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LACAN: THE TOPOLOGICAL TURN

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Sussex
September 2015

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Abbreviations

Lacan's published seminars are referenced by number followed by page number (e.g. SII: 67) and his unpublished seminars are referenced by number followed by the date of a particular session (e.g. SXXV: 9/5/78). The standard edition of Freud's work is referenced by volume number followed by page number (e.g. SE II: 12).

Various other works by Lacan are abbreviated as follows:

E: *Écrits*

ETD: '*L'étourdit*'

L: 'Lituraterre'

R: 'Radiophonie'

T: *Television/ A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*

Summary

This thesis introduces and explores Jacques Lacan's controversial topologisation of psychoanalysis and attempts to establish whether or not it was necessary, successful or important by providing readings of texts that have been largely ignored by the Anglo-American reception of Lacan (such as '*L'étourdit*' and *Seminar XXII*). In Part I, Lacan's efforts to present the topological architecture of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary are introduced as inextricably linked with less hermetic topics such as his concerns regarding the future of (institutional) psychoanalysis and his own legacy. Two particular figures (the infinite straight line and the knot) are looked at as exemplifying some of the theoretical impasses that Lacan hoped the writing of topological structure would formalise rather than resolve. Part II explains the purpose of each of the figures of Lacan's 'surface' topology (the Möbius strip, the torus and the cross-cap). In Part III, his 'topological turn' is given context by being examined alongside some of the more well-known and well-regarded elements of the Lacanian *bricolage* such as linguistics and logic. The role topology played in the 'return to Freud' is also examined and some key principles of topological reading and interpretation are established. The question of how the shift from an unconscious 'structured like a language' to an unconscious that is structured topologically (and thus not entirely reducible to linguistic mechanisms) might affect psychoanalytic literary criticism is addressed in Part IV. The thesis concludes in Part V by returning to some of the issues and questions raised in Part I, concentrating particularly on the validity and consequences of Lacan's provocative contention that, with the Borromean knot, he produced writings that 'support a real.' We will also see how it is that with these nodal writings Lacan finally distinguished psychoanalysis from science, philosophy and religion.

1. Introduction: Dissolution and *Déblayage*

1.1. *Oedipus at Colonus*, Lacan at Caracas

Attending an ‘International Encounter of the Freudian Field’ in 1982, Patrick Colm Hogan was privy to a ‘striking case’ (1990: xiv). This was not a matter of bumping into an exemplary neurotic or psychotic in the foyer, but of listening to the case presentations themselves, some of which had begun to resemble the performance of a collective delirium that would give any reasonable onlooker ample cause to assume that the lunatics were now running the asylum:

The speaker discussed for several minutes the history of a particular case. He then cited a very abstract, very incomprehensible sentence from Lacan, dealing with knots. Following this he flashed on the overhead projector a convulsion of lines and arrows, announcing, “This was the symptom.” He then concluded that, in the most recent session, and following Lacan’s analysis of knots, he decided to intervene and ask a question after several days of silence. “And the result was this” – more arrows and overlapping curves flashed on the board. “Thank you,” applause.

It is, of course, possible that in this particular case there was, indeed, *a connection between the quote, the diagrams, and the intervention*, poorly explicated by the speaker, or poorly understood by the auditor. However, in this one conference alone there were many, many cases like this, and very few, we think, were open to *coherent reconstrual*. (ibid)¹

The very idea that the presentation of a clinical construal should itself require, let alone inhibit, a further ‘reconstrual’ in order for some measure of coherence to be attained, is unlikely to persuade those critical or ambivalent toward Lacanian psychoanalysis to mark on their calendars the dates of any future International Encounters. Of course, there is a distinguished precedent for the fulfilling of just such an operation of reconstrual: Freud’s case studies have proved a seemingly inexhaustible support for a vast industry of interpretation. However, it has undoubtedly been the case that the best work produced in this field has very often not been in establishing or reconfirming a synthesized *coherence* in Freud’s work, – indeed, it was a principled opposition to precisely this transformation of the Freudian text into uncritically accepted *doxa* that originally gave the Lacanian project its purpose – but in isolating pockets of *incoherence*, the recognition of which compels the renewal of theory and further such readings.

¹Unless otherwise stated, all italics are my own.

There is a deceptive simplicity to Freud's work and an easy-going clarity that makes him both a pleasure to read and vulnerable to over-hasty comprehension. It is, therefore, tempting to straightforwardly suggest that Lacan, in seeking to dodge the fate suffered by Freud at the hands of lazy readers, is simply the stylistic reverse of Freud. We might cite as evidence the former's infamous opening gambit of his appearance on French television in 1973. A chance, one might think, to coherently present the case for psychoanalysis and charm untapped human reserves. Lacan, however, was in no mood to do any such thing:

I always speak the truth. Not the whole [*pas toute*] truth, because there's no way, to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real.

I will confess then to having tried to respond to the present comedy and it was good only for the wastebasket.

A failure then, but thereby, actually, a success when compared... with an aberration... [which] consists in this idea of speaking so as to be understood by idiots. (T: 3)

For Lacan, the distinction between *the* truth and the *whole* truth is fundamental to psychoanalytic praxis. The subject always speaks the truth but it is a truth that announces itself in bits and pieces: homophonic and grammatical slips provide the material for an analysis that gradually circumscribes the subject's real – the illegible, traumatic cause of the subject's repetitious blunders. A successful analysis requires numerous such failures of intentional meaning and communication: 'I am working in the impossible to say' (SXXV: 20/12/77). The appeal to *coherence* – to, that is, the possibility of construing a *whole* truth, of constructing an exhaustive narrative that says it *all* – can only serve to inhibit this uncomfortable process of 'working-through.' The subject's inadvertent *Witz* forms a comedy of errors – a jumbling of letters that (to cite a Joycean pun of which Lacan was particularly fond), rather than being the atomic building blocks of a totalised truth, amount to little more than litter – to which Lacan's response was not to produce a coherent theoretical construal but to produce his own litter for '*poubellication*.'

Given the suspicion with which he regarded clarity and mass appeal, Lacan would doubtless have appreciated the example given by Judith Butler in defence of her own unforgiving style. Nixon, addressing television audiences across America as the Watergate scandal percolated in the years before and after Lacan's own television appearance, and taking advantage of the popular misconception that truth and clarity are

equivalent, would often preface lies by stating “let me make one thing perfectly clear.” ‘What’, asks Butler, ‘does “transparency” keep obscure?’ (2007: xx) What is obscured when one is ‘understood by idiots’? It’s worth noting that Lacan takes things one step further: Nixon could not have told the *whole* truth even if he wanted to.

Nonetheless, as Malcolm Bowie (1991: 12-13) points out, things are not quite as simple as an opposition between coherent Freud and incoherent Lacan would suggest:

[W]here Freud cultivates clarity in the presentation of his ideas, Lacan cultivates obscurity. But where Freud employs an elaborate rhetoric of self-doubt in order not to seem too clear too quickly, Lacan, who runs the risk of not seeming clear at all, often contrives to suggest that a supreme obviousness is at work beneath the busy textures of his writing.

It was surely this unlikely mixture of illegibility and a claim to clarity that Hogan found so repellent. An ‘incomprehensible sentence from Lacan’ is succeeded by audaciously definitive declarations (“This was the symptom... [a]nd the result was this”) whilst in the background the ‘textures of writing’ form a remarkably ‘busy’ and dense weave; a ‘convulsion’ of arrows, curves and knots. They are this recounted scene’s *navel*; both an unintelligible obscurity and an integral pivot to which the ‘quote’ refers, the ‘diagrams’ present and the ‘intervention’ acts upon. If the connection between these three elements of the case presentation remains obscure, it is probably because the ‘analysis of knots’ that binds them has occurred off-stage.

This is perhaps the most insistent and difficult question that arises for a reader of Lacan’s later seminars: just what is the connection between the utterances about knots, the images of knots and the psychoanalytic act? How are theory and practice operative here?

Having first appeared in *Seminar XIX* (1971-1972), the Borromean knot represented the final phase of Lacan’s effort to produce a psychoanalytic topology – a project that explicitly began in 1953 with his first reference to a torus or ‘ring’ which was accompanied by the provocative contention that such a reference constituted ‘*more than a metaphor* – it manifests a *structure*’ (E: 263). A non-metaphorical access to structure: the appeal of topology hinged on the possibility of this being realised. It would take almost two decades for three tori or ‘rings of string’ to be organized into a Borromean knot – the fundamental property of which is that since no two of its rings are directly linked it requires a third to hang together. Now, whilst this might be a diverting *amusement* which we might derive a little pleasure from drawing or constructing for

ourselves, it hardly seems sufficiently substantial to support the years of obsessive study and explication devoted to it by Lacan and a small band of mathematicians. And as for the suggestion that this figure is not metaphorical or that it has an important contribution to make to psychoanalytic praxis – well, this is surely the height of ridiculousness.

For many of Lacan's readers, his use of topology is simply a step too far. David Metzger (2004: 134) perfectly captures the pragmatic mindset of those who 'suggest that we can do without some such thing as a Lacanian topology. "Remember the phallus?" they tell us. "We had a difficult enough time explaining that away. Why bother talking about something that is sure to discourage people from reading (about) this important thinker?"' Indeed, why bother? It is a reputation from which Lacan's topologisation of psychoanalysis has never quite managed to extricate itself: the impression of utter superfluity, an unnecessary extra layer of self-indulgent difficulty that has come to represent the worst excesses of Lacanian obscurity. And yet, there is, throughout Lacan's work, the frequently asserted declaration of topology's non-trivial and self-evident relevance to psychoanalysis which people find as, if not more, off-putting. As Jacques-Alain Miller (2004: 35) puts it, straying deliberately close to a Kantian term certain to raise the hackles of any good post-structuralist, '[w]e represent this topology, we manipulate it spatially; sometimes Lacan enhances its value to the point of showing an enjambment of knots and saying: "*This is the thing itself.*" For many, this seemed excessive.' Lacan's topology manages to alienate both mathematicians and literary critics: it is both too metaphorical and not metaphorical enough.

It is the purpose of this study to examine why we should bother with Lacan's topology. Firstly, we must approach the question that Lacan was asking himself. In other words, to what question is topology the answer? Why was topology necessary? For those of us who are not analysts, does topology retain any relevance? Does topology operate in concert with Lacan's other references such as linguistics, myth and literature – so often the gateways into Lacan's work for non-analysts – or does it supplant them?

If I refer to Lacan's topological aesthetics, this is something of an artifice on my part: Lacan never directly used such an expression despite often comparing Kant's transcendental aesthetics with his own topological account of a symptom-addled subjectivity founded by the contingent materiality of the signifier. A general artifice of reconstruction or reconstrual has had to be performed since topology was not, for

Lacan, a topic, theme or concept; he did not produce a seminar or *écrit* ‘on’ topology in the same way that he produced a seminar on ethics or an *écrit* on Gide. It is instead an ever-present support, knotting itself into the busy textures of his discourse. Whilst I have imposed a certain measure of coherence by weaving together Lacan’s scattered patches with some red threads, this coherence only goes so far: topology’s primary appeal lay in its formalisation of incoherence; its presentation of logical impasses and structural paradoxes.

Interestingly, Hogan follows his account of this ‘*striking* case’ by observing that ‘[o]f course, there were many *clear* and illuminating presentations also, some *strikingly* so, such as that of Jacques-Alain Miller’ (1990: xiv). That Hogan is *doubly* struck suggests that the two presentations occupied opposite ends of a stylistic spectrum. Whilst we will reserve a more thorough examination of Miller’s contribution to the ‘Freudian Field’ for later, it’s worth briefly noting the widely accepted assessment, proffered by Élisabeth Roudinesco, that ‘Miller’s theoretical reduction... made it possible to show a broad public that a body of work hitherto regarded as hermetic and ambiguous was really quite coherent and rigorous’ (1997: 309). The inferred mutuality between these last two terms warrants further attention since if, for Lacan, the cultivation of *rigor* in psychoanalysis was necessitated by the risk of this discipline becoming a barely credible voodoo, this same rigor did not result in interpretations that produced coherent histories belonging to newly coherent subjects. It was simply a matter of more rigorously ‘hold[ing] on to the real’. As Lacan often reminded his audience, a Borromean knot only holds together as a whole by virtue of the fact that the rings have holes. He made no secret of the fact that his experimentation with knots would not herald a new dawn of psychoanalytically ensured sanity: ‘I am psychotic simply because I have always tried to be rigorous’ (1975d: 2).

Roudinesco provides a fascinating account of the mania that consumed Lacan and his mathematician friends, characterising their collective effort as a ‘search for the absolute’, in reference to Balzac’s *La Recherche de l’Absolu* – the tale of a man (Balthazar Claës) who haemorrhages a substantial fortune and spurns his family during the course of an obsessive hunt for the alchemical absolute. If, however, this particularly wretched chapter in Balzac’s vast *Comédie humaine* testifies to the folly of utterly committing oneself to a realisation of the desire for knowledge in the form of the whole truth, Lacan was keen to impress upon his readers and listeners – who had either

reverentially, or, in the case of Derrida, critically, regarded him as the ‘purveyor of truth’ – that his ‘respon[se] to the present comedy’ that is the human condition would not be a curative panacea.

As one of Lacan’s fellow inhabitants of what Roudinesco refers to as the ‘planet Borromeo’, the topologist Pierre Soury provides an indispensable description of what they were up to: ‘What was our point of departure?... [T]here was the definition of a *casse-tête* [puzzle]... A *casse-tête* is a simple and unforeseen problem with a solution that’s *not easily repeatable, conscious, transmissible, or verifiable*’ (quoted in Roudinesco 1997: 366). If, as we noted above, the results of fiddling about with rings of string can resemble little more than tricks deployed to momentarily enchant a child, we risk badly underestimating what was at stake in such research. The passage from problem to solution was not a passage from incoherence to coherence; an *effective* practice that was to do justice to ‘the great *casse-tête*’, ‘the riddle of the unconscious’ (Roudinesco, 1997: 366-367), might not necessarily be repeatable, reducible to conscious knowledge or teachable. And yet, it cannot be a form of magic; it must be *rigorous*. The results of Lacan’s lifelong grapple with this double-bind are among his most significant contributions to psychoanalytic thought.

In an illuminating dialogue with Alain Badiou, Roudinesco (2014: 36) suggests an alternative literary doppelganger for Lacan: *Oedipus at Colonus*. Towards the end of his life Lacan was indeed enacting an extraordinary dissolution: disbanding his school and the theoretical foundations of his thought as his physical incapacity grew increasingly pronounced and the periods of muteness became more prolonged. If the union of these two literary figures seems incongruous – Claës suffers because he does not know enough, Oedipus suffers because he knows too much – and yet oddly appropriate, this says much about the difficulty of assessing the significance of this last phase of Lacan’s thought in terms of its contribution to knowledge. What does Lacan know? It is a question we ask the unconscious. As Badiou notes (2014: 53-55), in an elegant passage worth quoting at length, the ‘final Lacan’ – his ‘solution’ to the ‘great *casse-tête*’ – has himself become something of a *casse-tête*:

[Lacan] impose[d] on whoever listen[ed] to him this terminal, final unravelling. This posture is, to be sure, in certain ways obscure, spectral. But it reveals and condenses the tragedy itself of the subject. Not giving up on your desire is also being able, and knowing how, to undo what you believe you have done and tied together in a compact way. The final Lacan is obviously difficult at first, but he takes on in this way an eminence, an exceptional stature.

This is one of the reasons why his death struck me as a completely particular event. That masters will die one day, we all know. However, the death of Lacan was cloaked in a singular aura because it echoed his own work. His death is modelled after his late thought, which was placed under the sign of, precisely, Oedipus at Colonus, this figure of an old man who dies and leaves to all the world the insoluble enigma of his death. Lacan, if I may say so, succeeded in pulling this off: the muteness of his last years and his death form an integral part of his enigmatic legacy. Twenty years later, Lacan's mystery is still there. The relation to his work cannot be stabilized, even if you recognize him as a master. We will never finish interrogating this man and his thought. What was it about really, at bottom? Psychoanalysis? Obviously. Philosophy? Yes, in a certain sense. Contemporary writing, the adventure of language? Of course. The drama of subjectivity? That too. And what else? Is there some unfathomable remainder? Lacan was, is, and will always be an enigma, an author who is impossible to classify and to completely decipher.

... Everyone knows [Wittgenstein's] famous aphorism that closes the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." If the real is unsymbolizable, it is ultimately that about which one cannot speak; therefore, one must be silent. But remaining silent always implies as well, and this is still Wittgenstein's perspective, the duty to indicate, to point. You must show that about which you must remain silent. I imagine the late Lacan as someone who continues to point his finger at an unsayable real. Except that, in the end, *we can no longer know what this gesture indicates and truly implies*. It is left to us as an enigma, like death itself.

There is the real 'of' Lacan – the (for want of a better word) concept that we associate with Lacan – and then there is the real *of* Lacan, his 'unfathomable remainder'; the impossibility of saying what his topological presentation of the real 'indicates and truly implies.'

The necessity to be silent with regards to 'the real' as that which 'forecloses meaning' was clearly troubling Lacan as he began the eighth session of *Seminar XXIII*: 'my only excuse for telling you something today is that it is going to be *meaningful*. In exchange for this I will not achieve what I want. What I want is to give you *a bit of real*' (SXXIII: 16/3/76). If this was Lacan's desire, which he refused to give up on, it was not an epistemological desire in the traditional sense – it was not the desire for a *possibility*; the possibility of '[s]aying it all', of realising the 'whole truth' or the clarity of unequivocal meaning – but a desire or 'duty to indicate' the *impossibility* of such desire with the knot. In tune with the non-linear temporality of desire, Lacan closed the session with a critical glance behind himself and an anxious look ahead:

Will I ever be able to tell you – this must not only be a dream – what would be called a bit of real?... For the moment, it could be said that Freud himself produced only things that were *meaningful*, and that this deprives me of all hope. It is not, for

all that, a reason not that I should just hope to do it, but that I should not *really* [réellement] achieve it one day. (SXXIII: 16/3/76)

Lacan had argued in *Seminar XVII* that the Oedipus complex – the product of Freud's attempt to explain the enigma of sexuality through recourse to the universal truth of mythic meaning – was 'Freud's *dream*' (SXVII: 117). Dreams stage an encounter with the real, but it is always a missed encounter; such is the anxiety provoked in the subject by the oblique glimpse at the real of his desire that the dream affords, the subject awakens so that he might continue to dream:

No praxis is more orientated towards that which, at the heart of experience, is the kernel of the real than psychoanalysis. Where do we meet this real? For what we have in the discovery of psychoanalysis is an encounter, an essential encounter – an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us. (SXI: 53)

Freud had produced something meaningful: with the Oedipus complex, desire had been given *meaning* – a natural path of development and resolution in the sexual relation. Freud had retreated from the real and continued to dream. This is why a large part of this study will be given up to a reading of Lacan's return to Freud – his effort to shift the foundation of psychoanalytic praxis 'from myth to structure' and, ultimately, to topological knots. Whilst Roudinesco's effort to mythologise Lacan, to see in him the shuffling gait of an aged Oedipus or the mad ambition of a deranged alchemist, to say that we have seen his like before, – to declare, as Freud did, that we can understand *Hamlet* and, indeed, every other troubled soul, because we have seen *Oedipus Rex* – is certainly a start, her reluctance to regard his late encounter with 'the great *casse-tête*' as anything other than a case study in melancholic senility or a vainglorious search for the absolute, threatens to reverse the passage 'from myth to structure' to which Lacan devoted himself, thus necessitating a return to the return to Freud.

Lacan was particularly keen to avoid the mortification undergone by Freudian thought at the hands of the psychoanalytic church. Hence his climactic unravelling: 'The problem is revealed as such, at having a solution: which is a *dis* – a dissolution... That it be enough for one to go away for all to be free is, according to my Borromean knot, true of each, but must be so of myself in my *École*' (T: 129). Those analysts that listened to Lacan were given 'a bit of real' by being taken to the point of realising, as one does at the end of analysis, that 'the Other' – the monolithic socio-symbolic network of law and language that is supposed, by subjects, to know the *solution*; a solution that is

repeatable, conscious, transmissible and verifiable – ‘is missing’ (T: 134). It is apt, then, that we find, in the margins of the lines with which Lacan began his television appearance, the matheme $S(A)$: the signifier (S) of the barred (/) *Autre* (A). It is by failing to say the ‘whole truth’ that one ‘holds onto the real’ and effects a (dis)solution. The demotion of universal predicates (guarantors of a coherent Other) such as the Oedipus complex and the ‘Name-of-the-Father’ to the status of dreams and fragile sutures constituted important theoretical shifts that Lacan, with this unravelling, came to *enact*. We are left with the real *of* Lacan, the enigma of his death.

