

Seminar of January 21, 1975¹

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The question evoked at this time of my statement (*énoncé*) is the following, which responds to the notion of consistency inasmuch as this supposes the notion of a demonstration: what can be supposed a demonstration in the real?

Nothing supposes it other than the consistency of which the cord is here the support. The cord is the foundation of accord. And, to make a leap, I will say that the cord thus becomes the symptom of that by which the symbolic consists.

A formula that does not go badly with what language testifies to--*to wear down to the thread*² (*montrer la corde*), by which the wearing of the weave is designated. When the cord is shown, it is because the weave no longer is camouflaged in what one calls the fabric. *Fabric* (*Etoffe*) is of a permanent metaphoric usage--it is what, for a nothing, would give the image of a substance. The formula *to show the cord* tells us that there is no fabric that is not a weave.

I had prepared for you on a piece of paper a weave made wholly of Borromean knots with which one could cover the surface of the blackboard. It is easy to aperceive that one ends up with a hexagonal weave. Do not believe that that the sectioning of any one network of this weave will free anything whatsoever of what it is knotted to. If only one is cut, the six rounds in between, freed by this cut, will be held by the six-times-three--eighteen--other rounds to which they are knotted in a Borromean fashion.

If I have, just now, brought forth prematurely--it's the law of language: something must be brought forth before it can be commented on--the term symptom, it is because the symbolic is indeed what, for consistency, gives the simplest metaphor.

Not that the circular figure is not first a figure, which is to say, imaginable, since it is there itself that one has founded the notion of good form. This notion is indeed proper to make us enter into the real what there is of the imaginary. And I would say more--there is a kinship between good form and sense. The order of sense is naturally configured from what the form of the circle designates the consistency supposed to the symbolic. It is in accord with this image, in way that is in some manner primary. One had to await psychoanalysis to aperceive that it is tied to the order of the body in which the imaginary is suspended.

Who doubts--it is even on this thin thread that all that one calls philosophy has lived to this day--who doubts that there is another order than that in which the body is supposed to move? But, for all that, this order of the body does not explain much. Why does the eye see spherically, when it is incontestably perceived as a sphere, while the ear hears a sphere just as much, although it presents itself in the form of a snail's shell (*limaçon*)?

That these two forms so manifestly diffeomorphic, if I can express myself thusly, perceive spherically--is this fact clarified by taking things from the angle of my object *a*? One can say that the *petit a* has several forms; except it does not have them, forms, but is in a dominant fashion thinkable orally or shittily. The common factor of the *a* is its being tied to the orifices of the body. What therefore is the incidence of the fact that eye and ear are orifices on the fact that perception is for both spheroidal?

¹ This session is already available in a translation by Jacqueline Rose, as Chapter 7 of Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982), 162-171.

² Rose's translation of idiom translated more literally as "to show the cord."

Without the *petit a*, something is missing from any possible theory of reference, from any appearance of harmony. And why? Because the subject is only ever supposed. Its condition is of only being supposable. If it knows (*connait*) something, it is only from being itself a subject caused by an object that is not what it knows--what it imagines itself to know. The object that causes it is not the other of knowledge (*connaissance*). The object strikes it through, this other. The other is thus the Other, which I write with the big O (*le grand A*).

The Other is thus a matrix with a double entry. The *petit a* constitutes one of these entries. And the other? What are we going to say of it? Is it the One of the signifier?

This is at least thinkable, since it is what permitted me one day to couple the One with my *petit a*. On this occasion, I had utilized the golden number to introduce what I was led to by experience: that between this One and the *petit a*, there is no rationally determinable rapport. Never is there any graspable proportion between the One and the *a*; in other words, there is no reason that the overlapping (*recouvrement*)³ of the one by the other might end. The difference will be as little as one might figure it, there will even be a limit there, but at the interior of this limit, there will never be any conjunction, any copulation whatsoever of the One with the *a*.

Is this to say that the One of sense has something to do with the matrix that strikes the Other through with its double entry? No, for the One of sense is not to be confused with what makes the one of the signifier.

The One of sense is being, the being specified by the unconscious inasmuch as it ex-sists, as it ex-sists to the body at least; for if there is something striking, it is that it ex-sists in discord. There is nothing in the unconscious that makes an accord with the body. The unconscious is discordant. The unconscious is what, by speaking, determines the subject as being, a being to be struck through with this metonymy with which I support desire as for all impossible ever to say as such.

If I say that an *a* is what causes desire, this means that it is not its object. It is not its complement, direct or indirect, but only this cause that--to play on the word as I did in my first Rome Discourse--this cause that chatters on (*cause toujours*).

The subject is caused by an object, which is only notable from a writing, by which a step is made in the theory.

