

Back and Forth from Letter to Homophony

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In *L'Œuvre claire*, I propounded a general reading of Lacan's work.¹ I still maintain the main tenets of my attempt. Nevertheless, I must admit a serious defect concerning Lacan's last phase of activity.

After *Seminar XX*, Lacan multiplies the innovations. More than ever, his doctrine seems to be in a state of permanent crisis. In Kühnian terms, however, it appeared to me that the last paradigm shift had happened in *Seminar XX*. Accordingly, the perpetual movements of the following period were but a development of what was implied in this shift: essentially the introduction of the knots and a new doctrine of the autonomy of the letter. Such a conception allowed me to adequately comment on some aspects of the last seminars, but, all in all, I was missing the point. *Seminar XX* did in fact enact a shift of paradigm; ordinarily, a certain amount of time is necessary in order to stabilize the new state of things, but Lacan began to feel the necessity to accelerate. Time was running out. If a new shift of paradigm appeared to be opportune, so be it. It was inopportune to wait. As soon as the shift of *Seminar XX* had been initiated, Lacan engaged in another shift.

This is precisely what I did not perceive. What exactly did I miss? Why this lack of awareness? When did I take it in account? How was I made aware of it? All these questions must be raised and answered.

¹ Some elements of this article have been presented orally on the 1st of July 2016 before the Institute for Cultural Inquiry in Berlin.

La Troisième played a crucial role for me, but not immediately. Lacan presents it orally before the 7th Congress of l'École freudienne de Paris, which was held in Rome in 1975. He explicitly states that he is drawing on a manuscript of 66 pages, which he just completed; understandably, he had to abridge his talk. He did not communicate the original document, but a transcription of his conference was published in 1975 in *Les Lettres de l'École freudienne*. In 2011, in *La Cause Freudienne*, Jacques-Alain Miller published a new version (Lacan 2011); it was based on the 1975 version (Lacan 1975b), but had been carefully revised.

A passage of *La Troisième* is especially remarkable. Lacan seeks to define his own concept of *lalangue*. He connects it to the following decision: to refuse to attribute to mere chance the fact that *vœu* (wish) is also *veut* (he wants), that *non* (no) is also *nom* (noun), that *d'eux* (of them) sounds like *deux* (two). “*Ce n'est pas là pur hasard ni non plus arbitraire comme dit Saussure,*” says Lacan and concludes: “*c'est le dépôt, l'alluvion, la pétrification [...] du maniement par un groupe de son expérience inconsciente.*”²

The whole paragraph deserves to be scrutinized sentence by sentence. The chosen examples are most intriguing. The apparition of the group in connection with the Unconscious raises several questions. In particular, it would be most interesting to compare Lacan's approach to Freud's approach in *Der Mann Moses*. The constitution of the Jewish people could also be held as a “petrification of the handling by a group of its own unconscious experience.” The fact that Freud thinks in quasi historical terms, while Lacan prefers to listen to the sounds of speech cannot be considered as negligible. It reveals the differences of their methods, but also the proximity of their concerns. However, one and only one aspect of the text was of importance for me. Despite its shortness,

² “It is neither mere chance nor arbitrariness, as Saussure says ... It is the sediment, the alluvium, the petrification [...] of the handling by a group of its own unconscious experience.” (Lacan 2011, p. 20.)

the list of examples shed a blinding light on the real cause of my previous blindness, which in that case was also a deafness. What I did not want to listen to, I could henceforth define and name. It was not even new. For many years, Lacan had drawn everybody's attention to it and named it *homophonie* (homophony).

I am not even saying that my awareness was immediate. On the contrary, I neglected *La Troisième* when I read it for the first time in 1976. I still neglected it when I read it a second time in 2011. As a first motive for that lack of attention, I could mention my indifference to Joyce. Joyce's work had become essential to Lacan's progress after *Seminar XX*. Hence an abundance of admirable commentaries and interpretations left me absolutely cold. I even concluded that the "Joycean turn" was a dead end compared to the fecundity of the "linguistic turn" or the more recent "topological turn." Just recently in 2016, I finally recognized my indifference for what it was: a resistance.