For Lacan, every drive is a death-drive insofar as the subject is driven to *re-find* the lost object that would render this very drive obsolete. However, the drive operates on a false premise; the object that would restore the subject to a prelapsarian state of wholeness never existed in the first place: it cannot be re-found because it was never actually found(ed):

The one advantage of this *retrouver* is to highlight my point: that no progress is known, that we turn in circles. But there is perhaps another explanation, that there is no progress but marked by death... The death-drive is the real insofar as it can only be thought of as impossible – that is to say, that every time it peeps round the corner it is unthinkable. We cannot hope to approach that impossibility, because it is unthinkable; it is death, of which the foundation of the real is that it cannot be thought. (SXXIII: 16/3/76)

As Badiou’s eulogy suggests, Lacan engineered a way out of this impasse – that is, the impasse of futility that any notion of progress conceived of in terms of a restoration of totality (i.e. death *qua* satisfaction) will invariably abut upon – with the event of dissolution. What ‘this gesture indicates and truly implies’ we cannot say: ‘It is left to us as an enigma, like death itself.’ When Lacan states that the real ‘forecloses meaning [*sens*]’, we might also be mindful of an alternative translation of *sens* as *direction*: the drive is a ‘*dérive* [drift]’, having no *natural*, fixed or actual object(ive) (i.e. the realisation of the sexual relation or the formation of unified psychoanalytic institution that knows and transmits the whole truth) (SXXIII: 16/3/76). ‘[T]here is no progress’ for Oedipus and Lacan, these weary drifters, ‘but marked by death.’

According to Roudinesco, this act, for all its earnest authenticity, constituted not just a dereliction of theory but also a dereliction of duty which left the future of Lacanian psychoanalysis in a perilous state:

Unlike Freud, Lacan leaves nothing as a legacy. He undoes what he built by knitting his knots and his pieces of string. And this is why Lacan's heritage is in danger, more so than that of Freud: the psychoanalysts of the first Lacanian circle received nothing as a legacy, they received the dissolution... And what is more, he never stopped advocating "the work of dissolution," as if it were a major concept. One has the impression that it is necessary to grasp Lacan's work in a new way, outside the field of psychoanalysis: the only way to make it live. (2014: 60)

It's worth remembering that Freud's 'heritage' was endangered precisely because he had left a legacy of *sens*; his successors inherited a direction, an institution and a body of knowledge that they set about embalming. Lacan remained mindful of 'the effect of a consolidated group, at the expense of the discursive effect expected from an experiment [*l'expérience*], when it is Freudian. One knows what price was paid for Freud's having permitted the psychoanalytic group to win out over discourse, becoming a Church' (T: 130). It is a principle to which we will often return throughout this study: the *efficacy* of psychoanalysis is dramatically diminished when the *experiment* is advanced in accordance with an inflexibly adhered to knowledge that serves as a predictive, prescriptive template for interpretation. In this state, psychoanalysis lives on but it is really more of a living death, a ghoulish preservation. The 'group' is an *All*; it unifies its individual components, putting them to the service of a uniform direction which is then universalised. Psychoanalysis, which cannot be effective unless the singularity of the patient's contingent history is considered as irreducible to any *sens*, can only 'turn in circles', effecting no progress, whilst it remains the preserve of the group: 'I am within the work of the unconscious. What it shows me is that no truth responds to malaise other than one *particular* to each of those whom I call *parlêtres* [speaking-beings]' (T: 133): 'That is why I am dissolving' (T: 130).

And yet... '[i]n other words, I persevere' (T: 130). If Lacan's experimental school (the *École freudienne de Paris*) had itself ceased to serve 'the discursive effect expected from an experiment' – if, that is, the effect of the *École* had become '*l'effet de colle*', restricting praxis with the group's binding glue (SXXVII: 11/3/80) – then a 'compensatory counter-experiment' is called for (T: 130). As an integral part of the 'counter-experiment' (the *École de la Cause freudienne*), the cartel (a provisional study group comprised of four people and a 'plus-one,' dedicated to the reading of a work or examination of a concept) would avert the glue effect of organisational uniformity provided it was disbanded within two years, keeping the work of dissolution and renewal going: 'there is no progress but marked by death...' Excepting a fidelity to the

Freudian experiment, no standardisation was to be imposed on the cartels and ‘cartelisands’: ‘I am not going to make a totality out of them. No whole’ (T: 133). However, this ‘work of dissolution’ advocated as a ‘major concept’ ‘is not’, argues Roudinesco, ‘a testament’ (2014: 60). Lacan, I think, would not disagree, but this is entirely the point: psychoanalysis is a dynamic activity, not a collection of scriptural commandments bequeathed by forefathers.

If the knot of the EFP had been unravelled, it is apt, then, that the knot should appear again, retied, in Lacan’s ‘Overture to the First International Encounter of the Freudian Field.’ At this first annual gathering of the ECF, Lacan helpfully offered to ‘summarise’ ‘the debate I’ve been keeping up with Freud’:

My three are not the same as his [id, superego and ego]. My three are the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. I came to situate them by means of a topology... The Borromean knot...

I gave [*donné*] that to my pupils. I gave it them so that they might find their way in their practice. But do they find their way any better than with the topography Freud *passed down* [*léguée*] to his? (2011: 18)

Whilst we will reserve a more sustained examination of the merits of topology and the deficiencies of (Freudian) topography for later, it’s worth taking careful note of Lacan’s language. Freud’s knowledge (of which the static topography is a pertinent representative) is bequeathed (*‘léguée’*) as part of a scriptural will or legacy guaranteed by the Other. A *gift* is something quite different; it has no legal, institutional or formal basis. Lacan was keen that cartels be made up of *readers*, not pupils: a reader can do as he wishes with a gift (ibid: 17). Since Lacan’s expressed preference for readers occurs just a few paragraphs before this query, it is not stretching things to suggest that the distinction between a (bequeathed) topography and a (gifted) topology is related to the distinction between a pupil and a reader. How might topology necessitate such a switch and what are its implications?

Returning to the session of *Seminar XXIII* in which Lacan expressed his desire ‘to give [*donner*] you *un bout de réel*’, we find him presenting his audience with a knot that ‘Soury and [Michel] Thomé gave [*donné*] me. It is my kind of Borromean knot’ (SXXIII: 16/3/76). What makes this knot (produced by a cartel dedicated to providing solutions to *casse-têtes* that are not easily transmissible as a knowledge) so peculiar and, indeed, *Lacanian*, is that instead of being comprised of three closed rings, it has one

ring and two infinite straight lines. It is this knot that Lacan chose to *give* his audience at Caracas:

[M]y knot doesn't tell the whole story [*pas tout*]. Without which I wouldn't even have the opportunity of taking my bearings in what is there, because there is, I say, *not-all* [*pas-tout*]. Not-all, quite surely, in the real that I broach in my practice.

Remark if you will that in my knot the real features constantly as a straight line stretching to infinity, i.e. the unclosed circle that it presupposes. This is what upholds the fact that it can only be admitted as not-all. (2011: 19)

Although it is difficult to imagine – which is, of course, part of the appeal for Lacan – a knot comprised of infinite lines holds just as well as one comprised of circles since the ‘rings’ cannot slide off one another. Despite this consistency, however, the knot remains a work in progress; it cannot be framed or totalised. Within (or without? – this is undecidable) its organisation, there remains ‘*un bout de réel*’; a ‘not-all [*pas-tout*’ that constitutes *and* dissolves its suppositious ‘all’, with regards to which analysts must ‘find their way in their practice’: ‘I always speak the truth. Not the whole [*pas toute*] truth...’ Holding to the real, Lacan concluded his address in an apt fashion: ‘I don’t tell you everything [*pas tout*]. To my credit’ (2011: 20).

Evidently, when Hogan attended the 1982 iteration of this same event, the enigmatic knots had retained their position in Lacan’s school and its experiments whilst remaining no less awkward to communicate or digest. What follows is not a ‘*coherent* reconstrual’ but a *reading* of Lacan’s attempts to *rigorously* give a ‘bit of real’ with topology.

1.2. Beyond Theory

Three years before his death, at a conference held at the Sainte-Anne hospital, an exhausted Lacan *presented*, in a series of staccato sentences that resemble the gnomic aphorisms of a high-priest just as much as they do the axioms of a mathematician, the final state of his theory of the unconscious, taking care to emphasise that ‘the word *presentation* is absolutely essential’ (2015: 7). Such is the precision with which Lacan chose his words, I have already, in this brief *representation* of his presentation, produced a major distortion. ‘To speak about the *theory* of the unconscious’, Lacan had warned his audience a decade earlier, ‘is really to open the door to this sort of ridiculous deviation that I am hoping to prevent. This is what has been displayed already... under the term of “applied psychoanalysis”... To apply it precisely to what? In particular to the fine arts!’ (SXVI: 4/12/68)

At the risk of producing a glib précis without having even begun the work necessary to legitimise and support it, it is surely the challenge of speaking and writing about the unconscious, without the resulting body of work attaining the status of a rigid body of knowledge, that accounts for the purpose, particularity and difficulty of Lacan’s thought. Furthermore, if the unconscious is made the object of *theoria* – if, in other words, it is treated as a situated spectacle that can be thought about and contemplated from afar – it, rather than being rescued from obscurity, is radically obscured, not simply because it is antithetical to conscious comprehension, but also because it can, *as a theory*, be considered apart from *praxis*.

Requiring the severance of the unconscious from the clinic for its constitution and propagation, psychoanalytic *theory* – in its first guise as a ‘theory of the unconscious’ and its subsequent interdisciplinary guise as a theory of the textual or authorial unconscious – is confronted with a problem when, returning to the analysand or text, practice becomes a matter of the *application* of theory (see Felman, 1982). The ideal of ‘*theoria*’, notes Lacan, is ‘the *exhaustive knowledge*’ which would ‘allow us to give an account of’ the theorised object’s ‘*entire past* no less than its *entire future*. It is clear that none of this affords any place to what would be the realisation of anything *new*, a *Wirken*, an *action*, properly speaking. Nothing could be further removed from the Freudian *experience*’ (SII: 222). For Lacan, the speculative aspect of classical *theoria* is often only a prelude to the accumulation and consolidation of knowledge that characterises modern theory. The mutuality between *novelty*, ‘action’ and ‘experience’

is one that Lacan stressed throughout his work. Just as the application of psychoanalytic theory to literature simply served to confirm psychoanalytic truths rather than reveal anything *new* about literature itself, so too will a clinical praxis that operates on the basis of a consolidated and comprehensive knowledge – an *already known* knowledge – be extremely limited in its practical *efficacy*.

In his 1978 conference address, Lacan offered an extraordinarily compact history of his *Séminaire* by remarking that in order to ‘*present*’ the unconscious and not simply *theorise* it, his ‘discourse’ had concerned itself with a process of ‘clearing [*déblayage*]’ that had two stages: first, he ‘presented something’ concerning Freud’s famous case *presentations* and secondly, he produced ‘a presentation of the unconscious which is of... a mathematical order’, again emphasising that ‘[i]t [*Ça*] is only a presentation’ (2015: 7). Of the latter presentation, Lacan stated that ‘I *presented things* in the form of... the Borromean knot’, with each ring corresponding to one of the three ‘things’ (the registers of the imaginary, symbolic and real) that, when knotted together, constitute and support the psychoanalytic subject (ibid: 7). How is it that these two modes of presentation do not constitute a theorisation?

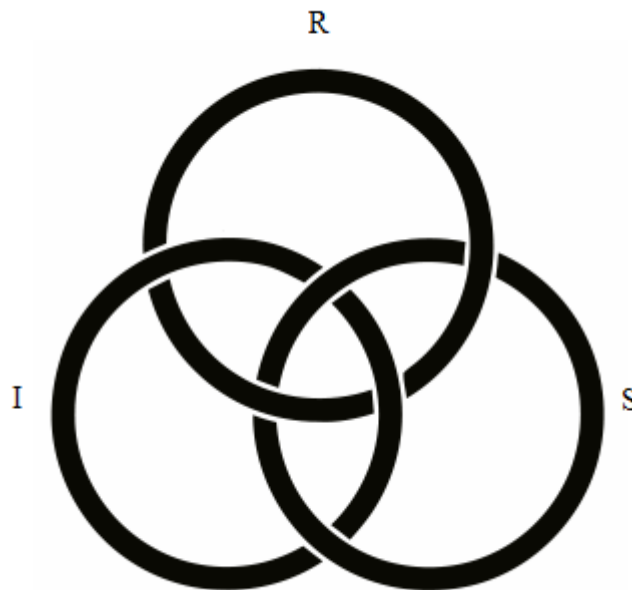


Fig. 1

For the moment, a familiarity with the terms used above – a knowledge of theory, or, more precisely, theory *as knowledge* to be learned and applied – is far less important than an awareness of their *presentation* – that is to say, the *structure* or ‘mathematical order’ of the terms (I, S and R). What is the *effect* of this ordering? How do the terms

relate to one another? What, in this order, is possible and *impossible*? What is *the* structure – the minimal, axiomatic invariant that makes this structure what it is?

Are these the questions of a theoretician or a practitioner? If this question remains difficult to answer, what does this difficulty tell us about Lacan's presentation? Does this distinction survive Lacan's topological turn?

It would, of course, be remiss not to ask just what does this peculiar thing (is it an object, an image, a model?) have to do with psychoanalysis?

Lacan recalls that he 'had already *announced* these things' in a 1953 lecture titled 'The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real' (2015: 7). Now, whilst we might be tempted to understand this statement as a suspect attempt to retroactively posit a theory *of a theory*, a history of theoretical coherence or clarity of purpose, – a meta *theoria* that treats theory *itself* as a spectacle to be judged and appraised from a vantage point in order to produce an 'exhaustive knowledge' that not only knows its 'entire past' but has also, so it turns out, *always* known its 'entire future' – this would elide an important distinction between 1953 and 1978. Where previously 'things' had been 'announced', or presented by means of an announcement, – the declarative gesture of a *maître* conveying points and principles in *language* – these 'things' are now '*presented* in the form of... the Borromean knot.' This is not simply a minor cosmetic alteration to the delivery of theory but an attempt to discern and test the limits of theory itself.

It is striking, then, that Lacan, taking Freud's case studies as his support, opens his 1953 lecture by arguing that a confrontation with these limits is inherent to psychoanalysis: 'One thing *cannot escape us* at the outset – namely, that there is in analysis a whole portion of our subject's reality [*réel*] that *escapes us*. It *did not escape Freud* when he was dealing with each of his patients, but, of course, it was just as thoroughly *beyond* his grasp and scope' (2013d: 5). The *réel* at stake here has a strange status; if it is 'beyond' the 'grasp and scope' of conscious *theoria*, this 'beyond' is not that of a divine absolute that sits radically outside a clearly defined limit. If this *reel* 'escapes us', this very fact 'cannot escape us'; it remains, as a hole in knowledge. Its inescapable escape does not stop bothering us – if only it would simply go away or cease to exist. Instead, it exists *as impossible*; this impossibility is its negatively defined essence. If, therefore, we were to proffer a theory of Lacanian theory by returning to these early works, it would only be to observe the consistency of a project's attempts to draw attention to, and *present* the absence of, that which cannot be theorised. As Lacan

puts it, the fact that the subject's *reel* 'escapes us' 'cannot escape us *at the outset*': its absence is the foundation of his, and any analyst's, *practical* project: 'It is quite true that [the real] is not easy to talk about. That's where my discourse *began*' (1977c: 5).

In his 'Translator's Notes', Bruce Fink (2013: 98) writes that '*le réel* (the real) and *la réalité* (reality) are often indistinguishable in ordinary French usage as well as in this stage of Lacan's work.' However, there are occasions in this lecture (particularly in the passages quoted above and below) when the distinction is certainly suggested and worked on, if not directly asserted. The real is not clearly defined; it does not enter the lexicon of *theoria*. It 'escapes us' and also appeared to escape Lacan's listeners at the time. As Françoise Dolto put it in a discussion following the lecture: 'We always arrive at the same question, "What is the real?" And we always manage to move away from it' (2013d: 49). To even begin to pose the question 'what is...?' is to overshoot, to represent or theorise Lacan's *presentation*.

Advancing what is, we recall, the first part of the 'clearing' operation, Lacan turns his attention to several of Freud's famous cases, remarking that '[t]his *direct* element, whereby Freud weighs and appraises personalities, cannot fail to strike us' (2013d: 5). For Lacan, there is a very particular reason as to why an analyst might suffer a lapse of discipline and start discussing various banalities such as character or spirit, especially when what's at stake is a training analysis – when, that is, the end of analysis marks the subject's passage from analysand to analyst:

[M]ust someone be neurotic in order to be a good analyst? A little bit neurotic? Highly neurotic? Certainly not, but what about not at all neurotic? In the final reckoning, is this what guides us in a judgement that *no text can define* and which leads us to appraise personal qualities? In other words, do we rely on the *reality* [*réalité*] expressed by the following – that a subject either has the right stuff [*l'étoffe*] or he doesn't, that he is, as the Chinese say, *xian da*, a worthy man, or, *xiao ren*, an unworthy man? This is certainly something that constitutes the *limits of our experience*. (2013d: 6)

Here, Lacan infers a vital distinction between *réalité* and the *réel*: if the former can be 'expressed' or *announced* by referring oneself to what Lacan calls the Other or the symbolic, – that is, the pre-existing sphere of signifiers which allows the subject to be situated, named and supported by way of the Law (morals, ideals etc.) as, for example, a 'worthy man' – the latter cannot be articulated by *theoria*; 'no text can define' the subject's *real*. The real does not just 'constitute the limits of our experience' but makes this psychoanalytic experience an *experience of the limit*. It is only by means of this

experience – an experience that necessarily takes place beyond the bounds of *theoria*, beyond what is *already known* – that the ‘realisation of anything *new*, a *Wirken*, an *action*’ can occur. According to Lacan, reality is comprised not just of the symbolic but also the imaginary. The latter grants the relational web of differential signifiers an illusory coherence and consistency, allowing fixed reference points and identities to anchor the subject. All psychoanalytic cases involve a particular knotting of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. The ‘*étoffe*’ – the ‘stuff’ or, to use an alternative translation, *fabric* – at stake is not some vaguely ontological substance like moral fibre, but a knot comprised of threads and *holes* by which what we say about ourselves (reality) and that which *cannot be said* or theorised (real) is bound.

The question of ‘[w]hat is brought into play in analysis’ is ‘raised by all those who try to formulate a *theory* of psychoanalytic practice [*expérience*]’ (2013d: 6-7). It is a question Lacan continued to ask: in a passage in *Seminar XVI*, preceding his dismissal of the idea that he is producing a ‘theory of the unconscious’, references to a ‘*theory* of psychoanalytic *practice* [*pratique*]’ and an ‘experience of the unconscious’ abound (SXVI: 4/12/68). If, ultimately, theory cannot be detached from practice – if, that is, ‘in order to explain it, we need first but *demonstrate* its movement by working’ (2013d: 7) – and if this *Wirken* brings ‘into play’ the subject’s *real* (the untheorisable unconscious that remains *impossible* to domesticate) this makes the question of what it is that Lacan accomplished in his seminars and *écrits* endlessly problematic.

We can, however, conclude this section with four important, awkward and interlinked points that comprise the skeletal manifesto for a ‘clearing’ operation that reaches beyond theory:

1). A purpose:

‘I *write*... insofar as I feel I must, in order to be on a level [*au pair*] with these cases, to make a pair with them’ (SXI: xli).

2). A definition:

‘[The] *real* is the unconscious... [It is] something that I defined as impossible. The unconscious *is* the impossible’ (2015: 7).

3). A progression:

‘I presented something which concerned Dora and then little Hans... I [then] presented things in the form of... the Borromean knot’ (2015: 7).

4). A conclusion:

‘The Borromean knot is a *writing*. This writing supports a real’ (SXXII: 17/12/74).

To this, we might add a mantra; a rephrasing of Wittgenstein’s famous injunction:

Whereof one cannot theorise, thereof one must present.

1.3. *Ex-sistence*

In the final chapter of his superlative monograph, Malcolm Bowie argues that there are ‘two different destinies for “theory”’ in Lacan’s work (1991: 196):

1). Lacan’s discourse, as a theory *of* desire is animated by theory’s desire. ‘The function of desire is a last residuum of the effect of the signifier in the subject. *Desidero* is the Freudian *cogito*’ (SXI: 154). The subject’s desire – or, more precisely, the subject *qua* desire, since this desire is all that he *is* – is a consequence of the signifier; the *wholeness* and *unity* of being that motivates desire is made ‘*impossible*’ by the signifier; there is *always* ‘an element *necessarily lacking*’ which Lacan named the object (*a*) (SXI: 154). We will examine this in greater detail in Part Two; the important point here is simply that Lacan’s theory of desire is the theory of *the impossibility of desire’s conclusion*. Lacan’s discourse also performs *theory’s* desire – the desire for the wholeness and unity of knowledge, the desire for a complete exhaustion of the epistemological field. However, he only does so in order to demonstrate the impossibility of satisfying theory’s desire: ‘I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth...’ The destiny of the theory of/as desire is realised in its hopeless journeying through the ‘bad’ infinity of signifiers as it attempts to totalise itself and ‘say it all’: ‘In the first case – that of the *objet a* in its perpetual flight – theory finds its furtherance by giving chase to an untrappable prey, and can easily dissolve into an endless riddling and quibbling’ (Bowie, 1991: 195).

