

# PSYCHOANALYTICAL NOTEBOOKS

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Lacan with Joyce

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# DOES THE FATHER SAY KNOT?\*

Pierre Skriabine

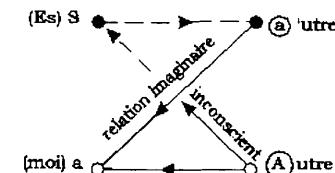
The clinical relevance of Lacan's topology is especially obvious in the field of the psychoses, with the clinic of the Borromean knot, a clinic of supplementations, which opens the way to a completely new differential clinic.

## 1. Generalised foreclosure and supplementations

As early as his article on 'On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis' (1958) Lacan considers that it is possible to think of a supplementation to the 'suddenly realised emptiness of the inaugural *Verwerfung*'<sup>1</sup>, but it is only at the end of his teaching that he gives this term, this function of supplementation, all its extension.

This development, this generalisation of supplementation is indeed correlative to the displacement of the status of the Other which Lacan effects when he chooses to be based, no longer on the Other, but on the One, i.e. on an axiomatic of *jouissance*.

## TOPOLOGY AND THE CLINIC



## Schema L

In schema L, as in the formulations of 'The Preliminary Question', Lacan is still based on the assumption of a dialectic operating between the subject and the Other. And the Other, in this respect, is complete and consistent: it is the true and absolute Other which has the power to annul the subject itself. It comprises its own guarantee. The Other of meaning is supplemented by the Other of Law, there is an Other of the Other which makes the law for the Other. Its signifier is the Name-of-the-Father: "i.e. the signi-

fier which is in the Other, as locus of signifiers, the signifier of the Other as locus of the law" (p. 583).

At this time in the development of Lacan's teaching, the Other thus contains its own signifier; in other words, the Other of the Other exists.

From Seminar VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, onwards, Lacan emphasises a new point of view. In the process of civilisation, of the absorption of the Thing into the Other, where language's grasp of the living body wipes away *jouissance* and lets it be reabsorbed, well, in this process there is remainder. This remainder is the object *a*, surplus *jouissance*, irreducible to any signifier.

For this reason *a* is not an element of the Other, but it must be conceived as included in the Other, like the *agalma* inside the figure of Silenus, to whom Alcibiades compares Socrates in *The Symposium*.

The Other thus becomes a concept organised around a core, a vacuole of *jouissance*, located in a point of *extimacy* of the Other, in other words, at its most intimate point which remains radically heterogeneous to it.

Consequently, the Other is marked by a central lack: that of *jouissance* as a signifier. At this place Lacan introduces S(A barred), signifier of the lack in the Other, a signifier different from others. It is the signifier without which the others would not represent anything, but it can only be conceived as *extime* in relation to the Other, as has been demonstrated by Jacques-Alain Miller.<sup>2</sup>

The Other is therefore to be conceived either as inconsistent, as only a heterogeneous element can come in the place of the lack, or as incomplete, since at this place a signifier is missing.

Lacan can then formulate that "the Other does not exist" - does not exist as complete with regard to *jouissance* - and also that "there is no Other of the Other" ("Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire") and this highlights the founding function of what he will later, for example in *L'Etourdit*, call "the defect in the Universe".

Consequently, what remains as Other in the Other and grounds its alterity is the object *a*, as non-symbolised remainder of the Thing.

The course of his elaboration leads him to pass from an axiomatic of desire, from a starting point in the Other, to an axiomatic of *jouissance* which is fundamentally acephalic, autistic. At the same time it leads him to think of the word, not as address to the Other, as a vehicle of communication, but as a vehicle of *jouissance*.

In this regard, at the end of his Seminar XX, *Encore*, he proposes the concept of *lalangue*, i.e. a symbolic disconnected from the Other and referred to the One.

To emphasise the One of "there is such a thing as one" (*Y'a d'l'un*), which Lacan formulates in *Encore* and which marks the last period of his teaching, means to designate *jouissance* and *lalangue* as being prior to language as structure, that is, prior to a consequently problematic Other.