No doubt I was resisting Joyce's program of research, but after all it did not matter so much. Far more important was the fact that I was resisting Lacan's work itself. He had pointed to an object I could not bear. The more attentive I had wanted to be till then, the more neglectful I had constrained myself to become. This lack of vigilance, remaining sufficiently discreet, escaped my attention. Indeed, I recognized my resistance as such only when it ended.

This event is very recent. It is directly related to Eric Laurent's book *L'envers de la biopolitique* [The Other Side of Biopolitics] and to Jacques-Alain Miller's findings, which Eric Laurent quotes abundantly. I never failed to recognize what I owe to Jacques-Alain Miller. He introduced me in 1963 to Lacan's work; later, he made me conscious of the importance of that work as compared to others that were then and sometimes still are far better known. Thanks to him, I am now able to identify the nature and the cause of my previous resistance: I could not accept the fact that homophony had become a cornerstone of Lacan's doctrine.

As Freud says, however, “I have always known this.” The reality of homophony is familiar to me. I had encountered it when I worked with Roman Jakobson on Baudelaire’s poem *Spleen IV*. In *For the Love of Language*, I had studied Saussure’s anagrams without however mentioning their condition of possibility, namely the total or partial homophony between several morphemes. Lacan’s wordplays always seemed important to me. I had noticed that the permutation *lituraterre* created in French something analogous to a Chinese ideogram. Like the latter, the former combines several units, *littérature*, *rature* (crossing out), *terre* (earth), *litura* (erasure). The principle of simultaneity replaced the principle of succession on which alphabetical writing is based. What is more, I raised these word plays to the rank of mathemes. In order to spell out the elements of knowledge they are the recipient of, it is both necessary and sufficient to display the various homophonies they are made of.

I already mentioned Lacan’s struggle against time. Since the seventies, he endeavored to write and to speak on several levels at once, in order to convey a maximum number of significations. If he had submitted his discourse to the constraints of linearity, he would have lost his battle against the most formidable of adversaries, namely Death. *Ars longa, vita brevis* (Art is long, Life is short), the old saying is relevant here. The unlimited effects of partial or complete homophony enable Art to compensate Life’s shortness. In *La Troisième*, Lacan mentions openly the possibility of his sudden death occurring during the very speech he was giving then: “*même si je défuntais, à la suite – ça pourrait bien m’arriver ...*”³ This passing remark sheds an oblique light on the systematic use of word play in the same text.

These presentations are accurate in many respects; they are however misleading with respect to the essential fact: homophony

³ “[E]ven if I were to die in the following instant—it could very well happen to me ...” (Lacan 2011, p. 12)

is not an addition to the various dimensions of language; it is not an ornamental superstructure that does not modify the foundations of the building. On the contrary, it transforms radically everything that can be theorized about the Unconscious and its relationship to the fact of *lalangue*. Moreover, I had fallen into a trap I had built with my own hands. By getting closely acquainted with homophony, I felt as if I had domesticated it. I could not suppose that this false security concealed in fact a resistance. While reading *La Troisième* anew, with Laurent's and Miller's findings in mind, I suddenly understood what had been at stake: linguistics, my own position as former linguist, my faithfulness to my own past as linguist. I had payed lip service to homophony in many circumstances, but my resistance to it would remain irreducible as long as I kept believing *la langue*.

For the difficulty lays there: there is nothing wrong in believing in *la langue*; its existence must not be put in doubt; its definition in strictly negative terms remains one of the major discoveries of the 20th century. But to believe in and to believe are two different things; one must not believe *la langue* exclusively; that belief must constantly undergo what Secret Services call a debriefing; indeed, *la langue* must not have the last word. There precisely lied my resistance: I conceded to homophony all kinds of importance, but the last word still belonged to *la langue*. Its materiality seemed to me both necessary and sufficient to give access to *lalangue*. Hence an implicit axiom: *the material of lalangue is la langue*. I mistrusted Lacan's Joycean turn, because its axiom was exactly the reverse; it could be summarized as follows: the material of *lalangue* is homophony, but homophony does not belong to *la langue*.

