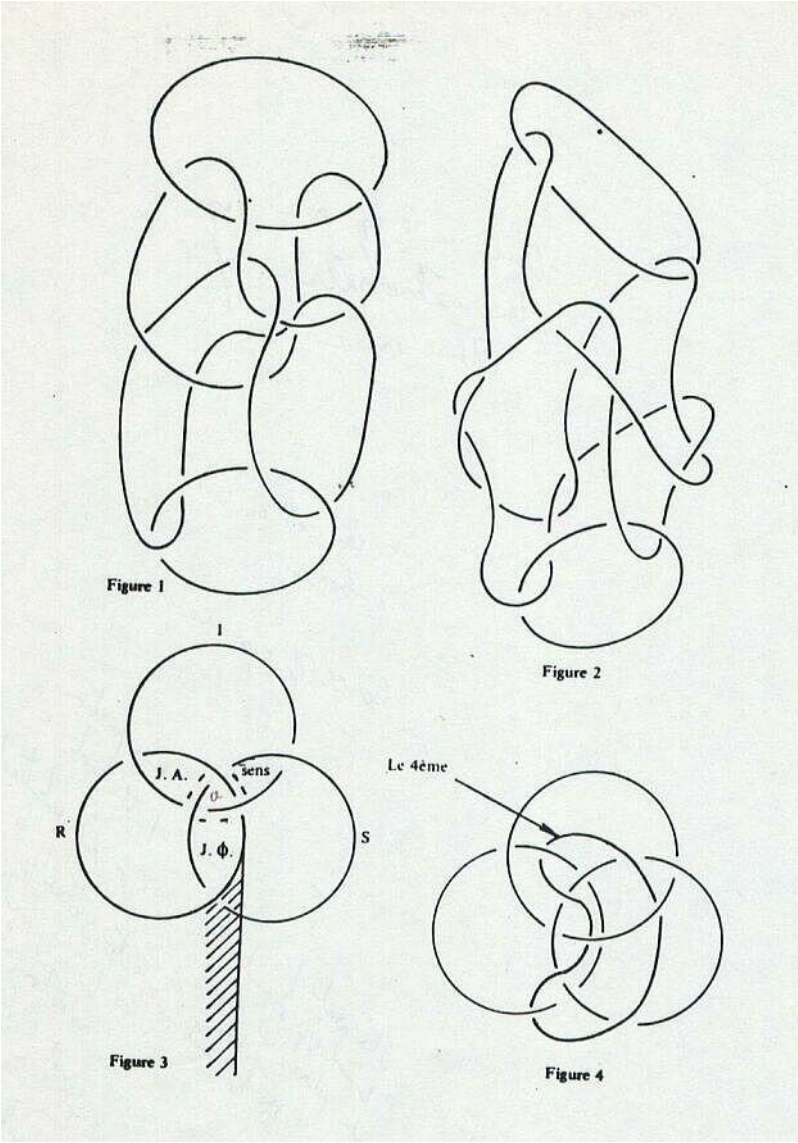

Seminar of January 14, 1975

What I say interests--you are the proof of it--everyone. It interests me, but <u>not</u> as it does everyone, and this is felt in what I say--which is why it interests everyone.

Why is this felt? Because what I say is a clearing of the way concerning my practice, and it takes its departure from this question--which I would not ask if I did not have the answer in my practice--what implies that psychoanalysis works?

You see here (fig. 1) a nice little four-looped Borromean knot. It is Borromean since it suffices to cut any one of these three rounds of thread for the other three to be freed. Nothing prevents you from making a Borromean knot as long as you like. Notice however that as it is drawn here the number of rounds is not homogeneous, and that one can distinguish a first and a last. The last--let us say that it is the round to the extreme right--is that which holds together the whole chain, and makes it so that we have four there. If I proceed by the same model to make a five-looped knot, I will have to give this last round another way of being knotted, since it will hold one more.

