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# On Love: Jacques Lacan and Plato's Symposium

## Summary:

In the 1960-61 seminar, where he faces the question of transference love, Jacques Lacan uses Plato's Symposium to thematize the nature of erotic desire from a psychoanalytical point of view. What ultimately emerges from this debate between the science of psychoanalysis and love on the one hand and a classic of philosophical thought on the other, is the subversive nature of erotic desire: Eros, more than acting as an intermediary between the gods and men, and hence as a protector of relations in general, becomes the third wheel throwing into crisis and breaking up links and unions. As a median, Eros is rather a broken one, which blocks the regular course of human actions. Eros is tragic more than it is sentimental.

## The Metaphor of Love\*

The scene is well known. Socrates has just finished speaking. All are applauding. But not Aristophanes. The comic poet asks to speak, he wants to reply: Indeed, Socrates, caring little for historical plausibility, has involved him, with Diotima as his mouthpiece. But suddenly a loud noise gives the guests a start. Someone, obviously with no manners or discretion, is knocking at the court door, there is a clamor of people in the mood for revelry as even the sound of a flute can be heard. After a moment Alcibiades walks in, stone drunk, staggering, a flute-girl sustaining him. Around his head he is wearing a garland of ivies, violets and ribbons, infinity of ribbons. He has come, he says, to celebrate Agathon and to drink. Without even noticing, he is so drunk, he sits right next to Socrates. On realizing this he flies into a rage: You again—he shouts—forever lying in wait for me. Having said this he elects himself symposiarch, dictates the new rules and decides: instead of praising Eros each shall praise the person to their right. He himself will begin and, as chance would have it, the man sitting on his right is Socrates.

A philosophical commentary would end here, having abandoned the text of the *Symposium* long before and, to continue the exposition of Plato's theory of love it would have gone on to analyzing another work, *Phædrus* for example. What happens in the *Symposium* after Diotima's speech is, according to philosophers, no longer pertinent. To them Alcibiades's tale may at the most be of some use to sketch Socrates' character, to stress his temperance, his power to resist, his contempt for the pleasures of the senses, all the qualities befitting the philosopher and that make up the ideal of the form of philosophical life. But the last word on the Eros of Socrates-Plato goes to Diotima: the rest is literature or historical information.

But is it really conceivable that in a text with Eros as its declared object what takes place between Socrates and Alcibiades is there only by pure chance or simply because in the intentions of Plato as writer—the second letter, in actual fact, proclaims him as the only one—there is also that of rehabilitating in the eyes of his contemporaries and in those of posterity the unique figure of a philosopher who, due to his eccentricity and for refusing to write anything in his own hand, exposed himself more than any other figure to detraction

and calumny? This is undoubtedly one reason. But the problem lies elsewhere: in the question of whether there actually exists a relationship, no matter if direct or conflicting, between what is usually referred to as the Platonic theory of Eros and the salacious scene, which could almost be something out of Boccaccio, of Alcibiades seizing Socrates underneath the blankets and Socrates resisting impassive as if the thing didn't concern him. A further question is whether within the very conceptual economy of the *Symposium* there is a relationship between the noble style of Diotima's speech and the far more concrete, even pedestrian, style of that authentic shift to action which Alcibiades' rigmarole amounts to. Which is also, as Socrates notices at the very end, a masterful example of coded speech, rhetorical performance, because, while he is explicitly addressing Socrates, Alcibiades is actually aiming at Agathon. Unless one wants to reduce this phantasmagoric blend of styles typical of the *Symposium*—from epical to comical, from tragic to medical, from philosophical to sophistic and sapiential—to a mere virtuosic exercise.

These questions may also throw new light on past arguments in Socratic and Platonic historiography; not only on the age-old and unsolved issue of the so-called 'historical Socrates, but above all on the issue of attribution. If, on the one hand, what Socrates actually said will probably remain forever inaccessible to us, on the other a greater attention to the textual strategies may lead to the drawing up of a boundary of some sort, however weak, between Socrates' position and Plato's, without this necessarily implying an acceptance of the theses of the Tübingen school. For example—and this is one way Lacanian commentary intervenes on the text of the *Symposium*—one could observe that the dialectical interlude Socrates subjects Agathon to is the mark of a very different philosophical style from that which transpires from Diotima's words. The former is entirely formal, busy building a plot of pertinent oppositions, of radical differences, one could say it is structural in an *ante litteram* sort of way. The latter, on the other hand, plays entirely on mediation, almost concerned with softening the other's radicality, with returning to a human dimension a speech such as Socrates', which risks, as usual, of confusing the interlocutor without offering any answer of sorts, any solution. And if it is true that Socrates himself abandons the position of Maître for an instant, appearing before the stupefied audience in that of pupil—it is he at last who answers questions and listens—almost as if he were publicly atoning for youthful mistake, one could also say that this changeover between Socrates and Diotima is only a trick of Plato's to slyly join in the debate himself. With this rhetorical *tour de force*, Plato manages to credit Socrates, through the mediation of Diotima (whose speech, just to further mix things up, is among other things described by Socrates as 'sophistic') his conception of love. This is of course nothing but a hypothesis, but one which, with the necessary precautions, may be of use to better disentangle the complexity of Plato's works. It is a hypothesis that would defer, or even permanently exclude, that result which is proper to a philosophical and academic commentary, which, aiming at extracting the concept or the essence of something, love in the case of the *Symposium*, tends to ignore the profusion of rhetorical figures and narrative functions that arrange the text and on which it is ultimately built.

Indeed, if it is true, as Derrida writes, that a style never lets itself be distinguished by intention, it never, in other words, allows that act that makes up the primary violence of every commentary—i.e. the prosaic disembodiment to a conceptual pattern—it is also true that before the violence with which Lacan inevitably risks reducing the text of the *Symposium* to his psychoanalytic theory, there is already the violence imposed by the institutional philosophical commentary. And Lacan ought to be credited with, even if this were his only merit, having got round this danger inherent to an academic philosophical interpretation. The fact that he reads the *Symposium* thoroughly and up to the very last word, that he attaches to the figure of Alcibiades a far more relevant function than that of swinging between the apologetic and the documentary, which is characteristic of the more traditional commentary, and the fact that he finds Alcibiades decisive to the understanding of Plato's theory of Eros at least proves the following: he does not disembody the *Symposium* within a conceptual pattern, but adopts it primarily as a text. Hence his meticulous highlighting of the style; beginning with the discursive contexts: mythological, medical, sociological, comical-tragic and tragic-comical, scientific, philosophical-idealistic; then of the narrative structures, of the dramatic patterns, the witticisms, even in the game of the pure signifier; and again of the distinction between uttering and utterance (*énonciation* and *énoncé*), decisive to understanding, for example, the speech Alcibiades makes which could be summed up in the common saying: «Talk to a daughter in law so as a mother in law will understand».

