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# ORDINARY PSYCHOSIS WITH A BORROMEAN APPROACH

**Pierre Skriabine**

Well, as you know, I'm supposed to present here from the topological point of view the structure of ordinary psychosis.

I'm afraid I can't therefore avoid reminding some basics of Lacan's borromean topology, and I apologise to those who already are very familiar with these matters. But may be it's always a good exercise questioning again and again the principles founding this structural and topological approach and putting in practice its clinical issues – that is acknowledging how deeply it can guide and sustain our own practice as psychoanalysts.

I won't give here any historical account of the way Lacan has been working out his topological conceptualizations throughout his whole theoretical development. Let's directly focus on his latest teaching, which gives a new light on the essentials of his theoretical achievements, basing them on knots. The essentials, this also means it is rather simple even if you may not yet be convinced.

## **I. Introducing Borromean Topology: Twelve short items to keep in mind**

1. The Other, with a big O, does not exist. As being par excellence a fact of language, it is structurally lacking, incomplete or inconsistent, and Lacan emphasized all its consequences. This means that the whole human experience can be referred only to those three categories distinguished by Lacan as real, Symbolic and Imaginary.
2. These three categories are radically heterogeneous, they don't have anything in common.
3. To make these three categories hold together is nevertheless a necessity for the subject in order to sustain himself in the so-called "human reality", that is, in the universe of the discourses (Master, University, Hysteric and

Analytic). For making this reality consist in its three dimensions, (R, S and I), to create and to maintain a social link with its fellow creatures, the subject needs to find or to build a common measure linking together Real, Symbolic and Imaginary.

4. This "human reality" has no intrinsic existence. It is only a veil woven with Imaginary and Symbolic used by the subject to shroud the Real in order to protect itself from this unbearable dimension.

5. This protection, by means of which the emergence of the discourse and the resulting social link are allowed, implies in counterpart a limitation of the otherwise unlimited jouissance –the jouissance of the mother as primary object. Such a limitation is obtained through the function of the Father as interposing, as prohibiting incest and establishing the symbolic law.

6. Thus operates the paternal metaphor, substituting the Name of the Father to the Desire of the Mother, making possible an access to the discourse in exchange of a loss of jouissance: in Lacanian words, this is what operates the Freudian castration.

7. To subsume, the Name of the Father as acknowledgment of the reality of castration so gives the speaking being an entry to the universe of discourse, ensures a protection against the Real allowing him to be inscribed in a social link.

8. In other words for any subject – for each subject one by one – the function of the Name of the Father consists in making Real, Symbolic and Imaginary hold together, so introducing him to a nonexistent but necessary reality where in the field of the discourses alone, can subsist any social link for a speaking being.

9. But as we already noted, the Other with a big O, just as the subject, is failing, whether incomplete or inconsistent. This is a consequence of the differential structure of the signifier that excludes any absolute reference.

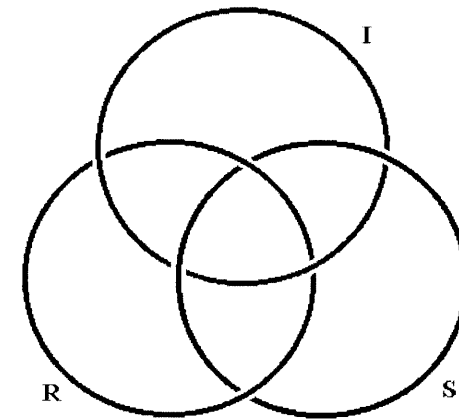
10. As there is no Other, no non-failing Other, there is no ultimate warranty. The signifier that would be the warranty of the Other, lacks in the Other. Language implies no guarantee. God cannot guarantee either himself or the Father. There is no Name of the Father as such, no immanent Name of the Father. Each subject has to implement for himself a name of the father. This means we have no other choice but to do without it (without the Name of the Father as a non existing warranty), provided we use it (we put its function in place).

11. Conclusion: The Name of the Father's failure is structural. There is no "innate" common link, no mythical "normality" able to link together Real, Symbolic and Imaginary thanks to a successful knotting. Briefly stated, foreclosure is the rule, we all are feeble-minded, debility is generalized. This leads to a universal clinic of delusion. This also means psychosis is our ordinary status, our "native" status, if I may say so. It's less reassuring than was the Freudian myth of the Father.