In making use of rounds of thread in composing these Borromean chains, I illustrate something that is not without relation to the sequence of numbers.

You know how, by means of some axioms, Peano articulates it. It is the function of the successor, of the n + 1, that he stresses as structuring the whole number--which supposes nonetheless to start with one that is not the successor of any, which he designates by zero. All that these axioms produce will be from then on, conforming to the arithmetic requirement, homologous to the series of whole numbers.

The knot is something else. Here in fact the function of the plus-one is specified as such. Suppress the plus-one, and there is no more series--by the sole fact of the sectioning of this one-among-others, the others are liberated, each as one. This could be a wholly material way of making you feel that One is not a number, although the sequence of numbers is made of ones.

It must be admitted that there is in this sequence of numbers a consistency such that one has the greatest of difficulties not holding it as constituant of the real. All approach to the real is woven for us by the number. But to what is owed this consistency that there is in the number? It is not natural at all, and it is indeed this that makes me approach the category of the real as knotted to what I am also lead to give a consistency, the imaginary and the symbolic.

If I make use of the knot, it is because in these three <u>something</u> that I originate of the symbolic, of the imaginary, and of the real, has the same consistency. It is on this basis that I produce the Borromean knot, and this to justify my practice.

Isolating consistency as such, one has never done this. Me, I isolate it, and to illustrate it I give you the cord.

This is to make an image. For I do not deprive myself of making images. What do we have there on the board if not images?--the most astonishing thing about which is that you find your bearings there. That these lines are continuous or broken, depending on whether they pass above or below, is already miraculous. But how far do you see into this? Would you know to say that this knot here (fig. 1) is the same as this (fig. 2)? Take it upon yourselves to fiddle with the thing. With a chain of three, it is impossible to pass from one disposition to the other. This could work however--but beginning with how many rounds? I will leave it to you to search for the rule.

And I will return to consistency. Consistency is subjacent to all that we say. Is it because of what one calls non-contradiction? I say no, and I illustrate it with these figures. They have a consistency that I am indeed forced to call real, and which is that of the cord. It is supposed that a cord . . . that holds.

A metaphor? One never thinks of what there is of metaphor in the term consistency. And what is still stronger is that I communicate this real consistency by way of an intuition that I can call imaginary, since I make use of images.

We have here in, in our hands, with this cord, a supposed foundation of consistency, which is indeed something other than the line.

This distinction does not however go by itself. How do we detach ourselves from the idea that the geometric line is not without some thickness? By what could its continuity be supported?--if not by some consistency, that is, by something that would make a cord. This idea is at the basis of the mirages mathematicians have been fighting over for a long time. For example, in the first dust in the eyes that the functions called continuous have been given. It seemed that one could not construct a line which does not have somewhere a tangent, straight line or curve. And it took time for mathematicians to awaken to this: that one could make a

perfectly continuous line which had no tangent. This is to say the importance, the pregnancy of the image of the cord.

But is this indeed an image? It is not for nothing that I say to you: *Hold well to the cord*. In fact, when the other end of a cord is knotted, on can hold on to it. This has to do with the real.

It is here that I have chosen to remind you that in the tenth of those good *Rules for the Direction of the Spirit*, Descartes did not believe it superfluous to remark, "As all spirits are not equally carried to spontaneous discovery by their own powers . . . we should not immediately occupy ourselves with more difficult and arduous things, but we must first delve into the less important and more simple arts; those above all where order reigns more, like those of the artisans who make canvas and carpets, or those of the women who embroider or make lace, as well as all the combinations of numbers and all the operations that relate to arithmetic and other similar things."

There is not the least suspicion that Descartes, in saying this, had the feeling that there is a relation between arithmetic and the fact that women make lace, even that carpet makers make knots. Never, in any case, is he in the least occupied with knots. We already had to be quite far into the 20th century for something to be outlined that could be called knot theory.