Lacan basically pays very special attention to the rhetorical dimension of the philosophical text. He reads it slowly, using both axes of language, syntagmatic and paradigmatic, thus avoiding the type of reading that rushes headlong towards the identification of concept or essence, that rushes in other words towards finding a stable and univocal meaning where to file the complexity of a textual plot. This does not mean that Lacan believes the theory of Eros that Plato puts in Diotima's mouth to be false and replaces it with another that may be more coherent and truthful, but equally one-dimensional and rigid: it simply means that he puts Diotima's speech back inside the overall rhetoric and dialectic of the *Symposium*. This act, violent like all interpretational decisions, does however have the effect of showing how the *Symposium* deconstructs itself from within, that is to say, it shows how Alcibiades's sudden entrance is not random, but, and this is Plato's ultimate irony, goes to making up the immanent critique of Diotima's theses and thus rightfully belongs to philosophical discourse.

A general thesis we could extract from the Lacanian commentary is the following: there is no virgin unprejudiced approach to philosophical texts (but the thesis may be extended to include all texts). It always reaches us as 'pre-understood', first of all through the institutional apparatus that Lacan identifies with academic discourse. To put it another way, whatever interpretation of the *Symposium* one wishes to give, whatever effect of misunderstanding is produced by the *Wirkungs-geschichte*, the Platonic dialogue will always be read as the inscription of a certain supremacy of knowledge over desire, of the ideal over the empirical, of reason over sensibility. Indeed, the *Symposium* will always reproduce the hierarchy on which the institutional interpretation of philosophical discourse ultimately rests. Hence the necessity of the act of violence of tearing the text away from the mechanism of self-reproduction of academic discourse, for which what counts is not so much the stiffness of an interpretation but rather the reaffirming of a supremacy, that of the ideal of knowledge.

There is a part of the seminar regarding transference where Lacan proves he has a clear idea of the general program of academic discourse. If the eternal aim of all university professors—i.e. getting rid once and for all of the proliferation and excessive determination of signifiers, reducing the terms of philosophical vocabulary to a univocal signification—he says, the effect would be the silencing, the very disappearance of philosophy. As if for Lacan all the conceptual effectiveness of philosophy rested on the presence of multiple linguistic voices. Hence the conclusion that a philosophical text, in the same way as a dream, should be interpreted more as the effect of a rhetorical strategy than of a conceptual deduction: it is the displacements and the condensations, the metonymies and metaphors, that produce the shifts of meaning, the semantic short-circuiting, which can in the end become actual conceptual innovations.

Let's return, then, to the question we started off with: what has the drunken Alcibiades got to do with the ideal essence of love inferred in Diotima's speech? This question implies another: who is Alcibiades? To find the answer we simply have to read, as Lacan suggests, the relevant pages in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*: Alcibiades is a young ambitious politician, prepared to go to any lengths, even betrayal, to achieve his dream of glory and power, and above all he is handsome, with a beauty that "bloomed with him in all the ages". Lacan wittily compares him to a president Kennedy with a James Dean face. In a page of the *écrits*, contemporary to the seminar, he thus portrays him:

But Alcibiades is by no means a neurotic. In fact, it is because he is the epitome of desirousness, and man who pursues *jouissance* as far possible, than he can thus (though with the help of an instrumental drunkenness) produce before everyone's eyes the central articulation of the transference, when in the presence of the object adorned with its sparkle. The fact remains that he projected onto Socrates the ideal of the perfect Master.

And in *The Seminar*:

Let us observe that in the attitude of Alcibiades there is something, I was going to say sublime, in any case absolute and passionate which is close to something of a different nature, of another message, the one where in the gospel we are told that the one who knows that there is a treasure in a field – it is not

said what this treasure is – is capable of selling everything he has in order to buy this field and enjoy this treasure. It is here that there is situated the margin of the position of Socrates with respect to that of Alcibiades. Alcibiades is the man of desire.

The first thing we notice is that Lacan, by promptly dismissing the possibility of Alcibiades being a neurotic, can immediately reject the objection that a psychoanalytic commentary of a philosophical text is necessarily a wild analysis of sorts where the individual characters or authors are forced to lie in the couch. None of all that. To Lacan the only form of applied psychoanalysis, if this expression still means anything, is clinical practice. What takes place in the seminars when texts, whether by Freud, Plato or Shakespeare are discussed, is theory, psychoanalytic theory or theory *tout court*.

At this point a digression is necessary: if there is one thing that characterizes Lacan's teachings, this must be the idea that psychoanalysis is an integral part of the field of science. A thesis already upheld by Freud and of which Lacan keeps the essentials, perhaps just shifting the focal point from neurology to linguistics. It is just as true, however, that psychoanalysis's inscription into the theoretical horizon implies a change of the model of reason that has come into being in the western tradition. But this very revision becomes possible only under the condition that psychoanalysis be preventively removed from the psychological field, from the sphere of life experience, removed basically from the field of the 'human sciences' and led back to its place of origin. What is the subject of psychoanalysis if not the very subject of science, the Cartesian subject of the certainty of the self, re-inscribed this time in the field of the unconscious, reinterpreted beginning from an archeology of desire? So, among the motives that led Lacan to imposing a commentary on Plato's *Symposium* upon an audience that must surely have been crammed with psychological knowledge but reluctant towards 'the patience of the concept', there must have been the following: Socrates is the prototype of the subject of science, the archetypal Maître. And that Lacan's intention was to interlace psychoanalysis and science is proved by the bewildering theory—who knows whether more so for the philosopher or the analyst—that in the *Symposium*, and not only in the *Symposium*, Socrates behaves as a quasi-analyst and that his reply to Alcibiades' speech resembles interpretation.

