sense, becomes a mode of rewriting, which is to say writing. The impropriety of the “nascent thought” that animates writing without being written remains; it is not the property of the translator, but no more is it that of the *auctor* who is translated. Grace is never a given, or even a gift; it signs itself in the poverty of articulation, in the unruliness of the words. The words, Lyotard writes,

*désobéi parce qu’ils obéissent à autre chose. Si vous n’êtes pas leur maître, ce n’est pas qu’ils en aient un autre semblable à vous, ne différant de vous que par le nom. Leur méchanceté ne vient pas de cette félonie simple qu’ils travaillent en réalité pour quelqu’un d’autre. Ils ne vous trahissent pas en respect d’un autre, mais par un respect autre.*²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 139.

This respect is anything but a respect for the law, in whatever form it may take, whatever compromise might be offered. They remain indifferent, the respect that they offer is to that which exceeds their power, what shows itself only in the moment of grace. And grace does not come to one who is too clever; the formulation that fancies itself exact, to have mastered this impropriety will have lost it. One approaches as it as does a lover, which is to say, without sure means. As he writes, one is “*trop innocent pour l’amour si vous n’éprouver l’excès de présence, trop malin si vous n’essayez que d’obéir à la péremption. Ce qui vient de l’autre dans l’amour n’est pas une demande simple.*”²⁸⁸

There is no sure guide upon which one can rely; the one animated by love is but a lost traveler, cannot be otherwise. Hence the emphasis of Jansenism, or more properly the Counterreformation that Lyotard invokes along with it. This is not the Tridentine program that would restore to the Eternal City its laws, its dominance; it is a refusal of a simple return to forms, to representation, to articulation. The unfathomable misery of discourse is not to be escaped, nor covered over, but admitted with a sigh. As a kind of suffering, but without *pathos*, the endless abandonment of grace.

The term “grace” permeates Lyotard’s later writings; it is nonetheless surprising that, in his last work, he turns to the Doctor of Grace himself, Augustine of Hippo. Turns, or rather returns, if one is not to ignore those works that preceded; one will not have forgotten the staunch criticisms launched in Lyotard’s earlier writings.²⁸⁹ Gone is the moralizing theologian; what Lyotard discovers is an Augustine not yet or no longer an *auctor*, much less an august one. This is the confessant Augustine, setting himself in a

²⁸⁸ Lyotard 1988b, 180.

²⁸⁹ Lyotard 1974, 15-21.

work that does not belong to the philosophical, theological or rhetorical genres; as Lyotard writes:

Mais les Confessions ne sont pas de cette veine: ni un plaidoyer dont le fin serait maîtrisée et fixée par l'intellect viril, cause à défendre ou contre quoi requérir; ni un traité de philosophie, où le chemin se tracerait par discrimination conceptuelle entre ceci et cela, sensible/intelligible, âme/corps, raison/imagination. La confession ne tranche pas, au contraire: une fêlure zèbre en zigzag tout ce qui s'offre à l'écriture, au grand dépit d'animus, dont la clarté binaire est humiliée. La césure ici n'a pas lieu, n'a pas de temps. L'ici et maintenant, les durées, les lieux, les vies et le je se présentent fêlés, ou plutôt se fêlent sans cesse. Le champ de la réalité, discours inclus, craque en entier, se craquelle comme un verre sous un coup.²⁹⁰

The *Confessions* – *The Confessions of Augustine* of Lyotard – manifests a stricken writing. Philosophy, rhetoric, and theology are not cast aside, but appear here at the point of their disintegration, albeit one that remains unaccomplished. They have not collapsed, but show themselves to be riven by the presence of an affect that does not and cannot avail itself of their ends. Argumentation is brought to a halt. Distinctions may no longer be authorized and articulated. What shows forth is a writing that exposes itself as affected; it breaks with articulation, and thus from any particular placing in space or in time. Affect appears as a *coup de grâce* visited upon the *auctor*, overthrowing his every possible means, dispossessing him without return. There is no result here; the destruction remains unaccomplished. Nor is there a salvific recovery where the confessant is returned to himself anew. The ground of the discourses that one uses to articulate one's self gives

²⁹⁰ Lyotard 1998b, 72.

way to the anarchic presence of affect. Writing occupies itself with this fissure: Lyotard remarks that, “*c’est dans l’infime interstice de la craquelure que le stilus se style, dans le porte-à-faux réciproque de l’énigme et de la manifestation.*”²⁹¹ This styling, which is not Augustine’s own, but the work of the stylus itself, is set to work by the impossible befalling of grace – it is moved by what it can neither master nor know. It gives forms, it writes and will have written, but only to display itself as riven, where the work of linkage has come undone.

Lyotard, it must be emphasized, does not follow the sainted doctor in sacralizing what remains outside the grasp of articulation, much less in divinizing it. Nor does he allow the text to pass without judgment; taking upon himself the role of the *advocatus diaboli*, he accuses Augustine of having yet confessed in bad faith:

*Il entend bien le Debout, toi qui dors que Paul criait aux Ephésiens, il ne peut se lever. Pour moi, mieux valait, j’en étais sûr, m’adonner à ton amour que m’abandonner à ma convoitise, mais voilà, ton amour me plaisait et j’en étais épris, ma convoitise, je m’y complaisais et j’y demeurais pris. Deux attrait, deux appétits jumeaux, de force presque égale, de quoi faut-il que l’un emport sur l’autre. D’une nuance, d’un accent, d’un enfant qui chantonne une rengaine? Qui parle ici de transcendance quand la grâce divine est mise au même rang qu’un appât? Le mal n’est peut-être pas substantiel, comme croient les Manichéens, juste affaire de vouloir, assure le repent, c’est-à-dire de désir. Mais le mal est qu’on désire le bien comme on désire le mal.*²⁹²

²⁹¹ Ibid., 73.

²⁹² Ibid., 41.

Does Augustine here betray himself, as Lyotard asks, by placing divine love on the same plane as carnal pleasure? The line is one that Lyotard himself follows throughout his work on the *Confessions*, where divine grace is aligned with questions of seduction, of affectability, of a desire that has been stirred up through the senses in the wake of the impossible imposition of an absolute affect. The course of the *Confessions*, however incomplete the text may be, traces this arc, discovers it in Augustine. In short, the argument is thus: the desire for the divine is positioned in such a way that it exists within the same economy of pleasure and of phantasy that the saint attributes to his sordid phantasies. The supposed distinction between the Christian love that calls itself *caritas* and erotic love is, at best, incoherent – the moments that are intended to reveal this transcendent love remain obstinately material, this-worldly, aesthetic. The grace that reveals him as affected does not belong to any transcendence; it is ascribed to nuance, a shade of color, or the pitch of a child's tune. In these he discovers the ordeal of the absolute, evoked by those aesthetic experiences that denude him, deprive him of the means to articulate them. This is so; it is fine hypocritique. One can still hear Lyotard playing the part of the virile intellect that he had attempted to rule out – judging the validity of Augustine's attempted distinction, finding it wanting as such, and sketching out the consequences of what the text, in his reading, presents. Lyotard argues with and through the *Confessions*, a text which, if he is to be taken at face value, does not lend itself to argument. The moralist of one stripe or another will declare this a perversion and either recoil in horror at the sordid character that Lyotard finds in Augustine, or rejoice in it, as is his or her wont.²⁹³ This is to miss the point. This is not a matter of fidelity,

²⁹³ Lyotard's Augustine is an extremely sordid text, to the point of being hyperbolic – the figure of the divine being behind the back of the sainted doctor is transformed into one of anal rape. The move is

whether to a given orthodoxy or to its inverse, which remains an orthodoxy. These positions presume a firm foundation. But the passing of affect is always unfounded.

What emerges remains an act of grace, one that flies in the face of the precept that grace exists to serve the law, or that it is to serve as the governing term of the law. This is not to foreclose the event of grace, impossible though it might be. Philosophical argumentation too retains its role – argument might yet be mustered to deliver the *coup de grâce* to argumentation. The goal is not that Lyotard's argument, or any other, should be acknowledged as triumphant and become received opinion – it is to divest theory of its supposed position of mastery, to show that it yet bears with it the infantile affectability that it would deny. This is to say that Lyotard's argument is indeed in bad faith, but only the pious would remain able to condemn him for this. Argumentation is made to serve the purposes of betrayal, not one that is self-serving, but which aims towards immobilizing argumentation, if only for a moment, that something of grace might yet show through. To attest, in spite of every attempt to call it before the tribunal, that affect yet remains. Such a gesture is inevitably treasonous; the law cannot admit of grace, that there might be a limit to its means. Through one means or another it will reassert itself, declare its right, find reason for the occurrence and thereby domesticate it. Accounts will need be settled, the disruption made to serve the law as an example. But all the same, a gesture that calls to a *coup de grâce* may yet remain an act of grace.

perhaps necessary to distance the discussion of grace from any comfortable, salvific understanding; it relates to the enigma of the sexual. For present purposes, I have deliberately set this aside. The reader may consult the previous chapter for a line of argumentation that, while not entirely commensurate, reflects on much the same motifs.

Quignard: The Pursuit of the Image

ΠΕΧΕ ΙC̄ ΝΖΟΥ ΕΤΕΤ̄ΝΝΑΥ ΕΠΕΤ̄ΝΕΙΝΕ
 ΨΑΡΕΤ̄Ν ΡΑΨΕ ΖΟΤΑΝ ΔΕ ΕΤΕΤ̄ΝΨΑΝΝΑΥ
 ΑΝΕΤ̄ΝΖΙΚΩΝ ΝΤΑΖΩΠΕ ΖΙ ΤΕΤΝΕ ΖΗ
 ΟΥΤΕ ΜΑΥΜΟΥ ΟΧΤΕ ΜΑΥΟΥΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ
 ΤΕΤΝΦΙ ΖΑΟΥΗΡ·

Jesus said, “When this day you see your likeness, you rejoice. But when you see your images which were before your beginning, and which neither die nor show forth, how much will you have to endure!”

– *The Gospel According to Thomas*

Within those texts of Pascal Quignard that treat the orators of antiquity, one finds a certain palpable sense of incompleteness. This is, at least in part, brought about by his selection of figures of and of texts – amongst those to which he returns most frequently, one might name Marcus Cornelius Fronto, Pseudo-Longinus, Gorgias of Leontini, Caius Albucius Silus, and Marcus Porcius Latron. The writings of the first two, Fronto’s correspondence with his student in rhetoric, the emperor Marcus Aurelius, and the treatise *On the Sublime* that has come to bear the name of Longinus, survive only in uncertain fragments. Nothing of the texts of the latter pair remain – their memory is preserved, for the most part, in the fragmentary and uncertain recollections of the Elder

Seneca, set out in his *Controversiae*. The respective receptions of these five orators are perhaps most notably joined together in that to none of them has posterity been particularly kind. Gorgias lives on mostly as the doddering old fool of the dialogue that Plato entitled with his name; the rediscovery of Fronto's letters in the nineteenth century was announced to great excitement and read to a disappointment yet greater; and if Albucius and Latro have any posterity, it is largely through Quignard alone. One might perhaps contest the status of pseudo-Longinus here, and not without some justification. Nevertheless, if the translation of Boileau secured this text a place within the modern literary canon, it was by voiding it of its connection to the ancient rhetorical and sophistic movements.²⁹⁴ Quignard's writings align themselves with a sort of countercurrent to what the reception has honored with the name of Greco-Roman thought. His ancients are not the grand, not the admired. They are for the most part, minor figures, condemned to the periphery of the "classical tradition." These are not the finely rendered images of Greek art and of philosophy that have captivated the Occidental imagination with their exacting proportion and the rationality that it mirrors, nor do they comport themselves with the *dignitas* that one ascribes to the Roman political legacy, which modernity has not ceased to claim and reclaim as its proper heritage. Quignard's investigations of the ancients turn rather to disorganized *corpora*, those few fragments that survive of these authors, writings that suggest a parallel disorganization of bodies. The disjuncture of these texts are made to reveal personalities and bodies in excess. These unseemly figures manifest variously, in Latro's abandonment of the Eternal City for a half-animal existence beyond the city's bounds,²⁹⁵ in Albucius' stuttering melancholy, one which even in old age drove

²⁹⁴ Cf. Deguy in Courtine *et al.*, 14.