2). In the second case, the unsolvable ‘structural paradox that analytic *practice* reveals’, – the structural paradox whereby articulated reality and the inarticulable real are somehow knotted together without this same subjective knot amounting to a whole and unified being (i.e. desire’s satisfaction) – rather than being *imitated* by the theory of/as desire, is *presented* by topological ‘devices’, such as the Borromean knot, which ‘lead the theorist beyond the babble of theory and towards a state of rapt contemplation. Before him lie topological schemata that are at once grand, definitive and pointless. He beholds a procession of models beyond which more models in procession extend to the horizon. *In both cases theory is brought to the brink of its own impossibility*’ (Bowie, 1991: 196).

If the *form* in which theory's destiny is realised markedly differs between the two cases (incessant blathering followed by reverent mutism), the *structural* condition of this destiny does not. In both cases, to cite the title of Bowie's final chapter, we are faced with the unappetising prospect of 'theory without end'; the choice is that between an infinite parade of signifiers or topological figures extending toward an endlessly displaceable horizon. If 'theory is brought to the brink of its own impossibility', it remains very much on the brink, trapped in a cycle of desirous self-proliferation. How, then, are we to understand Lacan's insistence that topology is *a writing or presentation of the impossible* that decisively surpasses theory? How does topology escape the fate of the signifier (i.e. becoming just one more model among a potentially infinite number of models, having failed to be 'definitive')? We must first grasp the distinction between the 'bad' infinity that exists only as a potential point on the horizon of a geometric plane on which the inexhaustible procession of signifiers and 'models' meanders forward (as per Bowie's metaphor) and topology's *actualisation* of infinity.

'[T]he Freudian unconscious', declared Lacan in 1976, 'is *exactly* what I have said, namely the relation that exists between a body which is foreign to us and something which is a circle, or rather an infinite straight line [*droite infinie*] (they are *equivalent*), which is the unconscious' (SXXIII: 11/5/76). If, as witnesses to the spectacle of a discourse (the 'return to Freud') straining to do justice to a discovery by *presenting* it, and, indeed, straining within and against the limitations of discursivity, we suspend our disbelief at the sheer strangeness of its outcome and take seriously the provocative appeal to *exactitude*, rather than dismissing it as an ill-advised rhetorical flourish, an essential feature of Lacan's topology becomes apparent. Put simply, when he states that the unconscious really *is* the knotting *effect* that a 'cord' biting its own tail at an *unthinkable* and *unimaginable* 'infinity point' has on a body, he means it (SXXIII: 9/12/75). The unconscious *is* a topology and its topology is that of a knot. If one remains understandably averse to following Lacan on this point, it's important to note that the *exact equivalence* postulated between the Freudian unconscious and a knot cannot be verified by recourse to an *inexact* similitude based on *appearance*.

The mathematical discipline of topology is concerned not with measurable quantity but with axiomatic qualitative relations, thereby 'mak[ing] *meaning* (=quantity) dependent on *structure* (=quality)' (Leupin, 2004: 24). This rubber geometry can entertain continuous deformation (expansion or contraction without cutting or suturing)

to its *quantitative form* without its *qualitative structure* being altered.² For example, rings the size of a galaxy or a bagel are topologically *equivalent*: the specific *topos* in question (i.e. an unbroken, material contouring of a hole) remains unchanged. At stake, then, is a radically different way of thinking about the exactitude of a postulated equivalence. This non-trivial correspondence can be further illustrated by the topological equivalence, stressed by Lacan, between a circle and an infinite straight line: although these two figures *look* nothing like each other, their structural *effect* is *exactly equivalent*, insofar as a Borromean knot's fundamental nodal *quality* endures regardless of whether it is comprised of closed rings or infinite cords. The infinite straight line and the circle are not to be considered as two components of a *metaphorical* substitution.

We should not assume, however, that Lacan's acknowledgement of the topological equivalence between a circle and an infinite line renders his reference to the latter figure an undermotivated superfluity. Its introduction serves two functions: firstly, it makes strikingly apparent topology's break with the traditional logic of mimetic or metaphoric representation. Secondly, it exemplifies Lacan's trenchant efforts to *present* the psychoanalytic subject not in terms of an ideal, enclosed totality but as a complex entity that defies representation without being an ineffable absolute abandoned to theologians (e.g. the spirit or soul). Retrieving the subject from fallacious representations and erroneous, ideal forms, topology is integral to the effort to shift the basis of psychoanalytic practice 'from myth to structure.'

'[P]eople don't manufacture closed rings of string', observes Lacan in reference both to the everyday item and the Freudian subject itself (SXX: 127). Whilst we *imagine* ourselves to be closed, consistent and self-conscious units, the great Freudian insight is that we owe the irreducible singularity of our subjectivity to a repressed nexus that our self-image or identity excludes. Our conscious 'imagination's powers of abstraction are so weak' that when asked to *intuitively* picture a closed ring – or, that is, to imagine ourselves – we naturally '*exclude* from this cord... the knot' (SXXIII: 13/1/76). A 'whole portion of our... *réel*... *escapes us*' and yet, in this strange 'structural paradox', we cannot escape it – which is why we turn to psychoanalysts; to be relieved of this inescapable *and* irretrievable knot, falsely believing that one will ultimately 'know thyself' (*theoria*) and become a consistent being.

² Lacan's parodic uncertainty over whether an analyst should be slightly or very neurotic is an example of the intellectual *cul de sac* of quantitative thinking.

The ideal, *knotless* ring is ‘mythical’ (SXX: 127), as is the ‘sack [that such a cord would close] whose myth... consists in the sphere’ (SXXIII: 11/5/76). Despite the fact that no satisfactory *image* of the ‘closed’ infinite line can be made, it remains an *effective* actuality such that the knot’s *condition of possibility* (i.e. the buckling that occurs at the ‘infinity point’ and which *makes* the knot by ensuring its *qualitative* nodality), rather than being identifiable in (self-)representational *reality*, is *real* in the Lacanian sense as somehow both *concrete and impossible*. The real ‘exists as impossible’ (SXXII: 13/5/75). Rather than existing, the knot, to use the Heideggerian term Lacan favoured, ‘*ex-sists*’ as an atheistic Beyond. It is at once a non-recuperable illegibility and an *effective* presence, both immanent and inaccessible. This *ex-sistent* ‘infinity point’ is thus quite different to the potential, virtual or, more bluntly, *non-existent*, infinity upon which Bowie’s characterisation of Lacan’s topology is based. The topology is ‘*effectively* knotted at infinity’ (SXXII: 13/5/75): ‘What is the equivalence of the straight line to the circle? It is obviously because they make a knot. This is a consequence of the Borromean knot; it is a recourse to efficiency, to *effectiveness*, to the *Wirklichkeit*’ (SXXII: 8/4/75).

The unconscious, as Lacan frequently argued, does not form the foundation of a Freudian ontology; it is not a consistent being, but that which is *excluded* by any appeal to consistency: ‘The knot does not constitute the consistence, it *ex-sists* in the cord element’ (SXXIII: 13/1/76). And yet, this real that ‘escapes us’ is inescapable; it imposes itself upon us: ‘There is no consistency that is not supported by the knot. It is in this that the knot imposes the idea itself of the real’ (SXXII: 15/4/75). The real is both most fundamentally what we are *and* that which is most radically alien to our self-conception: ‘the unconscious *ex-sists*’ (T: 28). The ego (theorisable reality or imaginary consistence) and the unconscious (untheorisable, real *ex-sistence*) ‘belong’ to the same subject and yet are absolutely incompatible; they cannot be joined as *one* thought, knowledge or being.

However, the structural equivalence cannot be *represented*; we can draw *either* a straight line *or* a circle, not both at the same time. Therefore, any *representation* of the knot invariably *fails* to capture its object, which, rather than being brought into *existence* by its image, is successfully *demonstrated*, precisely through *failure*, as *ex-sistent*. This lends Lacan’s attempts at presentation an impermanent and dynamic quality; it allows his thought to evade the kind of fossilisation that necessitated the return to Freud. In other words, *demonstration occurs when representation fails*:

[T]he knot is *not a model*. What makes a knot is not imaginary, not a representation. Besides, its characteristic – and it is in this that it escapes the imaginary – is that each time I represent one, I cross it out... [T]his shows already to what point the knot repulses us as a model... *There is a distinction between the real and reality*; the knot *demonstrates* it. (SXXII: 15/4/75)

Like the psychoanalytic subject, each knot, in simultaneity with its appearance, is barred and placed under erasure as a demonstrable failure in representation. The activity of such a demonstration shrugs off the dull lethargy into which symbolisms and models lapse, enabling Lacan, as Douglas Adam's Dirk Gently so splendidly puts it, 'to grapple with the ineffable itself, and see if we may not eff it after all' (1988: 150) – to, that is, exactly present the Freudian unconscious as real.

For readers more familiar with the well-known element of what has become, despite his best intentions, Lacanian *theoria*, – that the unconscious is 'structured like a language' – the above 'definition' of the unconscious will doubtless sound a little unusual; not least for those of us introduced to Lacan by way of literary theory. With the topological unconscious, we can immediately note a sharp departure not only from a reliance on analogic similarity – instead of being *like* a language, the unconscious is now '*exactly*' this topology – but also from the undeniable seduction that a *poeticised* unconscious holds. Indeed, if (Lacan's demonstration of) the topological unconscious 'repulses' readers expecting intuitive legibility, this is precisely because the unconscious is not reducible to any *metaphorical meaning* produced by inexact substitutions and analogies. If this might tempt us to mistake exactitude for a lazy ontology that tautologically says 'it is what it is' and says no more, it's worth remembering that the unconscious is an *ex-sistent* real rather than an existent being. Indeed, as we will see, the unconscious arises as the consequence of the impossibility of producing a self-identical tautology in language.

Reflecting on Roman Jakobson's argument that Noam Chomsky had, by branding his famous composition ('Colourless green ideas sleep furiously') semantically meaningless, neglected to account for language's metaphoric resonances, Lacan remarks that we could, if so inclined, perform a 'stylistic exercise' and regard it as a fine characterisation of the unconscious itself. After all, muses Lacan, is not psychoanalysis testament to the fact that 'sleep [is] accompanied by some fury'? Might we not imagine that the unconscious is made up of 'ideas... [or] thoughts whose faded greenness... that,

like the shades summoned from hell and returning to the sunlight, want to drink blood, to recover their colours'? (SXII: 23/6/64) Despite its laudable ingenuity, this effort is, Lacan contends, 'completely idiotic' since the unconscious 'has nothing to do with these *metaphorical meanings*'. Furthermore, 'to *search for meaning* in a signifying, grammatical chain is an undertaking of extraordinary futility' since one is drawn into a hermeneutic 'bad' infinity without resolution – the interminable interpretation that Freud so feared. The meaning one searches for is eternally deferred. Perhaps alluding to the contemporary debate that Derrida had so forcefully initiated, Lacan posits that 'one can vary to *infinity* the surrounding conditions, the situation, but what is more, the situations of dialogue, [so that] I can make [Chomsky's] sentence mean whatever I want'. Contrary to this inexhaustible reservoir of meaning, what should be isolated is the '*supporting point*, the *navel*, as Freud would say... [which] *vanishes* beneath sense' (SXII: 23/6/64).

The navel, or *knot*, towards which psychoanalytic interpretation tends, is the unconscious's *ex-sistent* 'supporting point', elided by a search for a mythic meaning (such as Jung's universal symbolism) embodied by the illusory perfection of the closed ring and the sphere. The 'point at infinity', where the subject's knot is (un)made, cannot be reached by taking the path of infinite substitutions, spurred by a belief in the meaning of meaning that would return the 'shades' to 'sunlight'.

Since one can vary to infinity the quantitative meaning/size of a *topos*, it is hard not to feel that topology makes for an odd influence for the psychoanalyst. However, as Lacan is at pains to point out, the statement "[i]n rubber" *does not mean that everything is possible in it*. Nothing... will allow us to undo two rings linked one through the other, even though they are in rubber... [A] logic in rubber is not condemned to total liberty' (quoted in Hughes, 2010: 82-83). The infinite morphing that appearance can undergo is limited by an axiomatic quality: an irreducible *impossibility* that Lacan labelled the 'real-of-the-structure' (T:37). Only the limit posed by 'this notion of structure' gives Lacan 'hope of escaping' being condemned to the total liberty that would make psychoanalysis an interminable and ineffective 'swindle' – 'the hope', that is, 'of attaining to the real' (1977c: 4). Topology, rather than legitimising a manic free play of interpretation, actually helps to concentrate praxis toward what has *effects* beyond the hopeless liberty or bad infinity of the Sisyphean 'search for meaning.'

In a session of the previous year's Seminar, following the prefatory observation that '[m]ost of you will have some idea of what I mean when I say – the unconscious is

structured like a language', Lacan (SXI: 20) had addressed the stakes of his *return to Freud* in terms of the very same metaphor he would subsequently dismiss; itself a metaphor recycled from *The Interpretation of Dreams*: 'If I may use a simile,' writes Freud, dormant and enduring unconscious pathways, awaiting excitation, are like 'the ghosts of the underworld of the *Odyssey* – ghosts which awoke to new life as soon as they tasted blood' (SE. IV: 249). Given that the session in question is entitled 'The Freudian Unconscious and Ours', it is worth briefly observing the apposite fashion in which our opening quotation captures the contentious nature of this return: 'the *Freudian* unconscious... is exactly what *I* have said...'

Noting that the 'navel' – an infamous Freudian *metaphor* transformed by Lacan into a topological real – is an 'anti-conceptual' 'hole' inherent to 'this topology' and that analytic praxis should isolate this '*navel of the dreams*' or 'world of shades... without always being able to bring them up to the light of day' (SXI: 22-23) – that is, without necessarily being given a *meaningful* articulation – Lacan also insists that '[s]ince Freud himself, the development of analytic experience has shown nothing but disdain for what appears in the *gap*. We have not... fed with blood the shades that have emerged from it' (SXI: 32). It is, then, this very hole which no amount of 'metaphorical meanings' can account for, that Lacan seeks to preserve in Freud – a preservation that is itself codified in terms of the very same 'metaphorical meaning' which the unconscious, Lacan will later insist, 'has nothing to do with'. Much is at stake in Lacan's vacillation between a metaphorical and topological presentation of the unconscious.

'[A] thinking that is not I: such is, from a *first vague approach*, the way in which the unconscious is *presented*' (SXIV: 18/1/67). The problem with such nebulous definitions and, indeed, the very word itself (*unconscious*) is that they are negative and, as such, allow for a number of misconceptions. For example, 'a thinking that is not I' might just as conceivably be a reference to instinct, present in beings that are not afflicted by language. Remarking in 1973 that 'Freud didn't find a better [word], and there's no need to go back on it', Lacan added that the unconscious is 'a very *precise* thing. There is no unconscious except for the speaking being' (T: 5). In 1976, having overcome this reticence, Lacan advanced his own redefinition: 'The unconscious [*inconscient*] has nothing to do with unconsciousness. So then why not... translate it by *l'une-bévue* [the one-blunder]' (SXXIV: 16/11/76). This is an odd precision – *a rigor without coherence*. The negative prefix (*in*) has been replaced by a positive entity (*une*), *precisely*

detectable in the *imprecision* of the analysand's speech; *negatively* arising as the failure of *positive meaning* (a blunder) and misapprehended by linguistic science. Lacan's redefinition does not lend the Freudian unconscious a positive *existence* in reality, but an *ex-sistence* repeatedly *demonstrated* in the clinic and persuasively documented in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. For Lacan, the 'experience of the unconscious' is realised in the 'experience of speaking' (2013d: 9).

Within the same year (1976), Lacan proffered two 'definitions' of the Freudian unconscious (as *l'une-bévue* and knot), both of which have clear precedents in Freud's work (*Witz* and navel) and both of which are obscured by the search for (metaphorical) meaning. How is it that the silent knot ('It [*Ça*] is only a presentation' [2015: 7]) and the blabbering *l'une-bévue* ('*ça parle*'[E: 571]) are *equivalent*? What, we ask again, has topology got to do with psychoanalysis?

In Part Two, we will explore the various topologies (excluding the knot) that Lacan utilised in order to better present the psychoanalytic subject.

2. Irreducible Holes and Unlocalisable Twists: A Topological Aesthetics

2.1. The Sphere

In the second session of *Seminar XXIII*, having recently returned from what he described as a wearying ‘American ordeal’ which consisted of a series of lectures and Q&As at MIT, Columbia and Yale, Lacan congratulated himself on having ‘create[d] some agitation, some emotion’ with his Borromean knots (SXXIII: 9/12/75). Proudly revelling in his audience’s stupefaction like an exultant tenor showered with roses, Lacan interpreted his reception as evidence of the knot’s relevance and fidelity to Freudian thought, which was an inherently scandalous affront to settled *theoria*. Lacan’s ‘late writings’, argues Bowie (1991: 196), are a ‘means of defending the strangeness of Freud’s work and of preserving its undecidability. Where other Freudians appoint themselves as explainers, emendators or continuators of the original theoretical texts, Lacan wants to keep on feeling their initial shock.’ The unconscious *ex-sists* to any theorisation with pretensions to *consistency* and totalisation: ‘The desire for knowledge [*connaître*] encounters obstacles. As an embodiment of this obstacle I have invented the knot’ (SXXIII: 9/12/75).

America – as the place where psychoanalysis had been received not as a plague but as a curative *knowledge* – had attracted a considerable amount of Lacan’s opprobrium over the years and he once again took the opportunity to accuse his American counterparts of an intellectual ‘lassitude’ that is the cause and result of ‘ego psychology’: the theoretical doctrine according to which clinical psychoanalysis is a matter of forcing the disorderly unconscious to bow to the ego (an ideal *model* of which is provided by the analyst who has gone through the same process). The *ex-sistent* knot is ironed out and conscious (self-)knowledge reigns supreme.

Lacan’s transatlantic excursion was to be a counterattack, an abstruse offensive launched against the university-citadels that had been so influential in the propagation of the ‘theory of the unconscious’ and ‘applied psychoanalysis’, leaving their inhabitants bewildered and scandalised, disoriented by the fog of war that the French Freud’s whirl of topological drawings threw up. Where once the ego had bested and civilised the unconscious, *topological* knots were now ranged against the *geometry* of the central Cartesian point and the ideal form of the sphere.

Let us begin, then, with the sphere: ‘It is perhaps a good shape’, asserts Lacan, ‘but it really is stupid!’ (SIX: 7/3/62) Why so? With its imperforated surface acting as a clean boundary between interior and exterior, the sphere is not a particularly Freudian object. It is too simple, too serene. It belongs to the domain of imaginary abstraction; an illusory aspiration that inadequately reflects the complexities of the subject of the signifier. It is this that the analyst must puncture with words, both in practice and in the theory of practice: Lacan is ‘leading [us] along this path’ with ‘words which are slogans’ so that we might ‘escap[e] from the pre-eminence of the *intuition of the sphere*’ that, following the Mirror Stage (i.e. the assembly of the ego via identification with an imago), ‘dominates our logic in a very intimate way’ (SIX: 9/5/62):

[T]o give himself an image of what he calls the world, man conceives of it as this *unity of pure form* that the body represents for him. From the *surface* of the body, man has taken the idea of a privileged form. And his first apprehension of the world has been the apprehension of his *semblable*. Then, this body, he has seen it, he has *abstracted* it, he has made of it a *sphere*: the *good form*. It reflects the bubble, the sack of skin. Beyond this idea of the *enveloped and enveloping sack* (man began with this), the idea of the *concentricity* of the spheres has been its first relation to science as such. (1975b: 1-2)

The prematurely born infant, wracked by bodily disarray, triumphs in the illusion of *consistency* granted by the experience of control over his own reflection and it is upon this ‘misrecognised’ foundation that the ‘autonomous ego, the conflict-free *sphere*’, is erected (T: 109). With the constitution of a unified ego supported by the *imaginary body*, the Mirror Stage produces an ideal point of *geometric* perspective radiating from the central observer, who, having acquired mastery over his own sphere, is equipped to mediate external stimuli via a normative economy of (self-)representation and knowledge: a developmental ideal Lacan labels ‘the *Innenwelt* to *Umwelt* circle’ (E: 78). For Lacan, the domination of this intuitive logic is exemplified by pre-Copernican science and its cosmological maps: a series of enveloped and enveloping spheres extend from an ideal centre occupied by man.

Any ‘psychological analysis of space’ will require an acknowledgement of the germinal role that the “‘geometrical” structure’ of Cartesian autonomy plays in the functioning of ‘man’s narcissistic structure’ (E: 99). The psychoanalyst, then, ‘must apprehend something of another order than [this] spherical space’ of intuited *identification* if he is not to lapse into the same regrettable mistakes of ego psychology and further bolster this fallacious model (1975b: 2). It is on this point that topology, – a

truly psychoanalytic *mos geometricus* – as a pedagogic tool superior to mere ‘slogans’, comes into its own. Bodily space cannot be unequivocally mapped or localised by Euclidean co-ordinates. The body presented by Freud’s case studies is not a self-enclosed bubble; it is constantly introjecting and projecting, incorporating and expelling.