At this point Lacan can draw the ultimate conclusions from the division of the Other (A barred) and from the function of S(A barred). The Name-of-the-Father consequently appears as a plug for this (barred A); the function of the father, as operational as it is, is nonetheless nothing but a Freudian myth. It is not unique. This is why Lacan produces the pluralisation of the Name-of-the-Father, i.e. we have now to conceive of the Names-of-the-Father as supplementations to the structural failure of the Other.

In other words, the fact that its own signifier is lacking in the Other, that it is foreclosed, is a fact of structure. It is here a generalisation of foreclosure, as something structurally lacking, a minus. And in this respect, the Name-of-the-Father appears as already an addition, an extra, a complement. And if it is failing, a supplementation, which is always a supplementation of something which is already a supplement, can come to mitigate this defect. Supplementation is thus correlative to a universal clinic of delusion.

## 2. The Borromean knot

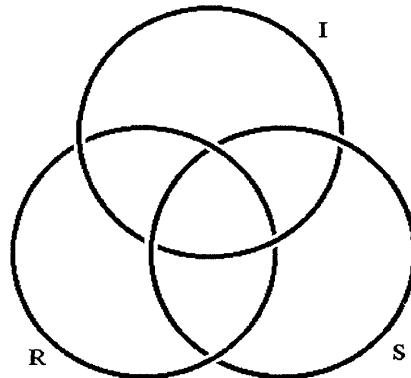
In fact, this is what is shown through the topology of the Borromean knot, by means of which Lacan reformulates the very concept of structure from the only categories of analytic experience which are the real, the symbolic and the imaginary.

The Borromean knot is an effort to think structure without any reference to the Other. Lacan's aim thus consists in grasping the One, *jouissance*, with the help of the three registers: real, symbolic and imaginary, in so far as they are basically three heterogeneous registers.

However the speaking-being leans on these three registers and something of *jouissance* is thus caught, wedged. It is to give an account of this that Lacan used the Borromean knot, as he indicates in his Seminar *Encore*. (Page 101)

His problem is thus to work out and locate this common point, the common denominator necessary to link these three fundamentally heterogeneous registers together.

A fourth term intervenes, as the four is already there in the Borromean knot.

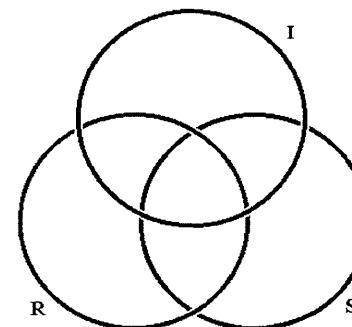


### 3 Ring Borromean Knot

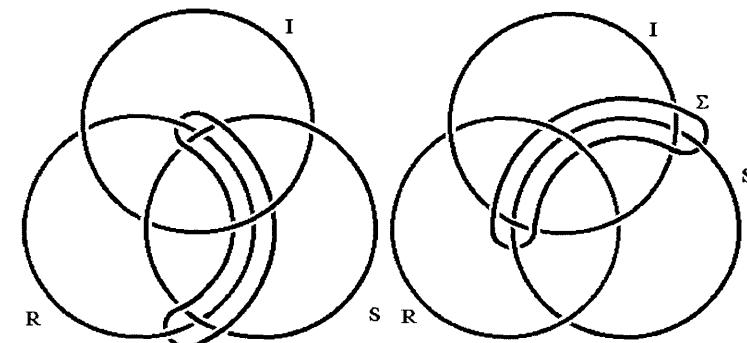
Each one of the rings supporting R, S, and I is not intertwined with either of the two others, they are free two-by-two, and yet, in the Borromean knot, they hold together.

What makes a common point for three is that they can be tied, knotted, and that they are knotted in a Borromean way. And the result, the Borromean knot, is a fourth entity, a new one: it is their common denominator, *a minima*, and to some extent the perfect solution. But that does not exclude the fact that this solution is not the only one and even that this one has to be considered as an ideal solution and we could even say, a mythical one.

Lacan points out that for Freud, these three registers are left independent, adrift, and to make his theoretical construction hold, Freud needs an additional something that he names "psychical reality", and which is nothing other than the Oedipus complex: i.e. a fourth term which makes a knot out of the three independent terms, the three free loops of R., S. and I. (Seminar R.S.I. 14th January, 1975)



3 Free Rings



### Different possible modes of supplementation

Here what the Oedipus complex explicitly achieves in this figuration of the four-loop knot, is the same as what the Borromean tying achieves implicitly in the three loop knot.