12. Consequence: each subject can only invent its own solution to compensate this structural lack and to build as supplementation [suppléance] some link to allow Real, Symbolic and Imaginary to hold together. But some do not really succeed, this is the case of ordinary psychosis, and for some others these makeshift jobs do not hold together well.

## II. The Borromean Knot

This is what is shown through the topology of the borromean knot. The Borromean knot is an effort to think the structure outside of any reference to the Other, with the help of only the three categories of the analytical experience: Real, Symbolic, Imaginary, as so far as they are basically heterogeneous.



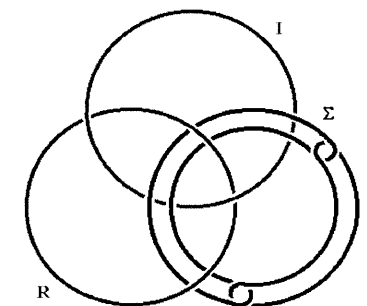
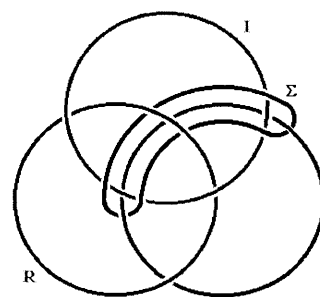
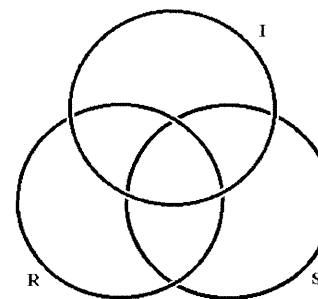
1. In the topology of knots as developed by Lacan, the three loops of the Borromean knot show the lack in the structure, show what does not exist :

it would figure the Name of the Father, if there was one. The three loops of the Borromean knot, as the perfect solution, is always a miss, it is structurally foreclosed, as is the Name of the Father. That's why it interests us. We need three elements, R, S and I to form the Borromean knot. Each one of the loops supporting R, S and I is disengaged from the other two; they are topologically equivalent; any two are independent, and yet there are four elements: the Borromean knot is the fourth. Furthermore, each one of the three, S, R or I, knots the remaining two and allows the knot to consist; each one, as an implicit fourth, operates the borromean knotting. Breaking any one of them un-knots the whole set.

2. There are lots of ways to fail the knotting just as there are lots of ways to make R, S and I still hold together. This means there are many names of the father. Lacan needs this topology to demonstrate their multiplicity: if the Name of the Father is always missed, numerous are the names of the father able to supplement this failure.

3. Lacan points out that for Freud, R, S and I are left independent, adrift; and that to make his theoretical construction hold, Freud needs something more 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, R, S and I (*Seminar R.S.I.*, January 14, 1975).

Thus we need at least a fourth element to supplement the original foreclosure and obtain a Borromean solution. In his *Seminar RSI*, Lacan displays different kinds of supplemental elements, the names of the father, able to restore a four looped Borromean knotting : there are three privileged types, first of which the symptom.



Down here on the right is another representation of this same four-loop knot, which allows us to better grasp how this fourth as supplement to one of the three, R, S, or I, restores a Borromean knotting.

4. The fourth element comes here to supplement the Symbolic with its prime function, the "giving-name", the naming – which gives name to the unspeakable real; the supplementation is namely what answers to S (A), to the failure of the Other, the lack of a signifier, of a name.

More generally in the four-loop knot, Lacan complements, supplements one of the three in its primary function, which is naming, nomination. To say it differently, it is in naming, in nomination that supplementation truly resides, insofar as it responds to the failure of the Other.

