



**Seminar of February 18, 1975**

Last time, disappointed that Mardi Gras had not rarefied the plenitude of this room, I let myself slip into telling you what I think. Today, I would like it a lot if someone would ask me a question.

A certain Spinoza endeavored to spin, to deduce, according to the model given by the Ancients. This *more geometrico* defined a mode of properly mathematical intuition that does not at all go by itself.

The point, the line, are fomented by a fiction; and also the surface, which is only supported by the split, a break specified as being of two dimensions--but since the line, properly speaking, is a dimension without consistency, it isn't saying much to add a dimension to it. And the third dimension, built from a perpendicular to the surface, is also very strange. It is nothing but an abstraction, founded on the cut of a saw. How, without finding the cord again, can we make this abstraction hold?

On the other hand, it is no doubt not by chance that things are produced in this way. No doubt there is a necessity here arising from the weakness of a manual being, *homo faber*, as they

say. But why has this *homo faber* who manipulates, who toils (*tisse*) and spins, passed to the point, to the surface, without stopping at the knot? Perhaps this has some relation with a repression. Is this repressed the primordial one, the *Urverdrängt*, which Freud designates as what is inaccessible in the unconscious?

The Borromean knot, I have told you, remains a knot if we open one of its loops and transform it into a straight line. But we must extend it to infinity (Figure 1). This is why I say that the straight line is hardly consistent. We have glossed over this from the moment that a geometry called spherical made of this infinite straight line a new round, without grasping that this round is implied beginning with the position of the Borromean knot. We perhaps didn't have to make this detour.

Whatever the case, you saw me, last time, extend the geometry of the Borromean knot from three to four. This was to make you experience the difficulty of what I have called the mental knot. Flattening it out, as I have attempted, is to submit it to so-called thought, to which in fact extension is stuck. Far from being distinct, as Descartes supposes, thought is nothing but extension.

Let us remark that for this there has to be an extension that is not just any, but an extension of two dimensions, which can be daubed on a surface. Thus, it would not be out of place to define the surface I just showed you in geometry, that which is imagined, that which is essentially supported by the imaginary--the surface is what gives us something to daub on. It is singular that the only way anyone has succeeded in reproducing this ideal surface is precisely the one from which everybody recoils: the braiding of a canvas. The painter daubs on a canvas, since it is all he has found for taming the gaze (*dompter le regard*). As for me, I find myself flattening out what I have to communicate to you of the knot on the surface of a blackboard.

How can we draw the fourth round so that three independent rounds of thread make a knot with it? I have figured it by a flattening out that brings in perspective, and which I give you again here in a little different form (Figure 2).

I then wanted to flatten the figure out in a way that reproduces it while modifying it, and there I have found that I have made an error. More exactly, I have slipped up (*raté*), explicitly, out of laziness, and also to give you an example of the unnaturalness of representing the knot. Here is the correct figure (Figure 3).

Why has the failed act (*acte manqué*) functioned here?--if not to show that no analysis avoids something that resists in this theory of the knot. I have made you feel it, and in a somewhat experimental fashion.

. . . What is the essential thing about the round of thread? If one responds that it is the hole in the middle, one is induced to make consistency, ex-sistence, and the hole correspond to the imaginary, to the real, and to the symbolic respectively. Is this right? (Figure 4).

Saying that the hole is the essential thing about the round does not entirely satisfy me. In fact, what is a hole if nothing surrounds it?

Consistency nonetheless indeed seems to be of the order of the imaginary, since the cord goes off toward the vanishing point of the mathematical line. Ex-sistence, in regard to the opening of the round and in regard to the hole, indeed belongs to the field supposed, if I may say so, by the rupture itself. It is within, in-there, that the fate of the knot plays itself out. If the knot has an ex-sistence, it is by belonging to this field. Whence my formulation that, in regard to this correspondence, ex-sistence is of the order of the real. The ex-sistence of the knot is real, to the point that I could have thought that the mental knot, it (*ça*) ex-sists, whether or not the *mens*

figures it. It has still to explore the ex-sistence of the knot, and it does not mentalize it without difficulty.

It is the order explored beginning with my experience, I remind you, that has led me to this infernal trinity. I am not thinking here of bringing a cord into play that is not Freudian. *Flectere si nequeo superos Archerontes movebo*--here is illustrated what I have called the truth of a certain religion. It is not completely by chance that it arrives at a divine trinity, and this, contrarily to the tradition to which it is connected. I will confide in you in saying that the desire of man is Hell, because Hell is what he lacks. Thenceforth, it is what he aspires to. We have the testimony for this in neurosis. The neurotic is someone who has not attained to what for him is the mirage where he would find himself satisfied, to wit, a perversion. A neurosis is a failed (*ratée*) perversion.

It is because you are a lot more interested than you suppose in this nodalization of the imaginary, of the symbolic, and of the real that you are there, it seems to me; why else would you take this strange satisfaction in hearing these stammerings? For me, I can no more than clear the way for the consequences of what I say.

We have established that the ex-sistence of the knot was supported by this field, and that it was of the order of the real. On the other hand, what supports a body? The body only has an appearance for you by being what resists, what consists before dissolving. There is a consistency of the body, just as there is a consistency of the line, and consistency is of the order of the imaginary. As a consequence, by elimination, we are led to pose that the hole is of the order of the symbolic, which I have founded by the signifier.