²⁹⁵ Quignard 1990c, 26-28.

him to drink the milk of nursing mothers,²⁹⁶ and in the hectoring hypochondria of Fronto, whose rhetorical performances remain, in his letters, indelibly linked to a manifold set of ever shifting maladies. Quignard's writings engage the writings of the ancients precisely where the phantasy of self-possession cannot be upheld; one might yet yearn for a sense of mastery, but its rupture is perhaps irrevocable. One finds this interruption in the frustrated desire of the philologist who finds him or herself condemned to work only with whatever piecemeal remnants of whatever ancient author. And it is fitting that the ancient orators do not offer the modern critic this pretense of mastery; with their afflicted bodies, they show themselves to be guided by a presence that opposes itself to the fiction of a dominant reason. A certain air of the unrepresentable accrues about these figures, insofar as they remain noxious to social mores, thereby throwing an unsightly addendum upon the pristine cast of the vaunted Greco-Roman legacy.

The selection of authors whose works exist only in fragments does not introduce any dynamic that would be foreign to the practice of reading taken in a general sense; it merely serves to exacerbate certain features that are endemic to the practice. Speaking broadly, these are:

1. The absence of any certain contextual framing – the reader is forced to take them up exactly as they are given, in whatever situation that they might be found;
2. A disillusionment with regard to the phantasy of completion – the text will never have “said everything,” it will have held back and thus demands a practice of interpretation that is always contingent and can never be finally ascertained;
3. Absence of possible dialogue, not only with the reader, but with other texts, the extent to which a given work might respond to or correspond with others is open to conjecture;

²⁹⁶ Quignard 1990a, 238.

4. Particularly pointed in ancient authors preserved entirely in citation, but nonetheless endemic to the practice writ large, “authorship” and the *auctoritas* it comports cannot be ascertained – one does not know if an ascribed sentence is spurious, whether it appears in another author’s paraphrase, whether it has been subjected to distortions intentional or unintentional in the course of its preservation;
5. An extension of the previous, and somewhat counter to it, the demand that one read the fragmentary text in light of other works, counter to the phantasy of an unmediated encounter with a given work, or perhaps even an author,
6. The state of the text, complete or incomplete is owed to factors that are largely contingent, what is preserved may be on account of a perceived value that one shares or does not with ancient copyists, what has not may be ascribed to disdain, to ignorance, or even to simple accident – what “value” a text might have, or might have had, is uncertain, open to multiple appraisals, and may not accord with the value that it is ascribed in its absence, as is made clear by the manifest disappointment in the discovery of Fronto’s writings, which failed to live up to the expectations conditioned by the flattering portrayal in Aulus Gellius’ *Noctes Atticae*.

Quignard’s treatments of the ancients explicitly take up his sources as they appear, in their fragmented dispersion. That they should be found in such a state is not his doing, but there is nonetheless a deliberate refusal of any attempt to reconstruct the diffusion of his sources, thereby to restore them to a pristine state. He does not conjecture a system that attempts to return the texts, their authors or what in each might be called their “thought” to themselves. Refusing the hermeneutic conceit, Quignard instead takes

them up as chance occasions of sense, which remain capable of moving their reader despite being irreducible to any simple identifiable expression. He describes them as,

litterae qui tombent sur la page, atomoi qui tombent dans le vide. Etoiles filantes dans la nuit d'août. Virga des queues d'orages qui se retirent dans le ciel comme des grands dinosaures noirs. Virgules qui suivent les suites du temps qui marquent leur rythme au-dessus de l'horizon. Eclats, fragments, apories, attaques, cris, appels, apocalypses, détresses, dévoilements, désaides, aubes, débuts. La langue non plus unanime, non plus commune, est effritée, désolidarisée, disloquée, roulée, déferentialisée, devient vertigineuse comme si le parleur en devenant silencieux était monté sur une falaise que la mer, sans finir, à sa base, ruine, comme l'origine est ruine.²⁹⁷

The image with which Quignard opens this passage is an old one, already present in the Hellenistic grammarians; letters (γράμματα) were designated the minimal element (στοιχείον) of language, having in themselves no manifest quality but only a potential that comes to be realized when they are given voice. That is to say that they are by themselves non-phenomenal, though they compose phenomenal syllables – in short, they are the basic “building block” of language, which was understood, at least by certain authors, as manifestly parallel to the composition of phenomena out of unapparent atoms in the tradition inaugurated by Leucippus and Democritus.²⁹⁸ They have no form in themselves, but in their perpetual torrent of motion, they give rise to forms according the configurations of rhythm, form, and order.²⁹⁹ The question of representation is all but

²⁹⁷ Quignard 2010, 212-213.

²⁹⁸ For an overview of the position of the “element” and its relation to both letter and atom, see Porter 2010, 209-220.

²⁹⁹ Leucippus DK A6

abolished – all is atoms let to play in the void according to an endless unmotivated motion. The appearances and images that emerge are but contingent arrangement arising within this dispersion, absent any intention or higher reason. Quignard follows this perpetual displacement, those compositions and decompositions that take place in turn, not only across the void that is the white of the page, but as a translation without limit, passing unto the heavens and to the movements of time. What forms that are given do not depict the torrent that motivates them; they are but the contingent effects of an eternal, formless “origin” that is no origin at all – originary, perhaps, but what is let to appear are but the occasions of what hurtles itself inevitably across the void. One should not be mistaken – the formulation of the ancient atomist is not an objective depiction of a reality somehow given, insofar as it is not, cannot be, divorced from the torrent that it posits. One who would advocate the theses of a Democritus, a Leucippus or an Epicurus is merely him or herself a participant in the perpetual unsettling that he or she aims to describe. The “system,” is not one, it is merely a figure, it knows no outside from which one might observe it. It is a matter of a double figuration, where the movement of atoms is a figure for the scattering of letters which hide behind their sense the trace of what drives their inscription; the placement of letters, their composition in words that refer to objects that they do not resemble, attempts to capture the indefinite play of appearances against an uncapturable void. Each serves as an attempt to elucidate the other, and remains unfounded.³⁰⁰ The *logos*, as Quignard depicts it, does not confine itself within a

³⁰⁰ As Democritus himself seems to have been aware, at least if one is to judge from the somewhat baffling fragment μή μαλλόν τό δέν ἤ τό μηδέν εἶναι (Democritus DK B156). The phrase is difficult to render in English on account of the Greek neologism δέν – rather than use any of the conventional terms used to signify “being,” Democritus has rendered his own through subtracting the negation from the term for “nothing,” μηδέν. An overly literal translation, which would lose all the force of the neologism, would be “there is no more being than nothing”; a better rendering, one which retains the singular character is given in Matson 1963 – “there is no more hing than nothing.” While it is certainly not incorrect to read in this

set of givens against which it might be judged objectively. Signs, letters, fall through the void and emerge in it, what “words” they give are merely the chance concurrence of these elementary motions, whether they show forth as text or as phenomena.

For Quignard, the instance of the *logos* is but the chance event of those elements, significant, but yet lacking sense, as they are borne by what remains alien to them. The construction of sense is merely the occasion of the transport of elements – it is metaphor.

As Quignard writes:

*Tout le logos est métaphore, transport, pathos. Tout le logos consiste dans une superposition de trois metaphora distinctes: celle qui transporte le signifié sur la signifiant, celle qui fait les sons (psophos) émis par la voix humaine (phônè) se transportant comme des symboles (symbola) sur les passions de l'âme, enfin celle qui transporte vers une chose un mot qui désigne une autre chose. Telle est la violence propre au logos: la violence décontextualisante du langage.*³⁰¹

The *pathos* that is here indicated is not necessarily a synonym for “emotion” – it recalls the passivity that lies behind any act of articulation. Neither speech nor writing emerges from a neutral position, they are impelled by what passes beneath, that which the figure aims to conceal by giving it form. There are at least three transpositions, metaphors, as he names them, that are constitutive of instances of the *logos*, each of which marks a transposition that provides a passage, which is not a mediation, between domains that are radically heterogeneous. The first of these is that which poses an equivalence between

statement an affirmation of the inter-imbrication of atoms and void, the statement itself has something of the character of a demonstration of the physics of *στοιχεῖα*; via the subtraction of two letters, or a phoneme, “nothing” becomes its opposite; the neologism *δέν* remains readable within a system of differences, and the whole affair comes off as an alienating bit of word-play; Cassin (in Badiou and Cassin 2010, 82-90) reads this as a psychoanalytic *Witz* in the Lacanian vein, as an eruption of the *ab-sens* that might serve to indicate the disjuncture between the symbolic and the real.

³⁰¹ Quignard 1995, 23-24.

signifier and signified, creating rather than reflecting a linkage between words and objects. One might well be on familiar Saussurean grounds, though in a different register. This transposition recalls no less the *On Non-Being* of Gorgias, where it is argued that the nature of objects of thought (which, in the Freudian lexicon, would rest upon *Wortvorstellungen*, as opposed to *Sachvorstellungen*) are quite otherwise to the nature of beings. The transport between the object as sensory given and the object as referent of discourse, although apparently natural and indeed necessary, disguises the difference in nature between these two, putting in its place a linkage that holds them to be equivalent.³⁰² An unformed, uncertain aesthetic significance that arrives via the senses finds itself supplanted by signification. The second of these metaphors pertains to the human voice itself, as it subtends the act of articulation. This voice, which serves as a mere signal of the state of the body or the psyche that emits, is cut up, sectioned and organized into those discreet phonemes through which the *logos* actualizes itself, at the cost of setting aside its signality. Its function as an indicator of the passions of the body is forgotten as one lends his or her voice to articulation. Cries of pain and pleasure metamorphose into symbols through the instantiation of those divisions that constitute the latter; immediacy is deferred, the audible substance of the voice is degraded to a mere medium, affectedness gives way a sense that represses its origin.

The third of these transports is one that is posterior to the other two, and in some ways works contrary to them. It consists in the application of a word to a thing that it does not, according to lexical conventions, principally designate. It is, of course, this transfer that designates metaphor in its most conventional sense and the work of figuration more widely. As one knows from Freud, these transports, endemic to dreams

³⁰² Sextus Empiricus *Adversus Mathematicus* VII, 77.

no less than to parapraxes and *Witzen*, are products of the primary process, as it works condensation and displacement. The first two transports are to a certain extent undone by regression, only to be reenacted in an unfamiliar form; aberrant linkages are established, words and things take upon sense contrary to mere convention. It is with these unexpected turns that *pathos* is yet able to announce itself, in the disruption of the fashioning of a clean, direct sense; the *logos* remains animated by that which is outside of its grasp. The impassioned state of language yet reveals itself; whether in literary figures, in oneiric formations, or in slips, the void shows through, giving the lie to any presumed unity. Fragmentation, interruption, divergence: each manifests a countermovement against the catalogues of contextualization upon which articulation must necessarily depend. Those distortions of discourse, as they unsettle any attempt to present language as a fixed system of differences, gesture towards the “decontextualization” in which the *logos* participates in every instance. The heterogeneity between the thing and the word, or that between the affected voice and what it is made to signify, reasserts itself. These metaphors do not abolish, they merely elide, these points of incommensurable difference. It remains that is left to articulation does not reflect the torrent from which it results, at least not in any direct fashion – at best, what is left are only partial, incomplete traces that scatter themselves within the *logos* while remaining foreign to it. These foreign elements bespeak only the incompleteness of what the *logos* may comport; despite all appearances, there is nothing but significance and void.

It is thus that Quignard takes up the ancient Romans, combing the fragments of authors largely ignored. His approach is one that runs directly contrary to the phantasy of imperium that guides the political consciousness of the West, in shaping in the form of

the state, and moreover in making of the world a dominion over which it might exert mastery. Self-assertion, self-possession, the project of enlightenment, such is the aim of a project that seeks to rid mankind of the shadows that stem from its past, and to thereby make the human fully present to itself.³⁰³ If Quignard's writing aims at the ancients, he does not do so as a historian who seeks to elucidate the happenings of the past, such as to establish an unbroken chain of causality according to which the present might be positioned as the most recent link. Those works that treat the ancients dispense with narrative form, the grand narratives of historical reason find no place there. Quignard draws together figures that exist only in fragments, which compose themselves against the backdrop of obscurity, in order to symbolize what will have remained obscure. One does not escape the lacunae that permeate these texts, the absence of transition that results, the struggle to yield sense in the face of that which ever threatens to swallow it once more. In this, Quignard's method perhaps resembles that of Nietzsche – the philologist, not the philosopher, if such a distinction can be drawn. In the notes and fragments prepared for own his never-completed monograph on the fragments of Democritus, he remarks that, “the extraordinary laxity in literary investigations must finally be rebuked. Here there are few laws, but countless analogies for each figure; the best that one can do is the conscious poetic recreation of spirits, events, characters, [*Geistern, Eriegenissen, Charakteren*] etc.. Whether this image corresponds [*zusammenstimmt*] with the past is questionable, but possible.”³⁰⁴ The lassitude that is here denounced is that of the supposed “objectivity” that the critic might aspire to, in denial of the imprint left by his or her own hand upon those images reanimated in his or

³⁰³ Sfez 2011, 361-362.