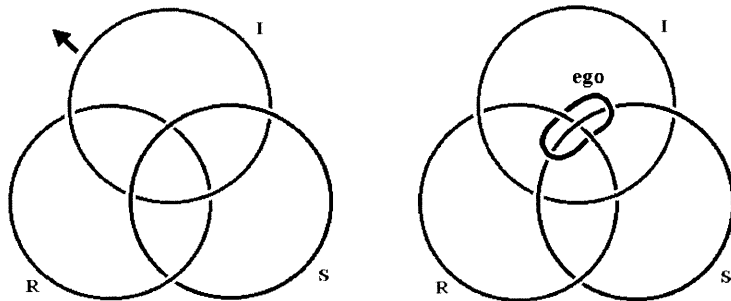
Thus Lacan can propose "three forms of the Name-of-the-Father, those that name the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real" (*R.S.I.*, 18/03/75). He then

specifies that "It is not only the symbolic which has the privilege of the Names of the Father, nomination does not have to be conjoined with the hole in the symbolic" (R.S.I., 15/04/75). Inhibition as nomination of the imaginary and anxiety as nomination of the real are thus added to the symptom as nomination of the symbolic: this is what Lacan indicates at the end of his Seminar R.S.I. These are the three basic forms of the names-of-the father.

5. But there many other ways for the subject to protect himself against the Real and to make Real, Symbolic and Imaginary hold together.

Joyce's repairing solution is very illustrative. The sinthome, the "ego" produced by Joyce comes to repair the error at the very place it occurs. This "ego" is Joyce's literary invention. It is the name of the father he leans on, he uses to make a name for himself. With his art, with his writing, where signified is stuffed with signifier, he makes this fabric, he weaves the Imaginary – that for him wasn't linked with anything – with the Symbolic. His writing is his protecting fabric, it has, says Lacan, a repairing function. Joyce's writing is his protecting fabric against *jouissance* which remains caught, encrypted under its different forms within the fabric.

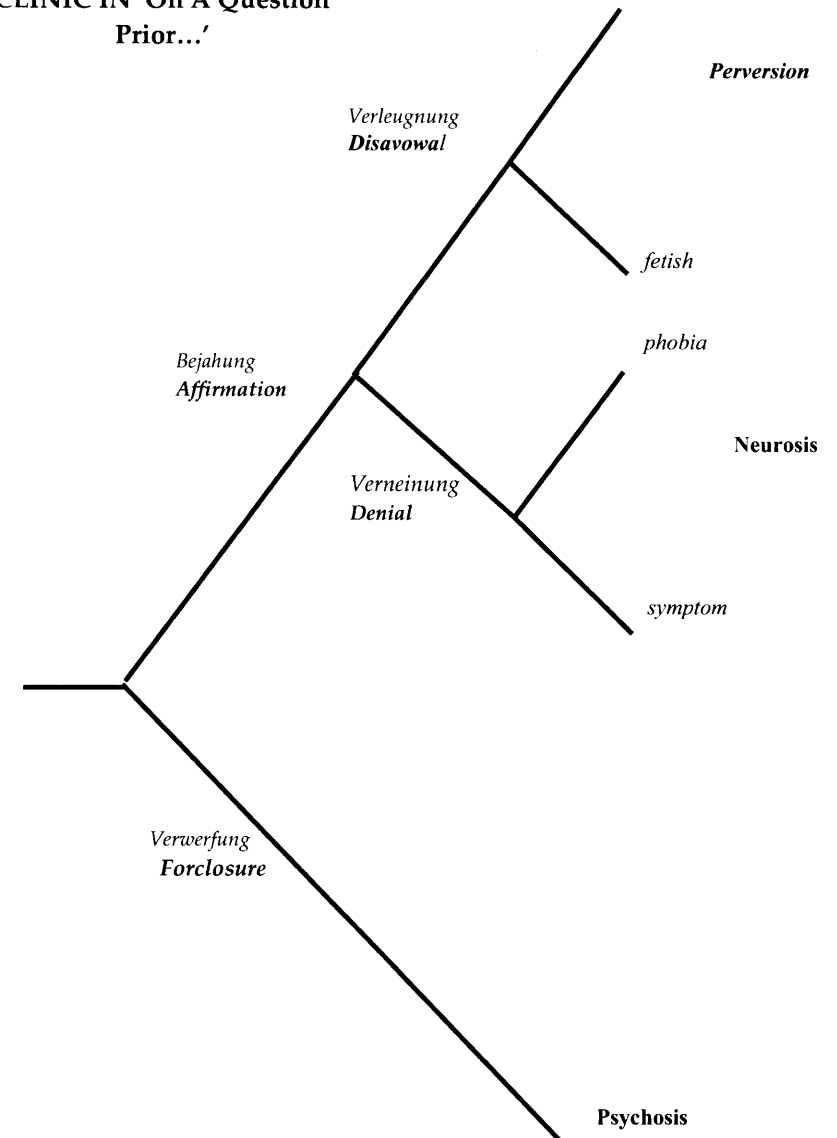
This however remains a "do it yourself" solution which leaves some marks, among them the intertwining of R and S.