The fourth loop, as explicit fourth, here comes to mitigate the unknotting, the untying which shows up the foreclosure.

In the untying, it is the Borromean character which is foreclosed; the untying as -1 of tying, is a fact of structure: this is precisely equivalent to laying down the function of S(A barred)

As the implicit, ideal fourth, the Borromean tying of the three is, in fact, under foreclosure, it is necessary to have an explicit fourth: an additional element which makes for the supplementation which restores a structure of Borromean tying.

This is what is achieved by the fourth loop, as Oedipus complex for Freud, the Name-of-the-Father for Lacan, but also with reference to "the radical function of the Name-of-the-Father which is to give a name to things with all consequences that this comprises, in particular up to a *jouissance*" (R.S.I., 11th March, 1975). This is the function of the Name-of-the-Father as nomination, as "giving-a-name"; here, Lacan says: "the chit chat ties with something real".

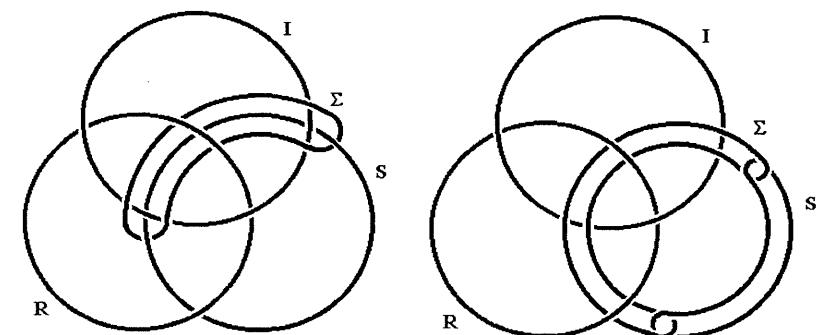
In the perfect solution of three loop Borromean tying, "the Names-of-the-Father are the symbolic, the imaginary and the real; they are the prime names as they name something"; i.e. any one is not only a name, gives a name, but also ties the two others, and thus as third also carries the efficiency of tying, just as the explicit fourth does in the four-loop Borromean knot, but here, each one, as a third tying the other two, is an implicit fourth.

In the four-loop knot, Lacan complements, supplements one of the three with its prime function: that of "giving-a-name", nomination. In other words, it is precisely in giving-a-name, in nomination, that supplementation resides. Supplementation is, namely, what answers to S(A barred), to the failure of the Other, the lack of a signifier, of a name.

That's why Lacan then proposes three modalities, "three forms of Name-of-the-Father, those which name the imaginary, the symbolic and the real" (R.S.I., 18th March, 1975); he then specifies that "not only the Symbolic has the privilege of the Names-of-the-Father" (R.S.I., 15th April, 1975).

To the nomination of the symbolic as *symptom* are thus added the nomination of the imaginary as *inhibition* and the nomination of the real as *anxiety*: that's what Lacan indicates at the end of his Seminar, R.S.I. These are three forms of the Name-of-the-Father.

Here is another figuration of this four-loop knot which allows us to grasp more easily how this fourth term, as a supplement to one of the three loops of R.S.I., restores a Borromean tying.



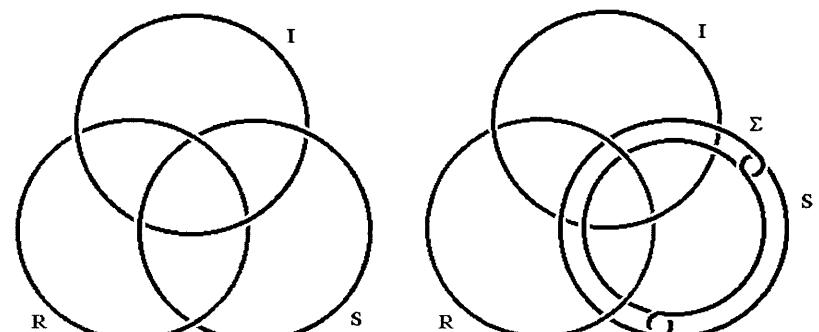
### 2 perspectives on the 4-loop Borromean knot

The general law, therefore, is that it fails: the constitution of the three-loop Borromean knot is missed; in other words, the foreclosure is structural, and a fourth is necessary.