³⁰⁴ Nietzsche 1867-1868 (1994), 336, my translation.

her own work. The lacunae, whether those readily apparent in a fragmented text, or those more subtle which mark the blind spots, the distance from the written work, are inevitably filled in by even the most circumspect commentator; Nietzsche proposes not to denounce this unavoidable process, but rather to embrace it, after a fashion – the history of literature becomes a procession of images, figures refigured in perpetual metamorphosis, each bearing with it the force of its origin by necessarily dissembling it. This dissemblance is not a flaw – as Calle-Gruber remarks, Quignard’s writing plays this semblance, becoming “apocryphal.” It positions itself in the shadow of canonical pretention, of the fiction of possessing, by one means or another, the Book. She writes, “*les écritures apocryphes de Pascal Quignard ne revendiquent pas le leurre de quelque authenticité, pas d’illusion de la co-incidence du sujet d’écriture ou de l’écran autobiographique. La littérature ne trompe pas la faille, ne trompe pas l’attente, n’a pas peur d’avoir peur. Elle les explore.*”³⁰⁵ Literature is the exploration of figures, as they explore themselves by means of the psyche; they find occasion for their own reinvention, following the path of what guides them; they are not subject to the author, but rather move of their own accord, bearing one along with them.

That one might be conscious of this, as one partakes of it, crafting these schemata anew in writing, or in the act of reading, does not mean that one would be in control of their confluence. As Quignard remarks: *Préciser le plus la mise, jouer à fond, c’est-à-dire laisser se développer les conséquences jusqu’à la suppression. Ne jouer sur rien d’autre que sur la mise initiale. Plaisir de la pensée articulée. Plaisir du lecteur. (En grec: le mot qui est à la fin de l’Eloge d’Hélène).*³⁰⁶ He does not give this word. One

³⁰⁵ Calle-Gruber, in Bonnefis and Lyotard 2005, 50.

³⁰⁶ Quignard 1990b vol. 1, 187.

recalls it from the preceding analysis: it is *παίγνιον*, “plaything.” It is with this term, as one recalls, that Gorgias marks the double position of seduction relative to his text – he seduces in that he persuades, he sets the figure of Helen to seduce his audience, but only insofar as he himself has been seduced by this figure, such as it engenders in him a desire and an appetite for violence awakened by the sublime force that bears her proper name.³⁰⁷ Behind the *Encomium* lies the tradition of works through which Helen passes. Prior to the Gorgias who composes, there is the Gorgias who reads, the Gorgias who is afflicted, moved by this figure. He aims to praise her, but finds himself compelled to instead defend her; in so doing, he perhaps condemns her. The seduction that she works wreaks havoc upon one’s better judgment, or declares the impossibility of a judgment being rendered with any finality. This would, for Quignard, be the situation of one who undertakes to read. Quignard describes it thusly:

Lire vraiment n’est jamais juger. Il y a quelque chose de beaucoup plus profond que juger dans le sens muet de recevoir, dans l’altération de l’âme et le remaniement total que ce qui s’y engouffre induit. Avant le j’aime/j’aime pas, avant le je prends/je délaisse, il y a un être ému qui est sans distance. Il y a un sentir qui est comme une blessure. Avant le sentir au sens sublime de sentiment, il y a le sentir au sens primaire de sensation. Il y a une lésion avant le ressentiment. La faculté de juger, elle, est tout entière du côté du ressentiment. Elle venge de l’effraction que la sensation a ressentie, Mais lire vraiment, lire merveilleusement traumatise l’âme.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷ For the *Encomium*, see the third chapter of the present work.

³⁰⁸ Quignard 2015, 183.

The position of the reader – that which Quignard consistently claims for himself, *lecteur* rather than *écrivain* – is more remarkable than its quotidian aspect would suggest.³⁰⁹ To take up a text, to truly read is to suspend one's self, to place one's capacity for judgment into abeyance. One gives one's self to what appears on the page, accepts a certain passivity with respect to what is written, and thus portends no negotiation, no dialogue. What befalls instead is an alteration of the spirit, or the psyche – one is awakened, affected, the psyche is animated by what forms itself across pages. This is not to confine the work to what it might communicate, but to the play of figures; one is transported away from immediate concerns, the domain of the practical, towards what appears as fictive, unreal figures that are not given, but which take form as they impress themselves upon the psyche of the one who reads. Yet it is not merely a matter of those metaphors that may explicitly appear in a given work. The *sens muet* that Quignard recalls is one that belongs to the silent aesthetic work done by the text, whether it be found in its style, in its form, in its positioning – at issue is that which impels the text, or impels through the text, the absence that resists any transformation into sense. The peculiarity of writing, Quignard often remarks, is that it allows for articulation in the absence of the voice. The metaphor according to which the voice transforms itself into signification is left in abeyance; if there is communication, it does not rest upon interlocution between parties present to one another.³¹⁰ The transmission of sense cannot rest upon the fiction of presence, as it is conventionally construed. Divorced from this immediate contextual grounding, the *logos* is fragmented. In the absence of the articulated voice, something of

³⁰⁹ This is more than a gesture of modesty, as Pierre Lepape has remarked. The *écrivain* is amongst the elite, addressing himself to, if not hailed by that which deems itself “society,” while the position of the reader is that of the solitary, the figure who shrouds himself in silence. See Lepape in Marchetti 2000, 79.

³¹⁰ For one instance, see Quignard 1990b vol. 2, 99-100.

the inarticulate yet passes, afflicting the reader with the *pathos* that is, for Quignard, prior to the *logos*. This affection comes as a shock, a wound, a trauma; it moves through figures and inflicts its absencing presence upon the psyche. Like any trauma, it will be followed by the belated creation of forms, which attempt to bind, however partially and provisionally, that which will have remained foreign to any binding. With respect to the canons of the *logos* and to the social bond that rests upon the dynamics of communication, the manifestation of a *logos* that retains traces of affectability can only appear as a deviation – in reading, one is lead astray, seduced, according to the etymology of the word. What terms might have appeared given are mobilized otherwise, made to move contrary to themselves so as to become images. These figure reveal something of the interminable torrent that yet rages behind the ostensible fixity of terms. That is to say that it is not a matter of a creation *ex nihilo* – the psyche makes use of what it might avail itself in contention with that which does not avail. It is a matter of a perpetual recreation rendering semblances of an intractable *pathos*. In these images, distorted, unbecoming the simple transmission of sense, the passions continue to stir, leaving deformations of discourse in their wake.

It is as such that Quignard revives the ancient orators, as the advocates of a tradition that he terms “*rhétorique spéculative*.” Speculative though it might be, they lay no claim to the perspective that bears the privileged name of theory. The ancient thinkers of the image are made to speak once more via Quignard’s pen and his philological labors. Transposed anew into text, these Roman sophists themselves become literary images. If they assert that the force of the figure awakens the passions and makes impossible a detached, objective position, in animating once more, Quignard sets them upon his own

readers. The eponymous work opens with the following gesture of definition: “*J’appelle rhétorique speculative la tradition lettrée antiphilosophique qui court sur toute histoire occidentale dès l’invention de la philosophie.*”³¹¹ If, as Quignard indicates, this tradition is first articulated in Fronto’s declaration of war against the presumptions of philosophy, it nonetheless reaches further back; its foundation, should one wish to locate one, is shared with the invention of philosophy. One recalls well the assaults of Plato and of Aristotle against the advocates of literature contemporary to them, whether poets or sophists; the so-called “Greek miracle” constitutes itself according to a gesture of repression, whereby the sophist is declared to be one who tarries with images, plays with semblance, a malign sorcerer who plays in the umbra of being, or whatever sovereign referent one might seek to install. What Quignard finds in Fronto is not an assertion that challenges this dismissal directly, but rather an assertion of the force of the image. As he writes, “*Il se trouve que le philosophe peut être imposteur et que l’amateur ne peut l’être. Le littéraire est chaque mot. D’autre part, son investigation propre est plus profonde à cause de l’image.*”³¹² These images, Fronto terms εἰκόνες – “icons,” to follow the most proximate cognate, referring not only to visual images, but likewise to literary figures. The Greek of Fronto’s own teacher intrudes into the Latin of his letters, despite the existence of an accepted Latin translation, *imago*. The image is marked off as that which does not belong to the clean unfolding of sense, its apprehension requires a gesture of translation. The challenge to philosophy is manifest in that the image, as thought by Fronto, cannot be contained to a particular mode of speaking, “rhetoric,” distinct from others. Literature, the mode of speech and of writing that contends with the image, is

³¹¹ Quignard 1990c, 13.

³¹² *Ibid.*

present in every word. It is a question of what lies veiled behind the utterance, the voice which attests the affectability of the one who speaks or who writes, and the *metaphora* that are operative in any rendering of the *logos*.

To turn to a quote from Fronto, as framed by Quignard:

*La philosophie s'en tient aux étants et son inquisition ne prend pas en compte, en se déployant, en la divisant, la rhétorique fondamentale dont elle n'est qu'une branche. Les images ne cessant de surgir au sein des litterae tandis que le sermo des philosophes s'emploie à les écarter. "C'est comme si en nageant (in natando) tu préférerais pour modèle au dauphin la grenouille (ranam potius quam delphinos aemulari). La philosophie n'est qu'une rouille (robignoso) sur le glaive (gladio). C'est comme si, moi, je n'étais pas Fronto mais Sénèque – ne se laisse pas de répéter le rhéteur impérial – et comme si toi, tu n'étais pas Marcus Aurelius mais Claudius Nero. C'est comme si tu préférerais à la majesté de l'aigle (aquila) les courtes plumes de la caille (cotornicum pinnis breviculus). Ne préfère pas la trêve au combat. Combats avec le langage dont il te faut dérouiller jour après jour la lame, pour la faire resplendir."*³¹³

As the traditional criticism would have it, this is Fronto at his worst – he condemns the philosopher-emperor for indulging overmuch in those studies for which he is best admired, admonishing him to return to a proper consideration of rhetoric. This is not an argument, as one might readily recognize, though neither is it the empty hectoring for which Fronto has been derided; he besets Marcus with images. Fronto issues a challenge

³¹³ Ibid., 16.

to which the emperor is invited to respond in kind.³¹⁴ What is at issue is not an invitation to philosophical debate – the depiction of philosophy as the rust on a blade ensures that any such attempt might be readily dismissed– though the honor of philosophy might yet be defended, if Marcus were to contend on its behalf by introducing a contrary figure against his master. Perhaps the most insulting of these images is that where Fronto compares himself to Seneca the Younger, Nero’s tutor, who is perhaps today best remembered as a philosopher despite being also a man of letters and a playwright, and Marcus to Nero. Fronto’s gesture is precisely a challenge to Marcus’ command of words and of figures. In the eyes of ancient literary critics, the earlier emperor’s greatest crime was neither indolence, nor his persecution of Christians, but in having been brought the violence of the state against any who criticized his trite poetic stylings.³¹⁵ In effect, Fronto declares this: any praise that you may have earned for your command of rhetoric is only the result of your being emperor. The faculty of language is not to be measured by public opinion, but by the appraisal of figures. Philosophy has dulled your attention to the force of images. Marcus cannot respond to this gauntlet by means of argumentation - to prove his teacher wrong, he must supply an image that would demonstrate that he is attentive to the force that lies hidden behind the communication of sense. Here Fronto reverses the classical philosophical critique. It is not the orator or the sophist who contents himself with mere appearances, but the philosopher. The latter tarries only with communication, with the objects that pass in well-articulated utterances, without

³¹⁴ Such contests with images appear earlier in the correspondence of Marcus and Fronto, on the subject of their love for one another, where each invents images, attempting to outdo one another in their amorous affection and to read the images of the other in order to disarm them. Rhetoric appears both as combat and as love itself, moving from metaphor to metaphor; Quignard largely ignores this part of the correspondence, where the status of the image is very much at stake, though it perhaps presents itself with less immediate violence. For an overview, see the insightful remarks in Taoka 2013.