Thus, according to Lacan, this is the reason why the presence of Alcibiades on the scene of the *Symposium* becomes necessary. Who is Alcibiades? He is *l'homme du désir*, he who goes all the way on his quest for pleasure, up to the possible and the impossible. He who to pursue desire not only accepts all the good but also all the evil that may derive from it. Someone who has been elected by desire in turn elects his disciples, like Jesus, and is therefore prepared to betray father and mother, sell out his country, undergo suffering and death, to simply enjoy the treasure he has been able to glimpse. Nothing could be further apart from that education to the desire of immortality that is the backbone of Diotima's speech; nothing could be further apart from Socrates' call of «know yourself», which implies the appeasement of desire in the possession of the ideal object, the idea of good. And one may want to find out the reason for this obstinacy of Plato's in wanting to act out this strange relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades, why his insistence on showing Socrates engaged in the ever failing attempt to educate Alcibiades. As desire is by definition uneducable, it resists any orthopedic practice. Perhaps in the Socratic check Plato has projected his very same experience, his disappointment with the impossibility of educating the politician, and in the name of this failure his project to put the government of the state directly into the hands of the philosopher gathers momentum.

But there is something else Lacan is more concerned with: the fact that *l'homme du désir* opposes the subject of science, that he damages its certainty. But do bear the following in mind: if it is true that the only categorical imperative which psychoanalysis recognizes as its own is the demand not to give up on desire, for Lacan this does not imply acquiescence towards that strange emphasis that makes desire a tool of human liberation. If on the one hand Alcibiades, as the incarnation of *l'homme du désir*, checks the pedagogical attempt of the subject of science, on the other hand it is he who projects Socrates as the ideal of the perfect Maître. Lacan means several things by this: that the science-desire subject pair is primal, or rather co-primal, to the emergence of scientific discourse; that the episteme is the specific modality with which the West has attempted to think about desire, to inscribe it in a plot of signifiers to allow its articulation, even if science, which has ethics among its relations, were to try to turn into pedagogy; that the passion most

peculiar to *l'homme du désir*, which amounts to saying the human subject, is the passion for knowledge, this being the reason why desire places the subject of science in the ideal of the perfect Maître, i.e. of the subject who is supposed to know more than anyone on desire; a passion for knowledge, finally, which, as Socrates knows only too well, always tends to overlap with learned ignorance.

Was it not indeed Socrates who first combined the desire for knowledge with the passion for knowing nothing? Is it not he, in other words, who always states at the beginning of each dialogue, as a preliminary to any possible type of research, that he knows nothing except the fact that he knows he doesn't know? And is not this proposition that performs him into the position of subject of science, which distinguishes him, the result of an actual epistemological breaking point from the sapiential poets and philosophers, from the physiologists and sophists, united in their claim to the possession of knowledge and to their ability to transfer it? Instead Socrates' operation consists in stripping value from all those propositions whose criterion for legitimization lies in authority, whether that of nature, divine inspiration or of rhetorical and sophistic ability, and in subjecting them to the test of the pure game of signifying oppositions, as already mentioned and as we shall later see in more detail. In other terms, the Socratic non-knowledge is the refusal—the hysteric refusal, Lacan suggests—of information that has been passed down, of empirical content, of experience, of the *doxa* in general, in the name of a knowledge of knowing—the episteme—which is merely formal, empty, brought into play as it is only because of the power of the signifier.

However, there is one thing Socrates is an expert in, something he can claim to be wise about with no embarrassment: love. This he claims in the *Theages* and repeats in the *Symposium* (198 c-d). Socrates, therefore, has knowledge of desire, he knows, in other words, what he's aiming at and where he's leading to. This thus explains why Alcibiades, alongside many other handsome ambitious young men like himself, is seduced by Socrates. Alcibiades sees Socrates, by the latter's admission, as possessing the knowledge that really interests him, that actually concerns him: the knowledge of desire. Alcibiades doesn't need masters to teach him how to run the state, gather riches or persuade the people: this, as his history shows, he knows instinctively, in this he is led by desire. What he wants to know, rather, is what this desire guiding him, acting inside him beyond his own self, actually is; Alcibiades' question is: I want, but what is it I want? And is what I want what I really want? The paradox, or one might say the tragedy, of *l'homme du désir* is precisely this: he desires, but lacks knowledge of his desire. And an even greater paradox is that he asks the other, as if his desiring, his wanting what he really wants, didn't depend on him but on the desire and the will of the other. And Lacan's thesis: not only does every 'what do I want?' turn into a 'what do you want?' addressed to the other for the person who utters it, but the 'what do I want?' is in turn the inversion of a message that, unwittingly or not, the other addresses to us. The mere presence of the other, indeed, summons us, draws us in. The other is a question that keeps us hanging in the balance that puts us in crisis: what do you want? What's the object of your will? What is your desire? An excruciating agonizing position we get away from by resorting, fully unconsciously, to an imaginary solution: it seems to us, in fact, that if he is asking us this means that he knows, indeed that he is the only one who knows. In other words, we send that 'what do you want?' he summons us with back to him with return receipt, hoping that by the end of this correspondence we will be given a single, clear and univocal answer: «Yes, this is what you are».

Socrates must have had such an effect on his fellow citizens: a question mark placed in the heart of the polis. In short, Socrates was 'the other'. And if this may come across as a Lacanian twist, how to deny that nearly all accounts agree on attaching to Socrates an eccentric atypical position, even to the point of theorizing *atopia*? In the first place he is ugly, as ugly as Alcibiades is handsome, plus he goes around barefoot with a ragged cloak and never washes. Conversely, he is impassive; he can drink as much as he wants without getting drunk; he withstands the heat or the cold with indifference; he fancies young boys but behaves with Alcibiades as if he couldn't care less. But the most striking thing, something that coincides with his lifestyle, is of course his way of dealing with issues: he does not teach, he questions. Those who go for him, or those he himself provokes are thrown into desperation: they thought they knew but discover they knew nothing. Yet it is enough to give oneself up to his game even for an instant to be seduced by it. And what is his game? Pronouncing to be an expert, he who knows he knows nothing, in the concerns of love.

The question now becomes: what relationship is there between his knowing he knows nothing, a knowing and not knowing that qualify him as a subject of science, and the possession he claims to have of *mathemata* of love? What does his only knowledge basically consist of? In the awareness of the absolute insubstantiality of the object of will. When debating with his conversation partners what good is, whether it is wealth, health or military glory, or what virtue is, whether courage or temperance, on who one should love and how, on what, in short, the purpose of will should be, what Socrates knows even before the dialogue has become is that desire has no object. An even minimal analysis is enough to notice that what was believed to be the object of one's will, what had been destined to it by instinct, by family tradition or public convention, turns out to be provisional, replaceable and even lacking any value.

