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The Point of the Signifier[1]

[**Editorial note: this manuscript file will be replaced by a definitive pdf in early 2013**]

[73] We have inherited a relation between being and computation – this point is sufficiently demonstrated by ancient doxography, which, relaying opinions on being, can only state them as enumerations, and in order to list them, can only follow the sequence of numbers. Isocrates relates, for example, that 'for one group, the ancient sophists, there are an infinity of beings; for Empedocles, there are four; for Ion, only three, for Alcmaeon, just two; for Parmenides, one; and for Gorgias, absolutely none' (Isocrates, Or. XV, 268; cited p. 345 of the Diès edition).[2]

This relation, which the anecdote describes, also delimits [*cerne*] the hypothesis supporting Plato's movement in the *Sophist*, where he desires to establish the status of non-being. Placing himself in the succession of opinions, since he aims to conclude it – between Parmenides' 'one', which summarises all the positive countings [*les comptes positifs*], and Gorgias' 'absolutely none', which erases them all – all he can do is enumerate non-being, provoking its emergence with a calculation.[3]

Consider the *genera* [or general 'kinds' of things] then, as the elements of the collection to be deduced or deducted [*à décompter*], out of which non-being should arise through e-numeration: 'Among the genera, [...] some may participate in a mutual community, and others not; certain of them will accept it with some, while still others, penetrating everywhere, find nothing to prevent them from entering into community [74] with everything' (254b).[4] Through this opposition between mixture [*le mélange*]

[1] This is a revised version of a text delivered on 2 June 1965 at the Seminar of Doctor Lacan. We must thank Dr. Audouard, who, speaking before us, presented us with more than a point of departure: while taking a different approach, we have done nothing more than recognise, following him, the foundational points he had already marked with the doctrine of the signifier.

TN: First published as Jean-Claude Milner, 'Le Point du signifiant', CpA 3.5 (May-June 1966), 73-82. Translated by Christian Kerslake, revised by Knox Peden. In Cormac Gallagher's rough translation of Lacan's *Seminar XII: Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis* (1964-65), Milner's presentation runs from pages 334 to 339, online at http://www.lacaninireland.com.

[2] TN: The reference is to Isocrates' *Antidosis*, cited in Auguste Diès' edition of Plato, *Oeuvres complètes*, tome VIII, part 3 [1925]: *Le Sophiste*, 4th edition (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1963), 341. The full passage from Isocrates reads, in the most recent English translation: 'I would advise the young to spend some time in these subjects but not to allow their natures to become withered up by them or stranded in the discourses of the old sophists, of whom one said the number of elements is infinite; Empedocles, that it is four, among which are strife and love; Ion, that it is not more than three; Alcmaeon, that it is only two; Parmenides and Melissus, that it is one; and Gorgias, [that it is] none at all' (Isocrates, *Antidosis*, 268; in Yun Lee Too, *A Commentary on Isocrates' Antidosis* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 75).

[3] TN: We have translated quotations from Plato directly from Milner's French, but have included some passages from the English translation by Nicholas White (in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997]) in the notes.

[4] TN: Nicholas White's translation of this passage, in the Cooper edition of Plato's *Complete Works*, reads as follows:

'VISITOR: We've agreed on this: some kinds will associate with each other and some won't, some will to a small extent and others will associate a great deal, nothing prevents still others from being all-pervading – from being associated with everyone of them. So next let's pursue our account together this way. Let's not talk about every form. That way we won't be thrown off by dealing with too many of them. Instead let's choose some of the most important ones. First we'll ask what they're like, and next we'll ask about their ability to associate with each other. Even if our grasp of *that which is* and *that which is not* isn't completely clear, our aim will be to avoid being totally without an account of them –

and non-mixture, between what lends itself to community and what does not, a distinctive trait is defined, which allows for the introduction among the genera of an order and classes: a hierarchy.