### 3. The symptom as nomination of the symbolic

In the topology of the Borromean knot such as he developed it from his Seminar R.S.I. onwards, let us note only that Lacan emphasises the symptom as a fourth loop, as a supplementation to the function of the father, as one of the Names-of-the-Father necessary to mitigate the structural failure of the Other, and to carry out the tying of R., S. and I.

This four-loop knot as Lacan underlined in his seminar on Joyce, conveys a kind of shift, of renewal in the status of the symbolic itself.



### The symptom as supplement

The loop of the symbolic is replaced by a pair,  $S + \Sigma$ . In 1975, in his lectures in the United States, Lacan will specify that: "The fourth element is what the symptom constitutes, as it makes a circle with the unconscious.... That makes a loop,  $S + \Sigma$ : it is what makes a new kind of  $S$ ."<sup>3</sup>

This binary loop corresponds to the two faces of the symbolic: the signifier, insofar as it can couple itself with another to make a chain, and the letter. In other words, as proposed by Jacques-Alain Miller, it corresponds to the two functions likely to apply to the One of the signifier, the function of representation and the function of symptom.

Thus, on one side, we have what belongs to the signifier as it is articulated with another, in other words what belongs to the structure of language, the unconscious and speech, i.e. we have what is dialectical and can be worked out as knowledge. On the other side, we find what concerns  $S_1$  alone, namely that which belongs to the register of the letter as condenser of *jouissance*, as non-analysable, in other words as real.

Identifying with his symptom, the subject appears as response of the real.

The symptom as real is a supplementation.

Contrary to neurosis, where the effect of meaning and *jouissance* (*joui-sens*, as Lacan writes it), are opposing, in psychosis, the effect of meaning disappears and it is absorbed in the enjoyed sense [*sens-joui*] i.e. in the *jouissance* of the meaning which is indexed on the Other. *Jouissance* is identified as being located in the Other, an Other which enjoys, an Other as persecutor who enjoys with the subject. This is what the phenomenology of psychosis shows.

The symptom is what co-ordinates *jouissance* and meaning; and this is true in neurosis, as in psychosis.

In this respect, delirious construction, considered as a psychotic symptom, is what makes it possible to control *jouissance*, to tame it, by separating it from the signifying chain that it invades, to locate it, to stabilise it in the delusion as symptom, condensing it as writing, as letter, non-analysable and as such as rejection of the unconscious. It is for this reason that Freud could recognise an attempt of healing in the delusional construction.

In neurosis the symptom as supplementation, which shows a fixation of *jouissance*, works to complement the unconscious and constitutes the

necessary supplement to the failing Other. In psychosis the symptom, as contingent, works by separating *jouissance* from the Other whose open fault had caused *jouissance* to become engulfed there, in a massive rejection of the unconscious.

If psychosis is thus pure symptom, the delusional metaphor as psychotic symptom, as a supplementation, but a contingent one, comes to condense this invading *jouissance* by locating it in this rejection of the unconscious.

In this respect, the paternal metaphor looks singularly like a delusional metaphor. This is what Jacques-Alain Miller reminded us of as early as 1979, during the study days on psychoses<sup>4</sup>.

Until his Seminar on Joyce, *The Sinthome*, and his development of the Borromean topology, Lacan had insisted on a split between the signifier as an element of the chain where meaning and signification are carried and as a materiality subjected to a structure in which *jouissance* is caught: the unconscious is, at the same time, knowledge and *jouissance* and the symptom is a formation of the unconscious.

Lacan's development consequently led him to stop emphasising the congruence of the unconscious and the symptom, and to propose their disjunction.