As opposed to the unity of the sphere and the geometric centrality of the cogito, the *desidero*’s ‘knot is tied in the spirit of a modern *mos geometricus*’ – tied by the unthinkable, unimaginable and traumatic event at an *ex-sistent topos*: ‘We are in fact always *captivated* from the outset by a *geometry*’ inaugurated by the Mirror Stage, ‘which I described... as comparable to the *sack*, in other words to the *surface*, and it is very difficult – something which happens most often *when your eyes are shut* – to *think* about knots’ (SXXIII: 9/12/75). ‘A body’, on the contrary, ‘has the property of being able to be seen’ – indeed, this is the imaginary body’s *essential* property; it exists or, more precisely, it *consists* by being seen (Lacan, 2013c: 5). It supports a specular cogito: ‘the illusion of the consciousness of *seeing oneself see oneself*’ (SXI: 83 [Italics original]).

Whilst the subject ‘adores his body’ because it ‘is his only... *consistence*’ (this narcissistic *amour-propre* is ‘the root of the imaginary’) and ‘because he *thinks* he *possesses* it’ (it is this misapprehension of *mastery* that founds the ego *qua* conscious thought), ‘[h]is body is always bugging off’ (SXXIII: 13/1/76). The subject’s *possession* of his body, as a *unit* fixed in geometric space, is extremely tenuous; it is discordant and porous, constantly requiring one to ‘*panse*’ – to bandage it with thought (SXXIII: 13/1/76). If a free man is defined by the fact that he is at liberty to bugger off,

A slave is defined by the fact that *someone has power over his or her body*. *Geometry* is the *same thing*; it has a lot to do with bodies... Slaves knew that the master would set a price on their body; *they were property, and in itself this protected them*. A slave would know that the master wasn’t about to *carve* [*découper*] up his body: small chance his body would end up *fragmented*. (Lacan, 2013c: 5-6)

Whilst the slave is far from the ideal of self-possession and ownership – the American Dream for which Lacan had so much disdain –, he is at least *a* possession, an indivisible *unit*, securely positioned by the geometric grid of commerce and labour, his existence

guaranteed by financial considerations.³ As Freud learned, the Viennese bourgeoisie did not have it so lucky: ‘a structure, that of language..., *carves [découpe]* up [the subject’s] body... Witness the hysteric’ (T: 6). The imaginary body – the *consistent*, spherical surface – is an illusion that cannot survive what Lacan refers to as the cut (*coupe*) of the signifier:

[M]an’s relations to his body... entirely *consist*... in the fact that man says that he *has* a body, his body. To say ‘his’ is already to say that he *possesses* it, like he possesses a piece of furniture, and this has nothing to do with anything allowing a strict definition of the subject. The subject can only be defined correctly as a signifier as it is represented for another signifier. (SXXIII: 11/5/76)

How does topology account for this subject and what is the cut that makes a knot that is so difficult to see and think?

³ We should probably not take this as a developed comment on slavery – history offers no shortage of examples of enslaved bodies being abused and maimed – but as a flippantly deployed example of bodies being unitised.

2.2. The Interior Eight

Clearly, the sphere and the ‘*metaphor of the Innenwelt and Umwelt*’ (SIX: 7/3/62) have only a diversionary role to play in Lacan’s story of origins, which is instead influenced by a more fundamental proclamation: “‘In the beginning was the Word,’ I couldn’t agree more’ (2013e: 73). The word – or, more precisely, the signifier – makes a hole in the real and we must ‘*start from the idea of the hole [trou], namely, not fiat lux but fiat trou*’ (1975a: 49). Lacan illustrates this point by referring to the act performed by the potter, who ‘creates the vase with his hand around this emptiness, creates it, just like the mythical creator, *ex nihilo*, starting with a hole’ (SVII: 121). In other words, what the signifier creates is not so much a substantive entity as an emptiness that defines this entity. When, in the process Lacan termed alienation, the subject is *named* – that is, represented by a signifier –, he is brought into existence, but this existence is not that of a substantive and particular being: once the subject appears (as represented by a signifier) he also *disappears*, owing his being not to a soul or spirit but to the signifier. The being that alienation engenders is a ‘lack-of-being’ that exists *as barred* (\$).

The conceptualisation of this insubstantial, fading subject was a vital part of Lacan’s anti-humanist project that saw him dispense with various *inexact*, synthesising concepts such as personality – products of misleading ego identifications that clog the analytic session with self-regarding waffle (“I’m the kind of person who...”). Lacan was therefore keen to *formalise* his theory by equating representation by the signifier with counting:

God is not the author of this thing we call the universe. What we impute to God is the business of the artist. The first model for this... is the potter, who is said to have moulded this thing called, not by accident, the *universe* – which means only one thing, that there is One... *It is more than unlikely that this One constitutes the universe.* (SXXIII: 13/1/76)

Stuart Schneiderman (1988: 17) notes that the ‘One’ at stake is neither a unifying and universal meta-sphere that envelops and organises everything nor a central, unitary sphere around which everything is concentrically organised; rather, it ‘begin[s] a count. It is said that God created out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. But how does God or the potter go about creating something out of nothing? Very simply by attaching a number to it, making it *a* nothing, *one* nothing.’ Lacan argues that ‘1 is applied so well to the 0... [T]here is nothing better than the empty set’ – a set without elements, $\{\emptyset\}$, a place-

holder where something *might* come to be – ‘to suggest the 1’ (SXXII: 11/3/75). The barred subject is this empty set; *a* zero without content:

[A] signifier is what represents a subject to another signifier. (E: 694)

[O]ne is what is going to represent the zero for another one. (SXII 20/1/65)

These aphorisms add an important nuance: not only is the subject eclipsed by the signifier but the existence (*qua* representation) that this signifier provides is extremely slippery. A signifier cannot signify itself; it is instead negatively defined by its difference to other signifiers. The subject’s self-identical representation in language is interminably deferred: any search for final meaning – the attempt to *exactly* represent oneself – is doomed to hopelessly navigate the ‘bad’ infinity of re-presentation.

What, then, becomes of the imaginary body, the spherical surface, when a subject is defined as that which is represented by a signifier? ‘The sack, such as it figures in set theory [i.e. the empty set]... manifests itself in... the ambiguity of 1 and 0... Thus our writing S index 1.⁴ It does not constitute one, but it indexes it as an empty sack *unable to contain anything*’ (SXXIII: 18/11/75). The ‘idea of consistence’ (the imaginary body was no more than that: an *idea*) ‘means what holds together’; it constituted a ‘sack’ ‘holding in its bag a heap of organs’ (SXXIII: 13/1/76). It was *the* One, the enveloped-enveloping sphere, a set *containing* elements that constituted a coherent totality. The *real* body of the spoken/speaking subject is not an unbroken *surface* – it is instead structured by holes and animated by drives linked to these holes. We will not have cause to return to this body until Part Five and will instead concentrate on the insubstantial barred subject of the signifier since it was this subject that Lacan’s early topological figures presented.

If the concise minimalism of the two aphorisms quoted above helps to lend Lacan’s discourse the appearance of *exactitude*, this is, to a certain extent, only ever feigned. Conveyed in language, the aphorisms are subject to the very same dynamic of slippage that they attempt to represent – as confirmed by the fact that two statements have been deployed to say the same thing. Might there be a superior way of presenting the barred subject? Lacan’s response to the difficulty of theorising the insubstantial subject was not to represent it but to demonstrate it with topology.

⁴ Lacan is referring here to a regular abbreviation: the first signifier (S1) represents the subject for a second signifier (S2).

We can refer here to the simplest of Lacan's topological figures: the 'interior eight' – a line that, rather than returning to its starting point to produce an ideal *closed* ring, passes above this origin and only returns after having made an additional loop.

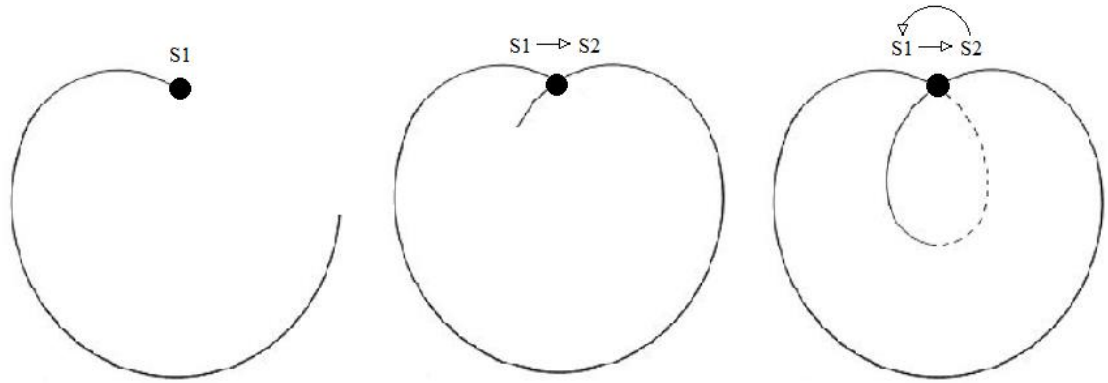


Fig. 2⁵

A signifier is inherently binary since it requires a second signifier for its sense to be *retroactively* apparent. In other words, the presentation is only established by its displacement in the *re-presentation*. The temporal logic that governs signification is silently captured by the interior eight which adds an extra loop ($a \neq a$) to the circle's tautology ($a = a$). There are 'two times' that constitute the barred subject (as that which *one* signifier represents to *another* signifier): the conjunction of the 'first stroke [*trait*] and of what effaces it' (L: 5). The 'first stroke' only exists by virtue of its being effaced in representation: there occurs an '[e]rasure of no trace that might be in advance' (L: 5) and the 'one unique time' (SIX: 9/5/62) of 'signifying unicity' is annulled to a mythic anteriority (SIX: 7/3/62).

This topology presents the minimal combinatorial that temporally constitutes and obscures the subject, not in terms of a substance, image or metaphor but an axiomatic logic of the signifier. Topology is thus called upon to *present* this logic on the condition that it is not subject to this logic (of differential displacement). Miller argues that 'topology *cannot be isolated* in the teaching of Lacan. Topology is introduced *with* the signifier; wherever there is no signifier; wherever there is no "capture" on the part of the symbolic, topology is unnecessary; in such cases... the sphere and the plane will suffice' (2004: 35). Topology is inextricably bound to the signifier without, for all that, being *of* the signifier. It is a presentation of the failure of presentation that must somehow avoid this very failure that sees every presentation become a re-presentation.

⁵ Figure adapted from 'Les schémas de Staferla II'.

Miller offers a revealing reflection on the difficulty of '[s]ustaining a discourse that induces a disjunction of subject and substance', remarking that upon trying to find an example of such a discourse that did so 'without recourse to mathemes' he arrived at that of Sartre, who, Miller contends, attempted to 'isolate' this being *qua* lack-of-being (the subject that never coincides with itself) through the 'magic of style', exemplified by a number of 'successful *metaphors*'; a rhetorical gymnastics that produces formulations that appear to *loop* around their object, endlessly re-presenting the problematic of representation itself (Miller, 2004: 38-39). This is one such, and by no means remarkable, passage:

[T]he pure event by which human reality rises as a presence in the world is apprehended by itself as *its own lack*... It apprehends itself as being in so far as it is not, in the presence of the particular totality which it lacks and which it is in the form of not being it and which is what it is. Human reality is a perpetual surpassing toward a coincidence with itself which is never given. If the *cogito reaches* toward being, it is because by its very thrust it surpasses itself toward being by qualifying itself in its being as the being to which coincidence with self is lacking in order for it to be what it is. (Sartre, 2003: 113 [Italics original])

For Miller, the interior eight is the most efficient method of capturing self-difference and is 'not a supplementary complexity' but a 'simplification that frees us from 600 pages of rhetoric such as Sartre's in *Being and Nothingness*' (2004: 44). Topology's role is here clearly defined as an aggressive *reduction* of style.

The question that must be asked, however, is whether topology surpasses the relative banality of an efficiency saving and is superior to language *per se*; that is, no matter how compact or voluminous. Certain of Lacan's statements seem to suggest that topology retains a suitability that makes it not merely a more refined version of what has already been formulated in language: there is 'a *very particular* mode of the subject for which the *only* index I have found is topological' (E: 731). Alternatively, in *Seminar XIII*, topology is offered as an aid to 'establishing fundamental relationships... with a *rigour* which has never been obtained up to now in *ordinary language*' (SXIII: 15/12/65).

Even this economic benefit is uncertain since Lacan's topology requires explanation. As he admits, while '[m]athematical formalization is our goal', this same writing 'only subsists if I employ, in presenting it, the language I make use of. Therein lies the objection: *no formalization of language is transmissible without language itself*' (SXX: 119). Must 'metaphorical meanings' return to rescue topology from a mute obscurity? If

topological formalisation is a metalanguage of the language he uses (as a meta account of an object), the language he uses is also a metalanguage of this formalisation itself (again, as a meta account of an object) such that, whatever mode of language he uses – be it formal or ‘ordinary’ – the ‘ideal metalanguage’ is made to ‘*ex-sist*’ as a real excluded by both these modes (SXX: 119). We might think here of Lacan’s two aphorisms: if the second is a formalisation of the first (e.g. the definition of ‘zero’ or $\{\emptyset\}$ is more concrete in formal logic than the definition of ‘subject’ is in psychoanalytic thought), the first must nevertheless be kept in mind if the second is to have any value (we must know that when Lacan says ‘subject’ he really means ‘zero’ and *vice versa*).

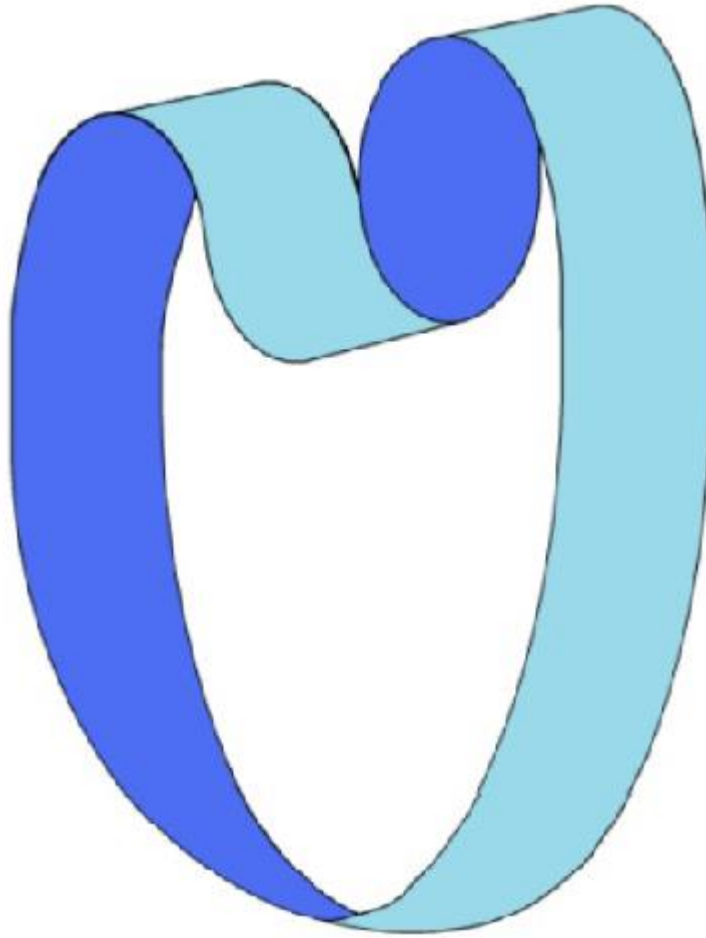
While topology is supposedly not subject to the same communicative failure that befalls language and can therefore be ‘integrally transmitted’ without remainder, this transmission cannot take place as an ideal telepathic silence – it requires ‘speech’ as a descriptive metalanguage to constitute and account for it (SXX: 119). As such, a dizzying *mise en abyme* occurs in which topology shares the fate of ‘signifying unicity’; the realisation of its presentation is displaced by representation. Topology rejoins the language that it formalises as an exemplary instance of this very same linguistic mechanism (displacement) that it formalises. It is precisely in its *re-presentation* that a *failure* is demonstrated.

2.3. The Möbius Strip

For Lacan, ‘the unconscious [is] the logical implication of language’ (1977a: xiii). It is, in other words, a consequence of the signifier’s differential logic. The subject’s identification with a signifier (referred to variously as the master signifier, the unary trait or S1), in the process of alienation necessary for the subject to acquire symbolic ‘existence’ – to appear in, and be recognised by, the field of the Other in which he speaks and is spoken of –, is imperfect since this primordial signifier only subsists under the erasure of re-presentation. It is precisely this failure of representation that establishes the unconscious: ‘*Urverdrängung*, or primal repression, is the following: what a signifier represents for another signifier’ (SXIV: 16/11/66). The signifier that originally determined the subject is lost to him.

The subject’s attempts to achieve a self-identical existence in language (by saying who he is, what he means and what he wants), that would be recognised by the Other, are doomed to failure precisely because these attempts are *spoken*. The subject cannot produce a metalanguage that would integrally transmit his identity. The imaginary One (the ego-sphere) is undermined by *l’une-bévue*; the subject blunders, the meaning of his speech is not unified and it is by these *failures of representation* that the *ex-sistent* unconscious is *demonstrated*. The speaking subject is not One: he is divided and psychoanalysis is tasked with accounting for ‘the *real* of that division’ – the *impossibility* of wholly presenting oneself by means of the differential signifier (SXXIII: 9/12/75). Both theory and practice are subject to an *Urverdrängung* that is impossible to resolve: should either be instigated and developed from the platform of the ‘philosophical error’ (supposing a subject that ‘identif[ies] with his consciousness’), they will ‘miss the topology which makes a fool of [the subject] in that identification’ – the topology without which ‘it is impossible to grasp anything of the *real* of the economy’ (T: 109). This is the real of the subject’s division (the impossibility of the signifier coinciding with itself) that topology formally presents.

A persuasive demonstration of the real of the economy can be provided by transforming the single edge or line of the interior eight into a surface to produce a Möbius strip:

Fig. 3⁶

The strip's popular reputation derives from the corrective that closer study of its *structure* issues to our intuitive apprehension of its *image*. Tracing a journey around the strip from, and back to, any given point on its surface, we cross what we assume to be the 'other side' of the surface without puncturing it. Dynamic *demonstration* disproves our perception of appearance: what seemed to be bilateral turns out to be unilateral. It thus requires a *second* circuit of the hole – the additional loop figured by the interior eight – to return to one's origin, having *missed* it the first time around. Furthermore, since each *topographical* binary that would usually allow us to distinguish and discern one 'point' from another is null and void (due to its seamless reversibility, there is no front and reverse side or left and right edge), this topology is a 'line-without-points' equivalent to the radical self-difference of the signifying economy (ETD: 16). Just as there is no self-identical signifier, '[t]here is not one of its points where the one

⁶ Figure taken from 'Les schémas de Staferla II'.

and the other are not united' (ETD: 15): the surface is non-orientable; all points are simultaneously on both the front and reverse, the left and right. 'In the unconscious, one is disoriented' (Lacan, 2015: 7).

Recalling the procedure necessary for the strip's construction (a *bilateral* length of paper is given a *half-twist* before its ends are struck together), this topology's axiomatic 'real-of-the-structure', to which its Möbian *quality* is owed, becomes evident: *it is the twist*, which, as Jack Stone elegantly explains, *ex-sists* as a *real* both actual and absent from observable *reality*:

[T]he Möbius strip is defined not in terms of any fixed locus or loci but by a twist displaceable throughout its length... We cannot pinpoint this twist in any definitive manner without the surface or line losing its Möbian nature. *The twist, thus, is the real of the Möbius strip*, a real as inaccessible as the point at infinity which would make [an] infinite line a circle, but also a concrete *actuality*, making of this strip, unlike the circle or sphere, something more than just an imaginary aspiration. Though we can scarcely imagine how, it allows this form to both 'exist,' as a real object we can hold in our hand, and to *ex-sist*, in the tactile and conceptual demonstration of its impossibility, of its irresolvable structural paradoxes. (1999: 21)

This topology demonstrates the real of the division: the subject of the unconscious does not reside in the *depths* of a psychical canyon and nor does it belong to a clearly separate other side or stage: rather, it *ex-sists* as a *twist* that *distorts* the tautologous, closed circuit of unitary meaning (a single loop). The 'source' of distortion cannot be *statically* presented as a localisable point; it is an *action* discernable only *after* the distortion inherent to the signifier's differential economy has occurred: 'the unconscious is what closes up again as soon as it has opened, in accordance with a temporal pulsation' (SXI: 143).