Since the procedure of enumerating a collection – by assigning a given genus to a class and situating it in the order – is now known, Plato is able to delimit arbitrarily a series by selecting from among the genera a certain number of them: the three largest, i.e. *being, rest, movement*. It is as if, instead of searching for non-being in some given collection (no doubt confident that he would not find it there), Plato meant to take the opposite course, and to produce non-being in the succession of states of a constructed collection.

Apparently arbitrary, the selected collection is in fact sustained by formal properties: if, among the three selected genera, rest and movement cannot mix or blend with one another, whereas being mixes with both, then Plato has in effect constituted the minimal series needed to support the binary opposition between mixture and non-mixture, which is the very law of the entire collection.

In actual fact, the initial distinction is between two [terms], mixture and non-mixture, but whereas one term suffices to represent mixture, two are required to support non-mixture. Suppose that movement and being are the only genera given. In this case being, which by definition involves everything, would mix with movement and movement's distinctive trait of evading any kind of mixing within its own order would be abolished: all that would appear in the series is mixture. In order to make non-mixture manifest, then, two mutually exclusive terms in addition to being are necessary: rest and movement. This gives us a minimal series of three terms (254d).

But scarcely are three terms posited before their trinity calls upon two supplementary terms to maintain itself as a series in which 'each is other than two of them, but the same as itself' (254d): these terms are the *same* and the *other*. In order to articulate the binary positions of mixture and non-mixture, a minimal series of five terms must be constituted: 'it is indeed impossible for us to consent to reducing this number' (256d).

But this minimal series cannot be closed off in a saturated cycle since, by the very play of the binary law of mixture that governs it, it allows for the appearance of an internal dissymmetry: all the terms fall under the law of mixture and that of non-mixture at the same time, except for one. To each term another is opposed which enters into a specific relation of non-mixture with it: rest against movement, the other against the same. It is only being that mixes with everything, finding no point of resistance, escaping a pairing with a term that would limit it. [75] It is in this dissymmetry that the place of non-being must be found.

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so far as that's allowed by our present line of inquiry – and see whether we can get away with saying that *that which is not* really is that which is not.
THEAETETUS: That's what we have to do.
VISITOR: The most important kinds we've just been discussing are *that which is*, *rest,* and *change.*
THEAETETUS: Yes, by far.
VISITOR: And we say that two of them don't blend with each other.
THEAETETUS: Definitely not.
VISITOR: But *that which is* blends with both of them, since presumably both of them are.
THEAETETUS: Of course.
VISITOR: We do have three of them.
THEAETETUS: Yes.
VISITOR: So each of them is different from two of them, but is the same as itself.
THEAETETUS: Yes.
VISITOR: But what in the world are *the same* and *the different* that we've been speaking of? Are they two kinds other than those three but necessarily always blending with them? And do we have to think of them all as being five and not three? Or have what we've been calling *the same* and *the different* turned out, without our realizing it, to be among those three?' (Plato, *Sophist*, 254b-255a).

Alone among the terms, being must support the founding opposition's binarity through an alternating duality of functions: mixing with everything, it effectuates [*effectue*] the trait that defines it as a term assignable to the class of mixture; yet in the very same movement it ceases to subsist as the delimited term [*terme cerné*] this effectuated trait sought to define.

Being spreads throughout the whole series. It is the very element of its own development since all the terms, as terms, have being. But through this expansion it cannot but make manifest the distinctive trait that situates it in a binary opposition between what blends or mixes and what does not blend: in short, through the modality of its expansion being becomes a term that can be delimited in its singular concentration.

Spreading itself, being presents or posits itself [*se pose*] as being. Now, if being posits itself, then by this fact alone it falls within the register of the other: becoming, through its self-positing, a term within the series, it posits, as its others, all the terms that it is not. 'So we see that to the extent that these others are, being is then not to the same extent; for it is not them, but its own unique self, and in their infinite number, for their part, the others are not' (257a).[5]

It is no doubt true that every term of the series participates in the same and the other: in the same, such that it gathers itself; in the other, such that, through the very act of gathering itself, it posits itself as an other (256b). But only being, which as a result of its limitless expansion sees its function split into two [*se déboubler*], can, in its double participation, invoke a new term, as an other it is powerless to deny or refuse: *non-being*.