³¹⁵ Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum* IV, 20-25.

considering the medium that sustains his language, and the force that remains there outside of any possible binding. Philosophy denies the trembling born of the aesthetic, antagonistic to sense, it cloaks itself in an illusory cease-fire, inventing for itself a stable-position, forgetting the torrent that lies beneath its utterances and within them. Throughout their correspondence, Fronto sets the affected body explicitly – as Friesenbruch has argued, to take the rhetor as a hypochondriac, as the greater part of past criticism has, is to miss his rhetorical performance. His maladies emerge at those points in the correspondence when Fronto is disappointed with Marcus, or with another of his students; whether or not his symptoms had any reality to them, he finds in his body an endless resource for telling his charges that their performance physically sickens them.³¹⁶ The effective image, honed like the gladius, strikes true; an inept one might too be wielded, though the wound that it might inflict, at best, consigns the hearer to a drawn-out suffering, of the sort where he or she might wish for death.

Quignard ranks Fronto as the most explicit of those rhetors of the imperial epoch to take up a particular presumption of the Greek inheritance that has not ceased to resonate within the philosophical project. “*Les œuvres des Achéens et de leurs descendants étaient pénétrées de l'idée que les dieux s'expriment en langue grecque. Leur langue, qu'ils s'appelaient "logos," et leur raison, qu'ils appelaient du même nom, était parlée ou estimée dans l'Olympe aussi bien que sur les pentes et dans les gorges du Ténare.*”³¹⁷ Call it a curiosity of the *logos* itself, a moment where the language takes itself as referent and thereby fashions for itself the authority upon which it rests. The speech of the Greeks names itself reason, or perhaps reason names itself in and as the Greek

³¹⁶ Friesenbruch in Morello and Morrison 2007, 242-243

³¹⁷ Quignard 1990a, 21-22.

language, to be distinguished from the babbling of barbarians, those afflicted with madness, animals, and whatever other creatures may belong to the domain of the ἄλογοι –the speechless and thus the irrational. More than a simple language placed amongst others, the *logos* asserts its particularity through reference to a presumed universality. From the heights of Olympus, where it rings forth from divine throats, to the depths of Cape Tainairon, where the lamentations of those lost to Hades might yet echo, the *logos* names itself one and the same, suffusing the cosmos, integral to its order. The figure is, of course, most pronounced in the *logos spermatikos*, the “germinative reason” that animates the Stoic universe, and which prefigures the divine word of their Christian inheritors, but the origins of this figure reach back to the dawning of the Greek philosophical tradition. One need only recall the injunction of Heraclitus, “not to me, but listening to the *logos*, it is wise to accord that all things are one,” to catch the *logos* in its displacement.³¹⁸ The word that is uttered by the philosopher is not his own. If it bears the mark of his voice, this is to be disregarded, for he is the mouthpiece of a *logos* that extends beyond him. Its bounds are inescapable, they compel that one be in accord (*homologeîn*) with the principle to which the philosopher gives voice. For the orator, the authority that the philosopher invokes – be it Heraclitus’ *logos*, Parmenides’ goddess, or any other – is but a disguise, and a transparent one at that. All-encompassing though his reason might claim to be, the philosopher must yet lend his particular voice to a universality, which is not given but only ever performed in the act of uttering. It is precisely insofar as this speech, and not any other, may ground itself thusly that the specific authority of philosophical discourse is founded. All the rest is but noise.

³¹⁸ Heraclitus DK B50: Οὐκ ἐμοῦ ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἀκούσαντας ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἐστὶ ἐν πάντα εἶναι.

In contrast to the Greeks, Quignard remarks, “*Les anciens Romains ne perdirent jamais le souvenir d’une origine plus complexe et plus sale des mots qu’ils usaient. Ils avouaient sans honte que leur langue est formée comme leur ville: un bout de bois, un morceau de pierre, un homme et la crainte de la pluie.*”³¹⁹ This may well too be a fiction, but with respect to that of the Greeks, it appears with the auspices of a desublimation. Language is not written in the *kosmos*, it was not there from the beginning, and if one was born into it, it is only because one’s *logos* was set down by those who preceded one’s birth. One occupies one’s words, or is occupied by them, insofar as one inevitably concedes to the fiction that they are indeed natural in their origin; yet it would be a mistake to assume that they were freely determined by the arbitrary whim of some ancestor. They are the product of the affections of one’s forebears, the fear of the elements and the desire to shield one’s self, not so much from what befalls, but from the anxiety of exposure. The language that one speaks is but the remnant of the errancy of those who came before; it is in no way the reflection of a record already inscribed in nature. If one’s language nonetheless does not depart from nature, it is because it remains a transformation of matter. The cries of one’s ancestors, of pain, of pleasure, of fear and of desire transform themselves into words no less than the city that surrounds one is merely wood and stone given shape by human hands. It is thus, Quignard notes, that,

Latron disait que “ratio” et “affectus” ne pouvaient se démêler l’un de l’autre – plus précisément: “in ratione habere aliquem locum affectus” – que l’une était suspendue à l’autre parce qu’elle en avait été précédée et, finalement, que la “réflexion rationnelle était peut-être ce qu’on avait fait de plus sentimental.” Il disait que nous avons accoutumé de susciter dans nos vies des peurs qui faisaient

³¹⁹ Quignard 1990a, 22.

*l'office de petits murets, des pensées qui étaient comme des refuges de planches dans la montagne, des livres pour se soustraire à l'heure actuelle et des lits pour se recroqueviller dans le sommeil et les plumes de canards.*³²⁰

Reason, as it is presented by Latro, does not emerge independently of the passivity that belongs to affect – if anything, what is articulated there serves an apotropaic function. The image that the Roman orator sets forth places *ratio* as an attempt to deny that one is prey to the elements, beset by that over which one has no power. Reason is itself a fiction, fashioned from an affectivity that is irreducible – through it, one denies this very passivity, or at least provides a refuge from it, by means of whatever may happen to avail itself. If one occupies the shelter provided by reason, and indeed cannot live without it, it is nonetheless the case that this domain is a secondary construction, one of belated origin that attempts to shut out the primal fact of one's exposure. It is the delusion of philosophy, as Latro, Fronto and the others charge, that it willfully forgets the violence that gives rise to the *logos* that it claims for its own. It forgets the cry that subsists within its polished utterances. As Quignard writes:

*Le logos des Grecs, avant d'être celui des philosophes, et même encore du temps du grand Platon, a d'abord été gestum, gestus, une main qui prend, et continuera à jamais de l'être. ... Les littéraires ne doivent pas s'identifier au langage in flore (les systèmes), ni même au langage in herba (la langue vernaculaire) mais au langage in germine, à la semence originaire, germinative, à la littera, à la substance littérale et pathique du langage, à la chose littéraire... La philosophie doit être rejetée parce qu'elle divertit de la prédation propre au langage.*³²¹

³²⁰ Ibid., 22-23.

³²¹ Quignard 1995, 29-31.

The *logos*, as he here presents it, is only secondarily a vehicle for communication, or a relatively closed system whereby sense is established. Before it was such, it was a gesture. To speak or to write attests a fixation, the fact of one's having been seized with a terror stemming from the fact of one's exposure to the aesthetic. One gives forms within the *logos* only as affected; that one should speak or write at all attempts to come to terms with an interminable excitation that does not pass. Before one can speak, there is the befalling of affect that compels the voice to issue a cry that attests its powerlessness in the face of what awakens it. The ancient orators, the sophists, the poets, all those poor souls that dwell outside the domain of philosophy, are those who continue to attest the fact of this capture behind its manifold transformations. It is not a matter of reconstructing it, such that it might be brought to articulation; that would be to take the side of the philosopher, to presume that one might adjudicate the matter in a dispassionate way, whether as fable, as logical derivation, or as a bio-historical postulate. If Latro, no less than Quignard himself, stages a scene that attempts to trace the origin of language, this remains a fiction, an image. It can only follow after this state of affectedness. To once more quote Quignard:

*Ce que nous nommons réel est l'extase insaisissable où nous tombons lors du deuxième monde [that of objects and the representations that constitute them]. Le réel est proche de ce que les anciens Grecs nommaient ekstos. Les terreurs ne ressemblent pas aux bêtes qui les provoquent. Les affects n'ont pas les traits des ouragans dont la menace les effraie. Les blessures ne ressemblent pas aux armes. Les tristesses ne ressemblent pas à des mots.*³²²

³²² Quignard 2005, 175.

Representation, as it is here depicted, is fundamentally figuration – it attempts to give form to what which remains formless. The reference to the *ektos*, “the outside” – Gorgias’ term – recalls the aesthetic as terror; one is overwhelmed by that which one cannot master precisely insofar as it precedes the *logos* and remains outside of its grasp. If fictions emerge that will claim representations as the dominion of the “I” that counts itself their author, these serve only to displace the terror; one might craft of language of words and of expressions as one does a hut of mud bricks, but the raddour that afflicts the psyche is not so easily cast away. Within, it will yet dwell, for each of the successive generations to occupy any such dwelling. It is an undignified portrayal, to be sure, and as such an attack on the pride of those who glory in their artifice. Latro cuts a pathetic figure – in more ways than one – precisely in order to recall the *pathos* that lies at the origin.

The phantasy whereby the *logos* is granted an ontological priority is not one that is unique to the Greeks. One might not, and indeed cannot, today hold to the specific honor that they granted their language and theirs alone. Nevertheless, it is the case that this species of forgetting, which conceals the passivity to the aesthetic, is perhaps integral to the tradition that continues to call itself philosophy. One finds it equally prominent in the Cartesian *cogito*, to say nothing of the paths taken by his various heirs. The place that thinking occupies, in Latro’s figure, operates contrary to this, in line with the portrayal of the affected body proposed by Lyotard in his dialogue “*S’il l’on peut penser sans corps*,” voiced by the unnamed “she” who offers counterparty to the fantasy of a certain rationality endemic to the West:

Il faut passer par l’expérience corporelle, recourir à des cas exemplaires d’ascèse corporelle, pour comprendre et faire comprendre cette sorte de mise à

*blanc de l'esprit qui est requise pour qu'il pense. Cela n'a évidemment rien à faire avec la "tabula rasa," avec ce qui se voulait (en vain) chez Descartes, un commencement à zéro de la pensée connaissante, et qui ne peut être, paradoxalement, qu'un recommencement à zéro. Dans ce que nous appelons penser, on ne se "dirige" pas l'esprit, on le suspend.*³²³

The phantasy that one's reason is integral to one's self, which is shored up through projection onto the *kosmos* itself, is the product of repression; it attempts to suspend the passivity of the affected body, and to provide a shelter in the image of a dispassionate rationality and in the façade of that which it may accord. As Latro indicates, there was a time before language, one whose traces do not depart from us. The historical dimension indicated by Latro does not contain itself there – it would likewise take place within the individual history of the life of each and every human. One is not born a speaking being, much less a rational being; one is born an infant. Before one gives voice to opinion, to arguments, to the representation of objects, one cries out from a position of powerlessness, of exposure to what befalls from outside and from within. The infant only cries its exposure to what befalls, be it desires emerging from within, or events accruing from without, the distinction matters little insofar as there is as yet not boundary to be drawn. "*Il y a un temps du corps seul,*" Quignard writes, "*avant la famille humaine, avant la phrase linguistique acquise, avant la triade œdipienne (Je Tu Il), avant le monde social externe (dialogos). Il y a une époque affect... Il y a un langage sans destinataire, sans voix, dont toute l'émotion est non référencée, en amont de l'acquisition de la langue du groupe.*"³²⁴ The "language" spoken here is perhaps no language, as one might

³²³ Lyotard 1988b (2014), 28.

³²⁴ Quignard 2010, 224.

conventionally define it. It bespeaks nothing; absent the oedipal triad, it does not pass from an “I” to a “you,” and if it references anything, there is none of the distance that one might attribute to reference. It is a language only as a figure that gestures to what lies before and outside of any articulated language, and from which articulation takes root. It is a time not of relation, but of the body utterly exposed. One might call it ecstatic, but there is, as of yet, no stable position from which it would diverge. The absence of position is not the result of a departure; it would rather be that all position would depart from this originary absence. Quignard describes it as such: “*Avec l’enfance arrive une “aparlance” orale, expulsante, pulmonée, impulsive, rythmique longtemps avant que la langue s’acquière pour la plus grande part et qu’elle organise l’essentiel du séjour à peu près de l’âge de raison.*”³²⁵ This unspeaking speech is aligned with the breath, marking a separation from the maternal body, twice over. It follows after the maternal body from which the infant has been separated with parturition, and with the repetition of this separation from the same body that would occur in the absence of the breast. The breath “speaks” this absence: “*dans la phrase d’enfance, dans la phrase qui ne parle pas encore dans la langue si difficile de tous, dans la phrase infantilis: à la fois pas de je vraiment constitué, pas d’adresse autre que ‘enigmatiquement maternelle,’ pas de référent externe.*”³²⁶ This address to what is enigmatically maternal does not, it must be emphasized, address the mother; it bespeaks only the absence of that from which one has been expelled, the sufferings that follow the expulsion from the uterine domain. What is maternal is what is irrevocably lost with the fact of one’s birth. Those comforts that may be found in the aftermath assuage this hunger for the maternal, if only in providing matter

³²⁵ Ibid., 225.