What is irreducible in that it is not an effect of language. The effect of language is the patheme, the passion of the body. But from language inasmuch as it has no effect is inscribable this radical abstraction which is the object that I write with the figure of writing *a*, and of which nothing is thinkable--except that all that is a subject, a thought subject, which one imagines to be a being, is determined by it.

The One of sense has little to do with this--it is only an effect of the One of a signifier, which in fact only operates in being able to be employed to designate no matter what signified.

What will we say of the imaginary and the real here mingled in the One of the signifier? What are we to say of their quality, whether of what Charles Sanders Peirce calls *firstness*, or of what distinguishes them as different? How are we to distinguish (*r partir*) on this occasion something like life or death? Who knows where to situate them? --since the One of a signifier chatters (*cause*) on both the one and the other slopes? Thus one would be wrong to believe that it is the imaginary that is the mortal, and the real the living.

Only the ordinary usage of the signifier can be called arbitrary. But where does this arbitrary come from, if not from a structured discourse?

³ See Rose's more explanatory translation (164). Here I am taking *recouvrement* (covering over, recovery, recuperation, overlap) to refer to an overlapping that always leaves a remainder [tr].

Am I here evoking the title of a revue, which appeared at Vincennes under my auspices, *ORNICAR*?⁴ Is this not an example of what the signifier determines? Here, the fact of being ungrammatical would only figure a category of grammar, but this is how it demonstrates configuration as such; which, from the Icarian perspective, only decorates. Language is only a decoration. There is only rhetoric, as Descartes underscores in his tenth rule. Dialectic is only supposable from usage in respect to an ordinary pathematically ordered, which is to say, to a discourse, which does not associate the phoneme, even understood in the broad sense, but the subject determined by being, which is to say desire.

What is the affect of ex-sisting? / . . /. What, of the unconscious, makes ex-sistence? This is what I underscore with the support of the symptom.

I say *the function* of the symptom, a function to be understood as the *f* in a mathematical formulation, *f*(*x*). And what is the *x*? It is what, of the unconscious, can be translated by a letter, inasmuch as it is only in the letter that the identity of self to self is isolated from any quality.

From the unconscious any One, inasmuch as it sus-tains the signifier by which the unconscious consists, is susceptible of being written with a letter. No doubt there must be a convention. But the strange thing is that the symptom operates even this wildly. What does not cease to write itself in the symptom arises from there.

Not long ago, someone I listened to in my practice--and nothing that I say to you comes from anywhere else, which is what creates the difficulty--someone articulated something to me, comparing the symptom to points of suspension [ellipsis]. The important thing here is the reference to writing to situate the repetition of the symptom, as it presents itself in my practice.

That the term emerged from elsewhere, from the symptom as Marx defined it in the social, takes away nothing of the well-foundedness of its use, if I may say so, in the private. That the symptom in the social is defined by folly (*la déraison*) does not prevent it from, for each of us, being signaled by all sorts of rationalizations. Every rationalization is a particular rational fact; which is to say, it does not come from an exception, but from no matter whom.

No matter who must be able to be an exception for the function of the exception to become a model, but the reverse is not true--it is not that no matter who can drag in the exception for it, based on this fact, to constitute a model. That is what usually happens (*l' état ordinaire*)--no matter who attains to the function of exception that the father has, one knows with what result: in most cases, that of his *verwerfung* by the filiation he engenders, with the psychotic result I denounce.

A father only has a right to respect, if not to love, if said love, said respect, is--you are not going to believe your ears--*père-versely* oriented; which is to say, makes of a woman an object *a* that causes his desire.

But what a woman *a-ccomodates* (*a-cueille*) of it thus has nothing to do with the question. She is occupied with other objects *a*, her children, for whom the father nonetheless intervenes--exceptionally, in the best case--to maintain repression, in the happy *mi-deum*,⁵ the version proper to him of his *père-version*. *Père-version*, the only guarantee of his function as father, which is the function of a symptom, as I have written it.

It suffices that he be a model of the function. That's what the father must be, inasmuch as he can only be an exception.

⁴ See Rose, 170n2.

⁵ Rose's translation of *le juste mi-dieu*. See Rose, 171n4.

He can only be a model of the function in realizing the type. It little matters if has symptoms if adds to them that of the paternal *père-version*, which is to say that its cause is a woman, whom he has acquired to make children for him, and that, whether he wants to or not, he takes paternal care of these children.

Normality is not the paternal virtue *par excellence*, but only the happy *mi-deum*, just said; that is, the right not-said (*non-dit*). Naturally, on the condition that it is not too obvious, this not-said; which is to say that one does not see right away what is in question in what he does not say --which is rare.

It is rare that it succeeds, this happy *mi-deum*. This will renew the subject, when I have time to take it up with you again. But I have already said it in passing in an article on Schreber--there is nothing worse than a father who proffers the law on everything (*sur tout*)--No father educator above all (*surtout*), but rather in the background (*en retrait sur*) of all the schoolmasters.