Through the vacillation of being as expansion and being as term, through the play of being and the other, non-being is henceforth generated. 'Having shown [...] that there is a nature of the other, and that it is distributed among all beings in their mutual relations, from each part of the other that opposes itself to being, we have the audacity to say – this here is what non-being really is' (258e).[6]

And yet, having accorded non-being the status of this new unity, Plato does not add it to the sum of genera, and in no way suggests that the minimal number needed to support the original binary opposition must be raised from five to six. This is because he needs to maintain simultaneously both that the genera are the points where being is bound [*se noue*], through which the articulation of the discourse on being is compelled to pass, and that they are also equally points wherein being disappears. Emerging through this operation of passage via the other, and of binding [*nouage*] via the same, non-being arises in the series of genera under a singular mode. In the series that must be unfolded to support the opposition of mixture and non-mixture, non-being has no assigned place, other than those points of inflection [*fléchissement*] where the limiting shape [*cerne*] shows itself to be passage.[7] [76]

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[5] TN: White's version reads: 'So we have to say that *that which is* itself is different from the others. [...] So even *that which is* is not, in as many applications as there are of the others, since, not being them, it is one thing, namely itself, and on the other hand it is not those others, which are an indefinite number.' (Plato, *Sophist*, 257a).

[6] TN: White's version reads: 'Since we showed that the nature of *the different* is, chopped up among all beings in relation to each other, we dared to say that *that which is not* really is just this, namely, each part of the nature of the different that's set over against *that which is*' (Plato, *Sophist*, 258e).

[7] TN: The French reads: '*il n'a pas de place assignée, sinon les points de fléchissement, où le cerne se révèle passage.*' Use of the term *le cerne* (a ring or circle that encloses or demarcates something) here echoes Milner's use of the verb *cerner* elsewhere in this text, which we have translated as 'to delimit'; for consistency we have translated *le cerne* as 'delimitation' or 'limit'. The term *fléchissement* also recurs; it evokes 'bending' or 'flexing' as well as 'yielding' or 'weakening'. We have translated it as 'inflection' throughout, but the connotation of 'yielding' should be retained as well.

Unable to continue without vacillation, the series is now confirmed as a chain whose elements entertain relations that are irreducible to a simple succession. Some relations of dependence are revealed, which, on the basis of the sequential linearity of the series, outline a space deep enough for the play of cycles that, in regulated alternations, posit and suppress the same, the other, being and non-being.

Each time that being, passing from one term to another ('others have just as much'), confirms its function of expansion, it denies itself as a delimitable term: at each passage, it makes non-being emerge in the form of repetition ('as many times that being is not'). On the other hand, when being, defined through this very capacity of expansion, gathers in on itself as a term, as a countable unity ('it is its unique self'), it denies its expansion, refuses itself to other terms, and rejects them into non-being as if into an abyss in which every chain and every deduction [*décompte*] vanishes ('the others are not').

Through a correlative movement veiled by the smooth statement that posits it as an 'integrating unity among the number [...] of forms' (258c), non-being is split;[8] it is the abyss which erases all terms ('the others are not'), but it is also the term repeated, each time the genera are deduced, as the delimitation [*cerne*] isolating the deducted term ('as many times, being is not'). Insofar as it is a term in the chain, it is a delimitation repeated without a fixed place, the displacement of a scrap of being; on the other hand, to fix it to a place is to renounce it as a delimitable term, since it cannot be fixed without becoming the abyss in which every series of terms is abolished. To count [*compter*] non-being as a unity 'among the number of forms' can only mean counting it in the chain as that which obliterates any account or deduction [*décompte*].