His call to his interlocutor—the «know yourself»—consists precisely in the acquisition of this non-objectuality of desire. It is a call for impassiveness or indifference. In other words, in terms of action, the only terms he is really interested in, Socrates knows that there is nothing to know. He knows that no knowledge, no constative statement will ever say what the will really wants to say. Virtue is knowledge, of course. But the problem then is: what knowledge? Not that of the physiologists, not of the sophists and much less so of the poets: only a certain type of ideal knowledge, i.e. a knowledge that places desire in a plot of signifiers.

All this implies that the relationship between *l'homme du désir* and the subject of science is necessary on the one hand—there is no episteme without a knowledge of desire—while, on the other, it is marked by a degree of enmity. This is because *l'homme du désir* ultimately rebels against this Socratic precept, albeit being seduced by it: he wants to pursue desire to the end, even though this may cost him abjection and perhaps even his own life. He does not want to sublimate it in the universe of ideas. In actual fact those of the subject of science and of *l'homme du désir* are two undoubtedly different but symmetric ways of recognizing the impossibility of desire: the former through the thought and anticipation of death—and the issue of immortality is something we will go back to—and the latter through action. It's no big deal for *l'homme du désir* if the object reveals to be inconsistent, but what is important is that his position as desiring one be preserved in any case, and if desire is the impossible to pursue it will at all costs be the maxim guiding his behavior.

What is certain is that their relationship is one of love—and this is, after all, the *Leitmotiv* of Diotima's speech: More than a desire for bodies Eros is a desire for knowledge. But, if it is a love relationship, Lacan sees—in opposition to certain contemporary ideologies that see in the sentiment of love the paradigm of an intersubjective relationship finally founded on reciprocity and equality—that according to the *Symposium* love rather generates asymmetry and disparity. Though linked to each other by erotic strength, this does not make Socrates and Alcibiades a couple. In other words, they never meet, their relationship is characterized not by good *chance* but by bad encounter. When Socrates looks for Alcibiades the latter escapes and when Alcibiades is after Socrates this time it is he who remains impassive. After all, and Lacan insists on this, the entire tradition of love theory, from the *Symposium* right up to the humanistic/renaissance treatises, including of course Freud, agrees in assigning to the actors of the erotic relationship positions that are not only distinct but above all unequal. Two are never both lovers, one is the lover the other the loved one: one is active, the other passive. And on this point love treatises feature an inflexible *akribeia*, precision: they codify behaviors, meticulously establish what is due to the one and what to the other. The erotic relationship is not one between two people of equal strength. In short, the love relationship is not, unlike some modern humanism would have us think, a relationship from subject to subject, but rather from subject to object, it is ultimately an unequal relationship.

All this explains why a commentary on the *Symposium* becomes part of a seminar devoted to transference. We shall not retrace the Freudian itinerary on the problem of transference love, on its ambiguous status as an unavoidable condition in the analytic relationship and resistance activated by the subject against the emergence of the unconscious, nor shall we dwell on the issue of counter-transference, which by the way is for Lacan the main issue regarding the analyst's desire, i.e. of the position an analyst, to be defined as such, has to take on with regard to his own desire. What interests us is the fact that if the analytic relationship is a

dialogic one—a *talking-cure* as many say—it involves a general theory of intersubjectivity. One of the main issues seems to have been cleared up here: Lacan's possible reading of the scene from the *Symposium* as a quasi-prototype of the analytic relationship lies in the fact that the libidinal investment tying the analysand to the analyst—transference—is due to a passion for knowledge that verges on a longing for ignorance. Someone suffers and doesn't know why, desires and is ignorant about what he really wants. There is then a knowledge of this suffering of which, however, one knows nothing, or rather, of which one wishes to know nothing. And this is why one ascribes it to the other: even before crossing the threshold of the analyst's room or lying on the couch, the analyst is projected in the position of the subject of science, of he or she who is supposed to know what the other is suffering from. Transference begins here; what follows—love—is a seduction strategy—a sexual parade—with which the analysand tries to snatch away from the analyst the knowledge he or she is supposed to be the subject of. But the analyst, on the other hand, knows he/she doesn't know a thing, knows, just like Socrates in the scene from the *Menon*, that knowledge lies repressed at the bottom of the analysand: so, leaving spatial metaphors aside, which are too tied to the surface-depth opposition—the unconscious is actually entirely and exclusively surface, nothing more, according to Lacan, than a signal chain—the analyst knows that knowledge is unconscious and that the only one to know that is not the subject of science but what Freud referred to using the neutral personal pronoun.

But to what extent does the problem of transference force us into revising the concept of intersubjectivity? To understand this, let's take a step back. From Hegel's *Phenomenology*—read, as is well-known, via Kojève—Lacan drew the thesis that human desire is the other's desire. Let's develop the following formula: when one says that the subject desires the other this means that he/she desires another desire, i.e. he/she wants in turn to be desired by the other. The result is that what the desiring subject really desires is to become the object of the other's desire. In other words, the statute of desire is alienation: the subject turns into object. As we can see, the proposition «desire is the other's desire» is twofold: on the one hand it establishes the other as the object of my desire, and on the other it makes me the object of his/her desire. In this early phase of the Hegel-Kojève argument we would find ourselves facing the illusion of reciprocity in full arms: both self-awarenesses would be at once subject and object. Self-awareness seems to behave like a lover when he declaims 'I love you' and expects a 'me too' in return; but, clouded over by love as he is, he fails to notice that the 'me too' nearly always means 'me too... I love myself'. This comparison, which may sound a bit irreverent, is probably the key to understanding propositions of an entirely different ethical caliber, such as the following: «love thy neighbor as you would love yourself». What brings them together is that both place the intersubjective relationship in a narcissistic and mirror-like dimension, or, according to the Lacanian *linguisterie*, they conceive the intersubjective relationship starting from the imaginary register. To love my neighbor, i.e. the other, as I would love myself implies for Lacan, as for Freud before him, that love is always and exclusively narcissistic, that the other is nothing but my mirror image. But, mutually, it also implies that I am nothing more than an image of the other. Feelings, Lacan says, are always mutual: if I love the other, the other will love me, if I hate the other, the other will attack me, and so on. And this happens because the other and I are both like two virtual images, each functioning as a mirror for the other: like the gag where the clown, after shattering the mirror in a million pieces, mimes the image of the other who must be prevented from noticing that the reflecting surface is missing.