The insubstantial subject of the signifier and the blunders in its re-presentation are *temporal* occurrences, which is why Lacan often encouraged his audience to make and manipulate the topological figures themselves so that they could *experience*, through a *dynamic demonstration*, what static exhibition elides (i.e. that *recto* and *verso* – consciousness and the 'other' stage – are distinguished by time and not by a spatial compartmentalisation that mistakenly disjoins one from the other, presenting the subject in terms of *quantifiable* measure, distance and degree). In '*L'étourdit*' Lacan ruefully noted that producing a 'topological presentation' in the form of a 'made-image', whilst necessary for 'mak[ing] myself understood to those whom I address myself', entailed an unfortunate 'fall into *metaphor*' that encourages one to think of the subject as *like* a

Möbius strip (the slightly loopy madman, perhaps) rather than *exactly* demonstrating, by means of this topology, the real of the division (ETD: 16). For Lacan, any attempt to *successfully* represent the *failure* inherent to representation – to present the fact that presentation is necessarily re-presentation without one's presentation of this fact being subject to this structural necessity – was at risk of resulting in, at best, metaphorical approximation and, at worst, sacrosanct models. The failure of re-presentation ('the *real* of the economy') constitutes the unconscious (i.e. S1 is erased or repressed by another signifier); the interior eight is 'a *knot* whose trajectory closes on the basis of its inverted redoubling' – *a knot that is made on the basis of failure* (E: 4).

The distinction between a model and a dynamic can be further illustrated by referring to Lacan's criticism of Daniel Lagache's suggestion that psychoanalytic structuralism can be reduced to two alternative approaches: either one operates on the basis of 'a structure that is in some sense *apparent*' and self-evident – that is, determinable by means of unrigorous and *quantitative* 'descriptive characteristics' of the sort that would obscure the *qualitative* 'real-of-the-structure' – or, in the tradition of diagrammed 'psychoanalytic metapsychology', a '*theoretical model*'; 'a structure... located at some *distance* from *experience*' (E: 544). The Möbius strip reduced to a 'made-image' or 'metaphor' typifies the latter mode by artificially freezing the temporal dynamic *experienced* when the effects that its *ex-sistent* twist has on its material existence are actively verified. When it is an image, it *appears* to have two sides.

Lagache's binary misses a third structuralism which concerns:

[T]he *effects* that the *pure* and simple *combinatory of the signifier* determines in the reality in which it is produced. For is it not structuralism that allows us to posit our *experience* as the field in which it [*ça*] speaks? If the answer is yes, structure's "distance from experience" vanishes, since it operates there not as a theoretical *model*, but as an original *machine* that directs [*met en scène*] the subject there. (E: 544)

The unconscious, we recall, is the 'logical implication' of the differential signifier (as theorised by structuralist linguistics) and it is in the signifying combinations produced by the speaking subject that the unconscious can be heard. This topological structure is not a model; rather than inertly *setting* the scene as a *given* background against which acts are performed (a transcendental, enveloping sphere), it is instead a 'pure' logic: a combinatory 'machine' that actively '*directs*' the scene: 'I claim to materialize the subjective *process*' (E: 48). If the Möbius strip is regarded as a spatialized surface rather

than a temporal cut – a static backdrop rather than a temporal *action* – we risk succumbing to the fallacy of the ant who, in skittering along the surface of the strip, ‘forms a *representation*’ of a bilateral plane (SX: 136).

This topology is ‘structure defined by signifying articulation’ (E: 544) – ‘defined’, that is, by a ‘pure and simple combinatory’ belonging to a temporal dynamic of ‘inverted redoubling’ that constitutes the invariant ‘real-of-the-structure.’ Topology is not a cartographic illustration of structure that *quantifies* space: it ‘is not “made to guide us” in structure. This structure, it is it – as retroaction of the order of the chain by which language consists’ (ETD: 24).

2.4. The Torus

Lacan is particularly keen to stress that the primordially repressed signifier (S1) bears no relation to the Kantian ‘*Einheit* [unity], which is the foundation of every synthesis, of the *a priori* synthesis... the function of a norm, to be understood as a universal rule’ (SIX: 21/2/62). Kant’s transcendental ‘logic of the *concept*’⁷ posits the necessity of *pre-established* and *universal* concepts through which the subject grasps the object. In contra-distinction to this *a priori* envelopment, ‘the notion of the *concept* is apparently absent’ in the ‘relationship of the subject to the signifier’ (SIX: 21/2/62). Indeed, since ‘what creates the structure is the manner in which language emerged to begin with for a human being’ (1975d: 4), Lacan maintains that ‘transcendental aesthetics has to be recast in our times’ to better reflect the structure at stake (E: 544). The subject’s affective judgement of the *structural* lack created by material and contingent primordial signifiers forms the symptom that the analyst reads.

The ‘paradox of [the psychoanalyst’s] One’ (the S1) is that it incarnates ‘difference *as such*’ (SIX: 21/2/62). Structure is first and foremost defined by the inverted redoubling of signifying articulation, by means of which *Urverdrängung* is founded and the subject comes to exist as barred. The creation of structure (‘*fiat trou*’) entails ‘the introduction of difference *as such* into the field’: the S1 cuts a hole in the real (SXX: 142). Structures can, therefore, also be defined as ‘organisations of the hole’ *qua* lack caused and circumscribed by the differential signifier’s double-loop (SIX: 13/6/62). In *Seminar XI*, Lacan, revising his assertion that the concept is absent in the speaking subject’s aesthetic, states that, as the logical implication of the differential signifier, the ‘true function’ of ‘the concept of the unconscious’ ‘is precisely that of being in profound, initial, *inaugural*, relation with the function of the concept of the *Unbegriff* – or *Begriff* of the original *Un*, namely, the cut’ (SXI: 43). This One of the cut – which, as Lacan’s transition from German to French makes clear, is nothing so *imprecise* as a negation – institutes the *lack of the signifier* (*qua* primordial repression): ‘the limit of the *Unbewusste* is the *Unbegriff* – not the non-concept, but the *concept of lack*’ (SXI: 26). It is this *Unbegriff* that determines the Lacanian subject’s aesthetic.

⁷ Lacan is referring here to the way in which the Kantian subject obtains knowledge about things by means of ‘concepts’ (*Begriff*): ‘In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *Begriff* becomes a function of the understanding (as opposed to the object of an intuition) – itself defined as a power of concepts. The *Begriff* is what gathers together, unites, and synthesizes the empirical manifold’ (Büttgen, Crépon and Laugier, 2014: 90).

Before continuing, it's worth observing that if 'there is no lack in the real [and] that lack is only *graspable*', as a *concept*, 'through the intermediary of the symbolic', it certainly does not follow that the inaugural cut spoils an Edenic fullness – an ideal, *a priori* state of nature where no such concept of lack existed: the body was always fragmented (SX: 132). In this wrongheaded story of origins, the mythical, spherical One returns in its most seductive guise:

Is the *one* anterior to discontinuity? I do not think so, and everything that I have taught in recent years has tended to exclude this need for a closed *one* – a mirage to which is attached the reference of the enveloping psyche, a sort of double of the organism in which the false unity is thought to reside... [T]he *one* that is introduced by the experience of the unconscious is the *one* of the split, of the stroke, of rupture...

Where is the background? Is it absent? No. Rupture, split, the stroke of the opening makes absence emerge – just as the cry does not stand out against a background of silence, but on the contrary makes the silence emerge as silence. (SXI: 26 [Italics original])

It is on the occasions that the subject's cries are met with silence that he encounters not only his own lack (alienation) but also that of the Other in a second logical operation – known as separation – that necessitates further sophistications of the topological structure outlined above.

In a passage in *Seminar IX*, Lacan speaks of desire purely in terms of the alienated *manque-à-être*:

[U]nconscious desire... is found in the repetition of demand... [A]utomatism of repetition is a matter of the search, which is at once necessary and condemned, for one unique time, qualified, pinpointed as such by this unary trait, the very one which cannot repeat itself, except always by being another one. (SIX: 9/5/62)

We can immediately recognise here the structure of inverted redoubling and its dynamic of repetition: desire is spurred by the lack of the self-identical signifier that would annul *Urverdrängung* and enable a conscious and ideal representation of being. If the cut of 'difference as such' *induces* desire, it is this same structural effect that *sustains* desire: given that *articulated* demands are the vehicle for desire (abbreviated as D and d respectively in fig. 4), this same desire cannot be ideally presented; it is 'found' not in a demand but in the '*repetition* of demand' as 'a metonymic remainder that runs under it' (SXI: 154). The subject's successive demands produce a toric surface that organises (creates and circles) *two* holes:

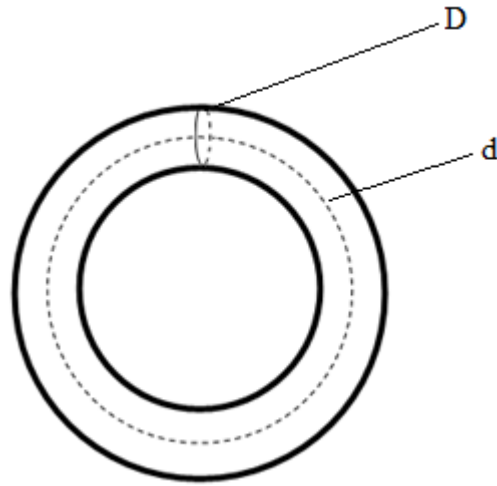


Fig. 4

The torus makes apparent an important point of difference between Kant's transcendental aesthetics and Lacan's topological aesthetics. For Kant (2007: 62), '[s]pace is a necessary *a priori* representation, which underlies all outer intuitions'. Space is not an object among others but is the necessary precondition for the presentation of objects. Importantly, space itself is ordered by the *universality and necessity* of Euclidean geometry: a consistent *a priori* concept that is not derived *a posteriori* from learning and experience as an *exceptional contingency*. This geometry is derived from a series of axioms: a *point* has zero dimensions; a *line* without breadth joining one point to another has one dimension; a *plane* with breadth and length defined by lines has two dimensions and a *space* in which a plane exists has three dimensions.

As we have seen, Lacan's aesthetic is founded upon the *circularity* of an inverted redoubling and the *hole* that it creates and organises. However, not all holes are created equal and 'if', Lacan tells his long-suffering audience, 'I made you do so much topology... it was precisely to suggest that the function of the hole is not univocal' (SX: 132). With Euclid's axioms in mind, we might, for example, ask '[w]ithin a circle inscribed on a plane, what is the hole?' (SX: 132) Such a circle would be an imaginary abstraction; an immaterial line composed of dimensionless points, insufficient to guarantee either its own existence or the existence of the hole that this circle would organise (Stone, 1999: 3-6). As early as *Seminar II*, Lacan had sought to make clear that the 'symbolic function' (*qua* introduction of difference) 'isn't at all homogenous' with the '*imaginary, or intuitive, plane*' that subsists as a mythical and *a priori* 'eternal form', a timeless totality (SII: 18). For these '*metaphorical forms... constituting the*

natural, intuitive support of the *surface*', Lacan substitutes a 'surface [that] is infinitely more complex': the toric ring (SX: 132-133). Unlike Euclidean geometry, topology allows us to posit circles and holes that are *not reducible to a point*:

It's a matter of knowing how a hole can be filled, how it can close up. It can be *represented* as a shrinking circle. Even though any old circle drawn on the plane can shrink down to nothing more than a point, a vanishing limit point, and then *disappear altogether*, this is not the case on the surface of the torus... *Structures exist that do not entail the hole being filled in.* (SX: 133)

That there is a lack that is *irreducible* is absolutely fundamental to Lacan's aesthetic: 'there are certain of [the subject's] loops which cannot be reduced. This is the whole interest of the model of my torus' (SIX: 7/3/62).

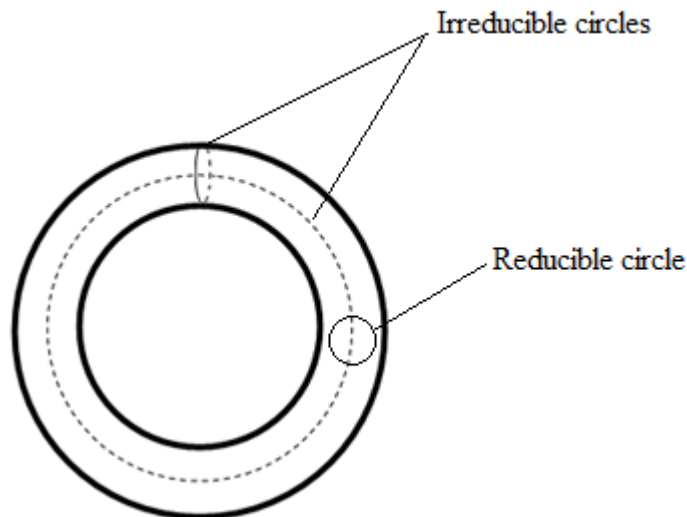


Fig. 5 (SX: 133).

Once again, *quantitative* measure (a principle concern of geometry) is entirely secondary: regardless of how small we make either of the torus's holes, the *qualitative* 'real-of-the-structure' is *impossible* to expunge: 'The torus... is not a puff of air... it has all the resistance of something *real*' (SIX: 7/3/62). Just as the price of the subject's symbolic being is an *irreducible* lack (of being), the circle's *existence*, as something more than an abstract object of thought, is logically consonant with an *ex-sistence* that inhibits its *reduction* to a dimensionless point (non-existence). It's worth noting here the distinction between the toric structure and the spherical surface of the imaginary body, which only was an 'idea of consistence', 'a *bubble of air*', having nothing of *ex-sistence* about it (Lacan, 2013c: 5).

If we identify the trajectory of demand, noting that the *minimal* requirement for *repetition* being two circuits, and merge this with the trajectory of desire that runs under it, we arrive at the interior eight:

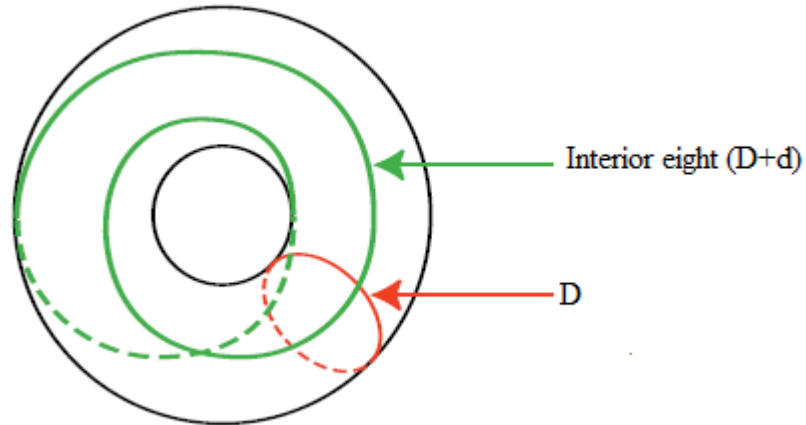


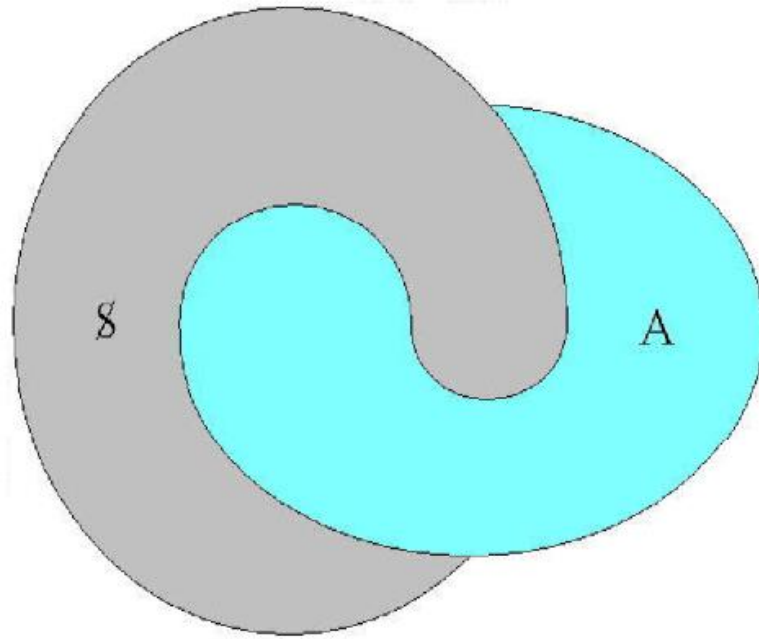
Fig. 6 (SXXIV: 21/12/76).

Just as the subject is found and lost in the repetition of signifiers, so too is unconscious desire found and lost in the repetition of demand. Whilst the interior eight is what remains once the Möbius strip's unilateral *plane* has been *reduced* to its single edge or *line*, we should not assume that this line, like the circle, is in turn reducible to a dimensionless point. Stone observes that 'unlike the circle or sphere... the Möbius strip cannot be reduced to the zero dimension of a point: for this strip, line or cut to maintain its peculiar Möbian invariant the twist must remain' (1999: 19). Indeed, if the structure *qua* signifying articulation were a single-loop rather than an inverted redoubling – if, that is, the symbolic was a set of self-identical signifiers ($a=a$) – the circle and the hole that it supports would be closed, being reducible to a single dimensionless point. A single signifier, like the point, cannot *exist*; it requires another signifier – the institution of a double-loop from which there is no turning back. 'The little interior eight is well and truly *irreducible*' (SX: 136): the *Urverdrängung* that its redoubling founds and the lack that its loop circumscribes retain an existence founded on *ex-sistence*. Therefore, Kant's is 'a world whose aesthetic is such that everything can be folded back on everything' in a concentric reduction toward the 'vanishing unity' of the dimensionless point (SIX: 7/3/62). Whatever trace is made on the 'surface of a sphere' or plane can be dragged into a 'collapse which when *significance* is involved will be called *tautology*' (SIX: 7/3/62). Neither the sphere nor the plane can support the line of inverted

redoubling: the lines we might draw would always be flattened abstractions, the ends of which meet to produce a circle. Intersections on these surfaces either occur immaculately (circle) or not at all: they are never *missed* (interior eight) – which is why Lacan presented his aesthetic through *aspherical* surfaces.

If the subject of alienation, as what one signifier represents to another signifier, owes his ‘existence’ entirely to the Other, the subject of separation’s existence is defined by some-*thing* that lies beyond the Other. On the occasions that his cries are met with silence – when the (m)Other fails to be an unerring and suffocating presence – the subject, confronted with this change, must attempt to decipher an inscrutable variable: the fact of the (m)Other’s desire; an enigmatic *x*. If the barred subject’s alienation is predicated upon a monolithic Other, ‘[i]n separation’, writes Bruce Fink (1995: 54), ‘we start from a barred Other, that is, a parent who is him or herself divided: who is not always aware (conscious) of what he or she wants (unconscious) and whose desire is ambiguous, contradictory, and in constant flux.’ What was once misleadingly experienced as an enveloping sphere, reveals itself to be inconsistent and structured by an *irreducible* lack.

The Other’s discourse, structured by the logic of the signifier, cannot achieve the coherence of univocal meaning; each utterance produces an ‘interval intersecting the signifiers... [which] is the locus of... metonymy. It is there that... desire crawls, slips, escapes... The desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work, in the lacks of the discourse of the Other’ which lead him to ask “‘*He is saying this to me, but what does he want?*’” (SXI: 214 [Italics original]) Rather than subsisting as two enveloped-enveloping spheres, subject and Other are two toric aspheres that link *by means of each other’s lack*:

Fig. 7⁸

The ‘*circularity*’ of the relation of the subject to the Other’ that would see each complete the other, is foiled by a ‘*twist in the return*’, an inversion in the relational relay between subject and Other which is itself caused by a ‘*twist in the return*’ (the Möbian inverted redoubling of any signifying articulation) ensuring that desire metonymically evades spoken demand (SXI: 213-215). In other words, the sender is returned his message in an *inverted* form:

- 1). The subject demands (to know) the Other’s desire: What do you want?
- 2). The Other demands (to know) the subject’s desire: What do *you* want?

This is the attraction of totalitarianism: a subject, deferent to the (m)Otherland, derives the existential certainty of purpose from an unambiguous command that frees him from the paralysing prospect of liberty and the recognition of the groundlessness of his desire. As far as the Other is concerned, the troublesome question of the citizen’s desire is thereby resolved and the hierarchy of spheres is re-established.

The subject is *separated* from the (m)Other; his attempts to align his own ‘lack-of-being’ with the (m)Other’s lack – to, in other words, answer the question of the (m)Other’s desire by *making himself the answer* – and produce, from these *two*

⁸ Figure taken from ‘*Les schémas de Staferla II*’.

aspheres, a unified *One*, fail thanks to the intervention of a *third* term: the signifier. The subject cannot figure out from the (m)Other's demands what it is exactly that is desired of him. The (m)Other's desire is mediated and obscured by language; the Other becomes 'the site of the lack-of-signifier' (SX: 134) with respect to which the alienated 'lack-of-being' becomes a separated subject whose 'desire merely leads us to aim at the gap [*faille*] where it can be *demonstrated* that the One is based only on the essence of the signifier' *qua* pure difference (SXX: 5). This 'gap' is the 'interval intersecting the signifiers', the lack in the Other's discourse, at which the subject 'aims' and through which his toric circuit of desire passes.