Knot theory is in its infancy. There are cases where it does not at all permit us to prove whether, yes or no, the tangle you have traced is a knot. And this despite the conventions that you might be given in advance to account for the knot as such.

To what is our maladresse with knots owed? Is it to intuition? Is it because vision always more or less makes a surface? I demonstrate to you, these knots render tangible, that this goes much farther than that. It is that, fundamentally, the being who speaks (and what can you say of the others? Not much. We must wait until we have advanced farther into their sounds)--the being who speaks is always somewhere, badly situated, between two and three dimensions.

This is why you have heard me produce this, which is the same thing as my knot: an equivoke on the word *dimension*, which I write *dit-mension*, *mension* [lying] of the *dit* [said]. One doesn't know very well if we indeed have three dimensions in the *dire*, if we find it so easy to move around there. τα ζωα τρεκει--assuredly we are ζϖον there, we walk. But we must not imagine that walking has the least relation with space in three dimensions.

There is little doubt that our body has three dimensions, however much we mash it up (*créve la boudouille*), but this does not prevent what we call space from always being more or less flat. All space is flat--there are mathematicians who have made this very explicit (*l'avoir écrit en toutes lettres*). All manipulation of a real is situated from there on in a space of which it is a fact that we know very badly how to manage it outside of techniques that impose giving it three dimensions. I add that it is striking that there is a technique--analysis--that one can reduce it to what it apparently is, to wit, chatter, which forces my hand, forces me to weigh the question of space as such.

In treating of space in the same fashion as is imposed by the fact of the technique, does not science encounter a paradox? We might have the suspicion--does not matter create a problem at every instant? A *problem*, as defense against advancing, is something to crush before coming to see what it defends.

Perhaps science has not yet accounted for treating matter as if it had an unconscious if it knew something of what it does. This truth had a little moment of awakening in the time of Newton. They objected to him--*But finally? This space, this gravitation! What are you telling us? How can each of these particles know how far it is from all of the others?* In a word, they evoked the unconscious of the particle. This truth became extinct very rapidly--they renounced

understanding anything in those little formulas, and this is all very well; all of their value is there. Besides, it is in the measure that one returns to them that one has arrived at more complicated formulas, knotting a few more dimensions into the business.

Analysis, this technique that I have in common with a certain number of the persons who are here, what place does it occupy in regard to what science does?

Science counts. It counts the matter, in the matter. But if there were no language that, already, bore the number, what sense would counting have there? Is it that the unconscious has an accountant in it? I'm not saying something that one might count, I am speaking of the accountant, this character whom you know, who scribbles figures, and I ask--is it that there is an accountant in the unconscious? It is completely obvious that--yes.

Every unconscious is an accountant. And an accountant who knows how to do addition. Multiplication, it hasn't yet gotten to that, and this is what gives it some difficulty. But could I say that it knows how to count the blows? It is extremely maladroit--but it must count in the manner of these knots. It is from there that proceeds this famous sentiment of culpability, which makes counts and does not find itself there again, does not find itself again there ever. It loses itself in its counts. But it is there that it is touched upon that there is at minimum a knot.

This knot, nature has a horror of it. It is another song than that of the void--nature has a horror of the knot, and especially a Borromean knot.

This is why I take this thing (*machin*) up for you again, and I advise you to practice manipulating it. This thing is nothing less than the *Urverdrängt*, the original, primordial repression. Manipulating this little knot will give you nothing of the repressed, since this repressed is the hole--you will never have it. But *en route* you will familiarize yourselves--at least your hands--with this which you cannot in any fashion understand.

It is in fact completely excluded that you know this knot. This is the reason why, history shows it, geometry has gone through everything, cogitating cubes, pyramids, diverse forms of porcupines, inventing rigor, which means nothing other than solids, while it had within hand's reach something that was worth as much as the stones, and without which one could not measure the fields--cords. No one seems to have given these cords the least attention before the modern époque. (. . . .).

