

Seminar XXII of Jacques Lacan, R.S.I.

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Introduction to this Publication

A wager which is that of my teaching, why not hold it to the extreme, since somewhere note has been taken of it, and not print it as it is?

The hesitation is not necessarily mine. My relation to [*rapport au*] the composite public who listens to me amply motivates it.

That I testify of an experience I have specified as being analytic and mine, is there supposed for veracious.

Seeing where this experience leads me by its statement (*énoncé*), has the value of a supervision [*contrôle*] (I know the words I employ).

The "categories" of the symbolic, of the imaginary and of the real are here put to the proof of a testament. If they imply three effects by their knot, if this is discovered by me not to be able to sustain itself except by the borromean relation, these are the effect of sense, the effect of *jouissance*, and the effect . . . I have said of non-*rapport* to specify it from what seems most to suggest the idea of a *rapport*, to wit, the sexual.

It is clear that these effects are implications of my categories themselves: which may be futile even if they indeed seem to be inherent to "thought."

I explain in the measure of my means what the knot, and a knot of a sort that mathematics is still little devoted to, can add of consistency to these effects. One will remark, however, to leave said consistency on the level of (*au ras de*) the imaginary takes here the value of

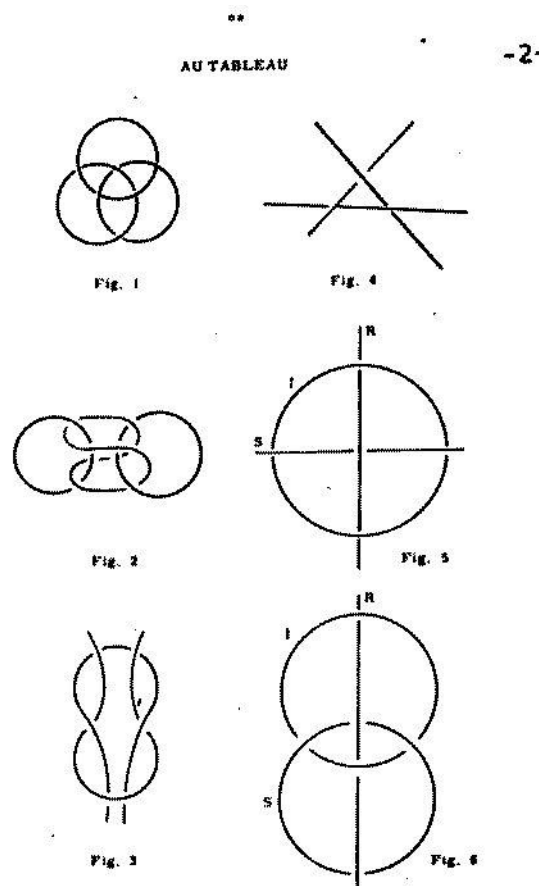
distinguishing it in a triad which keeps its sense, even in demonstrating that the real is excluded from it.

This is the type of problem I find again at every turn (without looking for it, it should be said).

But the measure itself of the effects that I say can only modulate my *dire*. To add there the fatigue of this *dire* itself does not lighten for us the duty of accounting for it: on the contrary.

A marginal note, like page 8, may be necessitated to complete a circuit elided in the seminar. It is not the touching-up which is here "futile," but, as I stress, the mental itself, to the extent that it exists.

Jacques Lacan



Seminar of December 10, 1974

Real, symbolic, imaginary--these three words each have a sense. These are three different senses. But that they are different, does that suffice to make them three? If they are as different as I say, doesn't that create an obstacle? Where is the common measure?

The unity here could become a function of measure: one counts--one, two, three. It is still necessary to found the equivalence of these unities on a sign--to make two little lines, or to write *equal*. And if by chance they were others, so to say, *the one to the other*? We would

indeed be in a difficult situation, and, after all, what would show it would be the sense itself of the word "other." But there isn't only one.

The first other--first because I begin with it--is defined, for example, by the distinction exterior/interior. It is that of Freud, whether or not he wanted it to be, in his second topic, which is supported by a geometry of the sack. The sac is supposed (*censé*) to contain--it is funny to say--the drives. It is this that he calls the Id (*Ça*). He obviously finds himself forced to add there a certain number of utensils: a sort of lunulla, which all at once transforms it into a vitellus, on which an embryo is differentiated. This is obviously not what he means, but his schema suggests it. And I will not tell you all that he is still forced to add, not counting I don't know what hatchure he titles the Superego. Such are the disadvantages of imaged figurations.