Secondary to its demonstration of the irreducibility of lack, the torus, like Lacan's other topological references, allows for the reduction of rhetoric. We might compare the topological presentation of the interplay between demand and desire to some of Lacan's less concise sentences in which this same presentation seems to run on without resolution, caught in the metonymy of desire itself as language attempts to perfectly capture communicative intention: 'desire is the axis, the pivot, the handle, the hammer, by which is applied the force-element, the inertia, that lies behind what is formulated at first, in the discourse of the patient, as demand' (SXI: 235). It is surely no coincidence that this repetitious imprecision immediately follows a promise to 'illustrate it for you next time with a small topological drawing.'

Of course, we should not assume that the matter will be resolved solely by replacing a verbalised description with a drawing: what's important is that this drawing be *topological*. Lacan provided an instructive dramatisation of what's at stake when, in *Seminar VII*, he imagined asking a simpleton to produce a drawing of the subject's psychical economy as determined by *das Ding*. Lacan had spent the two preceding sessions explaining that *das Ding* (a term taken from Freud's *Entwurf*) is 'the beyond-of-the-signified. It is as a function of this beyond-of-the-signified and of an emotional relationship to it that the subject *keeps its distance* and is *constituted* in a kind of relationship characterized by *primary affect, prior to any repression*' (SVII: 54). *Das Ding* is the term given to the Other's desire/lack encountered by the subject *prior* to this desire's repression (its mediation and obscuration) in language. It is experienced as an illegible trauma against which the subject constitutes itself *as a defence*. Fink (1995: 62) argues that 'trauma functions as the child's *cause*: the cause of his or her advent as subject and of the position the child adopts as subject in relation to the Other's desire.

The encounter with the Other's desire constitutes a traumatic experience of pleasure/pain or *jouissance*, which Freud describes as a sexual *über*, a sexual overload'. It is with respect to this trauma that 'the first seat of subjective orientation takes place... the choice of neurosis' (SVII: 54). It is the discernment of how this trauma organises, and is organised by, the subjective libidinal economy of associative signifiers and identifications that an analytic reading achieves.

In *Seminar XVII*, Lacan described the 'mother's desire' – the 'Other as a *Ding*' (SVII: 56) or the 'maternal *thing*' (SVII: 67) – in terms of an enormous crocodile that would swallow the unsuspecting subject whole were it not for a 'wedge... [which] is called the phallus' (SXVII: 112). A wedge is driven between the subject and (m)Other which allows the former to be *separated* from the latter. A *third* term intervenes in the oppressive dyad: 'one signifier comes to signify that part of the parents' desire which goes beyond the child... that signifier is the phallus' (Fink, 1995: 102). In the operation of what Lacan calls the paternal metaphor, the (m)Other's desire is *named* – or, more precisely, *substituted* for a name: the Name-of-the-Father. This latter is assumed by the subject to have earned the (m)Other's desire by virtue of possessing something that the subject does not: the phallus, which thereby becomes the signifier of (the [m]Other's) desire. It is the signifier *par excellence*, the signifier without signified. We cannot say what the phallus is. The traumatic concentration of desire is diluted when it becomes what one signifier represents to another signifier. The Other's desire, once suffocatingly constant, becomes an inconstant variable *x* by being subject to re-presentation.

Whilst the third term installs an irremediable distance between the subject and the Other, which is necessary for the former's constitution, it is nevertheless experienced as a resented prohibition (*non-du-père*) responsible for a keenly felt lack. The (m)Other, whose desire the subject now shares, is at times present and at others absent. The subject, if he is to have his needs tended to, must now listen to speech – to detect the Other's desire in the Other's demands – and communicate his needs by means of spoken demands. There is, however, 'a deviation of man's needs due to the fact that he speaks': firstly, because speech cannot integrally transmit need without loss and secondly, because the speaking subject is not a purely biological entity, his lack is not a matter of nourishment: 'What is thus alienated in needs constitutes an *Urverdrängung*, as it cannot, hypothetically, be articulated in demand; it nevertheless appears in an offshoot that presents itself in man as desire' (E: 579). The 'prohibition of incest' – that is, the prohibition of the (re)union of subject and (m)Other as One – 'is nothing other

than the *sine qua non* of speech' (SVII: 69). There is installed a 'distance between the subject and *das Ding*', constituting the desiring, separated subject, and this 'distance is precisely the condition of speech' (SVII: 69).

'Castration means that *jouissance*' – the traumatic, incomprehensible *jouissance* of the sexual *über* that causes as much pain as it does pleasure – 'has to be refused in order to be attained on the inversescale of the Law of desire' (E: 700). The *cut* of the signifier – its *castrating effect* as the introduction of 'difference *as such*' – results in an irreducible lack: the absolute *jouissance* that would annul this lack is endlessly deferred; desire cannot be presented in language except as an evasive, 'metonymic remainder.' The signifying combinations of unconscious desire – themselves arranged and inflected by various master signifiers that derive their value from their proximity to the encounter with *das Ding* prior to repression (prior, that is, to the substitution of *das Ding* for these particular, non-sensical signifiers as sub-headings for which there is no synthesising editorial) – nevertheless operate in accordance with the pleasure principle: a certain measure of pleasure can be obtained on the 'inverse scale' by, in the movement of inverted redoubling, looping around *das Ding*. Desire is sustained provided the *distance* between the subject and the Thing is maintained at a Goldilocks equilibrium.

We abut upon a structural paradox concerning reality and the real: if '*das Ding* is a primordial function which is located at the level of the initial establishment of the gravitation of unconscious *Vorstellungen*', if, in other words, *das Ding* is pivotal to the constitution of the unconscious structured like a language, it is also irreducible to this same linguistic web (SVII: 62). Anticipating the topology that would come to dominate his seminars in the 1970's and grappling with a complex intertwining of logically heterogeneous elements, Lacan frequently referred to the figure of the *knot*. The 'unconscious castration complex' – the point at which the quarrel between *jouissance* and the signifier is at its most problematic, influential and, in terms of symptom formation, productive – 'functions as a knot' (E: 575). In terms of praxis, 'the *nodal* point by which the pulsation of the unconscious is linked to sexual reality' – the *real* of sexual trauma – 'must be revealed. This nodal point is called desire' (SXI: 154). This gravitational 'real-of-the-structure' sets a limit to interpretation by being 'revealed' negatively as that which is *impossible* to rehabilitate: 'individual history... is orientated, pivoting, polarised by this secret and perhaps in the final analysis, *never accessible point*... the *irreducibility* of a *Urverdrängung*, the existence of this *navel* of desire in the

dream' (SIX: 20/6/62). It is, to recycle a formulation first offered in our introduction, the *ex-sistent* 'supporting point' that vanishes beneath sense, the knot in the cord:

If something *questions* us, it comes precisely from analytic experience as *locating somewhere this point at the infinity* of everything that is organised in the order of signifying combinations. This *point at infinity* being *irreducible* insofar as it concerns a *certain jouissance*, that has remained problematic, and that for us sets up the *question of jouissance* under an aspect that is *no longer external to the system of knowledge*. It is around this signifier of *jouissance*, this signifier *excluded* insofar as it is the one that we promote under the term of phallic signifier, it is around this that there is organised all the biographies to which analytic literature tends to reduce what is involved in neurosis. (SXVI: 21/5/69)

This is, of course, quite some question, and one that we can only call attention to rather than definitively answering here: how exactly does one go about 'locating' that which is, by definition, *unlocalisable*; the 'point at infinity' that ties and guarantees 'this constitutive knot'? (SXVI: 21/5/69)⁹ This problem remains utterly inscrutable so long as one's attention is solely fixed on the *insubstantial* 'order of signifying combinations', the inverted redoubling of a '*line-without-points*.' The line errantly redoubles itself and has no localisable point precisely because no signifier can signify itself. Any search for meaning – a final or original *organising* principle – is destined to navigate a 'bad' infinity of interminable extension because 'the point at the infinity of everything' – the universalizing One or 'Other of the Other' – does not exist: 'language cannot constitute a closed set; in other words: there is no Universe of discourse' (SXIV: 16/11/66).

Lacan's second sentence goes some way to resolving this impasse: the navel is 'irreducible' not because it is infinitely deferrable, but because 'it concerns a certain *jouissance*' – a *jouissance* that is not simply 'external to the system of knowledge [*savoir*].' This is not, however, to suggest that *jouissance* can be either systematised or *known* in the traditional sense. Lacan distinguishes between two modes of knowledge: firstly, that of the conscious ego (*connaissance*) – a naive epistemology that regards reality to be a consistent and coherent totality (One) in which discrete and unitary objects or subjects (other Ones) present themselves ('[t]he *whole* is the index of *connaissance*' [R: 26]) – and secondly, that of the unconscious signifying combinations (*savoir*): a knowledge that does not know that it knows. If what is 'discover[ed]' in psychoanalysis is 'not of *connaissance* or *representation*' but instead belongs to the

⁹A further question also arises: how can that which has zero dimensions – the *point* at infinity – be a 'supporting point' for something so logically and materially robust as a knot? Lacan's answer is 'wedging.' We will see what he means by this in Part Five.

‘order of *savoir*’, this does not mean that these combinations are infinitely random: it is instead ‘a question of something that links one signifier, S1, to another signifier, S2, in a relationship of *reason*’ (SXVII: 30). To cite the title of an important *écrit*, this ‘Reason since Freud’ does not constitute a new Enlightenment *connaissance* aimed at self-mastery. The *cause* of, or reason for, the desirous chains of unconscious *savoir* is the traumatic encounter with *das Ding* and the contingent fashion in which this *real* ‘sexual *über*’ is mitigated by the ‘signifier of *jouissance*’ – the phallic signifier (S1) – that is itself ‘excluded’ from the substitutive chains that bloom from the very same logic that this S1, *qua* ‘difference as such’, institutes (primal repression).

Returning again to an important quotation: if ‘*das Ding* is a primordial function which is *located* at the level of the initial establishment of the gravitation of unconscious’ signifying combinations, and this same *savoir* is accreted in accordance with the pleasure principle – that is, if the chains both coil around, and recoil from, this ‘sexual reality’ in such a way that allows desire to be supported and some *jouissance* to be obtained simply by virtue of desire’s continuance –, we can begin to see how this comingling of *jouissance* and the signifier allows the ‘nodal point’ where the ‘unconscious is linked to sexual reality’ to be approached in analytic experience. It is ‘repetition’ – inverted redoubling heavy with the substance of *jouissance* – that ‘is the basis of your experience... the stickiest, the most annoying, the most symptogenic repetitions’ (SIX: 6/12/61). Repetition is:

[T]he *savoir* that specifies the real [*le réel, le cerne*], as much as possible as *impossible... Thus the real is distinguished from reality*. This, not to say that it is unknowable, but that there is no question of knowing [*connaître*] oneself there, but rather of *demonstrating* this real. A path exempt from any idealization. (R: 4)

The signifying combinations *cernele réel*, negatively circumscribing the subject’s traumatic cause. Vitally, producing such material in analytic experience is not the first step to ‘knowing oneself there’ – to replace the unruly Id with the ego – and neither is this material a forlorn testimony to some quasi-mystical ‘unknowable’ that makes the ‘point at infinity’ a reified Beyond rather than an *ex-sistent* actuality. This is particularly important because it exempts Lacan from the charge of what Badiou (2009: 188) refers to as ‘idealinguistry’ – idealism taken to extraordinary lengths by the linguistic turn.

For proponents of ‘idealinguistry’, *reality* is nothing more than a social construction, a web of signifiers organised by power and narrative. There is nothing outside the text and any attempt to prove otherwise is to be decried as inelegant essentialism. Whilst the

distinction Lacan draws between reality and the real, along with his characterisation of the latter as impossible, certainly has all the hallmarks of idealism, his insistence that the real can be *demonstrated* sets him apart. For the idealist, the real can only be *represented*; he only has access to reality *qua* representations: ‘*reality* is redoubled in that he *represents* it, so that we no longer have to do more than reproduce this lining’ (R: 4). The idealist reproduces an envelope, an ‘idea of consistency’, whereby ‘I am master of myself as I am of the universe’ (SXX: 56). This ‘universe is the flower of rhetoric’; a sphere enveloping another sphere, the ‘ego [which] can also be a flower of rhetoric, which grows in the pot of the pleasure principle’ (SXX: 56). This carnation is quite different to the hole created *ex nihilo* by the potter/signifier (‘It is more than unlikely that this One constitutes the *universe*’). As Joan Copjec (2002: 192) writes:

One of psychoanalysis’s deepest insights is that we are born not into an already constituted world that impinges on our senses to form perceptions, but in the wake of a primordial loss; it is not, then, our relation to the order of things, but our relation to *das Ding* that decides the objectivity of our reality or its collapse.

There is an *irreducible* ‘fault in the universe’ and it is this fault, rather than any *a priori* synthesis, that determines the subject’s aesthetic (ETD: 20). Since idealists ‘don’t really contest that famous reality’ but ‘merely tame it’ by arguing that ‘we are the ones who give shape to reality’, they are, ‘[c]ompared to Freud’, who demonstrated just how ‘precarious’ reality is, ‘small beer indeed’ (SVII: 30).

The reality formed ‘in the wake of primordial loss’, as a particular organisation of the hole, is essentially *fantasmatic*. The lack in the Other – experienced by the nascent subject as a traumatic encounter with an engulfing, incomprehensible desire (*das Ding*) that is this lacking subject’s *cause* – is a horrifying ‘real-of-the-structure’ that reality *qua* fantasy mitigates by obscuring it with a phobic or fetish object (*a*). Fantasy, as a libidinal symbolic narrative – the *reality* of self-told ‘biographies to which analytic literature tends to reduce what is involved in neurosis’ –, is lent *consistency* by its reference to the object-cause of desire, allowing the subject to pleasurably (re)stage his primal scene whilst maintaining a distance: ‘The real supports the fantasy, the fantasy protects the real’ (SXI: 41). The idealist’s universe that blooms in and around the hole is a *precarious* reality; it ‘is merely the fantasy through which thought sustains itself – “reality” no doubt, but to be understood as a grimace of the real’ (T: 6). Fantasy has its own topological structure which we will examine below.

For now, however, let us return to Lacan's 'simple soul' – tasked with representing the place of *das Ding* – for whom the reader has probably generated a good deal of sympathy:

Simply by writing it on the board and putting *das Ding* at the *centre*, with the subjective world of the unconscious organized in a series of signifying relations around it, you can see the difficulty of *topographical representation*. The reason is that *das Ding* is at the centre only in the sense that it is excluded. That is to say, in reality *das Ding* has to be posited as exterior, as the *prehistoric* Other that it is *impossible to forget* – the Other whose primacy of position Freud affirms in the form of something *entfremdet*, something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me, something that on the level of the unconscious only a representation can represent. (SVII: 71)

Das Ding presents us with a *structural paradox* which we can recognise from the statements examined in our introduction: that something of the 'subject's *réel*' 'escapes us' 'cannot escape us'; it is both 'prehistoric' – beyond the grasp and scope of the neurotic's biography-cum-reality – and 'impossible to forget'; it is both interior and exterior to the subject, leading Lacan to speak of 'the intimate exteriority or "extimacy," that is the Thing' (SVII: 139). This spatio-temporal aporia cannot be adequately presented by a static *topography* that would either place *das Ding* inside the imaginary body (an enveloping sack that would contain *das Ding* like an organ) or outside, posing no threat to the sphere's boundaries.

Although he does not explicitly mention it here, Lacan had previously referred to the torus as an embodiment of this paradox. Making the Hegelian point that death is both *inherent* to language ('The letter kills' the Thing or spirit [E: 719]) and an unconditional *limit* for the 'being-toward-death', Lacan had proceeded to argue that '[t]o say that this mortal meaning reveals in speech a centre that is outside of language is *more than a metaphor* – it manifests a *structure*' (E: 263). This 'extimacy' is *exactly equivalent* to the toric 'real-of-the-structure.' This topology's 'peripheral exteriority and central exteriority' – that is, the hole that it organises – 'constitute but one single region' (E: 264). The hole at its *centre* stretches out *beyond* the torus. If 'the Thing is that which in the real... suffers from the signifier', it nevertheless structures the rings of signifying combinations in such a way that is *demonstrated* by the material (*savoir*) produced in analysis (SVII: 118). The object (*a*) secures the subject's fantasy by plugging the horrifying void in the Other and is therefore situated in 'what we will call, from an abuse of the *imaginary*, the *central hole* of the torus' (ETD: 26).

2.5. The Cross-cap

It was exactly this ‘abuse of the imaginary’ that Lacan sought to avoid by stating that the structure of fantasy is equivalent to the structure of a cross-cap. We cannot produce a satisfactory image of the cross-cap and nor can we adequately imagine it. Put simply, the cross-cap ‘plays the same role as complement in relation to the [interior eight] as a sphere in relation to a circle, a sphere that would close what the circle would already offer itself as ready to contain’ (SXI: 156). It is, in other words, a sophistication of the imaginary body’s sphere, a sphere inflected by the signifying articulation’s inverted redoubling – a sphere, and this is difficult to imagine, that has a Möbian surface. The insubstantial subject of the interior eight is inflated by the fantasmatic reality constructed around castration and the Other’s lack.

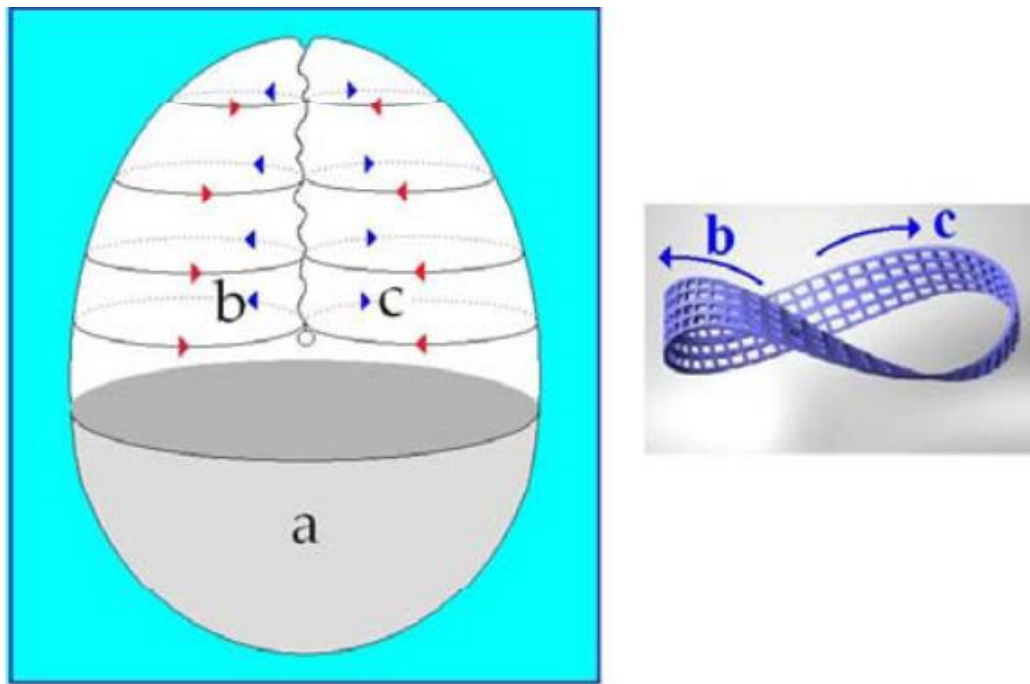


Fig. 8¹⁰

Topologically speaking, the *line* of the interior eight becomes a *surface* (Möbius strip) when this line is given width. However, this Möbian surface can, of course, in a reversal of this topological transformation, be reduced again to the line. In order to produce a surface that cannot be reduced to a line through homotopic transformation, this ‘line-without-points’ must be supplemented with a ‘point-out-of-line’ – a disc that is sewn

¹⁰ Figure taken from ‘*Les schémas de Staferla II*’.

onto the edges of the double-loop to produce an ‘asphere’ (ETD: 16). When submitted to the artifice of *representation*, the unlocalisable twist of the Möbian portion of the asphere that ensures one ‘crosses over’ without knowing where or when, appears to be materialised and sited by the self-intersecting line, offering the surety of a *topographical* milestone indicating where one would be forced to punch through to the other side rather than pass seamlessly. In the abstract cross-cap, however, this intersection or penetration does not take place, such that the surface remains unilateral and the line or twist ‘ungraspable’ (ETD: 16).