It is getting late. I lead you back to this figure that I have already presented to you (figure 3).

I write *sense* in this joint here of the imaginary and the symbolic. There are two points there, which do not proceed with the same movement relative to the two rounds, but are confused when their wedging is produced.

There, I write *phallic jouissance*. Why? Because there is something called ex-sistence.

Existence has a history. This is not a word that one employs so willingly, at least in the philosophical tradition. How did the people of the first centuries speak? We no doubt have some aperceptions concerning the vulgar Latin language such as it was spoken on a considerable surface--the core-language out of which came, by differentation, the romance languages. But we have no evidence that one employed either *existo* or *existere*. This term emerged in the philisophico-religious field. Curious! Thus religion had to inhale (*hume*)--the religious inhaling (*humante*)--philosophy for a word to come out which seems however to have had, it is the case to say, many reasons for being.

This naïve production, so to say, of the language, had to be untangled. Aristotle is the first to situate existence by the universal, that is, beginning with the *dictum of omni and nullo*

--what is said of all can also be applied to whichever. Whence the notion that universality implies existence. What followed consisted in demonstrating to Aristotle, which took a long time, that this was not at all the case. Of course--we don't everyday make a clean sweep of the idea that universality does not imply existence. But what is grave is to believe that existence implies universality, that, with existence, we chatter about something participating in the general. It is there that my little knot intervenes.

This Borromean knot is destined to show you that existence is of its nature ex-sistence, that which is ex. It is what turns around the consistent and makes an interval. But in this interval, that has twenty-six ways of being knotted. I say twenty-six ways in the measure that we have no familiarity with these knots, neither manual, nor mental--which is the same thing. A lot of people have had the suspicion that man is no more than a hand. If he only were a hand! But there is his whole body. He thinks with his feet also--at least he ought to.

I now pose the question: what is it that resists the proof of ex-sistence, to be taken as what is wedged in the knot? We must here follow the path of Freud.

Freud did not have of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real the notion that I have--which is the minimum; for call them what you like, provided that there are three consistencies, you will have the knot. However, if he did not have the idea of R.S.I., he nonetheless had a suspicion. And what he did does not go without relating itself to ex-sistence, and departing, to approach the knot. Besides, the fact is that I could have extracted my three from his discourse, with time and patience. I began with the imaginary, I had to chew on the history of the symbolic, with this linguistic reference for which I have not found all that would have arranged things for me, and I have finished by bringing out this famous real in the form itself of the knot.

Freud, therefore, contrary to a prodigious number of persons, from Plato to Tolstoy, was not a Lacanian. But nothing prevents me from supposing my three, R.S.I., to him--a banana skin slipped under his foot--to see how he untangles himself from it.

For Freud, the three do not hold, they are only posed the one over the other. Also, what did he do? He added a round (fig. 4), knotting with a fourth the three consistencies set adrift (. . . .). He calls this fourth consistency *psychic reality*.

What is psychic reality for Freud? It is the Oedipus complex.

The Oedipus complex is not for all that to be rejected. It is implicit in the knot as I figure it, and it ties the three, but at a minimum. To dispense with a fourth, to obtain the Borromean knot, it suffices to make, at two points, pass above what was below. In other words, the real must surmount the symbolic.

The surmounting of the symbolic by the real at two points is quite precisely what analysis is about.

Be careful not to take this term *surmount* in the imaginary sense, believing that the real has to dominate here. Besides, it suffices that you turn this thing around to see that, in the contrary direction (*sens*), this does not work. Turned around, the knot still has the same appearance--you do not have its mirror image; it is still levogyre. It is not a matter, between the symbolic and the real, of a changing of the order of the layout (*plan*)--it is simply a matter of their being knotted otherwise. For being knotted otherwise is what is essential to the Oedipus complex, and it is how analysis operates.

It is in entering the niceties (*finesse*) of these fields of ex-sistence that we will proceed this year. (. . . .).