La Troisième challenges directly all experts of *la langue*, whether they conceive themselves as grammarians or as linguists. The examples Lacan quotes summarize exactly what the experts have spontaneously agreed to ignore. Their agreement is so unshakable that it goes without saying. If someone dared to mention

this kind of data, the immediate answer would be: It is a matter of mere chance, it is of no consequence. Lacan's expression "*ce n'est pas pur hasard*" (it is not mere chance) directly opposes the expert's reply "*c'est un pur hasard.*" In fact, given the Lacanian definition of *lalangue*, a symmetrical definition follows for *la langue*: *la langue* is defined by the decision to consider the homophony between *vœu* and *veut* as haphazard. Such a decision amounts to an annulment of the data; they exist, but count for nothing.

By the way, Lacan's expression "It is not mere chance" does not imply that any necessary rule should be expressed. The "no chance" is neutral between chance and necessity. It just qualifies as a denial the attempt to annul all examples of homophony.

From these examples, nothing follows except their existence. The fact that two morphemes are homophones does not define any connection between them except homophony itself. Two homophones are neither bound nor separated. They just wave at each other like strangers travelling on two different trains. One could say of homophony what Heraclitus said of the god in Delphi: "it does not reveal, it does not conceal, it gives a sign." We know that Apollo's oracles required to be interpreted. The same is true of homophony. Once the echo between *vœu* and *veut* has been heard, the time of interpretation has come.

Moreover, different types of chance are involved in a language. Saussure's distinctions have not lost their relevance. The thing signified by the sign *wish* is not to be confused with the "signified" (*signifié*) of the same sign; the former is external to language in general and to *la langue* in particular, while the latter is internal to *la langue*. The phonic "signifier" (*signifiant*) /*wish*/ is not to be confused with the sign *wish*; it constitutes but one of the two faces of the sign. The conceptual *signifié* is generally expressed by repeating the phonic "signifier" and enclosing it between quote marks, 'wish'. The relation between all these elements oscillates between chance and necessity; once English is considered as a given reality, the relation between /*wish*/ and 'wish' cannot be

different from what it is; it is necessary. But it is also possible to conceive of a world where English phonology would be slightly different from what it is; the fact that English, as a whole, is such as it is depends on chance. But what is true of the whole is also true of its parts. In that case, the relation between /wish/ and 'wish' depends on chance, since the phonological form /wish/ itself depends on chance. All these cases of "chance" differ from each other; moreover, they have nothing to do with the "chance" to which the linguist would reduce homophony.

Lacan does not examine in *La Troisième* the labyrinth of the Saussurean theory of the linguistic sign. It is both necessary and sufficient for him to isolate the phenomenon of homophony. He openly rejects the Saussurean term of "arbitrariness"; even if it were relevant for the linguistic sign (which he denies), it would be irrelevant concerning homophony, because homophony does not belong to the space where the linguistic sign may be defined. While the Saussurean *la langue* has no exteriority, and finds in itself its own and only experience, homophony and, thanks to it, *lalangue* result from the unconscious experiences of a group. It is to be noted that Lacan opens the way to a new theory of culture. Instead of connecting culture and *la langue*, he connects culture and *lalangue*. The inscription in a given culture depends on the ability of hearing homophony and its effects. Freud's notion of *Unbehagen* (discomfort) should be connected nowadays with the obvious distrust of the various social institutions against *lalangue*. Many educational systems in the Western world promote the globish, in other words *la langue* deprived of *lalangue*. In truth, homophony is everywhere, but it has been instrumentalized as a tool for commercial or political marketing. Anagrams, rhymes, alliterations, word plays are used in the fabrication of slogans. Even an excessive knowledge of *la langue* raises some distrust, because one can never be sure whether *la langue* may not be corrupted and evolve into *lalangue*. Humanities are stigmatized as useless, but that cannot be the real reason, since many useless

practices are taught in Western societies. What makes humanities suspect, is not their lack of usefulness, but their ability to extend the field of *lalangue*. Obviously, they multiply the opportunities for partial or total homophony. Lacan was able to produce a new matheme concerning the unconscious by using the homophony between the German adjective *unbewusst* and the French phrase *une bévue* (some mistake). Such a procedure required of him and of his audience what is commonly called in French *culture générale* (general culture). Clearly, the decline of the humanities will make it impossible for a majority of readers to understand this word play and its implications. I do not share the melancholy of those who regret the loss of the classical languages and the classical culture; but I must admit that it entails almost mechanically the muteness of *lalangue* and the instrumentalization of homophony.