6. But there also are lots of other ways to try to make R, S and I hold together: various non Borromean knottings, intertwining, local repairs, continuities between R, S and I, and lots of patches, of shaky or faulty repairs that are not always sufficient for protecting the subject from Real and from *Jouissance*. This leads us to reformulate our whole differential clinic.

### III. A Renewed Differential Clinic

#### THE DIFFERENTIAL CLINIC IN 'On A Question Prior...'



#### IV. Ordinary Psychosis

In the differential clinic that Lacan introduces us to in this way, rather than a clear-cut distinction between neurosis and psychosis, we have a series of variations in the structure of the four-loop knot, Borromean or not, which simultaneously accounts for both the neuroses and the psychoses in their traditional sense, that of "The preliminary question ...". Moreover, it accounts for what we call "un-triggered" psychoses, as well as more difficult to classify cases whose possible structures are revealed through the four-loop knot. Lacan gives us there the bases of a completely new differential clinic, which is still to be elaborated, a clinic of supplementations referred to the Borromean knot.

Clinic shows that ordinary psychosis very often remains unnoticed by the subject's family or circle of friends. Moreover, the subject was perceived as very normal, even especially normal, until some troubles in his behaviour suddenly appeared.

This has been emphasized thanks to Lacan's presentation of the ill at Sainte Anne's that lasted for many years. J.-A. Miller gave an impressive summary of this experience in a paper published in *Ornicar ?* n°10, "Lessons from the presentation of the ill", 1977. Among these "normal mad people surrounding us" as Lacan puts it; among these ordinary subjects he considered as "normal", as basically feeble-minded, – like we all are originally as consequence of the structural failure of the Name of the Father and of the concomitant generalized debility – well, among these people, Lacan presents the case of a woman, that Jacques-Alain Miller quotes : "It is difficult to distinguish the limits of mental illness... This person has not even the slightest idea about the body she has to put under her dress; there is nobody there to inhabit this dress", and further : "her being is pure semblance: her identifications, so to say, failed to precipitate her ego, her self, and so no personne, nobody. This is debility, if debility consists in not being inscribed in any discourse". He adds: "No  $S_1$ , and as a result nothing to stuff her with any substance".

Well, I can testify to this; I had to work with this patient during this period. The case is exemplary. In everyday life, in a professional context, she seemed like a simple, slightly weak-minded, ordinary person.

If R, S and I do not hold really together, if they are not really linked, they nevertheless can appear as perfectly linked, but it is a

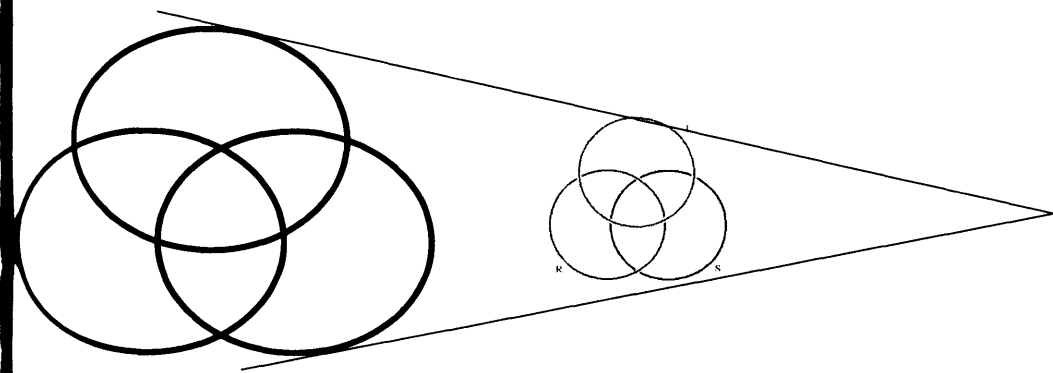
mere image, as the projected shadow of the three separated but superposed loops.