This topology of the sack is indeed what we have business with in topology, insofar as the sack chalks itself on a surface, and makes a round, of which there is an interior and an exterior. It is with this that we are lead to write inclusion in a set. We utilise this sign, \subset , from which one can slip to this, $<$. If $i \subset e$, $i < e$ --a manifest stupidity.

There you have the first other. Only, there is another, which I have marked with an A, which is defined as not having the least rapport--so little as you imagine it.

When one begins to take words as one's vehicle, one finds oneself quickly in a trap, because my *so little as you imagine it* puts the imaginary back into the mix. With the imaginary, you have every chance of getting bogged down. With the imaginary, one has departed for the infinitesimal, and it is a real pain (*mal de chien*) getting out of it.

Let us begin again. That they are three, this real, this symbolic, and this imaginary, what does that mean?

There is a slope that leads you into homogenizing them. What is firm is--what relation do they have between them? It is here that I would like to clear for you a path this year.

We could begin by saying that the real is what is strictly unthinkable. This would make a hole in the business, and that would allow us to interrogate what there is of what, don't forget, I have started from--three terms inasmuch as they carry a sense.

What is this *sense*? In analytic practice, it is with sense that you operate. But on the other hand, you only operate to reduce it, since you always operate with the equivoke--I speak here of those who are worthy of the name of analysts.

The equivoke is not a sense. The equivoke is fundamental to the symbolic, to that by which the unconscious is supported, as I structure it. Sense is that by which something answers that is other than the symbolic, which is--there is no other way of saying it--the imaginary.

What is the imaginary? Does it even exist?--since you puff over it just in pronouncing the term. Well! I would say that if the speakingbeing demonstrates itself to be devoted to mental debility, it is because of the imaginary. This notion in fact has no other point of departure than the reference to the body. And the least of assumptions implied by the body is this: what represents itself for the speaking being is only the reflection of its organism.

Only, something quickly makes us stumble--from a body one presumes--it is even its definition--that it has specified functions in its organs. Such that an automobile, even a computer the last we heard, is also a body. To say it all, it does not go without saying that a body is alive.

What best attests that it is, is precisely this *mens* that I have introduced with "mental debility." For it is not given to all bodies, inasmuch as they function, to suggest the dimension of stupidity. Where does this come from? Language (*La Langue*), and not just any language, Latin, has coined a word for it. This is what puts back in their place those who impute precisely to Latin this stupidity, while it is the only language that has not come up with an opaque term, the

ηOUS, or who knows what other metaphor--for a knowledge of which we cannot know if it exists, since it is the knowledge supposed by the real. The knowledge of God, it is certain that it exists, we have given ourselves enough trouble to spell it out. It exists, but only in the sense I inscribe by *ex-sistence*, otherwise than is usually done. It exists perhaps, but no one knows where. All we can say is that what consists gives no testimony of it. It is then striking that the language that we suspect of being the most stupid is itself the one that has coined the term *intellegere*, to read between the lines: that is, otherwise than in the way the symbolic is written.

It is to this effect of the writing of the symbolic that is owed the effect of sense, in other words, of stupidity--shown to this day in all the so-called systems of nature. Without language, we could not have the least suspicion of this stupidity, which is also how the body is shown to be alive.

In truth, this mental debility, attested to, I do not hope to get out of in any way. I don't know why what I bring you would be less stupid than the rest. This would make sense of that banana skin that someone slipped under my foot in ringing me up to go to Nice and give a conference on, I kid you not, *The Lacanian Phenomenon*.

Well! I do not expect this to be a phenomenon. If I persevere--and you know that I persevere without looking twice--it is only because I believe myself to have grasped something, one couldn't say with my hands, but with my feet--the entrance in play of the trace that the analytic experience draws; which, it must be said, is not so easily supported, and notably by analysts. Such that, if there is a phenomenon, it can only be the *lacananalyst* phenomenon, or else *laca-not-analyst*.

At Nice, naturally, I could explain nothing of all that to them, since for them I was a phenomenon. The organizers, what they wanted was to attract a crowd. And there is always a crowd to see a phenomenon. Me, I was not going to say to them--*You know, I'm not a phenomenon!* That would have been *Verneinung*. In the end, I let loose for a good little hour and a quarter.

And then, I posed them some questions, I mean--I asked them to pose me some. This was a request (*demande*). You will believe me, if you wish, that unlike you, they posed them, for three quarters of an hour, and these questions were striking in this way: they were pertinent, in a second zone, of course. To the extent that I found myself in the situation, without having challenged the Lacanian phenomenon, of having demonstrated it. The Lacanian phenomenon--it is not certain that they grasped it themselves--is that I have effects on a public which has only heard from very far, by repercussion, what I articulate here, the teaching I do to clear the way for the analyst to the discourse that supports him, insofar as it is indeed from discourse, and always from discourse, that suffers this little thing that we try to manipulate in analysis. That's it, the phenomenon. And it is in sum a little vague. And I might have been tempted to write the three letters in an other order--instead of "RSI," "RIS," which would have made a laughing (*ris*), that famous laughing of water over which I equivocate in my *Ecrits*--on page 166.