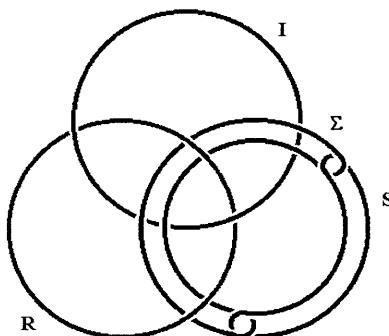
From there, they become a pair that operates in the structure – and Lacan initially calls them symbol and symptom, then unconscious and sinthome: "The unconscious" - that is, analysable knowledge, "is tied with the sinthome," says Lacan<sup>5</sup> "which is for each individual his most singular character."

The sinthome can only be caught by the *jouissance* that is showing in it, a *jouissance* which is split from *lalangue*. "Opaque *jouissance*, (...) excludes all meaning" writes Lacan in "Joyce the Symptom II"<sup>6</sup> and he adds: "the only way of awakening is by means of this *jouissance* - which belongs to the real". The symptom - as a sinthome - is real; "it is even the only really real thing".<sup>7</sup>

The symptom as real is what Lacan indicates to be his own symptomatic response: the real is his symptomatic response to the 'Freudian fancy' [*élucubration*]<sup>8</sup>. Such is the essential shift in the status of the symptom that Lacan brings about: "it was necessary for me to lower the symptom by one notch to consider that it was homogenous with the dreaming up of the unconscious [*l'élucubration de l'inconscient*], and that it appeared

as tied to the unconscious. I reduced the symptom to answer not to the dreaming up of the unconscious," - the symptom is not a formation of the unconscious, and less a residual formation - "but to the *reality* of the unconscious" - which is sexual: the symptom is the real which answers for it, - says Lacan in *The Sinthome*<sup>9</sup>. This corresponds to the definition that he consequently gives of the symptom: "I define the symptom as the way in which each enjoys his unconscious in so far as the unconscious determines him."<sup>10</sup>

Thus from now on, the unconscious and symptom are tied together, Ucs + S, tying R and I, real and imaginary, in the four-loop Borromean knot. This double, this pair, unconscious and symptom<sup>11</sup> is the unconscious reducible to an interpretable knowledge, articulated with a real which does not make sense, with the irreducible unconscious<sup>12</sup> which is mere opaque *jouissance*: here the readable and the unreadable present themselves as separated.



### The Symptom

What is this irreducible that is shown in the *sinthome*? To what extent would it be more irreducible than in the phallic *jouissance* that we recognise in the symptom?

This irreducible is the specific indelible mark in each subject: "one learns to speak and that leaves marks (...) and so that leaves consequences which are nothing other than the *sinthome*", noted Lacan in 1978<sup>13</sup>. This ineffaceable mark is for each individual his most singular feature and constitutes the part that will never be revealed of the misunderstanding which

governs the birth of each one of us, as Lacan indicates in the ultimate lesson of his Seminar in 1980<sup>14</sup>.

Even beyond any answer (for each one of us) to the impossibility of any sexual relationship that could be inscribed in a signifier, the mark that constitutes the symptom as a *sinthome* is the particular heritage which falls to the subject from this structural impossibility. It is a real mark.

It is therefore what the subject has that is most proper to him. That's why Lacan can come to this radical formulation, namely that at the end of analysis the best the subject can do is to identify with his symptom - i.e. with the most real thing he has. There, the subject occurs as response of the real.<sup>15</sup>

### 4. Some other clinical remarks and notations

In psychosis, when supplementation comes to function as a means of containing and delimiting *jouissance*, it can, in particular, consist in an inscription, in a localisation of this *jouissance* on the body. I will quote the case of a young psychotic woman, a discrete paranoiac, who remained perfectly steady in her daily existence and in her work except for some somatic symptoms which sometimes worried her entourage. They were due to a 'medicinal' drug addiction, kindly maintained by the mother who kept her supplied with drugs. The significant co-ordinates of her *jouissance*, thus localised and controlled by the drugs, perfectly transcribed her devastating relation with her mother. This particular supplementation was enough to contain the *jouissance*, which thus does not succeed in further parasiting her relationship with the Other.