It is now possible to scan through the cycle in which non-being is enumerated:

- Being as a term is defined by its ability to mix through expansion with any term whatsoever.
- Being, functioning as expansion, is attributable to all the terms, which thereby come to be.
- The terms, coming to be, deny being as a term (this is the moment of the other); non-being appears under all the terms as a term without fixed place, as a repeated limit or delimitation [*cerne*].
- Being as a term refuses or withholds itself from [*se refuse à*] all terms (this is the moment of the same); non-being fixes itself as the abyss absorbing all terms.

(At this point, the cycle can resume, since being is only a distinct term via its property of expansion).

Non-being is thus developed through a play of vacillations between expansion and term, between place and repetition, between the function of abyss and the function of limit [*cerne*]: [77]

- As term, it is repetition, without assigned place, since it is determined by the spreading out of being.

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[8] TN: White's version of the discussion of the being of non-being, or 'that which is not', reads: 'Then does it have just as much being as any of the others, as you said it did? Should we work up the courage now to say that *that which is not* definitely is something that has its own nature? Should we say that just as *the large* was large, *the beautiful* was beautiful, *the not large* was not large, and *the not beautiful* was not beautiful, in the same way *that 'which is not* also was and is not being, and is one form among the many *that are?'* (*Sophist*, 258b-c).

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- As place, it becomes absorption, effacement, since it is determined by being presenting or positing itself as term and refusing itself.

In this way, non-being is each time the inverted reprise of a property of being: the double use that must be granted it – at once a term of the chain, and, as term, the collapse of any chain – is none other than the reverse side of being's violent division [*écartèlement*] as at once term and expansion, and which, as a term of the chain, designates in the chain the possibility of any chain.

Perhaps here it is necessary, following Jacques-Alain Miller, to recognize the powers of the chain, the only space that can support the play of vacillation, and that also can induce such play. Indeed, any movement that replaces an element in the linearity of a sequence that, as element, transgresses it – either because it must situate its foundational authority or agency [*instance*], or because it indicates the place of its erasure – induces there this double formal dependence that we name vacillation, retroactively defining this sequence as a chain.

But to what does this movement of linearization refer, if not to the resonance [*prégnance*] of the unknown or disregarded order of the signifier from which being and non-being would regain their traits, those traits whose very coupling guarantees truth and authorizes discourse?

The signifying order develops as a chain, and every chain bears the specific marks of its formality:

- vacillation of the element, an effect of a singular property of the signifier, which, as element and order all at once, cannot be the one except through the other, and demands for its development a space – supported by the chain – whose laws are production and repetition; being and non-being recover this relation through their inverse symmetry, dividing themselves between term and expansion, between delimitation and abyss.
- vacillation of the cause, in which being and non-being never stop overflowing into one another, each one only able to posit itself as cause by revealing itself to be the effect of the other.
- vacillation of the transgression, finally, which recapitulates them all, in which the term that situates as a term (thereby transgressing the sequence) the authority [*instance*] that founds all the terms, summons [*appelle*] the term that might take up or recover transgression itself as a term, an authority that annuls every chain.

A formal system is [thereby] constituted, and the ways it might be interpreted can now be specified. How can we not read, in their double dependence, being as the order of the signifier, the radical register of all computations, the set of all chains, and also [as] 'one' of the signifier, unity of computation, element of the chain? And non-being [78] as the signifier of the subject, reappearing each time that discourse, continuing on, overcomes an inflection that confirms its discrete character – and [also as] reprise of the specific power of the subject to annul every signifying chain?

But might we not also be permitted to formalize along these lines the object (a), which can be described as being, in the form of stasis, the cyclical repetition of a fall?[9] It is as if we are in possession of a logic capable of situating the formal

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[9] TN: The French reads: '*l'objet (a), qui se décrit d'être comme stase la répétition cyclique d'une chute*'.

properties of any term submitted to an operation of fission [*fission*],[10] but not one capable of marking out specificities.