This is what we have to now interrogate. Is the symbolic the hole? The real, existence? The imaginary, consistency?

These categories are not easily manageable. They have, however, left some traces in history. It was by a traditional philosophical extenuation, of which Hegel gave the summit, that something sprang forth under the name of someone named Kierkegaard. You know that I have exposed his promotion of existence as such as convergent with an experience appearing much later in Freud. Think of his stressing of repetition as more fundamental in experience than the resolution called thesis-antithesis-synthesis on which a Hegel threaded history. The standard unit (*étalon*) of this function is found in *jouissance*. The relations lived by the Kierkegaard in question are those of a knot never avowed, which is that of a faulty father (*père à la faute*). It is not a matter of his own experience, but of that of he who in relation to him is found to occupy the place of the father. At the same time, this place of the father is found problematic . . .

It is only on this date that existence is promoted as such. No doubt it does not have the same accent as I give it by fragmenting it with a dash. If it is in this époque that existence emerges, emerges for me, and that I write it otherwise, and that it becomes tangible in the knot, I do not believe that this puts me in continuity with a philosophical interrogation. Rather, there is a rupture. The emergence of the unconscious as a knowledge, a knowledge proper to each particular person, is of a nature to change completely the notion of knowledge that has dominated since Antiquity. In fact, if knowledge depends on relations of the sequence of generations with the symbolic, with this hole of which I have just spoken, how can we not interrogate its status?

Is there a knowledge in the real? The supposition always made, a supposition not avowed, is that by all appearances there is, since the real walked (*ça marchait*), turned in a circle. We, *in the real*, we touch on a knowledge in a wholly other form . . .

When one poses knowledge as immanent to the real, one puts it in the form of the  $\eta\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ , thanks to which the real knows what it has to do. And when it is not the  $\eta\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ , it is the All-Power, the wisdom, of God. The Newtonian world is not thinkable without God, for how would each of these masses know its distance from all of the others? Voltaire believed in the Supreme Being: I am have not received his confidences; I do not know what idea he had of it. That could hardly be far from the idea of the All-Science, the idea that it is He who makes the machine work. It's the old story of the knowledge in the real that has sustained all the old metaphors of the potter. Aristotle was a populist--it was the artisan who gave him the model for his causes. Everything superb about the  $\eta\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$  reduces itself to that, which makes it so his theory has been welcomed with open arms wherever the metaphor of the potter is primary. A divine hand made the pot. But is God always busy making it turn? Does he let it turn by itself? Refinements of knowledge.

The question is to be taken up again beginning with this: knowledge is only supposed from a relation to the symbolic, which is incarnated by a material as signifier. But what is a signifying material? We only have the tip of its nose in Aristotle, when he speaks of the  $\sigma\tau\omicron\iota\chi\epsilon\iota\omicron\nu$ . It is certain that the idea itself of matter is only thinkable as an issue of the signifying material, where this idea finds its first examples.

Our own experience is that of the symptom. The symptom reflects in the real the fact that there is something that does not work (*marche*) where?--not in the real to be sure, but in the field of the real. This is owed to what? To what I support in my language by the speakingbeing--if it did not speak, there would not be the word *being* . . . There is a coherence, a consistency, between the symptom and the unconscious. I define the symptom by the fashion in which each *jouit* from the unconscious insofar as the unconscious determines him.

The origin of the notion of the symptom is not to be sought in Hippocrates, but in Marx, in the liaison that he makes the first between capitalism and what?--the good old days, what one calls the feudal time. Capitalism is considered to have some quite beneficial effects, since it has the advantage of reducing to nothing the proletarian man, thanks to which he realizes the essence of the man, of being stripped of everything, and of being the Messiah of the future. This is how Marx analyzes the notion of the symptom. He gives lots of other symptoms, to be sure, but the relation of this one with a faith in man is incontestable.

If we do not make of man anything whatsoever carrying an ideal future, if we determine him by the particularity in every case of his unconscious and of the fashion in which he *jouit* from it, the symptom remains at the same place Marx put it, but it takes another sense. Not a social symptom, but a particular symptom. No doubt particular symptoms have types: the symptom of the obsessional is not the symptom of the hysteric.

For the obsessional, there is a very particular symptom, which I'm going to tell you about. No one has the least apprehension of death; if this were not so, you would not be so tranquil there. For the obsessional, death is a failed act. This is not so stupid, for death is only approachable by an act. Still, for it to succeed, someone must commit suicide knowing that it is an act, which only happens very rarely.

This was however very widespread when philosophy had a certain aim--an aim other than to sustain the social edifice. There were then persons who came to group themselves in schools in a way that had some consequences. But what is of the nature to make you suspect the authenticity of the engagement in these schools, is that there is no need to have attained to any wisdom whatsoever, that it suffices to be a good obsessional, to know from a sure source that death is a failed act.

I will stop there today. I have not even been able to get to the bone of what I wanted to say to you. Someone has objected to me that by dint of saying that the woman does not exist, I have made *her (la)* exist. Don't you believe any of it.