But what is the result of this game of mirrors? According to Hegel-Kojève, the struggle to the death. If the other is only an image of myself and I am only its shadow, my identity is put into question: who am I? If what I want is what the other wants, what do I then really want? Mutuality ends up as a disjunction: either me or the other. But exactly at this point Hegel-Kojève impresses a dialectical turning point on the intersubjective relation: death—the absolute master—from being the final conclusion of the struggle turns into what puts a halt to the process of mutual destruction: for fear of losing its life one of the two self-consciousnesses gives up and makes a slave of itself. To Lacan the dialectical reversal that leads to the 'dominion-bondage' spiritual figure can be summed up as follows: the intersubjective relation, dual at first, has become a triangle. A third party has intervened between the two self-consciousnesses, which were initially one the pure mimesis of the other. This third party is death, which has brought the subjective positions back to their constituent dissymmetry. There is no mutuality between lord and servant but only difference, and,

although they constitute a pair, the subjects are not on the same level.

It is obvious that under one aspect love corresponds to the first phase or moment of the Hegelian model of intersubjectivity. But in reality disparity becomes the rule—Alcibiades and Socrates, the analysand and the analyst—whilst love is the strategy that the subject puts into play to reduce the anguish of death. To clarify the nature of love Lacan invents, on the Platonic model, his own Mythologem, which he calls «metaphor of love». Imagine—he says,—a hand reaching out towards a fruit or a rose, or a glowing log; imagine its gesture whilst it is trying to reach the fruit, attract the rose, stoke the log. This gesture is closely sympathetic with the maturation of the fruit, the beauty of the flower, the shining of the log, it grows with them. Now, if from the fruit, flower or log another hand comes to meet yours and at that very moment your own hand fixes on the closed fullness of the fruit, on the open fullness of the rose, on the explosion of a hand in flames, the product is love. And he concludes: this hand appearing from the other side is the miracle, the miracle of love. This is the myth. But, Lacan adds, ever since the advent of science, the myth no longer exists, only mythology: so, it is not a question of producing miracles, but knowledge. What, then, does the metaphor of love mean? It means that love is a metaphor. Replace the fruit, the rose, the log, with the loved one. What is it you expect? You expect the object to suddenly come to life, to turn, as if by miracle, from what you desire into what desires you. And you become the object of its desire. Love is a substitution: to take the place of the loved one, of the *eromenos*, the lover, the *erastés*, must emerge. In other words, what is especially desirable, which has so far been placed in a passive position, as a mere *termine ad quem* of my question, must become active, must give me a sign of its love, must metaphorize itself to become a desiring subject. Through the metaphor of love Lacan shows the structural illusion that envelops the intersubjective relation when it is thought of as a relation from subject to subject: love, which in this case acts as a paradigm, turns a lover-loved one relationship into a relationship between two lovers. But what is not taken into account is the fact that, once the metaphorization has taken place, he or she who was the lover has in turn turned into loved one. More precisely: from the very beginning in the relation the lover occupies the place of the object, and love is that unconscious strategy through which the desiring subject may surreptitiously offer itself to the other as the only thing worthy of its love. The love metaphor inscribes, in other words, the fact that in the love relationship the desiring subject has already given up on its desire, it has already turned itself into the object of the other's desire.

Thus the love relationship remains asymmetrical, from subject to object; except that, in Hegel's words, this is not known as such by the subject, who can rather revel in the illusion of having achieved a total equality of itself with the other and vice versa. The result of love, at this point, can only be what had already been foreseen by Hegel-Kojève with regard to the figure of recognition: a real fight to the death. And even if one does not wish to reach the catastrophic theses of a Sartre, who thought that the relationship with the other must necessarily lead to sado-masochism, it would still be difficult to deny that in the balance sheet of love the bottom line is always in the red, that the woes, to abandon the metaphor, outnumber the joys. And the reason for this is precisely this constituent asymmetry of love, which implies that the more the lover asks the other to admit him/her as the privileged object of his/her love, the more the message is returned reversed: the other denies himself. A situation that can lead to a break-up, unless a third party intervenes to break the perverse spiral of the mirror-like illusion.

In other words, Lacan uses the metaphor of love to remind us that the intersubjective relationship is never mutual, that, on the contrary, it is essentially unbalanced, and that as such it implies a third party, one that Hegel called death or the absolute Master. Love is that strategy acted by the subjects to keep death at bay, to prevent it, like an opponent in bridge, to call the subject's bluff: the subject, while declaring a wish to be the lover, the desiring subject as such, actually tends to miserably alienate itself in the other's desire. This explains Freud's remark that there is always a time during analysis when the patient, mystified by the fact that the analyst, faced with her/his love request, turns a deaf ear, is seized by the temptation to abandon treatment, gives up trying to heal her/his suffering through analysis and tries to heal it through love: there isn't a single subject who, when faced with the disenchantment of analytic discourse, fails to give the miracle of love a try. But the choice of a miracle doesn't drive out the difficulties, it actually even makes them more acute, as for the *homme du désir*, even in the climax of love ecstasy, the problem remains



knowledge: to know what he wants and if what he wants really is what he desires.

On the other hand, if we reduced the love metaphor exclusively to the imaginary horizon we would be betraying its conceptual range and the very role Lacan assigns to it. Thus, to capture the symbolic interface of metaphorical substitution, let's grant ourselves a brief rhetorical digression: unlike metonymy, which is the part for the whole, the ship's sail, according to the canonic example of every text book, metaphor is the figurative use for the meaning of a term that already has its own literal meaning. Indeed, it could be said that metaphor is the improper use of a proper meaning. Let's take the following example: «That policeman is a fox», a sentence that when broken down means: in his profession that policeman proves to be as cunning as a fox. Being cunning is the proper and literal meaning of being a fox, or cunning belongs to the concept of fox, whilst assigning it to the policeman is a figure of speech. But against any attempt at reducing metaphor to an improper use of meaning or concept, by which it is allegedly always possible to trace language back to its proper and literal meaning, which is always stable and univocal, so to speak—i.e. metaphor as the tinsel or ornament, or worse still as the distortion and concealment of concept—it must be stressed that in this example, and it is always true in all cases, if not according to metaphor the fox remains cunning, but by *antonomasia*. Thus, even if cunning weren't in the fox's nature, it still is entirely so in the nature of language. No fox is really cunning if not insofar as it is a fox-within-language. In other words, what is often called proper meaning is already improper, it is already the effect of a metaphor.

