



### Seminar of February 11, 1975

. . . I have just spent eight days where?--Believe it or not, in London.

Should I say a word about English psychoanalysts? I only know one who is English, and he must be Scottish. It is no doubt the English language (*lalangue anglais*) that is the obstacle here--which not very promising, since it is becoming universal. Those who read me from time to time may have an idea of the difficulties that there can be in translating me in the English language (*lalangue*)--one has to force it.

I am not the first to have noticed the resistance of the English language to the unconscious. It's not just English. On returning from a trip to Japan, I believed myself to see a certain duplicity in pronunciation, doubled by the duplicity of the system of writing, a special difficulty of the language (*lalangue*) to operate (*jouer*) at the level of the unconscious, and precisely in what would appear to make it easier.

. . . I must today clear the way to a certain number, I would not say of equivalences, but of correspondences. I have encountered them many times in the jottings with which I prepare what I have to say to you, but I look at them twice before I share them with you. I am rather careful and try not to speak at random.

Is there someone who knows if Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria* has been translated in French? No? How annoying. It hit the streets in the form of a *Penguin Book*, which is now "out

of print." <sup>1</sup>

Me, when I was returning from England, last Saturday and Sunday, I couldn't put this book down. This does not mean that I'm going to speak about it today, for to make it into something that would enter into my discourse, I would have to squeeze it, to wring it, to get the juice out of it, and I don't have time for that. However, it would not be without interest. It would have perhaps shown you one more origin of this stupifying phenomenon which is the discovery of the unconscious.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was dominated to an astonishing degree by the action of a woman, Queen Victoria. No doubt it needed this kind of ravage for there to be what I call an awakening.

An awakening is a lightening flash. When that happens to me--not often--it situates itself—this is not to say it is like this for everyone—at the moment when I emerge from sleep. I then have a brief flash of lucidity. It does not last long, to be sure—I return like everyone else into this dream called reality, into the discourses in which I take part, and among which I strive painfully to clear the way to analytic discourse.

I believe Lytton Strachey's book will render you sensible, with a particular relief, of the fact that love has nothing to do with the sexual rapport, and this begins with a woman.

Queen Victoria, now there was a woman; not *the* woman, who does not exist, but a woman among others, certainly very isolated in the English context by that prodigious selection that must not be confused with the master discourse. It is not because there is an aristocracy that there is a master discourse. Besides, this aristocracy does not have much to do with a local selection. The true masters are not the people of the world, the good people, the people of good society, the people who know their social standing, or think they do. What fatality made it so that a certain Albert of Saxe-Coburg fell into the paws of the *Queen*? He did not have any leaning toward women. But when one encounters a *vagina dentata*, if I can say so, of the exceptional stature of Queen Victoria . . . A woman who is queen is truly the best *vagina dentata* one can come up with, it is even an essential condition—Semiramis must have had a *vagina dentata*, one sees it quite well when Degas draws her. Elizabeth of England too, and that had consequences for Essex. Why did the above named Albert—when one refers to the museum that subsists in their memory, one does not refer to *Victoria and Albert*, but . . . *hand Albert*—why did the *hand Albert* not suffer the fate of Essex? But are we sure he didn't?—because he did perish rather early, from a death called natural, but you will want to look at that more closely. Peace to his soul, in any case. This seems to me a marvelous statement, illustration, of this truth I found without it, the truth of the sexual non-rapport.

By what mysterious encounter did Freud arise after this spectacular exercise of what women have of power?

I do not know besides if this is a power. We are very fascinated by categories like power, like knowledge. But these are foolishnesses, foolishnesses that give way completely to women, who don't care about them, but whose power immeasurably surpasses all of the categories of the man. Can women, should women, attempt some kind of integration into the categories of the man? What I say does not at all go in that direction. They know so much more simply by virtue of being a woman. It is not so much that they know how to treat of the unconscious—I'm not too sure of that—but their category in regard to the unconscious is without doubt of greater strength. They are less bogged down in it. They treat it with a savagery, a striking celerity; think, for example, of Melanie Klein.

I leave that to the meditation of each of you. Women psychoanalysts are certainly more

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<sup>1</sup> In English in the original.

at ease with the unconscious. But a woman does not occupy herself with it without it being at her expense; in doing so, she loses something of that luck which, from nothing but being one among women, is in some way without measure. If I had to incarnate the idea of freedom--something which I obviously cannot even think of doing—I would obviously choose a woman; not just any woman, since they are *not-alls* and the *just any (n'importe-laquelle)* slips toward the *alls\_(toutes)*.

Let's leave that aside, because it is a subject where, finally, like Freud himself, I lose my Latin. I will say again that this *Queen Victoria* is a reading that no one should miss, if it has a little touch, a little vibration of what I am saying—and I will move on to another subject.