Lalangue's name derives from *la langue*. In other words, the name itself involves homophony, while its *designatum* also involves homophony. All Lacanian word plays are mathemes. This one implies that *la langue* and *lalangue* are two separate beings, although the latter is produced by transforming the former. It is tempting to think of a Klein bottle, that had been crafted artisanally with a usual bottle as its starting point. It is easy for a glassblower to craft such an artefact. But the comparison would be misleading.

Contrary to the two bottles, *la langue* and *lalangue* are not made of the same material. *La langue* is entirely reducible to negative relations; each linguistic sign exists only as opposed to another; its elements have no positivity by themselves; their sensorial qualities are of no consequence. In particular, the phonetic *qualia* are dissolved and replaced by formal features. Homophony, on the contrary, depends on the *qualia*. *Lalangue* is integrally positive and affirmative. This positive affirmation however is punctual. *Lalangue* manifests itself in separate word plays; in each case of homophony, *lalangue* is involved in its entirety, but no homophony is related to another. There is no network of

homophonous pairs, of anagrams, of alliterations, of word plays that would constitute *lalangue* as a whole. Indeed, *lalangue* is not a whole, it is *pastout*. There is no *x* that does not belong to *lalangue*, while there is an *x* at least that does not belong to *la langue*. The existence of such a limit is the requirement of grammar and linguistics. Consequently, *la langue* is a whole; its negative relationships are connected in networks that may be expressed in various ways, the most traditional being the grammatical rule. In short, *lalangue* is homophonous to *la langue* because it attracts to itself, in the manner of a black hole, the unlimited infinity of homophony, the existence of which *la langue* must deny.

Given the homophony between *la langue* and *lalangue*, which of the two comes first? Apparently the name *la langue* comes first and its counterpart *lalangue* comes second. In the same way, it would seem that the speaking subject begins by learning *la langue* and reaches homophony subsequently, through his knowledge of *la langue*. The real process is quite different however. Even from the point of view of ontogeny, the child experiments with homophony and word plays before having a complete sense of *la langue*. His babbling has more to do with *lalangue* than with *la langue*. Indeed, what makes a speaking being of the infant is neither *la langue* nor *le langage*, but *lalangue*. Babies seem to play with sounds in the same way they play with water or sand. The main forms of their play imply repeated vowels or consonants, as is shown in baby language: *baby*, *dada*, *mama*, etc. But the repetition of sounds is simply a subspecies of homophony.

It is tempting to suppose that the *Fort-Da* represents a first discovery of *la langue* as separated from babbling. It could be considered as a repression of homophonous repetition of phonemes. It is at least a farewell to the baby talk the child used to exchange with his mother. Her absence puts an end to the age of homophonous repetitions. From now on, the phonological difference and more generally the regularities and negative relations of *la langue* will prevail. The well-known privilege of the mother

tongue depends on the fact that it is the sole language whose first form was babbling. It is then the sole language where some continuity remains between the preceding *lalangue* and *la langue* that followed. In many cases, the pleasure of homophony in its various forms (rhymes, alliterations, anagrams) is but an echo of the early childhood, when the mother tongue was still embedded in babbling.

Nature abhors a vacuum, according to Greek science. Lacan suggested a correction; “*la nature a horreur du nœud*” (nature abhors a knot), he said.⁴ I am tempted to add: Linguistics and grammar abhor homophony. Even more than the annulment of it in the name of mere chance, the best proof is provided by the cases where homophony is annulled in the name of necessity. After all, the inflection of a regular verb in English is based on homophony. But no grammarian, no linguist would think of it in these terms. Instead of considering the total homophony between *(we) exist* and *(they) exist*, or the partial homophony between *(they) exist* and *(he) exists*, they would posit a unique base form subsequently modified by adding *-s* or *-ed* or *-ing*, etc. While homophony implies a multiplicity of identical forms, the inflection implies the unicity of one morpheme. Here the notion of regularity absorbs homophony just as efficiently as did the notion of mere chance in Lacan’s examples. Both procedures are opposed, but they derive from the same horror.