One can conceive through this example to what extent the psychosomatic phenomenon shows itself to be like a localised psychosis: it is inscribed on the body like a letter, condensing *jouissance*, and constitutes an effect of return in the real of a non-symbolised element. It can be located, as Lacan has indicated, at the level of a freezing of signifiers, for example in the holophrase. The psychosomatic phenomenon functions in exactly the same way as in the preceding case, it is a supplementation. This supplementation can remain very localised and inscribe a *jouissance* which brings into play the gaze, but it can bear radical and deadly forms: when such a passage to the real arises, when the subject goes to the point of leaving his life at the mercy of this *jouissance* in order to prevent this latter from

disturbing his relationship with the Other, the question of psychosis can be legitimately posed.

The function of the phobic signifier as a substitute for the Name-of-the-Father has been developed at length by Lacan: before the anguish of castration, faced with the deficiency of the father, the subject gives a father-orientated response, he shields himself with the phobic signifier and finds, through the forbidding function of this signifier, a supplementation of the failure of the paternal function. Phobia constitutes a very pure form of supplementation of the Name-of-the-Father: it is a Name-of-the-Father of substitution.

The fetish, on the other hand, constitutes a mother-orientated response, at the limit point where the unbearable to see shows itself, the horrifying discovery of the absence of the maternal phallus. The subject stops just before, stops on the image that is staged there - shoes, a part of clothing, underclothing, etc. The significant articulation freezes at this point of stoppage where the subject grasps what will become the fetish. Constituted as a regressive mode of avoidance of the encounter with castration, the fetish incarnates an object by means of which the subject makes himself instrumented: he idealises it, and he knows how to use it. The fetish makes it possible for the pervert to short-cut the Other of the signifier at the point where his truth, the subject's truth, should be deciphered in this Other. He can therefore dodge the question of the enigma of the desire of the Other, since he has, with the fetish, a ready made distorted response which indicates his point of truth to him on the side of his *jouissance*. The fetish which is also a supplementation, functions as a letter which is used for *jouissance*.

Lastly, what can we say about the three-loop Borromean knot? In other words when R., S. and I. need neither the symptom, nor the *sinthome* to tie them? Can that be obtained at the end of an analysis in which the emptying of *jouissance* which occurs during its process would have been achieved? Beyond the joke, isn't it what Lacan indicated when in the last years of his teaching he launched this formula: "I am a hysterical without symptoms"?

#### To conclude

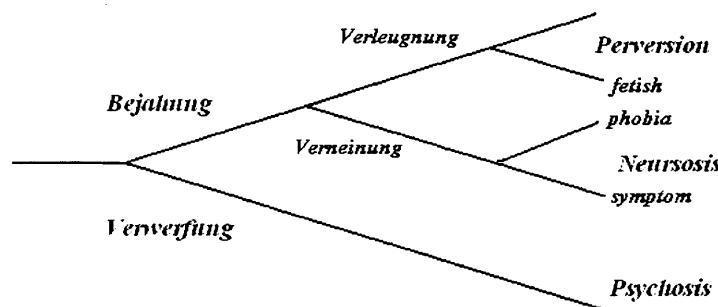
To conclude this short presentation of a few clinical articulations based on topology, and especially on the Borromean knot, I will make one last remark.

Through these examples we can sense how far Lacan strides, with the concept of (A barred) and with the topology of knots, to bring neurosis and psychosis closer together, at least from the point of view of the function of supplementation, as correlative to generalised foreclosure as a fact of structure. This conceptual shift moderates the radical nature of what, in the articulation which Lacan had built up since 1956, separates psychosis and neurosis.