The cross-cap offered an elegant solution to a particularly tricky *casse-tête*: how do two absolutely *heterogeneous* elements – the \$ and object (*a*) as interior eight (‘line-without-points’) and disc (‘point-out-of-line’) – combine to generate the structure known as fantasy ($\$ \langle \rangle a$)? Whilst the \$ is *nothing but relation* (as what one signifier represents for another signifier), ‘[a]ll objects – *except* the object I term *a*, which is an absolute – are linked to a relation’ (SXXIII: 16/3/76). Despite it being the object-cause of desire, this same object is antinomic to the relational metonymy of desire or the substitutive metaphor of the symptom; it cannot be apprehended by the signifier: ‘every metaphor, including that of the symptom tries to make this object emerge in its signification, but all the pullulation of meanings that it may engender never manages to staunch what is involved in this hole in terms of a central loss’ (SIX: 27/6/62). The search for the lost object, ‘this organising object’ (SIX: 27/6/62) – the object that, once incorporated by the barred subject, would transform the asphere into a sphere –, is an interminable search for the absolute. The analysand *believes* in this absolute to such an extent that he suffers from this fixation; he is tormented by a painful inertia of desire that causes him to make consistently damaging object choices. As for the analyst, ‘[w]e do not believe in the object, but we observe desire. From this observation of desire we infer that the cause is objectal [*objectivée*]’ (SXXIII: 9/12/75). The object is not *believed* in as an existing actuality but is instead *inferred* from a reading of desire.

In Part Three, we will further explore the reasons for Lacan’s confidence in the inherent utility of topology for psychoanalytic practice by examining the part topology played in the return to Freud and how it compares in value with some of the more well-known elements of the Lacanian *bricolage* such as linguistics and logic.

3. The Re-turn to Freud

3.1. *Encore*

In 'Psyche: Inventions of the Other', Derrida asks us to imagine a speaker addressing his audience:

He declares rather insolently that he is setting out to improvise. He is going to have to *invent* on the spot, and he asks himself *once more* [*encore*] 'Just what am I going to have to invent?' But simultaneously he seems to be implying, not without presumptuousness, that the improvised speech will *constantly remain unpredictable*, that is to say *as usual*, 'still' [*encore*] *new*, original, unique – in a word, inventive. And in fact, by having at least invented something with his very first sentence, such an orator would be breaking the rules, would be breaking with convention, etiquette, the rhetoric of modesty, in short, with all the conditions of social interaction. An invention... inserts a disorder into the peaceful ordering of things, it disregards the proprieties. Apparently without the patience of a preface – it is itself a new preface – this is how it unsettles givens. (1992: 312)

If the measure of an invention is the extent to which it introduces a 'disorder' into regulated and settled convention, by virtue of an unequivocal *break* with the prefatory order, then psychoanalysis certainly merits such a distinction whilst also acting as a pertinent example of the difficulty that anything which is 'new, original, unique' has in 'constantly remain[ing] unpredictable'. As Lacan never tired of asserting, no sooner had the Freudian discovery emerged, than it was subject to a rapid calcification at the hands of disciples who rushed to reinsert the 'Freudian Thing' into a pre-existing 'order of things.' In this sense, Derrida teases out an important nuance, complicating the relatively mundane assertion of an invention's novelty: in *remaining* unique – a uniqueness that is *re-established* with every subsequent *encore* – does the unique, precisely by virtue of the *retention* of its uniqueness, risk rehabilitation as a settled given? Does the unique thereby become its own preface, rather than becoming 'itself a new preface'? Must it remain in flux, in a constant undefined state of 'becoming', disjoined from institution and publication or, even worse, simply ineffable and silent? Can the 'Freudian Thing' be *repeated*?

'[T]he unconscious', Lacan asserts, 'is Freud's *invention*... in the sense of a discovery' (1989: 15). Whilst this is a peculiar formulation (one discovers what already existed and invents what did not previously exist), it is also an apposite one: spoken material must be constructed and invented in analysis because it is in such material that the unconscious is discovered. The unconscious cannot become part of the convention

with which it breaks; it is not novel in the sense of a discovered or invented *existent* thing (a definable substance or content) that ages by becoming known; it *repeatedly* remains unique because of the Möbian temporality in which it operates as an *ex-sistent action* graspable only in its effects.

If psychoanalytic praxis amounts to ‘a discipline which is also a *new era in thinking*’, what ‘distinguishes us from those who have *preceded* us’ is the insistence that “‘disciple” is to be distinguished from the word discipline’ (SXIV: 1/2/67). We are reminded here of the distinction articulated in 1.1 – that between coherence and rigour. What starkly separates psychoanalysis from its own precedents in science and philosophy is its break with the traditional logic of precedence itself. In other words, its novelty is defined not merely by its distance from particular precedents but by the position its disciplined non-disciples adopt with respect to the general figure of precedence. It does not itself become a precedent – a hive of information or laws to which the disciple refers – but a *disciplined*, or *constant*, refusal of precedence in the form of a pre-existing given such as an interpretative template that would obscure the unconscious. At stake here is the division between knowledge and truth: the latter disrupts the apparent stability of the former as that which is foreign to the precedents, identifications and narratives upon which subjective (self-)knowledge is based.

The ‘Freudian Thing’ announces itself, according to Lacan’s audacious prosopopoeia, as ‘I, truth, speak’ – an ‘enigma’ that cannot be captured by ‘the tawdry finery of your proprieties’ (E: 340); the extraneous ‘veil’ that Samuel Beckett so memorably described as being akin to ‘a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman’ (quoted in Perloff, 2010: 216). As Derrida notes, there can be no ‘rhetoric of modesty’ here. In this ‘new era of thinking’, ‘truth no longer involves *thought*; strangely enough, it now seems to involve *things*: *rebus*, it is through you that I communicate’ (E: 342). Truth does not emerge through conscious knowledge or thought, ideally posed in the form of a speech that is either an immaculate expression of intention or a perfect description of an object (truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*), it can instead be heard in the *constantly unpredictable* slips and homophonic equivocations (*l’une-bévue*), produced not in meaning and language (the conjunction of signifier and signified) but in the ‘thinginess’ of *lalangue*; the materiality of the letter (the disjunction of signifier from signified).

Despite the shock it induces in the subject of conscious knowledge, this truth is not straightforwardly unique: *it can only materialise in repetition*; in the failure of the

signifier to produce self-identical ‘signifying uniqueness’ (the interior eight’s inverted redoubling [S1 – S2 – S1]). Since one signifier always requires another, the logic of repetition subverts precedence *as such*: the ‘initiator operation’ (SXIV 15/2/67) of ‘original repetition’ (SXIV 24/4/67) is not the repetition of an origin but origin *as repetition*. *Urverdrängung* institutes the unconscious when a signifier is constituted, *through repetition*, as the erased determinant of a chain. The ‘Freudian Thing’ arises not in an original and inventive iteration, but in *reiteration*. Take, for example, the title of a particular *écrit*: ‘*L’étourdit*’. Phonetically, we hear *l’étourdi* and might understand it as an allusion to Molière’s play, *L’Étourdi (The Blunderer)*. Christian Fierens (2014: 5) outlines how this understanding is invalidated by a *reading* that notes the addition of a letter (*t*) which makes of the construction a rebus that, as a whole, makes no sense unless we make ‘a pronoun of the *l*’ and a verb of *étourdit*: that amuses and bewilders (*étourdit*) him.’ Even then, our reading of the letter compels an insistent question: ‘where has the grammatical subject of this literal sequence *l’étourdit* gone?’ In this respect, ‘*L’étourdit* goes beyond the meanings of its components’ and spurs a blundering interpretation that hits upon ‘the disappearance-apparition of a subject.’ It is a rebus that remains irreducible to any of the particular significations that it engenders. The subject of conscious knowledge (the grammatical ‘I’) has been fractured by an unfamiliar truth that invades its utterances. We have, then, the minimal combinatory of repetition; the subject has appeared/disappeared as what one signifier (S1 or *l’étourdi*) represents to another signifier (S2 or *l’étourdit*). Self-identical meaning has *failed*. Furthermore, the title is itself a meta-linguistic comment on the very mechanism that it sets in play and which the *écrit* itself will theorise and utilise: ‘the turns said’ (in ‘*L’étourdit*’ we also hear ‘*les tours dit*’). This meta-linguistic detachment (the description of the mechanism that it provides) is made possible only insofar as it partakes in the homophony; in, that is, the displacement and *turns* inherent to language. For Lacan, *reading* traces this trajectory of the Möbian *double turn*; it refuses to remain at the single turn of unitary meaning which takes language to be a tool of communication akin to telepathy.

To engage in psychoanalysis as a discipline without disciples, to *read* the unconscious, is to repudiate precedence again, still, *encore*. And yet, psychoanalysis is concerned with little else. What precedent, the psychoanalyst must ask, is compelling the subject to repeat? This is a question that concerns not just the signifier but the *real*. Whilst the analysand is determined by his own psychic precedent – which, as the causal,

missed encounter with the Other's lack, is *always a precedence without precedent* – psychoanalysis exists precisely because this preface, which is always both connected to and separate from the narrative chain, is not 'the peaceful ordering of things' but is *itself* the locus of traumatic *disorder*; stimulating and determining all manner of repetitious missteps. There must, in other words, be some libidinal and affective charge that powers repetition and lends its various manifestations a purpose that subtends apparent coincidence. Fierens (2014: 22) points here to the Ratman, who, when beginning to speak about his obsessional fears and wishes, would defend himself from their jolting effect by producing a 'rapidly produced *'aber'* ['but'] accompanied by a gesture of repudiation' (SE X: 224). Freud noted that this S1 (*aber*) had a specific S2 (*abér*), thanks to the unconventional stress his analysand laid on the second syllable, in which he perceives 'defence' (*Abwehr*). The detour of 'the turns said' (*les tours dit*) loop around what is, for the analysand, unthinkable and unspeakable. Homophony and grammar (a conjunction [*aber*] becomes a noun [*Abwehr*]) constitute two of the three operations an analyst interprets. The third is *logic*, 'without which interpretation would be stupid' (ETD: 29-30). Unconscious formations have a logical structure: the *lapse* indicates the *impossible*, the subject's unthinkable and unspeakable precedent. It is in instances of failure that truth grazes the real.

The encounter is always a missed encounter. If Freud's 'invention' of the unconscious should be taken 'in the sense of a discovery', this is also the 'discovery of *repetition*': the dynamic of 'the relation between *thought* and the *real*' (SXI: 49). The subject's repetitious thought '*always avoids... the same thing*. Here, the real is that which *always* comes back to the *same place* – to the place where the subject insofar as he *thinks*, where the *res cogitans*, does not meet it' (SXI: 49). This inassimilable precedent *remains*. It is an *ex-sistent* prefatory disorder or *primal* scene upon which no consistent or coherent order of ends and origins can be founded. An encounter with the Other's lack (*das Ding*) has taken place, an occurrence that derives its traumatic value from the nascent subject's inability to understand what he has been privy to. Defying comprehension and articulation, this unthinkable encounter is missed; as the real, it eludes apprehension and *continues to do so*.

Therefore, repetition is not a return to origins – the *single turn* of an exhaustive biography (reality) that seamlessly unites cause and effect: 'repetition is not reproduction... To reproduce is what one thought one could do in the optimistic days of catharsis. One had the primal scene in reproduction as today one has pictures of the

great masters for 9 francs 50' (SXI: 50). Furthermore, contrary to Freud's suggestion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 'repetition ... bears no relation to Nietzsche's "eternal return"' of the same (E: 307). The real remains 'beyond the *automaton*, the *return*, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle' (SXI: 53-4). This absent preface is the sexual real of the unconscious and the foundation of repetition which, as a defensive avoidance (i.e. *Abwehr*), constitutes the subject's particular mode of *jouissance*.

In *Seminar XIV*, throughout which Lacan elaborated his 'logic of fantasy'— which, presaging his logic of sexuation, he insists is 'a "logic" which is not a logic... a totally *unprecedented* logic', a *topologic* divorced from the totalising fantasy of logic (SXIV: 1/2/67) —, he notes that the prefatory order *par excellence*, the Pascalian 'God of philosophers', the infinite, enveloping sphere that secures Descartes' *cogitans* as a thinking being, the 'divine, empty Other' 'sustained in the philosophical *tradition*', is wholly discredited by Freud's discovery (SXIV:25/1/67). If the totalised Other in the form of the '*universe* of language... does not exist', this is '[p]recisely because of the existence of the object (*a*)' as that which is lost at the origin — or, more correctly (since it never existed in the first place), lost *as origin* — and which compels repetition (SXIV: 24/4/67). A belief in its existence protects the subject from the Other's desire/lack; it elides the sexual real and shores up the Other.

This cause is a strange precedent: both irredeemably beyond vocalisation and yet partially, tantalisingly present in every instance of repetition, it results in an operation of thought that, despite being inflected by a preface, is not the recollection of a 'simple return' but is instead 'a thinking of return, a repetition thinking' (SXIV: 15/2/67). If the inassimilable real presages a 'new era in thinking', by delegitimising the philosopher's omnipotent and non-deceitful Other as the *original* and final guarantor of thought, this does not license a 'free thinking' which is 'like the freedom of association... enough said' (SXIV: 1/2/67). As Lacan well knew, the death of God does not mean that everything is permissible. To ask the analysand to make like Derrida's speaker and freely *improvise*, to 'pass along the paths of free association', does not result in 'a slipshod discourse'. On the contrary, it is merely the initial step toward discovering 'what *conditions* this discourse beyond our instructions', whereby the analyst can 'bring into play this element... called *interpretation*' (SXIV: 21/6/67). A paradoxical logic (of

fantasy) emerges: if the real injects a disorder into the order of daily life, it also introduces an order into the apparent disorder of free association.

There is, then, a relation between ‘thought and the real’ in the logic of fantasy which is itself not, to recall Lacan’s incisive expression, ‘condemned to total liberty’: fantasy always veils and avoids the *same thing*; the real which ‘bears witness to a certain torsion’ in fantasmatic reality (SXIII: 8/6/66). The analyst must isolate ‘fantasy in its relationship to the real’ (ibid) by ‘find[ing] in each *structure*, a way to define the *laws of transformation* which guarantee for this fantasy, in the deduction of the statements of unconscious discourse the place of an *axiom*’ (SXIV: 21/6/67). Fantasy is a topology: the analyst must discern the axiomatic, qualitative invariable that remains throughout the various quantitative transformations that fantasy undergoes as it re-stages the missed encounter between ‘thought and the real.’

How can a thought confront this new era in repetition thinking? ‘If Freud *retains* our interest’, if he *remains* unique, this is not due to what Lacan refers to as ‘the *thinking* of Freud’ which is always vulnerable to the ‘historian of philosophy’, who is able to ‘minimis[e]’ this thinking by isolating a particular point of intellectual conservatism at which Freud has failed to ‘go beyond’ what preceded him (SXIV: 1/2/67). No, what is at stake for Lacan ‘is the object that Freud *discovered*’ which he intends to ‘*rediscover*’ by ‘following the trace of this thinking of Freud’; by following, that is, the relation between *Freud’s* thought and the real (SXIV: 1/2/67). Freud’s discovery *is* this relation; the ‘discovery of repetition.’ At stake, then, is not only the ‘Freudian Thing’, as the discourse of the Other/unconscious, but also *das Ding*; the real void around which repetition coils. If Lacan is to do justice to Freud, it is not a return to Freud that is required (the ‘reproduction’ of a ‘great master’) but a *repetition* of Freud. What, Lacan asks, was the real of Freud’s thought?

Does following Freud’s thought, or, indeed, an analysand’s thought, to the letter – which ‘only mark[s] out for us... what object is involved’ (SXIV: 1/2/67) – constitute a research? Is an ideal *repetition of discovery* possible? The ‘irresistible and natural tendency... of every constituted subjectivity’ is to ‘fail to recognise’ this object – a commonplace failing that ‘redoubles the drama of what is called research’ (SXIV: 1/2/67). The *researcher* – the one who *already knows* what he is searching for and complacently proceeds from the platform of an established reserve of information such as an exhaustive typology that would make psychoanalysis a zoology – always avoids

the same thing; that which, by its very nature, can only be misrecognised. The disorder of *novelty* is elided by the researcher who begins to do what ‘the word *recherché* implies – to turn round and round’ (SXXIII: 17/2/76), executing an immaculate and untroubled return to a prefatory law, a ‘theory of the unconscious’ – as dreadfully demonstrated by applied psychoanalysis (see 1.2). In this respect, reflects Lacan, ‘I have never regarded myself as a researcher. As Picasso once said... *I do not seek, I find*’ (SXI: 7).

In *Seminar XIV*, Lacan, reconsidering this dismissal, gnomically declares that ‘research [*recherché*]... [is] [n]othing other than what we can ground as being the *radical origin* of Freud’s approach concerning his *object*, nothing else can give it to us than what appears to be the *irreducible starting point* of the Freudian *novelty*, namely, *repetition*’ (SXIV: 1/2/67). The ‘starting point’ – the birth of psychoanalysis, prior to intellectual consolidation and institutionalisation or the discernment of an object that, once found, could be programmatically *researched* and re-found – was itself research *as repetition*. Freud’s thinking and object align when the material of research is itself research *qua* repetition: ‘This was the *first discovery*. Freud said to subjects, “Speak... let’s see what knowledge it is that you encounter”... And that necessarily led him to this discovery... [that] the essential thing in determining what one is concerned with when exploring the unconscious is repetition’ (SXVII: 77). Psychoanalysis is the discovery *of* repetition *through* repetition that remains novel by being the repetition of discovery.

Whilst the Freudian Thing speaks through repetition, this avoidance is not to be tracked interminably, lest the subject remain trapped in his circumlocutions. The purpose of psychoanalytic interpretation – a reduction of signification, leading toward ‘the analytic Thing’ (SVII: 203); the zero-point of the subject’s particular ‘economy of *jouissance*’ (SXX: 117) – is therefore to be distinguished from that of ‘the hermeneutic demand, which is precisely that which *seeks*... the ever new and the *never exhausted* signification’ (SXI: 7). The rigor of the psychoanalytic discipline will not result in the coherence that the disciple seeks. If the ‘real is that which always lies behind *automaton*’, it is this real that, ‘throughout Freud’s *research*... is the *object* of his concern’; a research that does not attempt to exhaust signification or reconstruct meaning but to ask of a subject afflicted by a ‘repetition dream’ (SXIV: 7/12/66): “What is the first encounter – the real – that lies behind his fantasy?” (SXI: 38) How can research into an object that cannot be defined even *begin*, let alone *repeat* itself? With

this question, prompted by the unspeakable real that causes and blocks repetition's *polysemy*, Lacan turned toward *asemic* resources: logic, mathemes and topology.

Fortunately, we need not merely imagine Derrida's hypothetical speaker who seeks 'as usual, "still" ["*encore*"]' to remain original:

What can I still [*encore*] have to say to you after all the time this has lasted, without having all the effects that I would like? Well, it is precisely because it doesn't that I never run out of things to say.

Nevertheless, since *one cannot say it all* [*tout dire*], and for good reason, I am reduced to this narrow course, which is such that at every moment *I must be careful not to slip back into what has already been done on the basis of what has been said*.

That is why today I am going to try, once again [*encore*], to stay this difficult *ground-breaking* course, whose horizon is strange, qualified, as it is, by my title – *Encore*. (SXX: 38)

In this passage, that which is 'ground-breaking' and *novel* announces itself from a particular *logical* locus – the 'not-all' (*pas-tout*)¹¹ – as the ineliminable excess that remains following any attempt to 'say it *all*'. Lacan can still go on, he can still muster another *encore* with the *Séminaire* entering its third decade, precisely because no symbolic 'order of things' can totalise itself. This is the state of affairs to which the psychoanalytic clinic testifies. However, there is, in analysis, a certain success that can only be ensured through the failure of a missed encounter: it is the particular way in which the analysand *repeatedly* fails to produce a coherent and consistent discourse which might say and explain everything that offers the analyst material with which to work. This is Lacan's 'narrow course' which traces the paradoxical *originality of repetition* without 'slip[ping] back' into what is *already known*: 'The approach to the real is narrow. And it is from haunting it that psychoanalysis looms forth' (R: 20).

In this respect, Lacan is, as a speaker addressing his audience – repeatedly, but unpredictably, improvising and inventing – in the role of the analysand; his circuitous speech perpetually bumps up against an unspeakable not-all. The real, however, is not simply *outside* discourse, as any *topography* might have it; it is instead '*extimate*' – a *topological*, internally excluded centre, marking and inflecting speech; a black hole identifiable only through the *distortive* effects it has on light. '[T]hose are words',

¹¹ I have chosen to render '*pas-tout*' as 'not-all' rather than 'not-whole' because the latter term suggests a simple dichotomy between completion and incompleteness which, for reasons that will become clearer in the examination of the logic of sexualisation below, is misleading. There are, however, occasions where the deployment of 'not-all' becomes a little awkward and 'not-whole' is substituted for it (e.g. I am 'not-wholly' subject to the Law).

writes Beckett in *The Unnameable*, ‘open on the silence, looking out on the silence, straight out, why not, all this time on the brink of silence... I’m shut up, the silence is outside, outside, *inside*’ (1959: 414). In the stumble, the scrambled word, the impossible to say can be heard. As Jean-Claude Milner neatly puts it, Wittgenstein’s discursive embargo (‘whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’) would be accurate ‘if only what we cannot speak about consented to be silent’ (1995: 169). The real is, according to Lacan’s idiosyncratic presentation of modal logic, the *impossible* as that which ‘doesn’t stop not being written’ (SXX: 94). Conversely, ‘repetition’, as ‘clarif[ied] with the glancing light of [Freud’s] *discovery*’, sees ‘great Necessity’ insistently ‘exercised in the Logos’ (E: 307). The symptomatic, repetitious avoidance of that which ‘doesn’t stop not being written’ is itself *necessary*: this avoidance ‘doesn’t stop being written’ (SXX: 94). The fact that the real escapes us *cannot escape us*.

