

This presentation "On James Joyce as Symptom" was given on January 24, 1976 at the Centre Universitaire Méditerranéen de Nice; the transcript by Henri Brevière, assisted by Joëlle Labruyère, was taken from a tape recording. Published unedited in the review Le croquant n ° 28, November 2000.

[...]

¹ Saying...saying produces encounters ... Heur. H.E.U.R., it is said like that. You no doubt imagine . . . that there are good and bad encounters, that there is *bonheur* or *malheur*. But this isn't true; there are just encounters.

We can't hear you!

You can't hear anything? . . . Is this better?

Yes, yes, yes . . .

Is this O.K.?

Yes.

I am not sure of having had the best encounter. Rather late, when I was . . . 31 years old, I had an encounter at the hospital — since it was there that I was brought by fate — at the hospital called psychiatric, with a madwoman. Although I may have called her Aimée, A.I.M.E, acute accent, E, this doesn't mean I loved her. I [just] called her that. Rather, this means that she needed to be loved. She so much needed it that she believed it. She believed that she was loved. This has a name . . . in psychiatric circles, it is called erotomania. Which does not altogether mean the same thing. But, finally, we will content ourselves with this mythological support, *Eros*, generally translated as "love."

Error, or accident? I couldn't deal with her case, which is published in my thesis, except by recourse to Freud. Which—there it is, the . . . the encounter—which made me slip into what I shall call the Freudian practice.

It so happened that . . . more than twenty years later, I found myself having to give an account of this practice because I was asked to.

By 1953, I had lived quite a long time; if you know that I presented my thesis in '32, it should be easy for you to reconstitute my date of coming into what is called the world — in '53, I began—I had been in practice at that time since about '38, since the year 1938. Thus, I had a little experience behind me, experience of the practice Freud founded and which is the practice of analysis.

I believed, I believed I had to give an account of this practice.

What I would like is to try today (since '53, some years have passed, and I haven't stopped for an instant . . . forcing myself to account for this practice). I am going to try to . . . since . . . you are here to hear from me, I am going to try to tell you what appeared to me, from the start, worth the trouble — for it was a bit of trouble — the trouble of being said.

¹ The beginning of this presentation is missing from the tape.

Freud represents, Freud represents . . . hum . . . like an artist . . . an attempt to maintain the claims of reason. I have tried to make a doctrine of what this attempt represented, an attempt which, it must be said, was crazy. Maintaining the claims of reason means reason has in it something, some *thing* of the real. He was certainly not the first to take part in this. There is even someone who said, well before him, that the rational was real.

The annoying thing about . . . about this someone, I mean about what he said, is that he believed the formula could be inverted, and that because the rational was real one could conclude — at least this is what he said— that the real was rational.

It is quite annoying that nothing we know of the real, or believe we know of it, is ever attained to except in demonstrating that the real has no meaning whatsoever. This brings us to the heart of an old debate, which, although we don't really know why, we call philosophical; but it is quite certain—and this implicates me—that having had a little bit of training in philosophy, I always ask myself to what extent I am not doing something on the order of that old song and dance we call philosophy. Since, finally, philosophy, since the age of the so-called pre-Socratics, who were far from being idiots and who even said some things it is appropriate to call profound . . . Freud believed he had to refer to certain pre-Socratics, but he did not do a Socratization of his practice. As for me, that is what I have tried to do. I have tried to see what we can draw from a questioning of this analytic practice.

The first response is clearly linked to a weighing of what I say: that is, if the rational is assuredly real, the real . . . resists. This is not a resistance of subject to subject, as analysts too often imagine; it is a resistance linked to the fact that we can imagine ourselves attaining to the real — we ask from what side — with words, a bla-bla-bla, in sum. For it is a fact that we have, at least a little bit, attained to it. There is someone named Kant who built what is called his philosophy precisely on this, which was perhaps the moment when it was least a question of philosophy: historically, it was insofar as Newton attained to something that . . . that assuredly had its merits, to something that resembled . . . a *hitting of its target* [*touche au but*] as to the real, it is around this that Kant constructed . . . constructed (something that led him down all sorts of paths) an Analytic, said to be transcendental, but also an Aesthetic, which, for him, was no less so.