Let's now try to apply the principle of metaphorical substitution to the Hegelian figure of struggle for recognition. The first thing to concentrate on is the positive function that Hegel himself assigns to the first phase of the formation of self-awareness, what we have already described in Lacanian terms as the metaphor of love or the moment of imaginary identification: without it the subjects would never have been put before the Absolute Master, i.e. death. But what follows is also made possible by the power of metaphorization: the softening of the struggle to the death of self-awareness in the 'Lordship-serfdom' relation derives, indeed, from the substitution of physical death that self-awareness, which claims to be a servant, implicitly makes with a quasi-spiritual death: slavery means relinquishing recognition. But there's more, there's yet a third moment: work. With an immediate abdication from recognition, self-awareness can keep the power of death away, it can do so by working, and in this way return it to knowledge, that is to say remove it from its character as a silent and unmentionable event.

If we return to the metaphor of love, we see that Lacan's itinerary is similar to Hegel's; for Lacan too it is a question of understanding that love puts us, despite our 'natural' tendency towards self-deception, before the reality of the intersubjective relationship: the fact that it is essentially asymmetrical and unbalanced. But in this case too the transformation of a mutual and equal relation—similar to the Hegelian model where every self-awareness is like the other and does what the other does—into a relationship between unequal parties, beyond being sensed on the plain of experience as a dead loss of one's own emotional tone turns out instead as being the necessary condition for the negative, which for conscience has wedged itself without reason into the relationship with the other, to be returned to knowledge. This is where, according to Lacan, the power of metaphorization lies: in allowing the passage from love to knowledge or, better still, from love to the knowledge of what makes love impossible. This impossibility is death and the negative, nothingness. And nothingness can only be expressed through metaphor.

The metaphor of love, therefore, has a double valence: on the one hand it expresses the illusion of mutuality and on the other the reality. In the end one could say that for metaphor to carry out its job fully it must go back to itself, make a double turn, metaphorize its own metaphorical power. In terms of the *Symposium*, the metaphor must not only turn the loved one into lover, *eromenos* into *erastés*, but it must also metaphorize the fact that the position of *erastés* reveals itself as the position of death. Once my loved one has become lover and I in turn have become the object of desire, I can only find myself, like Hegelian self-awareness, at his mercy: as the object of his desire the other's only wish can be to incorporate me, i.e. to destroy me. The power of metaphor must transform the other, who for me has become a harbinger of death, into a benevolent other, into another who instead of inflicting destruction upon me will give me the knowledge of death. In other words, this passage from love to knowledge, against which the resistance of subjects runs riot, subjects

who, as Freud said, prefer the neurotic symptom to recovery, is still part of the metaphorical register. Indeed, knowledge is by definition metaphorical: where there are only unknowable, inscrutable and obscene things, and therefore things removed by right from any possibility of representation, knowledge provides the words. And words are the only help the subject is given to live her/his human existence.

### **Ménage à trois**

As we know, Alcibiades's entrance changes everything: the convention that had regulated the discursive exchange is declared void. Not only can the guests drink to drunkenness, indeed they must, but the object of discourse is also changed: no longer Eros, but the people themselves, first and foremost Socrates. But not only this: from his very first lines, even before plunging into his praise of Socrates, Alcibiades draws in a third man. As soon as he notices Socrates he charges him not only with harassing him but also with having lain down next to, of all people, Agathon. So, if Socrates lives up to his love for handsome young men on this occasion too, Alcibiades must at least have his doubts on who is the object of desire. In short, for whose benefit is this jealous scene acted out, for Socrates' or Agathon's? It is this *ménage à trois* that must guide us through interpreting the final part of the *Symposium*.

But let's go in order. Socrates, who has already understood everything, asks for peace. To this Alcibiades replies that there can never be peace between them. He defiantly grabs the ribbons covering Agathon to crown Socrates, who thus cannot rebuke him for preferring the tragic poet.

Then he asks for wine, and when Eryximachus informs him that until then they had in turn been praising Eros, he takes no notice. Instead he continues to taunt Socrates: Has everyone actually taken Socrates' words seriously? They've let themselves be mocked; and if he dared commend anyone else, it would be Socrates laying hands on him. Socrates tries to defend himself, but Alcibiades continues. Then, Eryximachus tells him, do praise him. But to Alcibiades praising Socrates means making him pay for something. But making him pay for what? For a rejection.

We will now only isolate the essential features of his praise for Socrates. First and foremost the dialectics underlying the metaphorical transformations of the subjective positions. At the beginning Socrates is the lover and Alcibiades the loved one. Socrates charms like Marsyas, he is like those statues of the Sileni, which when broken in two reveal in their insides simulacra of divinity, his speeches have a strange effect: they leave you in dismay and possessed. Alcibiades confesses that Socrates' speeches even had the power of making him ashamed of himself: something that had never happened before. Imperceptibly, the loved one begins to feel the metaphorizing power of love: Socrates isn't particularly handsome, he resembles a Silenus, but just seeing his hidden *agalмата* is enough to be dazzled by him, divine, precious and wonderful as they are. How can they not be desired?

Alcibiades decides to speak: Socrates, he says, is the only lover worthy of him and asks him to pronounce himself. He wants to improve himself, and to achieve this he is prepared to please him in anything. Alcibiades hasn't yet noticed that he is abandoning the position of loved one and taking on that of lover. What he asks of Socrates is indeed rather strange: he knows full well that Socrates loves him. So, what does he want? A sign? Of what, may we ask? Not a sign that he loves him, but rather that he loves him from a different position than the one he occupied before. According to the dialectics of recognition regulating intersubjective relations, the sign Alcibiades asks Socrates for must testify to the fact that the latter has accepted the position of loved one, of desirable one, and that he will respond to Alcibiades' desire from this position. Alcibiades requests the metaphor of love to make a complete turn: he has first metaphorized Alcibiades from loved one to lover, now he must transform Socrates from loved one to lover. One could object: isn't this going back to square one? Socrates was the lover from the very start. But just because this is a dialectics it becomes necessary, in order to reach the truth about the position of being lover, to have gone through that of loved one. A lover who has never been loved is a half lover, a lover about

whom one may at least say that he has shirked the game of love, shirked the law of recognition.

The seducer must be seduced if he wants to be a full-scale seducer, a subject must become object of the other's desire if he really wants to be a subject: alienation is the royal road to truth. But Socrates' reply is quite the opposite: with the strength of Diotima's education, which has allowed him to acquire the knowledge of love, he makes it short and sweet. If it is true that Alcibiades has seen an irresistible beauty in him, his request is an unequal one. Trading his beauty with the infinitely superior beauty which Socrates is supposed to hold inside him, his advantage would be so superior as to be unfair: he would, indeed, be trading the appearance of beauty with the reality, and beauty itself, as we know, is not there to be traded. Alcibiades must be very careful: where he thinks he is seeing the *agalмата* there is actually nothing. His gaze is still too sensitive, but time will sharpen it, it will become a gaze of thought. In short Alcibiades has been hallucinating, he saw where there was nothing to see, he saw nothing. But if he lets himself be guided by Socrates he will gradually learn to see with the eyes of the mind, and if he manages to give up his dreams of glory and hunger for wealth, he will perhaps one day see eternal and immutable beauty.