I have been led to speak to you of *a* woman, since I have told you that *the* woman does not exist.

The woman is perfectly delineable, since she is all the women, as one says. But if the women are not all? Let us say that the woman is all the women, but then, this is also an empty set. Is not the value of set theory that it puts a little seriousness in the usage of the term "all"?

The question of *a* woman is only posed from the Other; which is to say, from that for which there is a definable set, definable by what I have inscribed on the board, Φ , the phallus.

The phallus; this is not the phallic jouissance. Is it therefore the jouissance without the organ or the organ without the jouissance? It is in this form that I interrogate you to give sense--alas!--to this figure. And I will jump ahead--for whoever is encumbered by the phallus, what is a woman?

She is a symptom.

She is a symptom, and this is seen from the structure that I am in the process of explaining to you--to wit, that there is no jouissance of the Other as such, that there is no guarantee, encounterable in the jouissance of the body of the Other, which might make enjoying (*jouir de*) the Other exist. A manifest example of the hole, of what is only supported by the object *a*--but always by a misdeal, by confusion.

A woman, in fact, is no more than a man an object *a*--she has her own, I have just said, with which she is occupied, and they have nothing to do with that by which she is supported in whatever desire. To make her a symptom, this A-woman, is to say that the phallic jouissance is also her affair, contrary to what one hears.

The woman has to undergo neither more nor less castration than the man. In regard to what is at issue in her function as symptom, she is altogether at same point as her man. Still, we must articulate what corresponds for her to this ex-sistence of a real that is the phallus of just now, over which I have left your tongues hanging. It has nothing to do with the little gadget of which Freud speaks.

The points of suspension of the symptom are in fact, if I may say so, interrogative points [question marks]--in the non-rapport. This is what justifies the definition I give you, that what constitutes the symptom, this something that smooches with the unconscious, is that one believes in it.

There is so little sexual rapport that I recommend that you read a very beautiful novel, *Ondine*. You will see that a woman in the life of a man is something in which he believes. He

believes that there is one, sometimes two or three, which is indeed the interesting thing--he cannot believe in only one; he believes in a type, in the genre of sylphs or ondines.

What is it to believe in sylphs or ondines? I remind you that one says "to believe in" (*croire á*), and that the French language even adds this reinforcement: *croire y*, believe there (*lá*).

Y croire? What does this mean? If not to believe in beings inasmuch as they can say something. I ask you to find an exception to this definition. Were it a matter of beings that could not say anything, that could not enounce what could be distinguished as truth and lie, believing in them would mean nothing. This is to say the fragility of this *croire y*, to which the fact of the non-rapport is manifestly reduced, which is not to be doubted, seeing how it is confirmed everywhere. Whoever presents us with a symptom believes in it (*y croit*).

If he asks our aid, our help, it is because he believes that the symptom is capable of saying something, and that it only has to be deciphered. It is even the same with a woman, except that it happens that one believes that she effectively says something. There is what pushes in the cork: in believing in her, one believes her. One believes what she says. This is what is called love.

And this is how, on occasion, I have qualified the feeling (*sentiment*) of the comic--it is the well-known comic, the comic of psychosis. That's why one says currently that love is a madness.

However, the difference is manifest between believing in it, in the symptom, and believing it. This is what makes the difference between neurosis and psychosis. In psychosis, the subject not only believes in the voices, but he believes them. It is all there, in this limit.

Believing her, a woman, is, thank God, a widespread state--this gives us some company; one is not all alone, and in that love is precious. It is rarely realized, as everyone knows, and only lasts for a time. For of what is it a question in love, if not to fracture this wall where one can only raise a knot (*bosse*) on one's forehead, since there is no sexual rapport?

Love is no doubt classified in a certain number of forms that Stendhal has laid out for us quite well: *love-esteem*, which is not at all compatible with *love-passion*, nor with *love-taste*--but the major love is that which is founded on this: one believes her.

One believes her because one has never found proofs that she is not absolutely authentic. But one is blinded there. This "believe her" would serve as the cork to the "believe in her"--a thing that can be very seriously put in question. Believing that there is One, God know where that will lead you--it will lead you as far as to believe there is a *The*, a fallacious belief. No one says *the* sylph or *the* ondine. There is an ondine, there is a sylph, there is a spirit, there are some spirits for certain, but all that only ever makes a plural.

From then on it is a matter of knowing if the fact that for believing *in* her, there is no better means than believing *her*, is wholly a necessity.

I have introduced today, in relation to the story of some points of suspension, that a woman is a symptom. That adheres so well to practice that, as no one has said it up to now, I have believed it my duty to do so.