I must comfort myself in saying that this phenomenon is not unique, it is only particular--I mean that it is distinguished from the universal. What is annoying is that it has been to this day unique at the level of the analyst. However, it is indispensable that the analyst be at least two: the analyst having the effects, and the analyst theorizing those effects. This is why I so appreciated being accompanied by a person who is an analyst.

Parenthesis closed; and I can now get to what I want to advance today. I have only found one way to give a common measure to these three terms, real, symbolic, and imaginary: it is to knot them as a Borromean knot. These rounds-of-thread, what is it that distinguishes each

from the other? Absolutely nothing but the sense. And this is what gives us hope that we will take a step this year--hope in the short term, there is no other.

The hope is only for me in this business, but if I did not have the answer, as you know, I would not ask the question. Certainly, when you win something somewhere, it is forcibly at the expense of something else. And in other terms, if analytic discourse functions, we will certainly lose something elsewhere. But if all of the systems of nature arisen up until now are marked by a mental debility, what good is it?

I would like to return to the Borromean knot for an instant.

The Borromean knot consists strictly insofar as three is the minimum (fig. 1). If you unknot two rings in a chain, the others remain knotted. In a Borromean knot, if you break one of the three, all three are liberated. The remarkable thing, a fact of consistency, is that you can add an indefinite number of rings--it will always be true that, if you break one of the rings, all of the others, however numerous, will be free. See this figure, which at I have already sketched for you (fig. 2).

This property alone homogenizes all that there is of number after three. In the sequence of whole numbers, 1 and 2 are detached--something begins at three that includes all of the numbers, as far as they are numerable. This is what I put the accent on in last year's seminar.

That is not all. There is more than one way to Borromize a number of consistent torii. I have already indicated to you in its time that there are many probably, a quantity that there is no reason not to qualify as infinite, in the sense of the numerable, because you only have to make a loop in the following fashion (fig. 3). It is clear that you can make as many turns as you like to knot together two torii. There is no plausible limit to this arrangement. It will be no less true that the borromean knot, whichever, has for its inferior limit the number 3. The borromean knot will always carry the mark of the 3. On this basis, you have to ask yourself, to what register does the Borromean knot belong? Is it to the symbolic, the imaginary, or to the real?

I put forward beginning today what in what follows I will permit myself to demonstrate--the Borromean knot, insofar as it is supported by the number 3, is of the register of the imaginary. For the triad of the real, of the symbolic, and of the imaginary only exists by the addition of the imaginary as third. And it is by this that space, insofar as it is sensible, is found reduced to this minimum of three dimensions--that is, by its attachment to the symbolic and the real--where the imaginary is rooted.

Other dimensions are imaginable, and they have been imagined. It is for holding to the symbolic and the real that the imaginary reduces itself to what is not a maximum, imposed by the sack of the body, but, on the contrary, a minimum, which makes it so that we don't have a Borromean knot except beginning with 3.

Before leaving you, I am going to give you some punctuations of what we are going to have to demonstrate this year.

I would like to draw to your attention that it is not at all implied in the notion of the Borromean knot that it be a matter of rounds of thread or of torii. It is just as conceivable that, conformable to the intuition of Desargues in ordinary geometry, these rounds will open or, to say it simply, become cords, conceived of as rejoining themselves--why not?--at infinity. One can nonetheless define in this way what one calls a point.

In Euclidean geometry--it is indeed strange--the point has no dimension at all, contrary to the line, the surface, the solid, which respectively have one, two, three. You know the Euclidean definition of the point as the intersection between two straight lines. Isn't there, I will permit myself to say, something that sins (*pèche*) here? For what, finally, prevents (*empêche*) these two

lines from slipping over one another? Me, I would like, for defining a point, three straight lines disposed like this (fig. 4).

These straight lines are not here simple edges, strokes of a saw, shadows; they are effectively consistent straight lines, which realize the essence of the Borromean knot, which is to say, determining, gripping, a point as such. But it no longer suffices to speak here of a dimension which might be zero, which, in other words, does not *dimension*. We must invent something else.

Let us make the effort to say that these are not simply strokes, but three surfaces. You will obtain the said effect of a point in a fashion as valuable as with three cords.