Unlike Frege's articulation, which reduces the chain to its minimal couple,[11] the interpretation of a less summary formalism is perhaps not univocal. What we might touch upon here, in the form of a system of fission, without being able to specify them further, are the lineaments of a logic of the signifier, and the source of all the mirage-effects that its miscognition [*méconnaissance*] induces.

It is even possible to perceive the necessity whereby this miscognition must summon the symmetry of the mirage to produce its effects, and to see that this necessity authorises the conferral, upon any balancing [*balancement*], of the significance of an indication or sign:[12] the relation of being to non-being already bore all its traits, and it was by right the critical point in which the signifier could be localised.

We need not be reluctant to recognize the deduction of non-being as a formal system, if we observe that Plato himself appears to rely on a formal system in order to lead the dialogue to its end or term. Superimposed on the chains of the genera, other chains unfold wherein he is able to articulate the status of the sophist, who must be delimited [*cerné*] by discourse at the precise point where he denies discourse the power of delimiting anything; and there is the status of discourse itself, which Plato must open to the statement of non-being, to the lies of the sophist, in order to delimit the sophist and his power for truth.

A double connection is instituted in this way: a thematic relation by which Plato reconnects the theme of non-being to that of the sophist through the mediations of lie and error; and a homological relation where, in its register, each theme requires a vacillation to be posited, with the sophist and his lying, counterparts of non-being, unable to place themselves except by effacing all place. But in order to draw up this homology, it is necessary to constitute the chains in which it will act. [79]

The object of the dialogue is the *onoma* [name or character] of the sophist, and the infallible sign that the latter will have been discovered will be that the sophist will have to cease being the sophist, that in escaping the circle traced by his definition, he will cease to be at the moment the *onoma* seizes him.

In the course of the dialogue, the sophist consequently appears at the points where he is pursued, pushed from definition to definition, surviving its inflections [*fléchissements*]. If he is spoken of, by the very rules of dialogical exchange, his presence must be that of a *he*, as opposed to an *I* and a *you*, pronouns specifically designating the partners of speech. But this is still not enough to situate his place in the dialogue.

We have to emphasise, in fact, the need to analyse closely a language with regard to this point, which, in contrast to the *I* and *you*, represents the one spoken of with a unique sign, whether or not it can enter into the dialogue as a partner through some sort of arrangement [*montage*]. Although devoid of pertinence at the linguistic level, his potential insertion in these partners' game is essential in order to be able to detach from the *he* of a partner another *he* with different properties.

Now, Plato provides an indication that he is operating with such a distinction when in 246e, arriving at the refutation of two philosophically opposed schools, he

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[10] I hope we might be allowed to collect under this unitary term, chosen to suggest their formal homology, the splitting of the subject, the evacuation [*déjection*] of the (a), and the distributions [*partages*] of being and non-being.
[11] Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Suture', CpA 1.3:57.
[12] TN: '*Il est possible même d'apercevoir la nécessité que cette méconnaissance appelle pour ses effets la symétrie du mirage, et que cette nécessité autorise à conférer à tout balancement la portée d'un indice.*'

charges Theaetetus with the task of rendering them present: 'Demand that they answer you [...] and then interpret what they say' (τό λεχθέν Παρ' αὐτών ἁφερμήνευε).[13]

The ἑρμήνεύειν [*hermeneuein*], this position of Hermes, the herald, the medium that lends his mouth to another voice, this is what clearly signals that this *he*, this absent one who is spoken of, belongs to those who can on occasion insert themselves into dialogue and take up their place therein.

But the sophist is excluded from this ἑρμήνεύειν. No one lends him their mouth, he is excluded from replying, and yet he is present at every articulation, since at each level the Stranger appoints him judge of the definition: the sophist is in fact this other *he*, the one who is both pretext for the discourse as well as its measure [*pesée*]. In the dialogue, his place is in the horizontality of a chain at its points of passage, and his function is purely one of form, such that this place and function need not rest on any turn of speech.

But if the sophist is the formal figure of the dialogue, it is because he has made his *techne* [craft] from a property of the discourse that must define him. As a result, every definition of the sophist opens on to a definition of the discourse, which will situate in it a potential community between being and non-being.