The striking thing about Kant is that . . . it is in the *Critique of Judgment* that he believed he had to situate his approach to the term *Bourk*.² Judgment is something that clearly goes

² Why does Lacan pronounce this word "word" . . . in this way? There doesn't seem to be any problem with the recording or anything else . . . The "word" said by Lacan, which is evidently a German word, can it be written in "French" like this: *Bourk*, with perhaps a *t* or a *g* in the place of the *k* . . .? It is difficult to explain why Lacan says this "word." We do not find the concept corresponding to this word in the *The Critique of Judgment*. The context and the "meaning" of what he says here could lead us to think that Lacan is trying to pronounce the German word translated in French as *judgement*. In the *Critique of Judgment*, we of course find *Urteil*, but also *Beurteilung*. *Beurteilung*, judgment of appreciation, of evaluation or estimation, which is distinguished from *Urteil*, judgment in the purely logical sense of the term. This rejoins the distinction between determinant judgment and reflective judgment. The opening consonant of the "word" Lacan pronounces, the *b*, might make us think that *Beurteilung* is the word that he "wanted" to say, but we are nonetheless rather far from this. However, this is closest to Lacan's words if we consider that, for Kant, this word concerns finality, teleology (the most frequently used expression for *teleological judgment* is *teleologische Beurteilung*) : Lacan indeed speaks of a judgment that goes "*beyond demonstration*," beyond purely logical judgment; he speaks of a judgment "*that concludes with an affirmation concerning what there is of the real*." But it must also be said that the word Lacan says has little in common with the word *Beurteilung* other than the initial *b*. If we search the *Critique of Judgment* for a word that works better, we find a proper noun: *Burke* ! . . . The name of an Irish, counter-revolutionary philosopher and English statesman, the author of a work, celebrated in its time, on the origin of our ideas of the beautiful and the sublime, in which Kant

beyond demonstration; it is something that concludes with an affirmation concerning what there is of the real.

How is it that we arrive at this? I mean that Freud, who had a little bit of training that we could consider . . . contemporary . . . How is it that Kant . . . that Freud . . . how is that Freud, in this *threadlet* (*filée*), could have wanted to maintain the real of the rational? I believe I clarified this beginning with my first doctrinal emissions, in formulating that the unconscious — as I said at that time — is structured *like a language*, to repeat myself. It is obvious that, there already, the difficulty was marked. Because, what is a language? I have had time, of course, after having ventured forth in this fashion, I have had time . . . to reflect . . . to reflect on the basis, on the basis of this: one must make oneself understood, and since psychoanalysts most of the time haven't the least training in philosophy, this has been the occasion for me to notice that philosophy serves for this, serves to elaborate the reality we are concerned with. In Freud, I don't know why, this reality is called psychic. One did not have to wait for philosophy to speak of the *psukê*; the *psukê* is a dream philosophy inherited.