This horror is such that the grammarian and the linguist avoid mentioning the phenomenon. In the few cases where the procedures do not suffice to erase it, another notion comes immediately to the rescue, namely homonymy. In this way, the difference in meaning contributes to the required annulment. *(River) bank* and *(savings) bank*, *their* and *there* are not homophonous, says the linguist, they are homonyms. Lacan distinguishes sharply between *la langue* and *le langage*; *la langue* has no exterior, *le langage*

⁴ Lacan 1975b, p. 101.

belongs to the means of communication, it has a practical use in the external world thanks to the meaning. By invoking homonymy, the linguist relies on the external world and the practical use of language. In order to save *la langue*, he puts his trust in *le langage*. In an obscure way, he feels that homophony's very name would be lethal for *la langue*. If Lacan's examples are real, then *la langue* vanishes.

But Lacan's examples are real. Hence the renouncement of linguistics that becomes apparent in *Seminar XX*. Lacan proclaims his own attachment to *linguisterie*.⁵ I have underlined the pejorative character of the suffix *-erie*; it appears in words like *piraterie* (piracy), *escroquerie* (swindling), *grivèlerie* (nonpayment of a bill), *pédanterie* (pedantry). Equally important is the fact that the word is based on *linguiste* (linguist) rather than *linguistique* (linguistics). Lacan could have fabricated *linguistiquerie*; he did not. His attention was not directed to a certain science, but to certain subjects who contributed to this science's progress. Among those, the first rank belonged to Jakobson, namely to a linguist who lent his ear to anagrams and poetry.

It is tempting to describe him as representing *lalangue* in the realm of *la langue* and *la langue* in the realm of *lalangue*. In truth, linguistics as a science had become less preoccupied with the negative notion of *la langue*; Chomsky had progressively substituted to it a positive definition that had more to do with *langage*. The revolution culminated in the conception he expressed in his *Reflections on Language*: Language is an organ. From Lacan's point of view, linguistics was free to adopt such a definition, however, if such a definition is accepted, language and linguistics shed no specific light on the structure of the Unconscious; they are not even relevant in the cases where language data interacts with unconscious phenomena. Consequently, there was no reason

⁵ Lacan 1998, p. 15. This lexical creation appears in the second session, dated 19 December 1972 and titled "To Jakobson".

to grant a special significance to the linguists' general proposals about language, even though they still could point out remarkable details in the various languages. But such empirical observations were due to individual linguists, who were studying narrow fields of data. *Linguisterie* prevailed over linguistics. Small positivities prevailed over comprehensive doctrines.

Poetry became a privileged domain of study. A poetic event happens whenever a dehiscence fractures the continuous surface of *la langue*. It defines its own regularities, that may be opposed to *la langue's* regularities; it plays with numbers while they have no relevance in *la langue*; the limits of the verse may overrule the boundaries of the phrase. Last but not least, homophonous word plays contribute to building up the poetic unit. A poem is a homophonic space, whose laws have to be defined each poem at a time. The relevance of the various forms of homophony confirms the connection between *lalangue* and the general possibility of poetry. It comes as no surprise that those linguists who deal with poetry are precisely the ones who listen to *lalangue*. Jakobson is of course a case in point. So is Saussure.

When his research on anagrams was partially published by Starobinski in 1971, many specialists considered it delirious. Nowadays they inspire several researchers in the field of comparative poetry. Saussure conjectured that the data he had collected reflected an intentional technique, the procedures of which were secretly transmitted among groups of specialists in the ancient Indo-European societies. He abandoned his hypothesis when he discovered anagrams in the verses of a contemporary neo-Latin poet. The latter did not even reply to Saussure's inquiries about his supposed knowledge of a secret technique. Nowadays, some linguists consider that this counter-experiment was not as conclusive as Saussure believed it to be. Jakobson on the other hand never believed in a specific technique. According to him, the anagrams were both real and unintentional. Lacan's word plays occupy an original position. They are obviously intentional, but on the

other hand Lacan considers as irrelevant the difference between intentional and unintentional homophonous echoes. A slip of the tongue and a “*mot d’esprit*” (spoken wit) are strictly equivalent.⁶ Whether the irruption of *lalangue* in *la langue* is intentional or not, its status remains the same. Freud showed very early on that the Unconscious may be tracked down equally in our most carefully calculated decisions and in our involuntary mistakes. The same is true of *lalangue*. Saussure’s historical conjectures and Jakobson’s ahistorical conception testify to the same real.