The art itself that has dealt with subjects called geometrical because an interdiction of a religious nature is placed on human representation, arab art to call it by its name, produces freizes and braids, but not a Borromean knot, although the Borromean knot offers itself to an abundant wealth of figurations. There is no trace of it in any art. This is a very surprising thing, which is not easy to explain. Why hasn't anyone felt the importance of this knot? Perhaps it is because it needed the emergence of certain consistencies, which are precisely those I give to the symbolic, to the imaginary, and to the real.

If I give them this consistency, it is to homogenize them. To homogenize them is to bring them back to the value of what is commonly--one asks oneself in the name of what--considered the most low: it is to give them the consistency of the imaginary. And because there is something that needs to be put right.

The consistency of the imaginary is strictly equivalent to that of the symbolic and that of the real. Each is in the same relation with the two others. And it is indeed there that it is a matter of making an effort that is of the order of the effect of sense.

Analytic interpretation in fact implies a see-sawing in the bearing (*portée*) of this effect of sense. It carries (*porte*) in a way that goes a lot farther than speech. Speech is an object of elaboration for the analyst, but what are some of the effects of what the analyst says?—for he does say. It is not nothing to formulate that the transference plays a role there, but it doesn't clarify anything. It would be a matter of explaining how the interpretation carries, and that it does not necessarily imply an enunciation. Too many analysts are in the habit of not opening it—I am speaking of the mouth. I dare believe that their silence is not just out of bad habit, but out of a sufficient apprehension of the bearing of a silent *dire*. I dare believe it, but I'm not sure of it. Beginning when we enter this field, there is no proof, if not in this: that an opportune silence does not always succeed. What I am trying to do here—alas, I babble a lot—is destined to change the perspective on what there is of the effect of sense.

It is a matter of gripping this effect of sense, and with a knot that is the right one for it. I am myself very astonished at succeeding in substituting this effect of sense inasmuch as it makes a knot, and in the right way, for what I will call the effect of fascination, which is produced at a point designatable in this knot itself. It is on this cord that are borne most of the effects of art, and this is the only criterion that one might find to separate art from what science comes to coordinate. A man of letters, like Valéry, for example, remains in effects of fascination, although there is room for analyzing them.

The effect of sense required by analytic discourse is not imaginary. Nor is it symbolic. It has to be real. What I am occupying myself with this year, is a thinking of what might be the real of an effect of sense. One is habituated to the effect of sense being carried by words, and not being without reflection, without an imaginary undulation. On my little schema (Figure 1), the effect of sense is at the joint of the symbolic and the imaginary. With the consistent circle of the

real, it has, in principle, only a relation of exteriority. I say *in principle*, because this exteriority supposes the knot flattened out. It is flattened out because we only think flat—but one can also figure it otherwise (figure 2).

What we pose with the Borromean knot already goes against the image of a concatenation. The discourse in question does not make a chain. There is no reciprocity in the passage of one of these consistencies into the hole offered it by the other, which is to say that no one of these consistencies links itself to another, so as to make a chain with it. And this is how the relation of the symbolic, the real, and the imaginary is specified.

From then on the question is posed of knowing whether the effect of sense in the real is owed to the usage of words or to their ejaculation.

A lot of things have always been given to be thought, but one does not make the distinction between this usage and this ejaculation. One believed that it was words that carried. While if we give ourselves the trouble to isolate the category of the signifier, we see clearly that ejaculation retains an isolable sense.

Is this to say that we must trust in that for the *dire* to make a knot? Speech (*La parole*) very often slips, lets slip. It is asked of the analysand to furnish all that passes through his head, which does not at all imply that there is nothing there but bla-bla-bla, for there is an unconscious. Based on the fact that there is an unconscious, there are in his speech already things that make a knot; there is already the *dire*, if we specify the *dire* as being what makes a knot.

It does not suffice to call this knot real. The imaginary is not an imaginary round. If the knot holds, it is because the imaginary is taken in its consistency proper. As for the symbolic, it is not to be taken in the everyday sense of the word, as everything in analytic technique indicates. It is not only bla-bla-bla. The real is that there is something common to the three in consistency. Now, this consistency resides only in the fact of being able to make a knot. Is a mental knot real? That is the question.

The mental knot has the real of the ex-sistence, as I write it, of these equivalences which I just told you that it was my aim to produce today. I have spoken prudently of correspondences. I speak now of functions, and this is how I advance the word “equivalence.”