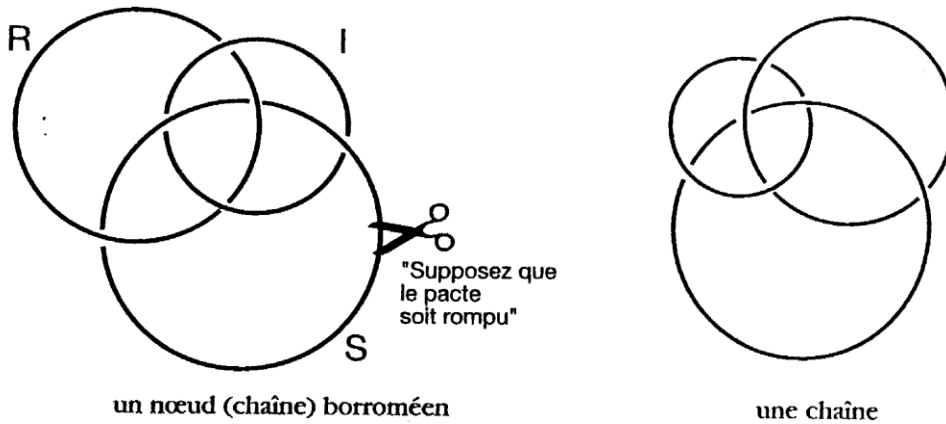
My patient, my patient who was very patient with me since she explained to me, finally . . . all kinds of things, permitted me to account for paranoia as . . . a normal state. Nothing is more normal than to be a paranoiac. And this, in sum, is what I have tried to account for. I have tried to account for how it happens that . . . what I was, much later, led to distinguish (I will try to tell you how) as *lunging* (*poumant*³) together, three categories I pinned down (I say "pinned down" because . . . when one couples words with categories, it is a pinning-down) — what I pinned together as the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real, this means that, for her, they constituted a single thread. This is the best way that at the present time I could choose to depict what there is of the paranoiac. The imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, for them — masculine or feminine [*eux ou elles*] — constitute a single thread . . . but for the subject who . . . who thinks himself clever, there is some play between these three categories: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real are distinct.

Since they have brought me a blackboard, I am going to try to . . . [the blackboard squeaks, Lacan sighs, there is a brouhaha in the audience] to represent for you where the play is. It is not for nothing that I distinguish them in this order, although the position of each of them might appear to you strictly equivalent to the other two, which is not correct; it is not correct, because if I put

was interested. If we say this name in German . . . then we are not far off: *Bourke* ! Now, in all of the German vocabulary, the word that comes closest would be: *Burg*, the fortified castle. We shall stick with this fortified castle: the fortress, for us, of an obscure and impenetrable meaning, a proffering of Lacanian abracadabra. One might wish to consult the Ferdinand Alquié edition, *La Critique de la faculté de juger* (Gallimard Folio/essais), particularly the notes on the translation of the term *Beurteilung*.

³ Here, again, this is no accident and the pronounced "French" word can only be written like this, *poumant*, as a present participle. This is a neologism. We can justify it and explain it if we remember, for example, the metaphor Lacan uses to characterize psychoanalysis: "*Analysis is the artificial lung [poumon] thanks to which one can try to insure what must be found of jouissance in speaking so that the story continues*" (Interview, *France Culture*, July '73.) We might also note, in the present talk, how Lacan tells us that the Borromean knot squeezes [*ça serre*] (itself or the others): the Borromean knot has play in it, it can tighten and untighten itself, breathe, like a kind of lung! And, furthermore, there is this passage in the lesson of December 9th of the seminar *Le Sinthome* : Lacan speaks here of how he was received in the United States: "*I was inhaled there, inhaled into a kind of vortex, which clearly only finds its correspondent . . . in what I make apparent with my knot*" (Thus, here Lacan describes his Borromean knot as a kind of vacuum cleaner, and this a month and a half before "coining" [*forger*], in the present context, the neologism *poumant*). We also know that Lacan defined psychoanalysis as a practice of blathering [*bavardage*]: blathering . . . a respiration of language? Voilà... again the lung . . . the lung *lunging*. The lung, I say!