Linguisterie, Joyce, poetry, autonomy of the letter, central position of homophony, all these features characterize the last period of Lacan’s work. They imply a farewell to linguistics. The Chomskyan revolution bears some responsibility in this matter, but it is not sufficient in itself to explain the shifts of the Lacanian paradigm. In 1964, Lacan raised a question: What is a science that includes psychoanalysis?⁷ His answer at that time was centered around Koyré. Mathematized physics embodied the ideal type of modern science, as opposed to Greek *epistèmè*. Galileo, Newton, Einstein, these names identified the landmarks of the progression. Structural linguistics belonged to the same movement. What was more, it proved that modern science was able to take into consideration phenomena that were not included in the classical conception of nature. The same was true of structural anthropology; its object obviously belonged to the field of *thesis* (convention) rather than *phusis* (nature). Hence the birth of what I have called an extended Galileism: it adhered to Galileo’s axiom “Nature’s book is written in mathematical letters,” with two corrections however. Modern nature had nothing to do with classical nature; rather than mathematization in its narrow sense, literalization was required; mathematization was but a subspecies of it. Structural linguistics and structural anthropology were

⁶ Lacan 1990, p. 50.

⁷ Lacan 2001a, p. 187.

literalized, even though their mathematized part was narrow or non-existent. They were then integrated into modern science.

But they proved to open new perspectives on the Unconscious and for psychoanalysis. Such is the import of the synthetic presentation given in Rome in 1953. New sciences are born. Thanks to their empirical discoveries, but also to the theoretical innovations they propounded, the general definition of modern science could be understood in a new way. The main representatives of extended Galileism changed the conditions of the quest for a science that were compatible with psychoanalysis.

This quest lasted till 1968. The events of May '68 offered to Lacan new themes of meditation. He certainly did not renounce his quest concerning science, but a new research program prevailed. Meanwhile, an important event took place in the field of science. Lacan was well aware of it. Mathematized physics was entering the phase that Kühn qualifies as "normal science." Of course, new discoveries were still to be expected, but nothing seemed to modify neither the problems nor the solutions. When Lacan draws attention to the exploration of the moon, he does not underline its novelty but rather its continuity with Newton. The LEM does not show anything new about modern science.⁸ Yet, on the other hand, something had happened in biology. The discovery of the genetic code, the unexpected fruitfulness of the linguistic modelization in this area, all this is, till the present days, leading to new empirical discoveries and new concepts. Moreover, the developments in biology do not conform at all with Koyré's construction. Mathematics plays no essential role; the literalization is obviously important, but it does not answer to the requirements of structural linguistics; it has rather to do with the positive techniques of writing or editing. The double helix is crucial for its architectural and material properties; for now, it does not appear that it could be reduced to a mere algebraic formula in terms of analytical geometry. What is

⁸ Lacan 2001b, p. 423.

striking is the prevalence of artisanal representations and material procedures: deletion, addition, substitution, permutation, displacement of sequences, rather than calculations. In short, the question should be raised: Is genetic biology Galilean at all?