³²⁶ Ibid.

according to which it might be refigured. Satisfying though they may be, their transitory nature, their connection to definite circumstance serves only to figure the lost state of satisfaction, not to bring about its return. Against every practical solution, one will have continued to hunger for that which exists without reference, that to which “I” was never present. The mother tongue gives voice to this absence. As Quignard writes, “*Un autre que soi et plus ancien que soi erre dans la voix, vers lequel le soi s’écrie mystérieusement.*”³²⁷ Before there is any self that might scream, before there is any “I” that could articulate a phrase, the voice cries itself, persecuted, pressed upon by the enigma of what is present but does not present itself, the absence indicated by the mother tongue. “*La voix d’une autre parle loin en nous, encore, au fond de la langue qui nous a envahis. Mais d’abord, ce n’est pas la langue qui parle dans la langue. C’est l’émouvoir de la voix du corps dont on était l’habitant, voilà ce qui parle ‘d’abord’ et s’y poursuit ‘encore.’*”³²⁸ This voice is that of an other, but one notes its feminine gender: not a language, but the mother tongue, which is no language at all, merely an infantile cry. It echoes the exposure of the body and passes through bodies, reflecting the trace of an immemorial affect.

The resonance that this voice has with Lyotard’s affected *phōnē* is clear, and the likeness to psychoanalytic thinking is likewise striking.³²⁹ Quignard further expounds upon it:

La phrase infantile est d’affect pur. “Purement” sexuelle. “Pure” parce que totalement “perverse,” inorientée. “Purement” sexuelle parce qu’elle n’est pas encore complètement asservie au génital. La génitalité ne donne aux jours sa

³²⁷ Ibid.,

³²⁸ Quignard 2010, 237.

³²⁹ On Lyotard’s thinking of the voice in its relation to affectivity, see the previous chapter.

*direction inlassable qu'à dater de la puberté. E-motion. Extériorisation. Ekstase... Il y a une traduction impossible à faire de l'inarticulé à l'articulable. Il y a au fond de nous un inarticulable et un inorienté et un invieillissable et un aoristique. Seule compte l'excitation plus prompte que le langage. Cette excitation non verbale débouche sur une expérience plus vivante que l'épreuve sociale. Et peut-être plus archaïque ou même "naturelle" que les sensations dicibles.*³³⁰

This is, rather explicitly, to call upon the psychoanalytic motifs of infantile sexuality, and the concomitant state of auto-erotism, as Freud had depicted them in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* and the paper "On Narcissism." This unspeaking, infantile sexuality exists without reference, without subject or object. It knows only the displacements of excitations, of pleasures and pains, satiety and its lack as they extend across a body that is not yet formed, organized through the symbol of the genital.³³¹ There are, of course, prior levels of organization, though these do not construct a unity of the body – those pinned to the erogenous zones, wherever they might be instantiated. This body, that which Lyotard aptly terms a "*chaos incorporel*," reveals only its own affectedness, the state of its having been excited, affected by that which it cannot master. It is, however, not worth dwelling upon this – the motifs, psychoanalytic and those of Lyotard have been discussed in previous chapters.³³² It is necessary to recall that psychoanalysis, no matter how important the contributions of Freud and his heirs might be, occupies no privileged place with regard to the transcription of affect, at least not if

³³⁰ Quignard 2010, 225-226.

³³¹ Quignard's comments regarding genitality recalls Ferenczi's exposition, as examined in the first chapter of this work.

³³² See chapters one and three for respective treatments infantile affectability in Freud and in Lyotard.

one is tempted to grant it an air of finality. It remains an articulation, a translation, a transcription of the inarticulate; it gives an account of affectability – a particularly attentive one – but all the same, it will nonetheless have failed to capture that which it seeks. One would be mistaken to see in Quignard’s writing a simple reformulation of psychoanalytic theory in literary form. If it is indeed the case that affect is posed as what is radically outside of any qualification or representation, then one must concede that Freudian theory occupies no privileged place with respect to it. While one may grant that it has perhaps surpassed other modes of theorization in the rigor of its engagement, and the ostensible gesture towards unworking the constitutive repression that belongs to philosophy – or indeed to any mode of theory, including psychoanalysis – these are but modes of literature, insofar as one can only figure that which lies at the origin, can only produce an image that attempts to capture that which will have remained enigmatic, obscure. Freud is perhaps then neither more nor less important than Latro – in each Quignard discovers one who attempts to render an account of the affectedness of the human, the testament of infancy that inscribes itself in writing, announcing the enigma of origin, and the operations of the sexual which are there rooted.

That Quignard should return to the words of the Latin orators to depict this maternal enigma is not by chance – one mother tongue folds upon another, the Latin that lurks behind his own French, (as well as upon all of the other languages of Europe, whether or not they bear the appellation “Romance,”) disguises that other, that infantile mother tongue that remains unspoken behind any articulated language.

Sans cesse la langue souche, la langue protomaternelle est celle d’outrage, c’est-à-dire la langue où l’obscénité se désire le plus. La sépulture de Musa n’est jamais

refermée. C'est la langue latine. Ce qui est avant notre langue renvoie à ce qui est avant notre naissance. La couche la plus ancienne (le latin) dira la scène plus ancienne. Ce que, enfants, nous lisions dans les cabinets de bois de la cour de récréation, dans le froid et le dégoût, ce que nous gravions à l'intérieur des portes des cabines de bain des piscines, ce que nous murmurions avec angoisse dans les fourrés, en rougissant dans la pénombre, en avançant les mains, en tremblant, fait naître la matière d'une langue antérieure qui a tout l'embarras, toute la curiosité, tout le pédantisme de cet âge de violence et d'angoisse. Pourquoi nos sociétés notent-elles par écrit dans les livres de science ou même dans les livres érotiques sous leur forme latine les mots non équivoques et âcres qu'on apprend à la puberté avec un air avide, faux, le cœur battant, chuchotant dans la chambre dans l'ombre ? Parce qu'il serait impie de rendre décents ces mots nés pour être indignes et dont l'indignité rapatrie à l'autre monde où le langage n'était pas.³³³

Quignard here recalls a phenomenon familiar to any reader of those translations of classical literature produced up to the first half of the twentieth century, where prudence demanded that sexual content was not to be indicated in a modern language, but left for the reader in Latin (even if the source text happened to be Greek). Counter to what were perhaps the best intentions of the translators, the effect is, as often as not, to render the opacity titillating, particularly for the schoolboy honing his Latin in conjunction with the stirrings of puberty. What is unspoken is indicated in the silence of writing, in a dead language that no longer passes from the lips of the living, sustaining the façade of communicability. Two threads of anteriority weave themselves together, that of one's

³³³ Quignard 1994, 260-261.

personal history, which recalls the terror and the anxiety of infantile exposure, and that of the sexuality that moves unbound across a disorganized body. Each gestures to the “mother tongue” that remains concealed and unspoken within the transformations of those languages that one may write or speak. The traces of the sexual might, at least consciously, be banished from the living language, but one finds them nonetheless inscribed, and not only in literature – as Quignard indicates, the gesture belongs much the same to graffiti, where the obscene is left to announce itself to the eye, in the absence of any interlocutor. It is perhaps striking that it is here, in those vulgar inscriptions left on the walls of public chambers, whether the ancient baths of Rome or contemporary bathrooms, that writing appears particularly immune to the vagaries of history. But for the language of their inscription, that which one finds carved inexpertly upon the walls of Pompeii might not be recognized as out of place in a contemporary settings. Those Latin sentences that appear within modern translations of ancient works, or in scientific papers that aim to disguise the character of their referents, maintain much the same character – a departure from communicability, and a movement towards the private language of the learned, which perhaps does not cease to be that of a schoolboy. These sentences are, as Quignard indicates, the product of a strange sort of piety. Out of respect for the indecent, the Latin is not translated but is let to show forth in writing, even if it is a writing that attempts to make itself illegible; it sets itself apart in prudishness, leaving what is alluring as visible, though closed off for all but the few. For these latter, it does not appear in the currency of a living language, it cloaks itself with the resonance of what is irrevocably past; it returns to the question of the origin. As Quignard writes, *“la cogitation du sujet sur son origine se mêle à l’agitation tumultueuse du coït qui a eu lieu pour qu’il l’ait fait.”*

Le sexuel ne peut être écrit au présent. Le sexuel ne connaît rien de contemporain (même pas nous-mêmes). Le sexuel est voué au passé absolu. Le sexuel est aoristique.”³³⁴ Adult sexuality is merely a recapitulation, or a series of recapitulations. It is the continual investigation of the enigma that does not cease to pose itself under the name of sexuality, both the infantile sexuality that animates one’s body, as well as the act of adult sexuality from which one is the issue. One is, after all, the product of the coitus of others. The sexual lies before one might articulate anything of it, it poses itself in the language that is before language, and which does not lend itself to the movements of temporality that depend upon the linking together of phrases in different tenses; no before, no after, nothing of the “now” that sets itself in relation to these. The sexual bears with it something of the character of the aorist tense, with its relative indifference to temporal positioning. Although, in the Greek language, the aorist is most commonly invoked in a fashion equivalent to the simple past tense, this does not cover the range of its uses. To speak only of the indicative mood, the aorist may denote a past action, a state which always holds true, something which occurs habitually, or replace other, temporally-determined tenses in order to indicate emphasis. The aorist announces a sense of facticity that manifests in the present, stemming from what exceeds the current moment, whether the reference is to the temporal past or to conditions that are otherwise not subject to the present. It is thus that Quignard frames the sexual; it is what is past without having passed, it maintains itself in the abeyance of the present without its presence ceasing.

It is this negative presence, which does not yield itself to representation that gives rise to the movement of those images that fall before the gaze. The sexual does not appear with a single aspect – that would be already to constrain it within the domain of

³³⁴ Ibid., 227.

appearances, to make it an object of *theoria*. Quignard allows it to show forth in a conjunction of figures that is posed at the opening of his lecture entitled “*L’image manquante*”:

*Une image manque à la source. Personne d’entre nous n’a pu assister à la scène sexuelle dont il résulte. L’enfant qui en provient l’imagine sans finir. C’est ce que les psychanalystes appellent Urszene. Une image manque à la fin. Car personne d’entre nous, vivant, n’assistera à sa mort. Aussi l’homme et la femme imaginent-ils sans finir leur descente auprès des morts, dans l’autre monde chez les ombres. C’est ce que les anciens Grecs appelaient Nèkhuia. Aujourd’hui, de façon plus radicale, je voudrais montrer qu’il y a une image qui manque dans toute image... Je voudrais vous faire toucher du doigt, juste une fois, l’image particulière qui manque dans une image particulière.*³³⁵

Each of these three articulations of the absent image bears with it the air of the conventional, at least up to a point. The first scene is recognizable from a psychoanalytic vantage, at least up to a point: this is not the *Urszene* that Freud discovered in the case of the Wolf Man, the remnant of an eighteen month old child having born witness to the coitus of his parents – *more ferarum*, as Freud describes it.³³⁶ It is rather the image which each child bears, that of his or her own conception. Whether or not it could be said to have taken place during one night or another – who would ask such a thing? – it belongs to the night, one that is without duration, irrevocable, that which preceded one’s own being. With regard to it, one is merely an incidental consequence; the movements of the desire of others preceded us, and it is this image that one goes in search of, regardless of

³³⁵ Quignard 2014, 8.