the *S* there, at the place of the *R*, and the *R* at the place of the *S*, this would not have the same import. In other terms, in what is drawn on the board, and which is called a Borromean knot — a Borromean knot because it is inscribed on the coat of arms of the Borromeos. The coat of arms of the Borromeos is made in this way, on the basis of the historical trifle . . . that . . . they resolved to ally themselves with two other families, that they were included in some pact or another such that if one of them separated from the chain, since, in sum, this is a chain (although not a chain like other chains, because everyone knows that a chain is made so that if one of its elements is removed the two others nonetheless remain knotted); and what they wanted to express in this coat of arms is that if we break one of these circles, these rings, these links in the chain, the others must be set free. That is what we see here. Suppose the pact is broken, you can clearly see — since the intersection of these two others is made from the imaginary being above real — you can clearly see that they are freed from each other. It isn't immediately apparent that there might be a way of uniting something like this — which is to say, something that, as is immediately felt, does not constitute a chain — that there might be a way of uniting them with a third element; however, this is quite simple. All that is required is that a third element pass beneath the one below and above the one above.



How did I come to consider, with a certain preference, this Borromean chain? It isn't so easy to say, but it is clear, as in Freud, that this was linked to the fact that some people exist⁴ who are in some manner the living testimony, the living testimony of the existence⁵ of the unconscious. I just spoke of the real, now I shall speak to you of existence; the two terms have nothing to do with each other. Existence has nothing to do with the real. Existence, at least as it is imposed on me to use the term, consists in this: . . . there is a knot. There is a knot, and here what I am drawing is not a knot . . . I will perhaps very soon show you what a knot is — this is a chain, a Borromean chain. This Borromean chain has been imposed on me by what I call the existence of the hysteric, male or female, of course. As for hysteria, one thinks — perhaps wrongly thinks — that women have more of a gift for it. This isn't a sure thing. In time, we will perhaps grasp that men perhaps, finally . . . contribute to this also.

But whatever happens (and this in particular might happen) it is a fact that . . . —in the play of these links, of these links insofar as they constitute a chain, is something that supports

⁴ It should be noted that at the time of this presentation Lacan wrote *ex-siste* and *ex-sistence*. This is perceptible here in his pronunciation, but since he did not feel the need to signal this to his present audience, we will write these words in their usual form.

⁵ Idem.

very well the notion of existence, because (it is enough to look at one of them, no matter which, the real, for example) it is to extent that it is wedged in, where, for example, it is capable of reducing itself to this, that it, properly speaking, exists. This of course supposes the admission⁶ . . . of the meaning (*sens*) that exists . . . in what I have designated, going back to a certain moment, as the speakingbeing (*du parlêtre*), the *parlêtre*, which I write like that. This has the advantage of evoking chitchat (*la parlote*) and also the advantage of allowing us to notice that the word *being* is a word with a quite paradoxical value. It exists, it must be said, in language. Philosophy, of course, has muddled this all up, just as it has done with the legacy of the *psukê* — which was an old superstition, to which every age has borne witness, if one can say so — likewise it has spoken of ontology as if being stood on its own.

It is certain that I distance myself from the philosophical tradition . . . I distance myself from the philosophical tradition and I do more than distance myself from it, I go so far as to put in suspension all that there is of . . . ontology, psychology, and of cosmology, since, supposedly, there is a cosmos. The cosmos is something that is pinned down, has always been pinned down as being strictly imaginary, strictly the double of what is imagined to be . . . — with a name not picked by chance — to be the internal world: the *Innenwelt*. Is the *Innenwelt* the image of the *Umwelt*? It is quite clear that for as long as one has . . . speculated, poetically, the cosmos — which, not without reason, has been marked by this cosmetic note, if I can say so, by this affinity with the beautiful — that the cosmos is conceived of as representing functions that are none other than those we imagine as connected to our body. There are all kinds of signs of this in what has passed for the intellectual productions of so-called humanity.

So-called humanity has obviously made some advances. I will not say progress, but it has managed, finally, to escape its poetic droning. This is where Freud applies the brakes. If I say, if I suggest that Freud said . . . he wanted to save the rational, it is insofar as that he took for solid, essential, consistent, the fact that man speaks; women, as is to be expected . . . women also speak . . . [laughter, "nervous" laughter, a tittering and guffawing in the audience].