To respect the conformity with the perfect shape, to look absolutely normal, even to behave in everyday life without major problems, does not imply any knotting. A few drops of glue, even two or three pieces of adhesive tape, if I may dare such a metaphor, could be quite sufficient.

R, S and I seem to hold together very well: even too well. The subject looks sometimes too conform; there is no gap between the social model and the appearance given by the subject.

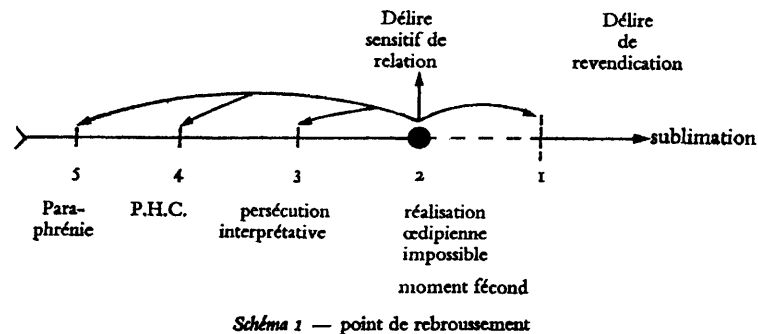
This is one of the characteristic features of ordinary psychosis: as the limiting, interposing, prohibiting function of the father has not been introjected by the subject, maybe not even acknowledged, nor even perceived, the subject contents himself to do "as if", giving an absolutely socially conform appearance. It is this appearance that constitutes his social link.

But this usually cannot last very long, nor resist to any really conflictual situation. These subjects often show themselves to be very concerned about the way others see them. With any conflict in the way others see the subject, it is and father's gaze that surges forth, and the subject collapses...



There is a particularly enlightening paper on this subject: it's Lacan's first development of his differential clinic, namely "Family complexes" published in 1938.

Lacan shows there on a scale the stages and the shapes of the object, as well as the stop points, and the corresponding clinical categories. Here is the corresponding scheme that we owe to J.-A. Miller. You can find it in *Ornicar ? n°44*



Such a scheme helps to find one's marks in the clinic by the means of the object, using the status of the delusional object. Lacan emphasizes here that this object, this semblance of the object, is for the psychotic a mere shape, no matter if it is empty.

And it's precisely when this formal artefact, this semblance, fails, stops functioning, no longer holds, that psychosis is triggered. In other words, it's when the object as real irrupts that the semblance of object on which the subject was leaning crumbles, and the subject himself collapses from his imaginary position, from the position to which he had conformed himself. This moment, says Lacan, is a turn back point.

Psychosis is triggered when the psychotic subject passes once again over this point where the Father's figure surges forth; he already made it through this point once without damage, as he was conforming himself to a shape, to a mere image, turning this image into an imaginary armour.

This could evoke the familiar cartoon character running off the edge of a cliff and who continues to run in mid air until some event makes him realize there is no more ground under his feet.

But let's quote Lacan: *"It is in this reproduction that crumbles the superficially assumed conformity (this means the subject has been conforming himself to the "good shape", expected from him, which was but only semblance and illusory appearance) by the means of which the subject until then has been concealing his narcissistic relationship to reality"*.

The subject was only playing, only pretending he was able to make R, S and I hold together. But he remained in fact under the prevalence of narcissism and of the maternal object as a means to satisfy his desire, rejecting the idealizing authority represented by the father. And when the prevalence of the shape collapses before the shock of the encounter with the object, psychosis is triggered, precisely when, from behind the semblance of conformity, is revealed the non implementation of the Name of the Father as an idealizing authority that allows sublimation and the establishment of a regulated social link.

We have here, in the early years of Lacan as a young psychoanalyst, clearly prefigured the characteristic features of ordinary psychosis, whose structure had to wait for the Borromean topology of his last theoretical work to be so clearly highlighted.

Text translated by the author