³³⁶ Freud 1918, *SE* XII 36-40.

one's conscious desire; the desirous operations of dreams, animated by the sexual, recraft it interminably, in the course of every night that passes.³³⁷ The second of these is the night towards which one passes, a philosophical trope since at least Epicurus; one is inevitably absent from the scene of death. Again, however, one notes that Quignard's presentation does not align with that of the philosophers, whether ancient or modern. The *Nèkhuia*, or at least the most famous narrative of this descent, is found in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus passes to the realm of the dead while remaining alive. His return perhaps enacts the continual return to the visages of the dead, as they manifest before the living in memory, in dreams and through those written or plastic works that survive their creators, attesting their work still. One notes in each case the gesture of translation, or perhaps its failure, that adheres to the image and what is lacking in it. Quignard might name the paired aspects of the image, *Urszene* and *Nèkhuia* but only via a departure to another language, whether Greek or German. The consecution of idioms interrupts any simple communication, forcing the reader either to translate or to derive the meaning from context; the gesture displaces the notion of a unified expression. This shift is parallel, however minimally, to the work of the image; it makes present a signifier that is made merely significant, a word that befalls from an outside. Its reception may be simple, but not necessarily; its meaning will depend on the faculties of the reader, the choice of a translation, which may or may not find ready equivalent in the native language. This then turns to the third sense of the image; a scene that is lacking translates itself into a plurality of forms, the infantile night that knows no formation demands the creation of images. And here the sense in which one might speak of "the scene" that is

³³⁷ Cf. the articulation, largely parallel to that quoted above, that appears at the opening of Quignard 2007, 7.

absent breaks down. Quignard notes that while images may recall their origin, there is no origin that would encompass all of these instances – just as one’s birth and one’s death are perhaps always singular in their occurrence, what absents itself is peculiar to the image through which it presents itself.

This figure literalizes itself in philology, albeit while remaining a figure – Quignard discovers it in the *images* of the Romans. “A Rome,” he writes, “*on appelait des images les têtes en cire, empreints sur le visage des morts qu’on portait lors des funérailles, qu’on rangeait dans une petite armoire dans l’atrium. Seuls les nobles avaient le droit d’images. Des empreints de faces mortes deviennent dans nos cauchemars des géants qui vont et viennent et soudain nous dominent.*”³³⁸ This is anything but an incidental curiosity; it returns to the question of origin in its threefold aspect. One owes one’s genesis to the image, the faces of those dead whom one might claim as ancestors, whether directly or indirectly; it is they who crafted the languages that the living yet speak. Dead though they might be, they continue to occupy a house that does not belong exclusively to the present, but which openly declares its indebtedness to those who came before. With respect to the *images*, the faces of one’s ancestors carved in wax, the *domus* serves only as a frame. The movements of the household and all of those who belonged to it – a wife, children, slaves, the *dominus* himself, all the rest – set themselves under the unseeing gazes of the images, the *unheimlich* presence that maintains itself at the center. Through the presence of these waxen visages, they ceased to belong to themselves. The *auctoritas* of the *dominus* might announce itself in his voice, in the commands issued, but this authority did not belong to him as an inherent right. If this mastery presents itself within the household, it is only because it belongs,

³³⁸ Quignard 2005, 50.

first and foremost, to those dead who continued to survey their domain with unseeing eyes. The bodies of living, their voices, and the eyes with which the *imagines* might be regarded continued to belong to the dead, before whom even all mastery was but the play of those children who might dress themselves in inherited finery. One received one's self, not merely material possessions, social status, or political right from these ancestors; if not for them, or perhaps more properly for their desires, one would indeed be nonexistent.

One did not, does not – there is nothing unique to the Romans here, save in the explicitness of their staging – belong to one's self. One's existence, life, one's very breath is owed irrevocably to one's progenitors. Yet, as Quignard indicates, the activity of the *imagines* is no simple memorial function; if they remain inert, unseeing during daylight hours, it is because the night is their own. In dreams, they return as they have never ceased to be, in spite of the death that continues to linger about them and through them. They pass through the dreams of the living, precisely in those dreams in which one recoils, the sleeping body made tense; in nightmares, they bear with them the fears and the anxiety of the living indicating the hold that they continue to exert over the living – *soudain nous dominant*. Dominion belongs not to the living, but to these mute faces that have constituted the living who are yet beholden to them, before whom the living remain, in dreams and in actuality, no more than children whose well-being, activities and lives are suffered at the whim of the paternal *imago*. Within the confines of sleep, the images stir according to a regression – Quignard's staging here is certainly a literalization, via the ancients, of the psychoanalytic notion of the parental image that remains with the

adult under the guise of the superego. Hermann's formulation is perhaps explicitly closest, though one finds much the same in Freud:

It is not accidental if, in our discussion concerning the consequences of a giant-mother-image, the formation of the Super-Ego has to be touched upon in the idealization of the parents (which is at the bottom of the Super-Ego) has one of its roots in this gigantic image of the parents. The power exercised by the parents radiates from their giant size and might. Essentially the Super-Ego formation means transforming physical greatness into mental values.³³⁹

This is no idle transformation, but one rooted in the terrors of childhood, let to reemerge in dreams. The figure of the giant parents returns to the perspective of the child that is exposed to the enormity of the adults that stand before him or her. This is not merely a case of their physical size, though that aspect is indeed integral to what is here described; it pertains just as much to the overwhelming character of the judgments that they enact, to which the child is exposed. There is no dialogue here, no possibility of debate, there are only pleas that proceed from the terrified *pathos* of the child. Even if the eyes of these images do not see, they do not need to; their gaze is transposed into the self-regard as means of defense against the autocratic superego; even having grown, the adult hesitates to risk their displeasure and the consequences thereof. This, as Hermann and Quignard alike indicate, does not pass – the *domus* of these images, which take upon the guise of the superego, is more properly the psyche of the living than it is the space that they occupy; the latter, after all, might be changed, renounced, destroyed, or subject to whatever other transformation, while from the former there is no possible release.

³³⁹ Hermann 1949, 304.

The sense of this superego, as it shows itself in Quignard's writings, departs perhaps from the more conventional sense in which the term has come to be recognized via the works of Freud and his inheritors; the role in which it might serve as the arbiter of moral dictates that are not to be transgressed without peril is only a secondary development, where the terror that it works is formalized as a system of decreed laws. Prior to this, the superego reflects only the terror of exposure to the judgment of the other, one already rendered, once and for all. He portrays the core of the superego as an absolute dictum: "*le commandement surmoïque: Tu n'existes pas. Tu ne vaux rien. Tu n'es rien d'autre que ce que tu es. Tu es sans devenir, tu es sans avenir. Tu es là et tu y restes.*"³⁴⁰ The decision appears as unequivocal – before the gaze of the *imago*, you are nothing. If you might stand as the addressee of this utterance, even this is called into question by the terms that are laid out. There is no possible return upon it, no appeal. This would rest upon a presumed exchangeability of deictics, where a phrase that passes from an I to a you links upon another where the I of the previous phrase is the you of the succeeding, and vice versa. Since the "you" of the first phrase is declared to be nothing, without any justification, the *auctoritas* through which one might assume the position of an I in a subsequent phrase is undercut. There is no possibility of interlocution, of transformation here – only the peril to which the one thus addressed is exposed, in which he or she is condemned to silence, and indeed to non-being. The superego serves only to divest the position of the living, to gesture to the nullity of the theatrics with which they comport themselves, dressing themselves in the habits of their fathers, pretending that it is their own. Whatever this "you" is, it is only the sordid remnant of those preceding, the worthless cast-offs of the authority that belongs to them. The ontological conceit is here

³⁴⁰ Quignard 2015, 58.

reversed – it is the image that claims the right to reality, while those bodies that position themselves about the *imagines* are held to be but shadows, pallid reflections set in the light of day. This position finds forceful expression in one of the images of Marcus Aurelius cited often by Quignard; to call upon the admirable English translation of Maxwell Staniforth: “Observe how transient and trivial is all mortal life; yesterday a drop of semen, tomorrow a handful of spice or ashes.”³⁴¹ From unseemly abjection you came, you will be as nothing, and whatever pretense you might have, you will neither have departed your fate, nor your origin. You are worth nothing save the disdain with which one might greet substances so ignoble. For one who would follow the modern reception of the Stoic thought to which Marcus is an heir, what is at stake in these lines is a simple exhortation to *apatheia*. This reading, which bears with it too refined a sensibility, ignores the force of the image set forth by the philosopher-emperor, the revulsion that the image indeed is intended to inspire.³⁴² This is not the simple ring of the more familiar “ashes to ashes”; the origin of one’s life is found in the vile secretion of the body of another, that which in any other context, would inspire disgust. It is less a matter of the presentation of an idea than it is of the visceral reaction that this image might invoke, the desire to turn one’s eyes, the grip of panic that seizes, the discomfit that becomes near-physical in its manifestations.

To quote, in Quignard’s rendering, a phrase attributed to the first century Roman orator Caius Albucius Silus: “*Nous ne sommes que des débris dans l’affection des*

³⁴¹ Marcus Aurelius *Ad Se Ipsum* IV, 48.

³⁴² The ancient Stoics were indeed never far from pronouncements intended to elicit disgust, that even in antiquity provoked the hesitation, if not the denunciation of their interlocutors. Most notable is of course the lost *Republic* of Chrysippus, remembered mostly through the remarks of his revolted readers, who objected to the arguments that incest and cannibalism rated as indifferent things, neither to be embraced nor condemned.

pères.”³⁴³ The line concludes Albucius’ response to one of the *controversiae* popular amongst the Latin orators of the day; these were fictive cases, more often than not possessed of a paradoxical character, from which these rhetors would compose speeches either for the prosecution or for the defense. As with the others preserved by the Elder Seneca, the case begins with a simple prompt, upon which the orators would elaborate in their compositions. Entitled “*Ab Archipirata Filio Dmissus*” – “A man released by the pirate leader, his son,” the affair is described as such:

A certain man whose wife had died, having two sons from her, married another woman. He privately condemned one of the sons for parricide [presumably of plotting to kill him]. He consigned him to his brother for punishment; this one placed him on a disabled boat [that is, with neither oars nor a rudder with which to steer it]. The young man was carried to some pirates, and became a pirate leader. Later, the father set out abroad and was captured by him, but was returned home. He disowns his [remaining] son.³⁴⁴ Albucius’ declamation treats the paradox central to the case from the side of the defense. For the son to contest his father’s disavowal, he must show that he did indeed attempt to carry out the father’s orders in good faith. That is to say that, since in Roman law parricide referred to the killing of any family member, the remaining son can only absolve himself by proving that he is guilty of the very same crime for which his brother was condemned to die: attempted parricide. Moreover, he must pose an equivalence where one might well suspect that the brother was falsely accused, given that when the father fell into the hands of pirates, and was at the mercy of the son whom he had condemned, he was released without penalty. As Albucius voices his defense, the

³⁴³ Quignard 1990, 220.

³⁴⁴ Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* VII 1.

accused sets his plea along two tracks – firstly, the situation is the fault of the father, for having crudely instrumentalized him, forcing to undertake the frightful task of killing that, by right, should have belonged to the father; and secondly, in that his brother’s survival can be attributed to no lack of judgment on his part, since he did as he was instructed to do. If the father blames him for his failure, he is to be cast out for not having power over the seas, the winds and the ships that move over them. Quignard locates a peculiarity in Albucius’ composition, unique amongst the defense speeches – the archpirate is given voice to speak. It is unclear, given the summary version of the text furnished by Seneca, itself host to a lacuna, but his position is perhaps his brother’s *ethopoeia*. Whether present or an effect of discourse, the archpirate, in Quignard’s translation, speaks thus: *On ne peut pas mettre son espérance dans les sacs. On ne peut pas mettre son espérance dans les gouvernails. On ne peut pas mettre son espérance dans les pères. On ne peut pas mettre son espérance dans les naufrages.*³⁴⁵ There is the father’s word, his punishment; what follows is an exposure to utter contingency, in which there is no hope, no certainty, to be found for either party. Though circumstances might avail his salvation, there is no escape from the sentence that pursues the youth irrevocably, which even his gesture of mercy cannot counteract – the pronouncement that labels him a parricide, however unjustly, knows no revocation. If he names himself the debris of the affection of his father, this affection was never, as the *controversia* poses it, for the son. It was first that of the *dominus* for the woman who was his mother, from which the son’s life stems. Secondly it is that for the second woman, the stepmother who is perhaps responsible, if the insinuations in Albucius’ text are entertained, for manipulating the father into eliminating the heirs from his first marriage. In its latter

³⁴⁵ Quignard 1990, 76.

form, this affection sentences him to death. Parricide, archpirate, or whatever else he may become, with respect to the superegoic dictum, it matters not. He will have been nothing more than the detritus of the passing of another's desire, to which he relates only indirectly, even as it commands his life and his death. With respect to the father's passion, he is nothing more than the sordid reminder. And the general form of the abandoned son's declaration should not be ignored – no matter if one should indeed have a father who is affectionate to his sons, this changes nothing in the affection that governs one's life; the superego is implacable on this point.