Well! . . . It is even probable, if we believe the Biblical text, that it was Her, Her with a big H, who spoke first. Is it certain that . . . that in that ferocious teasing God perpetrated on Adam in making him name the animals, nothing proves that Adam knew what he was doing, that he had the least idea what the name of a species was: it was necessary that God, through derision, force this naming so that assuredly (one dares, one dares hope it, retrospectively) . . . something might follow from it. But it was His doing, or the doing of the Devil, that Eve spoke, spoke so as to offer, to Adam, the apple, the apple supposed to be what was going communicate to him something in the way of a knowledge.

Hence, it is not so clear-cut that man would have spoken as he was teased into doing by this ferocious God, ferocious — as I have understood this to qualify what one calls the superego, which is to say, quite simply, the moral conscience — ferocious and obscene, for all of this could only end with obscenities, with what we grasp of the dimension of the obscene. This is what one, in general, calls the Beautiful, which, based on this fact, can no longer pass for being the splendor of the True, but, sadly, something hideous. There is certainly no lack of this, of the hideous in the true; even to the point that . . . what is most difficult to obtain is to say more than half of the true. Indeed, it is always a matter of a half-partitioning, a half-saying, for whatever there is of the true.

Yes . . . I, of course, refrain from any nostalgia on this occasion. There is no place for it for the simple reason that there is nowhere to return. Contrary to what is testified to by the last

⁶ Perhaps a word *or* two is missing here in the recording.

artist to occupy himself with the *Odyssey*, Joyce, in *Ulysses*, there is no *nostos*. What Freud, thank God, assures us of is that indeed the only possible *nostos* is the return to the mother's womb, and this return to the mother's womb is quite clearly something that cannot happen in any fashion, for the simple reason that, once one is delivered, it is over and done with and is without return. There is no *nostos*, no *nostos*, and . . . it is impossible to satisfy the wish, the only nostalgia there is, because of its never having existed, existed taken in the sense of each of these loops which, here, constitute the chain.

What made it so that, historically, Freud was determined to say what appears to me the essential thing? The essential thing, which, moreover, I am far from having resolved, in speaking of a language; I have said *a* language because it seems that in all that exists on the order of language, there is something in common; something in common that is highly abstract, which is that every language has a syntax. We must truly abstract a lot to notice this, but this has been done for a long time; there is, as one says, a consciousness of the *parlêtre* that has allowed this to be noticed, and it is even for this reason that from what is *phoned* (*phoné*) in a language, we can translate it into any other language. So far, every language we have catalogued can be translated into another. Where it is not possible is with languages we don't know. But even if a language is dead, as we have seen altogether too often, we can translate any living language there is into a dead language; there is even a major advantage to this. It is thanks to this that the so-called process of thought, of which, of course, Freud doesn't claim to give the key or even to know what it is. What he knows is that there is something there on the order of language, and not only of language: on the order of *lalangue* — which is how I write it, with a single word, to evoke what it has of lallation, [and] what it has of the . . . of the *languaged*, of the linguistic. It is in *lalangue*, with all the equivoques resulting from all that *lalangue* supports of rhymes and alliterations, that is rooted a whole series of phenomena that Freud catalogues and that extends from the dream, the dream whose meaning must be interpreted, to all kinds of other statements (*énoncés*) which, in general, are presented as equivoques, what we call the failures, the slips of everyday life. These phenomena are always interpreted in a linguistic fashion, and, in Freud's eyes, this shows that a certain kernel of language-based impressions is at the base of all that is humanly practiced, that there no example except in these three phenomena — the dream [chucklings in the audience], the slip-up (in other words, the pathology of everyday life, what we fail at), and the third category, the equivoque of the witticism — there is no example except for these that as such can be interpreted as a function of a first game which is . . . in which it is not for nothing that we can say that the mother tongue, the cares⁷ the mother has taken to teach her child to speak, plays a role; a decisive and always definitive role; and it is a matter of noticing that the three functions I have enumerated, dream, pathology of everyday life: this is simply to say of what is done, of what is habitual . . . the best way to succeed, as Freud indicates, is to fail. There is no slip, whether of the tongue or of the pen, no failed act, that doesn't have in it its own