With two infinite straight lines, take note of it, we can, by knotting a single round of thread, maintain the property of the Borromean knot (fig. 5). On this condition alone, that the two straight lines would not be able to overlap themselves between this knot and infinity except in a single fashion, that is, taking the straight line R, which must be pulled, if I can say so, forward, while line S can only be pulled behind. They must not be linked two-by-two. This is excluded by figure 6, where we see the blue infinite straight line pass beneath the one below and above the one above, to put it simply. On this condition, the Borromean knot functions.

Labeling as I do the blue round as real, the black as symbolic, and the red as imaginary is situated by a flattening out, in other words, by a reduction of the imaginary. The imaginary always tends to reduce itself to a flattening out. All figuration is founded on this. Of course, it is not because you will have wadded up these rounds of thread that they would be less Borromeanly knotted. In the real--which is to say, in regard to the fact that one of them unknotted liberates the other two--that changes nothing.

But how is it that we need this flattening out to be able to figure any topology whatsoever? This is very certainly a question that touches on that of the debility I have qualified as mental, inasmuch as this debility is rooted in the body itself.

I have written a here, at the central point. In the imaginary, but also in the symbolic, I inscribe the said function of sense. The two other functions to be defined in regard to the central point are two jouissances.

One of these two jouissances--but which?--we could define as *enjoyment of life (jouir de la vie)*. If the real is life--but is this so certain?--since this jouissance participates also in the imaginary of sense--we must situate it here. This is no less a point than the central point, the point called the object "a" since it conjoins on the occasion three surfaces which are also wedged together.

What then is the other mode of jouissance?

These are the points we will have to elaborate on, since they are also those that we interrogate.

Moreover, Freud, to return to him, has stated something triadic: inhibition, symptom, anxiety. Can we situate these three terms?

Inhibition, as he articulates it himself, is always an affair of the body, that is, of function. And to indicate it already on this schema, I will say that it is what somewhere stops interfering in a figuration of the hole of the symbolic. Is what an animal encounters, where there is a central inhibitor in the nervous system, of the same order as this imaginary arrest of functioning for the speakingbeing? How would it be conceivable that the putting in function, for the being presumed non-speaking, in the nevrax, in the central nervous system, of a positive inhibitory activity would be of the same order as what we know to be exterior to sense, exterior to the body? How, in other words, can we topologize this surface in way that, as I have said to you, it

is assuredly only on two surfaces that it is figured? How can inhibition have any business with this effect of arrest which results from its intrusion into the field of the symbolic? We will have to discuss this.

It is anxiety, insofar as it takes its departure from the real, that is going to give sense to the nature of the jouissance which is produced by the overlapping, in the Eulerian sense, of the real and of the symbolic.

Finally, to define the third term, it is as symptom that we identify what is produced in the field of the real. The notion of the symptom was introduced well before Freud by Marx, as the sign of what does not work in the real. If we are capable of operating on the symptom, it is because it is from the effect of the symbolic in the real.

Inasmuch as this knot, although only reflected in the imaginary, is indeed real, and encounters a certain number of inscriptions by which some surfaces respond, I can advance that the unconscious is what answers from (*répond de*) the symptom. Thenceforth, we shall see, it can be responsible for its reduction.

Marginal Note for Figure 3

It is obvious (!) that this kind of Borromean chain has an "end"--without which it is unknottable one by one (one-by-one round). For traction does not make a knot: dissociation of force and ex-sistence.

Thus there are two fashions to buckle it (in the "sense" of making it hold in a knot).

One is to close it in a circle. Which is true of all other Borromean chains. But this must be put aside for the moment.

The true Borromean chain remains open: cf. the three-linked chain.

There is nothing easier than to reproduce this three-linked chain with what we sketch here. Here is the flattening out that demonstrates it (fig. 7).

As soon as this chain is longer, if only by a single round, the round (F) that closes it here must double itself at the other end of the open Borromean "chain." It can also be filled in for in its function of One by what follows it: $1=2$. Whence the privilege of the three-linked chain, which, as we shall see, distinguishes it from the four-linked chain, where the order begins to be no longer any whatsoever. We shall dot the i's concerning this.

J.L.

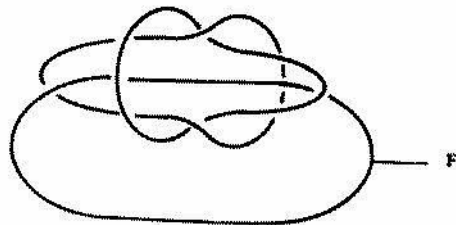


Fig. 7