The narrative offered in the *controversia*, where one might appeal the judgment of the paternal *imago*, is manifestly a fiction; against the wound that this image inflicts, there is no defense, no appeal. Even though the motif of disinheritance is common amongst the collection assembled by Seneca, it remains that according to Roman law the abdication of a child was a private matter, regarding which the forum had no say.³⁴⁶ The activities of the Roman orators are described by Quignard as such: “*Les déclamations exploraient le réel sous trois espèces: l'impossible, l'indéfendable, l'imprévisible. Le 'réel irréel', tel était l'objet psychologique, judiciaire, et rhétorique des romans des déclamateurs et des sophistes.*”³⁴⁷ The cases to which they lend their voices and their art, have little enough to do with the affairs of the public, save in the passing resemblance that serves only to frame them. This would be the case for a Gorgias, with his defenses of Palamedes and of Helen, as much as it is for the anonymous figures that populate the narratives of Albucius. What is plead is not a reality that must be decided upon, but rather the terror of the judgment that radiates from the image, which can only show itself forth

³⁴⁶ See Michael Winterbottom's note, found on page 26 of the first volume of the Loeb edition.

³⁴⁷ Quignard 1990, 22.

in the images that they set against it. This is no idle play – in their compositions, these sophists attest the hold that image continues to exert upon them, the inevitable bind in which one is placed with regard to them. The *imago* lies beyond any possible power, any possible means, and yet nonetheless one may set other images against it, may call upon the force of the image otherwise, interminably. One might, following the psychoanalytic lexicon, call it a certain mode of working-through; neither a simple repetition, nor a break, but a dedicated struggle to work a metamorphosis upon those images that one inevitably lives from, and without which one would not live. The impossible, the unforeseeable, and the unreal – these modes engage what is manifestly fictive, those “absurdities” for which the sophists have long been derided, precisely in order to pose the question of the force of the image. One interrogates the force of the image, always present and indeed inescapable, incessantly afflicting a psyche that knows no terms according to which it might relate to the *imago* in return. Before the *imago*, one remains silent, an infant, nothing at all; this status lies inescapable even in that language which assumes the posture of one unafflicted, which disavows the primacy of the figure. This silence is that which Quignard discovers inscribed in those orators of ancient Rome, a silence that at once belongs to their scattered texts, all but forgotten. This muteness shows forth in the refusal to communicate that their writings enact – the images that they set down in their texts operate this silence. They do not serve to transmit sense, rather these images serve to invoke an infancy that does not pass. But Quignard’s framing extends this interrogation yet farther; the orators themselves are *imagines*, the antecessor of the modern critic. The ancient sophists are at once forebears within the literary tradition of West even as they show themselves to be infants afflicted by the domination

of the image. They serve as relays, all the more notable for having put on display their powerlessness. They might be themselves children, but this will not have prevented them from having become tyrannical *imagines* in their posterity. They serve merely to relay the silence, the cry that passes through them, and which refuses to pass in them. They are but beats, moments in the transformative replay of what extends from the origin. As Dolorès Lyotard remarks:

La battue de l'écrit n'en finit pas d'écraser la mûre mûrissante d'une plaie d'enfance. Ecale le fruit de chair amère, la baie d'amertume, la fruition carencée d'une faim toute primitive. Parce que tel est le régime de l'imgo pour Pascal Quignard, qui entend la figure de l'écrit non seulement défère au passé, incarne la "viellonge" – "Le lettré est sa langue, c'est le vieux de la vieille" – mais prescrit que celle-ci, à jamais insatiable, morde au sens primaire.³⁴⁸

The image incarnates that dimension of anteriority that takes place before there is anything that one might say, which the *logos* conceals and attempts to deny. This incarnation is not to be found in the bust of the ancestor alone, nor is it in the text. It takes place in the flesh of he or she who reads, the recoil of the flesh that has been afflicted by the image. The work of the figure is to tear the viewer or the reader from his or her self. This is not accomplished without a degree of violence, as perhaps the return of the repressed only ever comes about – it rends the cloak of representations in which this self is garbed, through which it comes to something like identity. In the absence of simple representation, one is seized, affected by the force of the image which is not present, but which belongs to a non-presence, and exterior that cannot be contained. It manifests variously in Quignard's writings – it takes shape with reference to the history of the

³⁴⁸ D. Lyotard 2003, 244.

individual as it does to the tradition of writing, and to the history of the species. This passivity knows only the endless recapitulation of the eventual capitulation of the *logos* to what afflicts it, no matter how it might struggle. This struggle is no less endless, one invents forms in attempt to reverse this capture, to bind that which seizes upon every instance of linkage and undoes it.

“*Quelque chose en nous, qui ne nous est pas destiné, trouve issue,*” Quignard writes.³⁴⁹ The anterior is not our own, it paralyzes, annihilates the illusion of self-possession upon which the illusion of any “we” might construct itself. The affective domain that presents itself under the auspices of the anterior; it passes through texts, leaving in them its traces though they cannot finally contain it. It passes from work to work, as from parent to child, interminably condemning the human to a working-through of that to which it does not relate. In proper phylogenetic fashion, the infancy of the individual recapitulates the infancy of the species; one confronts a language that is not one’s own, and adapts one’s self to its movements, constructs one’s self according to the images that position themselves within it. Quignard comments:

Les langues dites humaines ne sont pas une invention humaine. Ni un homme ni une volonté ne sont à la source des langues qui passent de corps en corps Ce qui nous domestique n’est pas domestiqué par nous. La langue humaine est un fauve. Ce que les hommes imaginent comme rassemblant tous les êtres avance sur eux comme une bête sauvage. L’Etre aux yeux des humains n’a pas encore tout à fait perdu sa zoologie. Pas plus que le corps humain nu, sans fourrure, n’a tout à fait dans son apparence sa nature animale, ses crocs, ses, griffes, son sexe, pas davantage il ne s’émancipera tout à fait de l’angoisse de la mâchoire du

³⁴⁹ Quignard 1995, 81.

*prédateur qui s'apprêtait à le dévorer. Les parois des premiers hommes nous sont encore compréhensibles après l'écoulement de quarante millénaires. Elles nous fascinent toujours. Elles nous "parlent" toujours, en dépit de leur silence. Nous lisons toujours, si énigmatiques qu'elles soient, et d'autant plus énigmatiques que nous projetons vers elle une subtilité disproportionnée à la stupéfiante simplicité de ce que l'abri et l'obscurité tendent vers nos regards.*³⁵⁰

The primal scene, as Quignard poses it within the history of the species, returns back to the dawn of the human, to the night from which the species emerges. He takes aim precisely at the origins of the *logos*, that which humans have long drawn upon to set themselves apart from the animal, claiming it as their unique privilege. For Quignard, the *logos* is not a human invention – it is but a particular modality of the cry, here the cry of a beast pursued, wracked with terror. As he here frames it, the *logos* is itself a beast of prey, a wild animal, one which does not depart from a certain savagery. Quignard's image presents the *logos* as bestial, transgressing the division between the human and the animal that supposedly rests upon the faculty of language. That is not to say that he thereby nullifies the distinction, but, as he portrays it, the metaphor that transforms the animal voice into the medium of language diverts its former character without dispelling it. The originary moment of the *logos* is the cry of an animal caught helpless in the jaws of a predator – it replays ceaselessly in the infantile wail that the human voice has not ceased to be. That Quignard should land upon this image to indicate the primordial is not by chance – he discovers in the hunt the originary occasion through which the human constitutes itself as such. Writing, taken in a general sense, begins with pursuit, with the hunt. It is on the walls of those caves where neolithic hunters took shelter from those

³⁵⁰ Quignard 2010, 280-281.

other predators that might consume them, that the earliest known human inscriptions are found. Referring to the paintings of Lascaux, Quignard writes: “*La première figuration d’un homme a été peinte à l’aide d’un flambeau sur la paroi entièrement obscure d’un puits profond au cœur d’une grotte elle-même obscure. La première image humaine enfouit physiquement dans la nuit cette peur: le tueur tué, le prédateur devenu proie.*”³⁵¹

This image founds itself in a retreat into darkness; in the absence of light, the absence of the presence of the animal, the hunt yet takes place. Though the walls of the cave might provide shelter, the horror of the pursuit, and of animal capture yet inhabits the darkness. The image is let to manifest where light, where the gaze does not avail itself, it appears in that place where nothing is left to appear before the eye. One gives external form to the space of the dream, as Quignard remarks, where the terror and the desires that afflict as a result of the primal show themselves forth, of their own accord. What is at stake is not merely a representation; that which manifests itself is the work of metamorphosis, of a reversal of positions, the predator become prey.

The scene of the Lascaux cave painting, as Quignard describes it, is thus:

*On délinéine, avec sa ligne de sa lueur, une sorte d’homme à bec d’oiseau qui se renverse. On détoure un bison percé d’un épieu qui retourne sa tête parce qu’il meurt. Cela se lit de droite à gauche puisque l’homme-corbeau tombe de la droite vers la gauche. On ignore quelle est l’action qu’on voit mais l’action n’est pas achevée. C’est l’instant d’avant. Cet homme n’est plus debout mais il n’est pas encore complètement tombé. Il est tombant.*³⁵²

³⁵¹ Quignard 2007, 72

³⁵² Quignard 2014, 10.

The image manifests a moment of suspension – the depiction leaves its own inaccomplishment on display. This would be the case in more than one aspect: firstly, this would occur at the level of the narrative which Quignard discovers in the painting, insofar as it presents itself as something to be read from the right to the left. The bison, struck by the spear of the hunter, turns against its attacker and strikes him. The hunter who thought himself predator is reversed, thrown into the position of the victim by the intended target of his own predation. He is caught in the moment of his fall – if he is slain, it is not yet, and in this fall he appears with the head of a bird. That Quignard should discover the head of a carrion bird here is not inconsequential – there is something of a reversion here, one which gives rise to a displacement. The human figure disintegrates in a metaphorical flight. Its death cry resonates in the figure of the animal that it is become, or perhaps re-become. No longer a hunter, the human retreats to the visage of the scavenger that it once was, previous to taking up the spear. The corvid face is not merely a gesture to the past however; it also belongs to what is to come, insofar as it is to be expected that the body of this man is before long to rest within the bellies of such birds. The fixed image presents itself as the site of a displacement. In the capture of the falling human figure, the illusion of a movement is presented, but it is not one that would transpire according to a fixed direction. Echoing the cry of the gored body, this displacement transgresses any fixed position or direction, it spirals outward, at once towards the anterior dimension of the species and the imminent death of the outmaneuvered hunter. If this is a dissolution of the human into the animal, this would only be superficial – it is rather the case that the human emerges in such transports. As Quignard recalls, citing Serge Moscovici,

on ne pouvait en aucune façon parler d'une "hominisation" des primates mais d'une "cynégétisation" de certains d'entre eux. La praedatio a déchiré la collecte (en grec, le logos). La chasse dévastant la cueillette transforma un herbivore en mammifère nécrophage des restes des grands carnivores qu'il guettait, aux côtés des rapaces et des loups. Puis ces anciens herbivores devenus nécrophages se transformèrent en carnivores eux-mêmes. Ces transports sont les premières métaphores. Les hommes se transportent en ceux qu'ils imitaient et qu'ils dévoraient: ours, cerf, vautour, loup. Taureau, mammouth, bouquetin, puma, jaguar, condor.³⁵³

If the human is to be differentiated from the animal, as it is conventionally thought, this is not, Quignard indicates, to be found in some progressive advance towards a unique nature. The human is rather that, amongst the primates, which itself becomes metaphor, operating a displacement according to which it constitutes itself. The terror of origin is to be found first in that of the hominid that is preyed upon by other animals, the incessant, ever real fear of exposure to predation. Call it a defensive operation, not unlike the psychoanalytic identification with the aggressor – the human emerges as such when it takes on the features of those predators that persecute it, first in cautiously following after them, consuming the scraps that they have left behind, and then in directly taking up their methods, itself becoming a carnivore. The dread of predation is externalized – one escapes predation by making prey of the other. The senseless cry that signals the abandon of one beast or another to the violence of predation is displaced, such that it will belong to the animal, not to the human. The *logos*, as Quignard here depicts it, is propelled by a violence with which it is never done. In acceding to become metaphor, those hominids

³⁵³ Quignard 1995, 37-38.

become humans detach themselves from the animal collective, and make it the object of their violence. If further communities yet reemerge, *après-coup*, binding together the members of a group, this is only secondarily, and as a means to contain, not to bring an end to, this originary violence; one knows well that shibboleths might yet be discovered, and taken as justification for the further extension of predation. One continually flees this horror, as it manifests in the pursuit of the formless; one seeks image whereby one might master it, and yet it traverses still. It strikes in the muteness of images, in the continual attempt to place the terror beyond the boundaries, to assert the dominion of a *logos* that would be unaffected, forgetting its infancy.