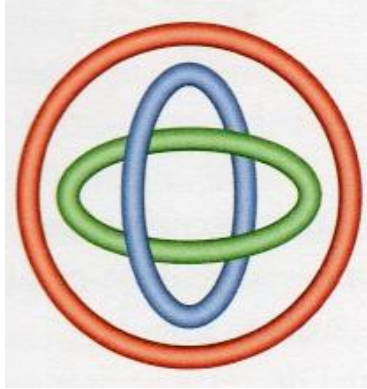
⁷ One would say instead: the *care* taken . . . etc. To clarify this (faulty?) formulation of Lacan, we will cite a passage from a talk given only two months earlier at Yale University, on November 24, 1975: "*I mean that the so-called oral, anal, and even urinary phases are too profoundly mixed up in the acquisition of language, that toilet training, for example, is manifestly anchored in the conception the mother has of what she expects from the child — namely, excrement — [. . .] I propose that what is most fundamental in the so-called sexual relations of the human being is involved in language, in the sense that it is not for nothing that we call the language we use our maternal language*" (*Scilicet* n° 6/7, 1976, éditions du Seuil, Paris.) And in "the other" Nice presentation, "The Lacanian Phenomenon," we find this: "*It is there that, always, the unconscious is rooted. It is not only rooted because this being learned to speak when he was a child, if his mother in fact wanted to take the trouble, but because he arose already from two speakingbeings.*" "The trouble," a formulation close to "the care," but perhaps . . . more sure!

reward. This is the only way to succeed; it is to fail at something. This, thanks to the existence of the unconscious.

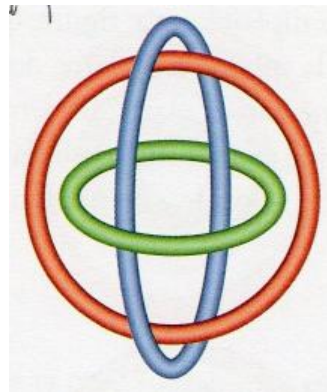
It is also thanks to the unconscious that we try to resolve what we can call, in this instance, some symptoms. There are, of course, symptoms that are a lot better organized, the symptoms called hysteric, or the symptoms called obsessional [loud commotion in the audience]; they are a lot better organized, they constitute [the commotion gets louder . . . Lacan raises his voice] a *psukê*, a *psychic reality*. This is what the symptom gives its substance.

I sense, my God, that perhaps the audience is getting tired [someone in the audience coughs]. I would like, therefore, simply to indicate that I am struggling, for the moment, with an artist, an artist who is none other than Joyce; I have called him *Joyce the Symptom*, because I believe that the historical moment — Joyce and Freud are nearly contemporaries. Freud was obviously born . . . some twenty years . . . a little more than twenty years earlier, but he also died before Joyce did, though not by much. The fact that Joyce oriented his art toward something so extremely entangled is something I am trying to clarify; I must say that, given my leaning, given how I now conceive of the unconscious as forming a consistency of a linguistic nature, through a kind of analogy, since I am at the same time lead to . . . it must be said, to symbolize the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real in the same fashion, in making use of links in a chain (I have, of course, shown you this, there where I situate the main wedges); this serves me (*ça me sert s.e.r.t.*), but I have only too often had the occasion to also see how, myself and others, this squeezes (*ça serre s.e. deux r. e*), these links squeeze, and I could designate for you the place where I see the main result, that is, this *squeeze* [in English] called desire, and for a long time I have shown that what there of demand, particularly the demand for analysis, is supported by image of the torus.