If modern science should include biology, then Koyré's doctrine is refuted as a general doctrine of modern science. Its validity must be confined to certain restricted parts of the natural sciences and to certain periods of their developments. If this is the case, then Lacan's quest of 1964 undergoes a radical transformation. Newton's God made no error. It is unclear whether the same is true of the God of genetics. A genetic mutation could be compared to a typing error; some physiological defects are attributed to spelling errors in the code; it is tempting to compare such a God to an *étourdi* (scatterbrain), as opposed to the impeccable architect of a so-called Great Design. Such a typist would greatly benefit from psychoanalysis. Lacan's saying "*Dieu est inconscient*" (God is unconscious) would then acquire a new meaning. The only obstacle is the simple fact that the typist does not exist, but that does not preclude a possible compatibility between genetics and psychoanalysis. They at least share the experience of *bévue* (slip-up). In his back-cover text written for *Autres Écrits*, Jacques-Alain Miller underlined the importance of the genome and expressed the hope that its decrypting holds a promise of "*noces nouvelles du signifiant et du vivant*" (new marriage of signifier and life). He was alluding to the title of a celebrated work of late Antiquity *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury* that was written by Martianus Capella (5th century) and constitutes an extensive encyclopedia of the classical knowledge. In a parallel way, Jacques-Alain Miller implied that a new kind a philology is being born that may concern both the letters of life and the letters of the Unconscious. Genome and homophony wave at each other without knowing anything of one another. Both might be subjected to an analogous sequencing. Both concern the speaking being as being also the bearer of a body.

To this union between genome and *lalangue*, *la langue* gives several names; in French, one of these names is *l'homme*. Relying on homophony and trying to stir up an echo with genome's decipherment, Lacan transcribed it as LOM, three letters like DNA, homophonous with *l'homme*. The French speaker takes some pleasure in finding its twins at the end of *génome* and in the beginning of *homophonie*.

La Troisième's penultimate section may now be granted a more complete interpretation. Returning to Galileo's discoveries, Lacan writes: "*la science naît [...] à partir du moment où Galilée a fait des petits rapports de lettre à lettre avec une barre dans l'intervalle [...] la science part de là. Et c'est pour ça que je mets espoir dans le fait que, passant au-dessous de toute représentation, nous arriverons peut-être à avoir sur la vie quelques données plus satisfaisantes.*"⁹ Relations of letter to letter, rather than mathematics, are the real point of departure here. Koyré is thus directly challenged. After a long period in which mathematics had annexed the letters in science, letters as such have now reappeared in their full autonomy. For that reason, it is possible to hope for some better data about life. Why? Because the reemergence of autonomous letters in modern science happened in biology. For many centuries, life had been the mother of all imaginary representations, the most tragic example of which had been given by the politics of race and *Lebensraum*. Thanks to the letter, it is possible to hope to move beyond the representations, even on the subject of life.

Some paragraphs earlier, Lacan had drawn a Borromean knot. In the circle of the Real, he inscribed life. His commentary is illuminating: "*Cette construction chimique qui, d'éléments répartis dans quoi que ce soit et de quelque façon que nous voulions*

⁹ "Science is born [...] from the moment when Galileo established minute relations from letter to letter with a bar in the interval [...] this is where science takes its starting point. And this is why I have hope in the fact that, passing beneath any representation, we may perhaps arrive at some more satisfactory data on life." (Lacan 2011, p. 32; trans. *Problemi*)

le qualifier, se serait mise à édifier par les lois de la science, une molécule d'ADN, comment a-t-elle pu prendre son départ? Tout ce à quoi nous induit la science, c'est à voir qu'il n'y a rien de plus réel que ça, ce qui veut dire rien de plus impossible à imaginer."¹⁰

Is life here equivocal between biology and ethics? Of course it is. If literalized, life is *the* Real as such; if biogenetics, rather than mathematics, is *the* science of the Real, then all forms of pseudo-representation that pretend to be based on life's reality lead to the fundamental myth of modern humanity, namely racism. Conversely the ultimate weapon against racism is not pity or fear, but the irrepresentability of life's lettering. Is life's name related to homophony? Of course it is. In the dialect of modern science, *life* is spelled *bio-*. Even in this dialect, *lalangue* may insinuate itself. Thanks to the invisible presence of its dialectal substitute, the word *life* alludes to one of Heraclitus's most celebrated sayings. It is not mere chance that it is based on homophony: "The name of the bow (*bios*) is life (*bios*), but its work is death."¹¹

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¹⁰ "This chemical construction which, starting from elements distributed in whatever medium and in whatever way we wish to qualify it, would build, by the laws of science alone, a molecule of DNA—how could it set off? All that science leads to is but the perception that there is nothing more real than that; in other words, nothing more impossible to imagine." (Lacan 2011, p. 30; trans. *Problemi*)

¹¹ Heraclitus, DK B48.

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