The thematic relation, however, can only be maintained by a homology. As with non-being among the genera, and as with the sophist in the dialogue, the statement of non-being can only enter discourse through the possibility created by an inflection. [80]

The itinerary here is the inverse of the first one, and can serve as its confirmation. From the other, we were led to non-being; from non-being, now given, we are led to install alterity at the heart of discourse by defining it as an assemblage (σύνθεσις, 263d) of classes of incommensurable words.

No doubt the sequence established toward this end will be indifferent to developments in the sequence of genera. This is because here again Plato is concerned with the minimal: since by definition discourse must be the intertwining of elements to be distinguished within it, the alterity that emerges will be subjected to mixture, but two terms now suffice to maintain it: the name or noun [*le nom*] and the verb (262a)[14] – with no need for three, as before, and above all without having to give an exhaustive analysis of discourse.

We see then that it would be absurd to search for Plato's teaching on the parts of discourse here, and to imagine that, at the level of the *sophist*, he would posit two of them. All he is telling us with this number is that discourse is divisible, but he stops well short of actually making the deduction himself.

For if the theory of the parts of discourse is exemplary for linguistics, this is precisely insofar as it has become a calculation forgetful of its point of departure, such that in this closed and declinable list a deduction of the elements of discourse is possible wherein the subject, misrecognized, becomes a term (namely, in particular, a pronoun).

With Plato, we find ourselves at the origin of this deduction, and its point of departure is still palpable: we know non-being is not yet an element like the others, but rather an element that, if made to appear or arise [*surgir*], makes discourse disappear. If discourse is made to appear, then non-being subsists only as an

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[13] TN: White's version: 'VISITOR: [...] Something that better people agree to is worth more than what worse ones agree to. Anyway we're not concerned with the people; we're looking for what's true. THEAETETUS: That's absolutely right.
VISITOR: Then tell the better people to answer you and interpret what they say' (*Sophist*, 246d-e).
[14] TN: White's version: 'There are two ways to use your voice to indicate something about being [...]. One kind is called names, and the other is called verbs' (*Sophist*, 262a).

inflection, at once limit [*cerne*] and passage from one term to the other, i.e. the dimension of alterity through which discourse defines itself as assemblage.

It is perhaps insofar as a miscognition is not fully achieved or completed that there can be no representing the subject here by an enumerable term in a list: the non-being in which we have read its appearance cannot take its place in this sequence, henceforth impossible to conclude – it must be made to fall into what lies beneath [*dans les dessous*].

But then a new operation develops, where the sequence of the dialogue seems to encounter a point of regression.

If what is at stake is indeed the ability to utter a false discourse, of being able to say what is not, this is in any case only possible through statements about what is, since discourse always bears upon a being. 'If it discourses about no-one, [...] discourse will not be discourse at all. We have indeed showed that it is impossible for there to be discourse that is not discourse on some subject' (the Stranger at 263c).[15] [81]

And it is perhaps here that the true implication of Plato's apparently arbitrary choice is revealed. Is it by chance that the example used to show the possibility of a false discourse is a statement bearing on a proper name, 'Theaetetus flies' (263a)? It seems that, tied here to the verb designating an action which is not, arriving at this place where being must give non-being a support of predication, the name must be set as a proper name.

For, after all, it was possible for the Stranger to speak in the first person: Πέτομαι, 'I fly', an inverted version of the Cogito. We must acknowledge in this avoidance of the grammatical person the resonance [*prégnance*] of the proper name as such. If it can mark the place where non-being disappears, it is because, designating the subject as irreplaceable, as now able – in Jacques Lacan's terms – to come to lack [*venir à manquer*], it also locates it precisely as not lacking. In the sequence of words, non-being, revolving around the proper name, seems to flow back upon itself and to condense: the subject, fixed, takes on the characteristics of plenitude; the sequence of words, as soon as it is posited as a chain, becomes again a series without vacillation, with the name, as a part of discourse, being absorbed into the proper name.