O.K. . . . But this Joyce, if he deliberately targets the symptom — to the point of it seeming that we could say that in his text, finally . . . the pointing to the symptom as such is something we could say it is consecrated to — he begins with what? With a *Dublin*, with a Dublin as we call it, with an Irish city where, manifestly . . . neither his father nor his mother were true supports, sustainers, as, with time, we have envisaged that things must be, must be to produce a result; it is very curious that Joyce — whether or not he was informed of the existence of Freud, which isn't a sure thing, though many have labored to offer proofs . . . it isn't a sure thing in any case that he was up to date on this. And it is probably to this that we owe the fact that in his work, since he certainly produced a work, he . . . it is a muddle, a muddle of knots, which constitute the fabric, the essential text of what he brings us, but he does so, if I can say this, quite innocently — it is very striking that, for someone like him who, in his final work, *Finnegans Wake*, played so much with the sphere and the cross, it is quite astonishing that he arrived no more than anyone else at the idea that there is another way of constituting the sphere and the cross [he draws] than is usually done, that is . . . a sphere superimposed by or superimposing the cross.



When you see an armillary sphere,⁸ which is something drawn more or less like this: the three circles, which refer to three planes in which the usage of the circle to represent the sphere is justified; in these three planes, you see that it is a matter of a single sphere concentric to itself, instead of what is involved here, which would be that one of the three circles . . . passes beyond a middle circle, and that also the third operates in the same fashion, on the condition of being outside of this transversal circle that I am drawing here — you see how it is already . . . that . . . it's just hard to talk about it . . . — that being



outside of this transversal circle, it passes to the inside, as you see here, of the sagittal circle. No one ever thinks of representing an armillary sphere in this way; while it is quite clear that the armillary sphere, already in itself — due to its being beneath two other circles at its poles, let's say . . . but only beneath one at its diameter — already implicitly puts this oval into play, while we would only have to urge this a little further to notice that it could be worked out differently. I mean, that this something that you see here as I draw it . . . and I must of course erase, not this one, but this one here. While this one here is nothing other than what, flattened out, would give us the Borromean chain. The fact that no one has thought of producing an elementary geometry of the first usage of the knot that is offered here, if I can say this, is what is most remarkable, and it is by means of this that, for the moment, I am trying to clarify a certain number of things in our technique.

⁸ The images Lacan draws on the board here are missing from the transcription of this presentation available to me. These are taken from *Le Séminaire, livre XXIII: Le sinthome* (Jacques Lacan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Seuil, 2005, pp. 35-36). Here in *Le Sinthome*, as in this presentation, Lacan is illustrating how an armillary sphere (represented in the first image) can be converted to a Borromean chain (represented in the second) [translator].

Well, I would appreciate — if you would do me this favor — I would appreciate it if anyone would like to offer something that would give me the feeling that . . . I have not spoken in a total vacuum. I mean, if someone were to ask me . . . some questions, the more naïve the questions [laughter], the more encouraging, it would seem to me. I experienced a lot of satisfaction, a lot of pleasure when I made a recent detour into America: it's crazy that the Americans . . . are more disposed to risk themselves in a questioning . . . this, of course, presents . . . other problems. I had . . . it was there that I could see that . . . [Lacan is called out to, loudly, by a woman's voice: "Mr. . . ." The rest is difficult to understand. Laughter.] Mr. Moon had some success. Mr. Moon was clearly very successful . . . I didn't even notice [?] . . . I didn't even put the accent . . . there is a thread, a thread that held Freud which is that . . . which we call the one most opposed to mystical confusion. This mystical confusion is, of course, something that we are always threatened with. The mystical is the exact equivalent of what I earlier called paranoia. Moreover, I don't see what would prevent the proliferation of the mystical, given that I say that paranoia is the most normal of states.

But I would like it if someone would ask me some questions.⁹

⁹ If there were any questions and answers, they are missing from this recording.