There then follows the seduction scene where Socrates shines with his impassibility. Why does Socrates refuse to give Alcibiades a sign of his love? What does he hope to gain by refusing to take on the position of loved one and as such requite Alcibiades' desire? First of all he wants Alcibiades to reach the position of lover once and for all and subsequently run through the path pointed out by Diotima that from beautiful bodies leads to beauty itself. In short, Socrates wants Alcibiades to repeat the crossing of the phantom exactly as he himself has done. Three conditions are necessary for this: 1) that Alcibiades become a lover, that is to say that he take on pleasure, i.e. a lack known as such—this is the definition of Eros attested by Diotima; 2) that to achieve this Socrates refuse to be something desirable, that he proclaim himself a cipher: in so doing he throws back on Alcibiades the lack the other's desire was still lacking and adds it to it; 3) that once desire is recognized as a lack, it turn in the direction of its valorization.

Alcibiades, Lacan states, is like the *doxa*, a truth without knowledge, and that is why he loves and wants to be loved. While Socrates, who is the *Maître* and knows what love is, cannot, precisely in virtue of this, love or be loved. Yet Socrates' pedagogic attempt fails. As the guests of the *Symposium* immediately notice when Alcibiades has finished his speech, the young man is still in love. The story of a failed seduction attempt is in turn a sexual *parade*. Alcibiades hasn't moved one inch, he continues to ask Socrates for a sign. The thing is that from the very beginning Alcibiades has introduced a question on which Socrates is totally unprepared: the question of *agalma*, the object of desire. With his answer Socrates proves his inability to do anything before this object and that Diotima's teaching was worthless. By saying in reply to Alcibiades that within him there is nothing, that he is nothing and that therefore the other can only have seen nothing, Socrates misses what is essential: the *Maître* of science himself is deceived by the game of the signifier. In his own utterance: «Be careful, dear, that I do not hide from you that I am nothing» (219 a), he takes that «nothing» as a simple nothing, as the exact opposite of 'something', and not as the 'nothing' that in some way, an impossible one of course, does however show itself, it gives itself to be seen, it is there.

What did Alcibiades see when he saw nothing? He saw just that, nothing, the *nihil negativum*, the impossible. He saw the object of desire. But from then on any attempt to lead a triadic relationship—Socrates, Alcibiades and the object—back to a purely dual relationship can only be thwarted. *L'homme du désir* will not allow himself to be educated, there can be no peace between the subject of science and him. And indeed, just as Alcibiades does not budge from his position, Socrates too does not move one inch. His answer to the new seductive rite is, if not exactly the same, at least on the same wavelength as Alcibiades's. Socrates mentions the final part of Alcibiades's speech where, after accusing him of forcing his attention on handsome boys with the single aim of making them his lovers, had warned Agathon not to end up like them. This is proof, Socrates says, that his entire speech had only one objective: to stir up trouble between Agathon and himself. And he adds: Alcibiades wants me to love him and not to love anyone else and that Agathon be loved by him alone. What he absolutely does not want is that Agathon and I may love each other.

At this point Lacan's insistence on the need to take Agathon's speech seriously becomes clear; and not only because the tragic poet is revealed to be the matter at issue, but above all because it is just here that his praise of love undergoes a test. In relation to Agathon's speech we had stressed that Eros comes out as the figure that gets in the way of human actions and makes them go haywire. And according to Socrates this is exactly what Alcibiades is doing. *L'homme du désir* gets in the way, acting as the unwanted third party: he gets in the way between Socrates and Agathon. The exact opposite of what Eros, of which Alcibiades is the only true epiphany in the whole Platonic dialogue, is supposed to do according to Diotima's model: in both cases Eros is the intermediary, that which lies between the two, but in Diotima it should work as a link or participation between the empirical and the ideal, but in reality it splits the extremes apart, it displaces them one far from the other, in other words it prevents their encounter and union.

To Diotima-Plato Eros is the mediating power between gods and mortals and, by permutation, between ideality and empirics, sense and sensibility, the eternal and becoming. By transmitting the messages of the gods to men and the prayers of men to the gods, Eros fills the abyss separating the two poles of the world and keeps the whole in all its parts tightly connected: Eros occupies a void and fills it. As member of both natures he transfers the one to the other and ties together again those links that always tend to break. But to fulfill its office it is necessary for it to be in turn mediation in action: i.e. Eros must preliminarily be a bearer of division in order to then be capable of putting its mediating powers to use. Indeed, Eros is the median between poverty and expedient, i.e. between the two sides of desire: a radical lacking that desires knowledge and a knowledge that doesn't realize it's poor. Already in this way Eros comes across as straddled with difference: its mediating function, its literally transference power, in a word its logical-rational valence, cohabits with the reaffirmation of the distance separating desire as an unfillable lack from totally idealized knowledge. With Alcibiades' appearance, indeed, Eros's intermediation changes: Eros no longer unites, it separates. It's what's in between, the unwanted third party, the deconstructing agent of reconciled difference.

Undoubtedly Diotima-Plato's speech concentrates entirely on the bright side of erotic power, the spiritually cleansed side: as desire of knowledge, far removed therefore from sensitive appetites and bodily seduction. Eros seems 'naturally' fated to be appeased with possession of the ideal object, of non-ephemeral beauty. But the very persistence of the divide makes this result impossible. What the *Symposium* states, through and against its manifest statement, is that if Eros is the median, it is a shattered one: divided in itself and therefore incapable of undertaking the task metaphysics has assigned to it, the task of mediating between the extremes of the opposition and taking them back to a stable and univocal meaning. Alcibiades' appearance on the scene of the *Symposium* is not therefore the empirical counter evidence, albeit negative, to Diotima-Plato's didactic and pedagogical program, but is rather its necessary accomplishment, the proof that desire had broken the banks built by knowledge even before the controlling process had begun. The overturning produced by analytical discourse that transforms the object of desire from what fills the void into the cause of the subjective divide makes the metaphysical damn overflow. Furthermore: the presence of a commentary on the *Symposium*, within the context of a seminar devoted to transference, points to a general thesis on the function and role of metaphysics. To Lacan metaphysics seems to be no more than a great transference machine with a program to *transducere* (lead across) or *transfere* desire under the control of an ethics of good, sensitivity under rational control and becoming under the control of the eternal: in a word, to *transducere* difference to the identical.