In this avoidance of the grammatical person (no doubt prior to any historical process), through which the category was defined as such, coming to fix the subject in a misrecognition, we nonetheless witness the recovery and the covering-up [*recouvrement*] of the vacillation: with the statement 'Theaetetus flies', thanks to the plenitude of the proper name, non-being of non-being, discourse establishes itself as a reign of unshakeable knowledge.

Everything proceeds as if, at the end of the *Sophist*, it was necessary to turn around and go back and erase non-being itself in discourse, even though it had been necessary to make it present there to ground the properties of truth. The cycles of being and non-being now acquire the status of 'hypotheses' condemned to the silence of the statements they support.

For the superimposition of interpretations within the same formal system, we must substitute the image of an itinerary of recovery and covering-up [*une itinéraire de recouvrement*], where the homologies were only able to develop so as to be broken: the chain has become a series again; hardly opened, the register of the

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[15] TN: White's version: 'And if it were not of anything it would not be speech at all [...]. But if someone says things about you, but says different things as the same or not beings as beings, then it definitely seems that false speech really and truly arises from that kind of putting together of verbs and names' (Plato, *Sophist*, 263c-d).

signifier slams shut, and the term that carries the cause of all the effects of fault and lack [*défaut*] itself comes to lack.[16]

Whereas being, restored, reveals its relation to discourse, insofar as it concentrates its properties in a truth that is henceforth assured, non-being, considered as a species of the false, fixes around the proper name those vacillations through which it had received its definition. It becomes at once the point where the register we should recognize as anchoring a logic of the signifier can be situated, and by this very fact, the point where its misrecognition must be marked. [82]

But the actual [*effectif*] movement is the inverse: the signifier and its logic may have provided a key, but this was at the cost of accepting that our commentary plays out in a circle, and that in order to support its claims, discerns in a smoothly polished text [*un texte lisse*] signs of closure that we have emphasised as misrecognitions and suturations. Here we did not have to read a suture but rather to invent one in order to render a statement legible: we have had recourse to the figure of the chain.

Chain of genera, chain of dialogue, vanishing chain of classes of words: each time, it has been possible to target a point where we can read the logic of the signifier – going so far as to recognize the limit where, we must realise, the introduction of this logic requires us to leave it behind – going so far as to establish anew in the wake of *The Sophist* the hidden and unpredictable adventure [*péripétie*] of an eclipse of the signifier.

From the point of departure, no doubt, everything was already given in the anecdote about the calculation of being, where the arithmetic of the ancient sophists offered an immediate support for the model of the chain. This was to invent everything, with regard to Plato above all, who did not miscognize the structure of the zero but simply knew nothing of it. But this does nothing but remind us that when Plato speaks of being, he seeks his own discourse in its very possibility, insofar as truth can constrain its discrete articulation.

If in its deduction from being, the latter connects, via the mediation of truth, the fate of the assertion and that of the thing which is its object, then what is at stake in being is also immediately at stake in discourse:[17] Plato, speaking about being in a discourse that reclaims truth, examines in detail the laws of a site where discourse as the assertion of truth may be possible.

To make this appear as the diffracted reflection of the signifier requires that we imagine Plato turning a blind eye toward a point whose unicity, position, and validity can only subsist as foreign to the gaze itself, just shy of a miscognition.

'To locate the point that makes the object come alive', Breton tells us, 'the candle must be well placed.'[18]

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[16] TN: '*le terme porteur de la cause de tous les effets de défaut, vient lui-même à faire défaut.*'

[17] TN: '*l'enjeu de l'être est immédiatement aussi celui du discours'.*

[18] TN: The citation is from André Breton's 'Ideas of a Painter', on the work of André Derain: 'The object whose being I paint only lives insofar as I can make a "white or blank point [*point blanc*]" appear. Everything depends on placing the candle well' (Breton, *Oeuvres complètes* [Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1988], vol. 1, 248).