This depiction of the primal scene, from which the human emerges, remains itself something of a myth, even though it might cloak itself in the language of paleoanthropology. It is but one more image of the primal, one more form given to the unrepresentable. It is but a gesture to the terror of an exposure to the formless itself, the affect that precedes the *logos*, which precedes any possible act of articulation. If this scene maintains a key position in Quignard's discourse, it is because it poses the act of reading at what is perhaps its greatest historical limit. One does not return further back than those inscriptions left by the neolithic hunters. That which they have given to read appears perhaps indeed near to the limit of what is legible. Whoever they might have been, the contemporary viewer of the traces that remain of them shares nothing in common with them, nothing save perhaps the terror that is endemic to the human. Be it easy to imagine the cry of the stricken hunter, the wounded beast, the silence of these primordial images remains absolute; the fiction that one will have discovered the

intention that governed their composition is all but impossible to establish here.³⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the image of Lascaux fascinates, it stages in the question of the origin through an image that is only minimally legible, and in so doing, it continues to strike. The metamorphosis of the human *qua* hunter is, of course, not a movement that accomplishes itself without a certain supplementation – it accomplishes itself via the technological, perhaps in its simplest form, in the adoption of weapons. Spears, javelins, bows, the human instaurates itself as that which carries a weapon and which casts it forth. That it is a matter of these weapons specifically, for Quignard, returns all but explicitly in the writings of the antique orators, and particularly that fragmentary treatise known as *On the Sublime*, most commonly ascribed, though falsely, to Cassius Longinus. He describes it as such:

*C'est un traité du tonos, de la tension, de l'intonatio, du tonnerre, de l'energeia propre au langage pour peu qu'il devienne quête de la profondeur et des limites supérieures ou inférieures (sublimes ou sordidissimes) de l'expérience humaine. Du Sublime est encore un recueil d'icônes, rassemblant les "cimes" du logos: "le sublime (hypso) est la cime la plus haute (aktotès) du logos." C'est un grand livre informe sur la création littéraire considérée comme art suprême. Il n'y a pas de bornes à la physis faite voix. Il n'a pas de frontière entre l'inné fusionnel et l'acquis passionnel, entre le don de l'écrivain et la technique linguistique, entre la donne biologique et la fonction investigatrice des paradoxes et des images.*³⁵⁵

This is not, it must be emphasized, the sublime of modern philosophy, such that returns to the operations of Reason, and of freedom. The “sublime” of this anonymous orator of the

³⁵⁴ Vouilloux 2010, 23.

³⁵⁵ Quignard 1995, 56-57.

first century is a matter of tone, of what echoes through the text and brings a halt to the organization of human experience. The sublime, as he poses it, returns to what is inhuman, that bestial cry that has never ceased to move within the human voice. The scattered collection of images that make up the text, images most prominently drawn from Homer, Demosthenes, and Sappho, though others likewise appear, is less an investigation into the rote aspects of composition than it is to the *pathos* inflicted by *phantasiai* – not those images that are given to the eye, but those which, stemming from the text, inflict themselves upon the psyche of the reader, and enthrall him or her. These images aim at the passionate, that which stirs, thereby casting the reader from him or herself, back into the passivity that is maintained in the night of the primordial. The orator describes it thusly:

Of grandeur, elevation, and vehemence in writing, my young friend, they are most capably furnished by apparitions [φαντασίαι παρασκευαστικώταται]. Thusly certain others have called them “eidolopoetic.” For that which is called an apparition is commonly applied to any state of mind [ἐννόημα] that presents itself, engendering the *logos*, but it now prevails that the name is applied when you speak under enthusiasm and *pathos*, believing to see it, and place it before the eyes of the hearers. It means one thing in rhetoric and another in poetry – it will escape you neither that, in poetry, the end is shock, while in discourse, animation, but each aims at what is passionate and what stirs.³⁵⁶

The sublime, as it is here phrased, is that which brings before the eye that which is absent – it sets alight the passions, forcing a departure from the scene of the present. What is let to appear manifestly recalls that which does not present itself. To draw upon the example

³⁵⁶ Ps.-Longinus, *On the Sublime* XV.

that follows the quoted text, it is as if the Furies are made present before the one who reads Euripides' *Orestes*. They manifest their pursuit tirelessly, looming before a victim who is, in the sublime befalling, made to share in the delusions of the hero, or of the poet himself. As Labarrière comments upon this passage:

*pour arriver à faire voir à l'auditeur/spectateur les Erinyes qui assaillent Oreste, pour le "captiver," "le rendre esclave," il aura fallu que Euripide les ait lui-même vues ces Erinyes, et ai vu Oreste les voyant. Et pour parvenir à les voir lui-même, il aura encore fallu que le poète soit en proie à l'enthousiasme et à la passion, sa phantasia ... lui ayant précisément permis de se mettre dans la même mania qu'Oreste.*³⁵⁷

While, in this commentary, Labarrière presumes that this mania passes via the theatrical performance of the tragedy, there is perhaps nothing in the pseudo-Longinian text that would indicate that the transmission of this madness should happen only in such form. Indeed, there is no reference to the performance of the text, or of any other. Given that the rhetor does not distinguish, in his examples, between poetic and rhetorical works that might have been performed, either presently or in the past, and those that would not have been so declaimed, it is perhaps rather a matter of transmission via the text alone. Nonetheless, his central point holds – as Longinus presents it, the poet is merely a transformer of sorts, he inscribes an enthusiasm, a mania, a passivity into images. This madness will thus be transmitted to those others who may read the work. It is thus that the images transform themselves – one can readily trace the lineage of the image of the Furies, from Aeschylus to Euripides, and then to their heirs, the horror of pursuit moves from text to text, from body to body. If Aeschylus' work is the first to attest this image, it

³⁵⁷ Labarrière 2006, 78.

is not itself the source of each of its later transformations – its appearance in his work would mark the tragedian as one already stricken, moved by what would lie outside and anterior to his compositions. The image finds occasion in Aeschylus, and then in Euripides – there were no doubt other intermediaries, but one cannot name them – before passing to Pseudo-Longinus and those contemporary poets and critics who take it up. Each time it is translated anew, whether rewritten directly, or set in a new context; it does not lack in force when posed in a rhetorical treatise. Each time it occurs – which is to say each time it is spoken or read – the image finds occasion anew. However it may be transformed, it does not fail to recall the affect that animates it. The passivity to the aesthetic rears itself once more, traversing from an origin that cannot be grasped by the *logos*.

For Quignard, if the sublime takes place at the highest, it does not remain there – the sublime is not a position, it is what befalls from the greatest distance, ejecting its prey beyond the bounds of the *logos*. Hence it is that Quignard retranslates the term, defamiliarizing it, perhaps undoing the work that the tradition has undertaken in order to contain it. He renders the Greek ὕψος as “*l’à-pic*” – it does not so much maintain itself aloft as it precipitates from afar, striking the auditor with dispossessing force. As he writes: “*La force du style est décrite comme un jet irrépressible, où le pathos prend pour icône le torrent, où le pneuma saisit pour l’inspiration délirante et tournoyante du chaman-sorcier. Cette force est liée à la violence de la nature elle-même.*”³⁵⁸ This is the double play of images – their emergence attests the exposure, the affectivity of the one who puts them on display and thereby affects others. The writer attempts a reversal; his or her exposure is denied, precisely insofar as his work projects it, not merely in

³⁵⁸ Quignard 1995, 57.

phantasy, but by inflicting it upon others. The image is at once apotropaic and murderous – one inflicts it upon the other so as not to suffer it oneself. This, of course, does not adhere to any conscious intent; what passes in the image is an affection that is anterior to the possibility of any subject; the phantasy of subjectivity follows after, attempting to deny the exposure to affect. The cry of the other is elicited so as to drown out one’s own, in an attempt to foreclose the immemorial presence of affect as it surges, never but unexpected, uninvited.

This sublime befalling, of course, does not contain itself to literature, or to the arts more generally; if Quignard grants these oratorical treatises special privilege, it is on account of the more or less active contention with the status of the image that takes place in them. Nor is it the case that this rendition of the sublime would adhere to greatness, if greatness is taken to be synonymous with a kind of nobility. The concomitant sensations of pleasure and of pain are indeed there in the body afflicted, wracked with an affect that it cannot represent, but this in no way returns it to a higher calling, only to the play of desire and the capture that is the image exerts. “*La langue ordinaire dit: ‘cette chose, cette femme tombent à pic.’ C’est ce qui traduirait le mieux le mot de hypsos, bien mieux que le latin sublimus. L’à-pic est ce qui s’ouvre sous l’humain comme abîme, comme la falaise tombe à pic. Le logos seul l’y ramène.*”³⁵⁹ The *logos* operates secondarily, attempting to bind together those fragments of what has been torn asunder by the sublime affliction; it attempts to recapture the event through dismembering another. That Quignard should discover the moment of this violence in the *kairos*, the “critical moment,” of the ancient rhetors is perhaps not surprising in light of the philological derivation of the term. The term is first attested in Homer, albeit in the adjectival form

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 67-68.

kairios, where it is indeed a matter of the surface of the body, and the fatal issue of the javelin. Wounded by an arrow, Menelaus reassures the Achaeans that he has not been struck in a fatal spot [οὐκ ἐν καρτίῳ]. As it is invoked in the *Iliad*, the term refers to the occasion of a mortal wound.³⁶⁰ The abyss opens – one is yet not so far removed from those images of a primordial hunt – it is merely the instance of the prey that has once again changed. The transposition of the term finds itself rooted in a metaphor that is at least as old as the poet, one that declares words spoken to be themselves projectiles. Its occurrence in Longinus cannot be dismissed; one is not merely speaking a sensation of awe in the face of the sublime, but of an ear, a body, stricken, mortified, cast precipitously into the domain where images alone reign, where the passions awaken unsettlingly. “*Lire*,” Quignard writes, “*c’est chercher des yeux aux travers des siècles l’unique flèche décochée à partir du fond des âges.*”³⁶¹ The violence endemic to the *logos* does not cease – it transforms itself endlessly, working and reworking in images the affect that remains stubbornly formless. Language does not depart from this violence, it only casts it forth in interminable projection. The *logos* is itself this projectile, hurtling forth from the absent origin, afflicting those bodies that, in turn, issue forth language. This affected *logos* knows no limits, it continues to rage unbounded, no matter what efforts might be made to contain it. One comes to speak only as affected, torn from one’s infancy, condemned to recast in images that violence that remains originary and impassible.

³⁶⁰ Homer, *Iliad* IV. 185. Of the four instances of the term in the poem, it must be admitted that one of them does not explicitly invoke the threat of death. In the eighth book, Hector delivers a *kairios* wound to the archer Teucros – the result is that his arm is crippled. Whether or not the wound will later kill him, one does not know, but it remains “decisive” in the sense that he will not fight again. For the uses of the term *kairios* in Homer, see Trédé-Boulmer 2015, 23-29.

³⁶¹ Quignard 1995, 63.

Quignard notes a gesture of translation undertaken by Marcus Aurelius, reworking an imaged bequeathed by Fronto: “*Le monde est un déversoir de l’abîme.*” *Deversorium, en latin, c’est le gîte d’étape. Marcus modifie l’image: “Le monde est une cité dont les nations ne sont que des demeures. Les astres paisibles sont un éternel orage.”*³⁶² The cosmopolitan ideal of the Stoa is recast as a heap of remnants, debris continually tossed about by the storm that lies at the origin. The image of his master might offer the semblance of a shelter from the abyss, but, for the emperor, it is already cast down. The *imperium* over which he reigns to the extent of its borders, and the bloodletting that takes places at the *limes* is but detritus. He, like all the rest, is cast forth without return; the transitory shelter from the rage of the abyssal heavens is no longer for him. He inscribes this image, an instance of *logos*, as one only ever does, as an attempt at recovery, as means to translate the image, to form anew what bears down upon him. Marcus attempts to give an account of the torrent that pushes him to write. It will not have ceased, even if the emperor no longer breathes. His voice resonates in silence, his gaze has become unseeing, that of an *imago*. What it beholds is not even that wreckage, it is nothing. The image traverses from the origin, surpassing centuries. It is indifferent to its trajectory, it aims at nothing in particular. Aims will have been occasioned for it, and will have continued to do so, as it moves from *corpus* to *corpus*, eliciting one cry after another. Always one more transformation, one more transfer, will have been demanded. Such is how the affected body bears the unbearable.

³⁶² Ibid., 48.

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