No wonder, then, that at this point Alcibiades catches the object of desire right in *agalma*. And no wonder that Socrates still doesn't see it. Undoubtedly Socrates' reply is largely a noteworthy example of interpretative skill and refinery; first of all Socrates catches in Alcibiades's utterance the level of the enunciation: talking about Socrates and for Socrates, Alcibiades is actually addressing Agathon. Beyond this, Socrates, with unbending critical rigor, unravels the tangle of subjective positions implied in Alcibiades' speech and unfolds it into a highly precise syntagmatic chain: Socrates Alcibiades Agathon, which must be read as: Socrates loves Alcibiades as Alcibiades loves Agathon. Which shows that Alcibiades's request to Socrates is not, as everyone believes, to have an erotic relationship with him, but to identify with his position and thus have a relationship with Agathon: in other words, Alcibiades wants to

love Agathon by occupying the same position Socrates loves him from, he wants to love as Socrates loves. The distinction between identification as such, i.e. identification with the other's subjective position, and the relationship with the object, is essential to the articulation of the dialectics of inter-subjective relationships. Indeed, this distinction implies that in a dual subject-object relationship there must always be a third party, another subject holding a position that the subject of the object relation is identified with.

The structure of intersubjectivity is always of the following type: subject subject object. This means that, before any object relation, an identification with the other subject is necessary. The result is that our relation with the object will always be exactly the same as that of the other: taking up the example of the *Confessions* once again, Augustine's relationship with the object milk is similar to that of his small rival's. The intersubjective rule does not change even if we replace the object with the alterego, i.e. another subject like us. We would merely write the sequence as follows: Subject Other alterego. We refer here to the stratagem with which Lacan, to distinguish graphically or conceptually the other of identification from the other of the object relation, writes 'Other' with a capital 'o' in the first case and 'other' with a small 'o' in the second. The 'other' is the alterego of the dual relationship, the imaginary relationship, the other of the mirror image. The 'Other' is the signifier's treasure, what the subjective signifier derives its signification from. *L'homme du désir* asks the subject of science for the knowledge of his own desire, the signification he is lacking, to know what he really wants and if what he wants is really what he desires: like Alcibiades he wants a sign. In terms of the dialectics of Eros, he wants the metaphor of love to go full circle, because only when the 'Other' gives him a sign will he know what to desire and how. Let's reconstruct the structure one more time: Alcibiades, the desiring subject, is identified with Socrates, i.e. with the 'Other', and is in an object relation with Agathon, the 'other' or the 'alter-ego'. If Socrates gives Alcibiades a sign, i.e. the signification of his desire, he will know how to love Agathon, but, since the sign belongs to Socrates, he will love him as Socrates loves him.

A further difference and complication that the *Symposium* introduces in this pattern is that Alcibiades has put in the place of the 'other', *agalma*, the object 'a' or object of desire. The sequence must now be written as follows: subject Other 'a', which must be read as: Alcibiades loves Socrates as bringer of the object of desire, i.e. of the truth of desire as such. The sign, or signifier, that Alcibiades expects from Socrates is therefore the signifier of the object of desire, the signifier of the impossible. At what condition could Socrates respond to Alcibiades's desire? Only if he accepted to take on the position of the object of desire and from here threw back to Alcibiades the sign, i.e. the signifier of radical lack. But Socrates, a disciple of Diotima Plato, is a nonentity, he cannot be loved, he cannot stand being the object of someone else's desire and, therefore, cannot even take on the position the other wants him in of object of the desire. Like an analyst who interprets transference merely as a resistance and not also as the vehicle of the analysand's desire.

Socrates continues to refuse the metaphorizing power of love and his reply is in fact metonymical, it moves entirely on the syntagmatic and metonymical level of language failing to see the paradigmatic and metaphorical level. Articulating the sequence of subjective positions syntagmatically: Socrates Alcibiades Agathon, it is as if he were saying: I have no *agalma*, *agalma* is nothing. Once again your gaze is not pure, it sees where there is nothing to see. I don't come in to it, you want Agathon and after Agathon you will fall in love with someone else and yet someone else after that, until you realize that there is another kind of beauty beyond the ephemeral transient beauty of beautiful bodies, an immortal everlasting beauty. Again Socrates sends Alcibiades back onto the metonymical procession that must lead the lover from the body to beauty in itself. Why metonymical? Because any body, idea, argument, institution, law or type of knowledge will always be a part for the whole: As Aristophanes said, and whatever Diotima thought, they will always be one half of a double, they relate, in other words, to the total, spherical and perfect object.

Only metaphor, on the contrary, can introduce the object of desire into signification in general. Indeed, the object of desire has no meaning of its own and can consequently only be spoken of using metaphor. It is therefore a question of shifting from a strictly metonymical use of the signifier to its metaphorical one: and as each signifier as such has no meaning, all signifiers are necessarily signifiers of the object of desire,

signifiers of lack. But indeed, one must at the same time play on the double axis of language, syntagmatic and metonymical and paradigmatic and metaphorical. It's obvious that Socrates stops only on the metonymical axis; his constant and repeated refusal of the metaphorizing power of love prevents him from responding to Alcibiades' desire, from giving him what he's asking for: the signifier of lack. Socrates only gives him the lack, not the signifier through which *l'homme du désir* could finally live out his human existence. And Alcibiades will continue to look for it in objects, he'll go to any lengths, even betrayal, but to no avail: he'll lose his way without ever finding it. His encounter with Socrates will have turned out to be *nachträglich*, a bad encounter.

This scene of the *Symposium* ends here: more people arrive, the confusion becomes indescribable and everyone, engrossed by the 'Bacchic delirium of philosophy', gets definitely drunk. Only Socrates resists: as the others fall asleep he continues to converse with Aristophanes and Agathon about drama genres and the dramatist's ability to shift from tragedy to comedy: this is not incidental, if the *Symposium*, as we saw, has shown the tragic in comical discourse and the comical in tragic discourse. But the last two interlocutors are now practically falling asleep too. Like a good father, Socrates tucks them in under their blankets and leaves the room. He heads off to the Lyceum, he tidies himself up and spends the rest of the day there as if nothing had happened and only towards the evening does he return home and give himself up to Morpheus's arms.

Those who dwell among the immortal know not fatigue. Not so for *l'homme du désir*: to desire wears you out.

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