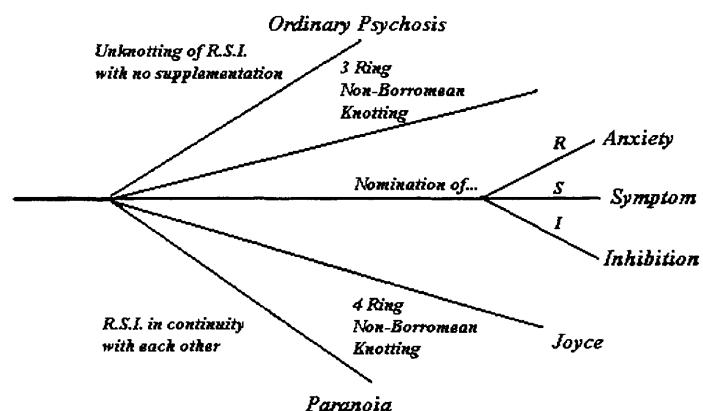
In fact, Lacan will discreetly, but very clearly reconsider the idea of a tight, impassable limit from one clinical structure to another. In 1972 in "*L'Etourdit*" he notes the following: "My topology... must give an account of the fact that there are, among the cuts of speech, ones which modify the structure that this speech, this discourse originally harbours" <sup>16</sup>. In other words, psychoanalysis operates on the structure. And Lacan will not fail to occasionally reiterate this indication, as advice, a call for caution. That's what he does in 1975, in his conference at Yale University, where he says: "neurotics... thank God we don't make them so normal that they end up as psychotics. This is a point where we have to be very careful. Some of them really have a vocation to push things to their limit. I'm sorry if what I say seems daring - which it isn't. I can only testify to what my practice provides me with. An analysis does not have to be pushed too far; when the analysand thinks that he's happy living, that's enough" <sup>17</sup>. Such an indication by Lacan poses a question for us and we have to take its incentive for caution very seriously.

In the differential clinic that Lacan introduces us to at the end of his teaching, rather than a clear cut distinction between neurosis and psychosis we have a series of variations in the structure of the four loop-knot (whether Borromean or not). The four-loop knot thus gives an account of neurosis and also psychosis – both in its traditional sense (that of "The Preliminary Question"), as of what we call "un-triggered psychoses", and of cases which are more difficult to classify and whose possible structures are revealed by the four-loop knots. Here, Lacan gives us the basis of a completely new differential clinic, which is still to be constructed, a clinic of supplementations referred to the Borromean knot.

1. The differential clinic according to 'The preliminary question'



2. The differential clinic according to the topology of knots



\* This paper was presented in London at the Freudian Field Seminar 2000-2001, February 3, 2001

1. J. Lacan, "On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis ", *Ecrits*, (p.582), Seuil, 1966.
2. J-A. Miller, Cours 1985-1986, "Extimité", not published.
3. J. Lacan, "Conferences and talks in North-American universities"

- (p.40-58), *Scilicet* n° 6/7, Seuil, 1976.
4. J-A. Miller, "Topological supplement to the "Preliminary question""", *Letters of School* n °27, 1979.
5. J. Lacan, "Joyce the symptom I", in *Joyce with Lacan*, p. 28, Navarin, 1987.
6. J. Lacan, "Joyce the symptom II", in *Joyce with Lacan*, p. 36, Navarin, 1987.
7. J. Lacan, *the Seminar, Livre XXIV, L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre* (1976-1977), lesson of March 15 1977, in *Ornicar?* n°17/18, p. 9.
8. J. Lacan, *the Seminar, Livre XXIII, Le sinthome* (1975-1976), lesson of April 13, 1976, in *Ornicar?* n°10, p. 8.
9. *ibid*, p.12.
10. J. Lacan, *The Seminar, Livre XXII, R.S.I. (1974-1975)*, lesson of February 18, 1975, in *Ornicar?* n°4, p. 106.
11. J. Lacan, "Conferences and talks in North-American universities" (p.40-58), *Scilicet* n° 6/7, Seuil, 1976.
12. J. Lacan, *the Seminar, Livre XXVII, Dissolution* (1979-1980), lesson of January 24, 1980, in *Ornicar?* n°20/21, p. 12.
13. J. Lacan, *the Seminar, Livre XXV, Le moment de conclure* (1977-1978), lesson of January 10, 1978, not published.
14. J. Lacan, *the Seminar, Livre XXVII, Dissolution* (1979-1980), lesson of June 10, 1980, "the misunderstanding" in *Ornicar?* n °22/23, p. 12.
15. J.Lacan, *the Seminar, Livres XXIV, L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre* (1976-1977), lesson of November 16, 1976, in *Ornicar?* n°12/13, p. 6.
16. J. Lacan, "L'Etourdit", p.34, *Scilicet* n °4, Seuil, 1973.
17. J. Lacan, "Conferences and talks in North-American universities ", p.15, *Scilicet* n°6/7, Seuil, 1976