We are forced not to put the real in consistency. Consistency, to designate it by its name, I mean by its correspondence, if of the imaginary order. What is demonstrated at length in human history and should inspire in us a singular prudence, is that all the consistency that has proved itself is pure imagination. I make the imaginary return here in its accent of sense. Consistency, for the speakingbeing, is what is fabricated and invented. In this occasion, it is the knot, inasmuch as one has woven it. But precisely—“woven” is just the word we’re looking for in this business—it is not because one has woven it that it ex-sists. Even if I do not draw the figure of my Borromean knot on the board, it ex-sists, for as soon as it is drawn, anyone can clearly see that it is impossible that it does not remain what it is in the real: a knot. And this is why what I advance can be useful in their practice to analysts who listen to me--if they know that what they weave of the imaginary doesn’t any less ex-sist. This existence is what responds to the real.

What we have introduced to the notion of ex-sistence is the inscription,  $\exists x. f(x)$ —there exists an  $x$  that can be carried into a function, whether this be a function in the general sense of the term, or simply an equation. In the case of an equation, it happens that there is no root. This leaves us neither hot nor cold—we make it exist; we invent, for example, the imaginary root, and that gives us some results.

One sees here that the term imaginary is not a synonym for pure imagination. If we can

make the imaginary exist, it is because it is a matter of another real. I say that the effect of sense exists, and that in this, it is real. This is not an apologetic; it is a consistency, an imaginary consistency, no doubt, but there is indeed, it seems, a wholly everyday domain of the imaginary function that endures and holds.

I can only enter into dialogue with someone whom I have fabricated to understand me at the level where I speak. It is indeed because of this that I am astonished that you are so numerous. I cannot believe that I have fabricated each of you to understand me. In analysis, it is not a question of that. It is a question only of accounting for what ex-sists as interpretation. The astonishing thing is that in working on the three functions of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real, I have at a distance fabricated enough people who have had only to open my books—there is not an Englishman who has done more than that—to find something which allows them to respond to me.

How can a construction be made to ex-sist of which the consistence is indeed not imaginary? For that, there has to be a hole. And this is what leads us to the topology of the torus. I do not see why a theory of knots needs to pass through the function of filter, for example, or requires consideration of open and closed sets, when these terms open and closed take on an imaginary consistency always different from that required by the practice of knots. The hole of which I speak detaches itself from the thought that makes a circle, from the thought that flattens out, and which on this basis distinguishes inside and outside.

It suffices to imagine the circle as a consistent cord to see that the inside and outside are exactly the same thing. There is only one inside, which the one that we imagine at the interior of the torus. But the introduction of the figuration of the torus consists precisely in not taking that into account.

I showed you last time how to make a four-looped Borromean knot. One begins with three independent torii, and knots them with a fourth (Figure 3).

I figured for you last time how, by a figure of a fourth torus, these three figured here as independent can be knotted. Freud, I said, elides my reduction to the imaginary, symbolic, and real knotted together. It is by his Name-of-the-Father, identical to what he calls psychic reality, and which is nothing other than the religious reality--it is by this function of the dream that Freud installs the tie between the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. Well then, let us transform figure 2 so that the third circle does not knot anything (Figure 4). The three rounds are disjointed. How can we draw the fourth that would knot them?

You will easily conceive of the figure that I am going to sketch if you think of the form of the astrolabe, materialized dozens of times (*trente-six fois*) in the course of the ages—it must be said that we are only capable of doing geometry with solids.

Here is a circle seen from the front. The equatorial circle that I am drawing now is seen flat, and it is for this that I feign drawing it in perspective. Let us now make a third, sagittal circle. Let us sketch the little dotted line to give the notion of how you should see it in perspective. It suffices to sketch this fourth line for the three disjointed rounds of the symbolic, imaginary, and real to be found knotted (Figure 5).

Four these three to be knotted must there necessarily be one more, of which the consistency would be referred to the function of the father? The Borromean knot demonstrates the contrary.

It is indeed this question that made me begin my seminar on *The Names of the Father*. I had not yet found the figuration I introduce here, but there is not just one fashion to illustrate how Freud makes the conjunction of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real hold for me, by

the Names-of-the-Father—as is patent in his text.

Is this supplementary function of the Father indispensable? I show you that this could be disputed. It is not because it is indispensable in theory that it always is in fact. If I titled this seminar the *Names* and not the *Name of the Father*, it was because I already had certain ideas about the filling-in-for (*suppléance*) the Name-of-the-Father. But it is not because this filling-in-for is not indispensable that it does not take place.

Perhaps it is because our imaginary, our symbolic, and our real, for each of us, are still disassociated that there has to be the Name-of-the-Father to knot them. But do not imagine—this would not be my style (*dans mon ton*)—that I prophecy that, in analysis and elsewhere, we could dispense with the Name-of-the-Father without each of the three would going its own way. Besides, how would the reduction of a knot to its minimum constitute a progress? It would be a progress in the imaginary, which is to say, in consistency. In the current state of things, you are as inconsistent as your fathers, and it is precisely from being entirely suspended in them that you are in your present state.