Therefore, the psychoanalytic ‘not-all’ is not simply effaced by the *encore*; it is instead precisely through this repetitious and distortive *encore* that it emerges:

One could say that the *real* dream is *ineffable*, and, in many cases, it is. *How can there be a real experience of the dream?* This was one of the objections made to Freud. This objection lacks validity. For it is precisely on the material of the narration itself – the manner in which the dream is recounted – that Freud worked. And, if he gave an interpretation, it was based on the *repetition*, the frequency, the weight of certain words. (Lacan, 1975d: 4)

One must try, once again, to ‘fail better’ and through this failure – ‘the inability to speak, the inability to be silent’ (Beckett, 1959: 400) – the unconscious is *rediscovered*. It is lost precisely when the analyst is not receptive to failure; when he believes in the Other who will allow one to ‘say it all.’

Reflecting on his own intervention in the ‘order of things’, Lacan notes that ‘I have got lots of Freudian things going, I’ve even entitled one of the things I’ve written “The Freudian Thing” – but in what I term the real, *I have invented something which imposed itself on me*’ (SXXIII: 13/4/76). Once again, we cannot tell whether this is an invention or a discovery: the subject’s real is neither brought into existence by interpretation (invention) and nor does it pre-exist interpretation (discovery); it instead *ex-sists*. It is the real that, as we have seen, Lacan *gave* to his readers so that they might unglue themselves from the *legacy* of Freud (the precedent of *sens* that, according to Lacan, the Freudian institution erected). The ‘invention’ of the Lacanian Thing is, paradoxically, both with and without precedent: the real has been ‘imposed’ on Lacan – by Freud, by

his analysands, by, no doubt, his own unconscious – and yet its mode of imposition, its emergence *through repetition*, through the torsion and circumlocution of language – Freud's language, his analysand's language, his own language – never ceases to *remain unpredictable*. The real is a product of the return to Freud; it is a repetition spurred by an initial *encounter*: 'If Freud really made a *discovery*, and supposing that it is true, it could be said that the real is my *symptomatic response* to it' (SXXIII: 13/4/76). The symptom is an *inventive* response on the part of the subject to an original trauma; a *repeated* response through which what is impossible to speak about speaks.

Shoshana Felman (1989: 54) argues that:

Freud's originality is indeed not unlike the originality of a trauma, which takes on meaning only through *the deferred action of a return*. Freud's discovery of the unconscious can thus itself be looked at as a sort of primal scene, a cultural trauma, whose meaning – or originality in cultural history – comes to light only through Lacan's significantly transferential, *symptomatic repetition*.

Lacan's repetition of the Freudian trauma – which is *itself* the 'discovery of repetition'; the discovery of the way in which the real is (not) spoken – produces the real as that which inhibits the deferred attribution of 'meaning' through a *return*. 'Repetition thinking', insists Lacan, 'is a different domain to that of memory' (SXIV: 15/2/67). With his famous late aphorism – 'the unconscious... is real' (SXI: xxxix) – Lacan's repetition *returns* psychoanalysis to the stakes of its initial discovery: the *impossibility*, which the sexual real of the unconscious presents, of any ideal return to origins or resolution in meaning. Lacan's symptomatic response to the Freudian trauma traumatises ego psychologists who, after Freud, had begun to believe that one really could *return* and *say it all*, thereby betraying 'the *traumatism* of the *birth* of analysis' (SXVII: 128). This effort to demonstrate the 'not-all' would culminate with the topology of the Borromean knot. With this topology, Lacan 'claim[s] to have *invented* something' which, by 'articulat[ing] the real in question in the form of a writing', has a '*traumatic value*' (SXXIII: 13/4/76).

Preparatory to an investigation of Lacan's attempts to leave a legacy of trauma by giving a 'bit of real' with his nodal writings, we will outline how he got to that point through an examination of his reading of the relation between (Freud's) thought and the real.

3.2. A Möbian Method

It would be helpful to invent something, but we end up going in a circle.
(Lacan, 1975d: 7)

For Derrida, the invention's repetition is integral to the invention itself. It must be recognised and 'counter-signed.' It is not, in other words, an absolute and mute singularity, but rather only 'begins by being susceptible to *repetition*, exploitation, reinscription' (Derrida, 1992: 316). In this respect, the invention is not dissimilar to the unary trait of signifying repetition as the trace that announces itself only through its own erasure. This 'loss' of self-identity or signifying unicity results in the subject's splitting (*Spaltung*), which is, perhaps, a more recognisably *Lacanian* response to Freud, who, by '*inventing* psychoanalysis', introduces 'a *method* of detecting a *trace of thinking*, where thinking itself masks it by recognising itself differently in it – differently to the way that the trace designates it'. '[T]his is', Lacan declares, 'what I have promoted' (SXIV: 15/2/67). This method of tracing the topology of repetition (inverted redoubling) characterises not just psychoanalysis itself but also *Lacan's response to Freud*: the 'topology of return'.

If the Möbius strip makes explicit 'the necessity, in the structure, of a double circuit' – the traversal of the double loop that allows one to *rediscover, repeat* and *read* the point of departure – '[t]his is exactly the sense that I would give to my *method* with respect to what Freud taught' (SXIII: 1/6/66). Lacan had by this point become less comfortable with the characterisation of his 'method' as an uncomplicated return; as a motto it had served its purpose by originally distinguishing his teaching from 'the confused manifestations of a colossal deviation in analysis' – detours that required straightening out – but it did not adequately capture what was at stake in the *originality* of his repetition (SXIII: 1/6/66). Delivered two years prior to this statement, *Seminar XI* had marked a fundamental break in Lacan's teaching since it, unlike the seminars that immediately preceded it, was not solely dedicated to an appraisal of a single Freudian concept (e.g. *Seminar IX: Identification* or *Seminar X: Anxiety*). Instead, Lacan set the foundations of his future work by concentrating on four *Grund-begriffs*: the unconscious, transference, the drive and *repetition* itself. *Seminar XIII: The Object of Psychoanalysis*, which was primarily given to a *topological* account of the object (*a*) – here notable for being a concept that Lacan laid claim to having '*invented*' (SXVI: 27/11/68) – was emblematic of this *deviation*. If the first decade of the *Séminaire* had

ostensibly entailed a *return* to a *unique origin*, a return to an unconscious whitewashed by the ego, tracing the trajectory of the *single loop* of the circle in which ideal self-identical (re)union is realised, what followed would be a *repetition* or *re-turn*: a traversal of the *double loop* and the emergence of novelty. The research into ‘Freud’s object’ could finally *begin*... with a deviation granted by repetition.

Immediately prior to this *topological* account of his reading strategy, Lacan attempted to pose it in language: ‘To *rethink* [Freud], that is my *method*... [b]ut I prefer the second word if, precisely, you study it in order to take it apart a little bit, you realise what the word *method* can *mean exactly*: a path taken up again *afterwards*’ (SXIII: 1/6/66). Regardless of the appeal to exactitude that a term such as *method* superficially implies, the term is itself precisely that which does *not* ‘mean exactly’. Lacan is here alluding to the word’s Greek derivation: *meta* (μετά – beyond, after, with, among etc.) and *hodos* (ὁδός – way, journey etc.). As he remarks, the preposition ‘*meta*’ is, like many Greek prepositions and, indeed, ‘prepositions in every tongue’, extraordinarily rich in its etymology and is guaranteed to drag those who attach a ‘pre-eminence... in the study of linguistics to meaning’ into ‘an inextricable labyrinth’ (SXIII: 1/6/66). Whilst Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* influences our standard usage of the preposition as designating transcendence, *meta* actually accounts for a large, and not necessarily congruent, variety of relationships. In other words, *meta*, contrary to expectation, is itself a fine example of why there is, for Lacan, no metalanguage. If psychoanalysis ‘does not claim to reconstitute any new *whole*’, it is precisely ‘in this that it *inaugurates a method*’ (SXVI: 14/5/69).

In *Seminar VII*, having noted that *meta* can imply both ‘with’ and ‘after’, Lacan declares that ‘*Meta* is, properly speaking, that which implies a break [*coupure*]’ (SVII: 265). He takes as his support a line from *Antigone* in which the titular heroine articulates her apparently unequivocal stance with regards to Creon’s decree, which, she maintains, has nothing to do with (μετά) her morality (SVII: 264). Here, *meta* produces both a conjunction and a radical separation, *implying both continuity and discontinuity*. The method of Lacan’s return will mirror this double valence. It is worth noting that Lacan’s translation of *meta* as ‘*coupure*’ is not itself without complications since ‘the break [*coupure*]... [is that which] the very presence of language inaugurates in the life of man’ (SVII: 279). *Coupure* could, in this particular instance, be translated as *cut*; the *Möbian* cut of the signifier which, by introducing ‘difference as such,’ bars self-identity and motivates a movement of re-turning that will never attain the ideal return.

Designating the imperfect self-intersection of signification (S1–S2), the cut carries resonances of both a break and a repetition. This continuous discontinuity is itself a *method*; a *hodos* inaugurated by the primordial *meta* whose double-looped trajectory structures the insubstantial subject.

In this brief ‘search for meaning’ which Lacan encourages us to take on, we have looped back to topology. Lacan himself, having concluded that no definition perfectly captures meta’s diverse resonances, decides to pass over to the topological structure which, we recall, offers ‘*exactly the sense*’ that Lacan wishes to ascribe to his rediscovery of Freud’s discovery. But what exactly happens when one accomplishes a ‘double circuit?’ On the Möbius strip, one can only ‘*retrouviez*’ the origin ‘by making *two circuits*’ (SXIII: 1/6/66). In order to invent, one must turn in circles.

What, then, had been accomplished by Freud’s *first* circuit? There is, in the progress – we use this term dubiously – or method of Freud’s thought:

[S]omething strange which is the *fastened, closed, completed character*, even though *marked by a twist*, through something which connects up with itself in this point which I have for a long time underlined in his writing, as the *Spaltung* of the ego, and which *returns fully charged with the sense accumulated in the course of a long exploration*, that of his whole career, *towards an original point* with a completely *transformed sense*, an original point from which he started, almost, from the completely different notion of the duplication of personality.

Let us say that he was able to transform completely this current notion by the reference points of the unconscious, it is to it that at the end, in the form of the division of the subject, he gave his definitive seal. (SXIII: 1/6/66)

Let us quickly flesh out Lacan’s skeletal account. As early as Breuer and Freud’s *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-95), we can find references to a ‘splitting [*spaltung*] of consciousness’ and a ‘*spaltung* of the psyche’ (SE II: 12). The fundamental psychoanalytic subversion is already in evidence here; already we can observe a conscious subject disjoined from another scene: ‘The unconscious *originates* from the fact that the hysteric does not know what she is saying’ (Lacan, 1977c: 1). In the first of the *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1910), Freud refers to a ‘splitting of the personality’ between two independent ‘mental states’: a condition in which ‘consciousness remains attached to one of the two states, we call it the *conscious* mental state and the other, which is detached from it, the *unconscious* one’ (SE XI: 19). This *spaltung* remerged in the posthumously published ‘The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence’ (1940) as *Ich-spaltung*. Here, the ego (*Ich*) is not unified and

coherent but is instead *split*. The circuit is completed; at this point ‘Freud's pen stopped *inarticulo mortis*’ and Lacan, seizing upon this mature revisiting of the original point of departure, takes it up *again* by railing against ‘the *common sense* of psychoanalysts’ – the *sens* of the *group* – ‘which banishes that *splitting* from all considered reflection, isolating itself instead in a notion like the weakness of the ego’ (E: 633).

Recalling the important distinction between repetition and return, Lacan states that ‘[w]hat I have to do is very exactly to make the same circuit a *second* time [*une seconde fois le même tour*], but *in such a structure*, doing it a second time has *absolutely not the sense of a pure and simple reduplication*’ (SXIII: 1/6/66). Repetition *is* the mechanism of *spaltung*: the ‘two times’ that ‘make’ the subject. We know that rather than taking this *Ich-spaltung* to be a relatively peripheral crack in egoic harmony, Lacan generalises this fault as constitutive of the subject as such. The split occurs neither between ego and Id nor within a flimsy ego but is instead the very condition of possibility for the inconsistent psychic structure. Indeed, even at the point at which Lacan will claim that Freud’s ‘definitive seal’ is found in this postulation of the ‘division of the subject’, we can recognize Lacan’s ‘counter-signature’ and the initiation of the *second* circuit.

A notorious feature of this second circuit is that division becomes the consequence of *coupure*: ‘the *Spaltung*... [the subject] undergoes [is] due to his subordination to the signifier’ (E: 691). However, even this apparently novel introduction of structuralist linguistics suffers from an ambiguity that Lacan willfully nurtures: ‘*Starting with Freud*, the unconscious becomes a chain of signifiers that repeats and insists somewhere... In this formulation, *which is mine only in the sense that it conforms as closely to Freud’s texts as to the experience they opened up*, the crucial term is the signifier’ (E: 676). To which circuit does the signifier belong? If, for Lacan, it is ‘*only* a question of language in what [Freud] *discovers* for us of the unconscious’, this apparently elementary pillar, from which ‘[w]e must depart... to *revise* all that [Freud] advances in the *progress* of an experience’ – the act of ‘mak[ing] the same circuit a second time’ – still needed to be ‘*found at the departure* of this return to Freud’ (1977b: 1).

The logic of the signifier, whilst already *implicit* in the first circuit, is, like *any* signifier, only rendered retroactively legible by the second circuit: by Lacan’s *reading* of Freud. And, just as no signifier can be subject to a pure reduplication (no signifier can *return* in the form of an identical reiteration), Lacan’s second circuit, whilst of course being inseparable from the first circuit (it is not absolutely novel), is nonetheless

different and cannot avoid the inevitable effacement of the ideal origin. In other words, if no signifier can describe itself without losing its self-identity in difference, we should not expect Lacan's 'mak[ing] [of] the same circuit a second time' to amount to an absolutely faithful return or for its 'discoveries' to be absolutely heterogeneous to Freud's circuit. This double-loop, the twisted Möbian space of which ensures that one returns to an 'original point' with a 'transformed sense', is the (topo)logic of the signifier: there has been a *'twist'* in the return' (SXI: 215). Here, the logic of the signifier is both what Lacan's second circuit (re)discovers *and* what directs the *method* – a *hodos* guided by the impossibility (which the signifier forces us to realise) of the *meta* – of this second circuit.

Linguistics was an inherent, but unnamed, part of Freud's *first* circuit and came to be recognised by Lacan's reading: *Wahrnehmungszeichen* ('signs of perception'), as a series of mnemonic traces imprinted on the layers of the subject's unconscious/preconscious memory connecting perception and consciousness in Freud's first topography, are signifiers (L: 4). If 'the *trace* has always caused thinking' (SXIV: 15/2/67) – a thinking that is *not* 'consciousness' – Lacan will read 'the *trace* of this thinking of Freud' (SXIV: 1/2/67).

In this respect, Freud's *Entwurf* (1895), and the early topography established therein, 'is very revealing of a kind of *substructure* of Freud's thought' (SVII: 35). This striking presentation of the *Entwurf* as an uncontaminated point of origin – a 'pure text' and 'virgin source' of all successive Freudian tributaries (SVII: 37) – indicates its importance for Lacan's own formulations. However, if it is 'the *true*, solid backbone of Freud's thought' it is nonetheless a 'hidden backbone' that will require Lacan to 'return' to it (SVII: 25-27). As is so often the case, this return offers itself as the isolation of a 'true' Freud, but this figure will only be rendered visible after a certain refraction; a refraction that is more true to the text than the reigning 'common sense.' Indeed, no sooner has Lacan eulogised about this 'pure text,' he is telling his audience that 'this year I am proposing not simply to be faithful to the text of Freud and to be its exegete, as if it were *the source of an unchanging truth* that was the model, mold and dress code to be imposed on all our experience' (SVII: 37). Lacan will meddle with this 'virgin source' and renew this truth so that it may retain its role as a 'backbone'. How exactly does Lacan perform this delicate *reading*?

The *Entwurf* confirmed two foundational principles of his own work; the priority of the unconscious (perceptions are organised as traces by the unconscious before they are

accessible to consciousness) and its linguistic structure (the associational field of neurons [signifiers]). The ‘return to Freud’ had been necessitated by the dilution, at the hands of ego psychology, of a conceptual purity rediscovered in the *Entwurf*: the primacy of the unconscious. Nevertheless, this text is not the source of a rigid and bequeathed truth: what Lacan garners from this ‘substructure of Freud’s thought’ is nothing less than the substructure of Lacan’s thought; the unconscious ‘structured like a language.’ The fashion in which Lacan proceeds is most typical: firstly the English translation (upon which the French translation is modelled) is dismissed as being replete with ‘distortions’ of ‘original intuitions’ – the particular object of Lacan’s ire being the translation of *Bahnungen* for ‘facilitations.’ Secondly, Lacan proposes restoring the original word because it better facilitates his own translation: *Bahnungen* ‘suggests the creation of a continuous way, a chain, and I even have the feeling that it can be related to the signifying chain...’ (SVII: 39) As for the traces or ‘signs of perception’ organised in this chain: ‘our reading’ ‘give[s] to these *Wahrnehmungszeichen* their *true* name of signifiers’ (SXI: 46). Lacan’s repetition has been neither a perfect return nor an absolute break.

In the short treatise on method titled ‘On a Purpose’, written especially for the 1966 publication of *Écrits* and offered as an introduction to his two lectures that bookended Jean Hyppolite’s commentary on Freud’s 1925 paper ‘*Verneinung*’ (‘Negation’), Lacan again discusses his second circuit in terms of a topology. The “‘return to Freud” has nothing to do with a return to sources that could, here as elsewhere, signify no more than a *regression*’, and instead takes on an ‘entirely different meaning insofar as it is based on the subject’s topology, which can only be elucidated through a second twist [*tour*] back on itself’ (E: 306). Lacan would take liberties with the ‘virgin source’ that is Freud’s *Entwurf*. The notion of ‘a *return* to the sources’ would only give rise to ‘all sorts of idealisations’ (SXIII: 1/6/66). As we will see, this equally applies for any reading of the unconscious itself.

The Lacanian re-turn to Freud brings with it the subject’s double-looped topology as a conceptual *progression* whilst itself being an example of this topology as a return that delivers a ‘transformed sense’. With the ‘here, as elsewhere’ that serves as an example of a return that has amounted to nothing more than a ‘regression’, Lacan is referring to neo-Freudian readings of ‘*Verneinung*’ that have taken instances of negation in the clinic as evidence of resistance on the part of the analysand; a response which then

requires an analysis of resistance. In an exemplary instance of negation outlined by Freud, an analysand, without prompting from the analyst, states that, whatever else his dream might concern, it certainly has nothing to do with his mother. In the analysis of resistance, this would be read as a defensive stance that the analysand is to be browbeaten into dropping. One can easily see how such a practice could quickly devolve into a specular rivalry, a clash of egos that would ensure analysis remained fixed at an imaginary level. Analysis does not have as its aim the dissolution of defence: 'it is not the conviction with which [the interpretation] is received by the subject that counts' toward an evaluation of interpretation's 'well-foundedness' (E: 497).

Where Freud had, in what Lacan repeatedly refers to as a 'turning point' in his thought during the 1920's,¹² begun to conceptualise the *elusiveness* of the unconscious – the worrying revelation that, via operations such as negation, it closes itself off – his disciples argued that for this new development to be countered, a shift from the analysis of repetition's 'material' to an analysis of resistances would have to be enacted. If it is the unconscious that is to be analysed and not the ego, one must grasp that '[o]n the unconscious side of things, there is no resistance, there is only a tendency to *repeat*' (SII: 321). Repetition, as the *insistence* of signifiers, produces material for analysis. Freud's *twist* – the 'turning point' that would see him, upon completion of the circuit, arrive not at ego psychology but at the (*Ich*)*spaltung* – had, instead of remaining bound within the 'fastened character' of his progress toward the divided subject, been fallaciously grasped as licensing a violent 'swerving in its entirety of a field of observation'; the 'great turning, the agonizing revision' which sees the 'reintegration of psychoanalysis into the categories of general psychology' (Lacan, 1977b: 1). The *originality of repetition* had been folded back into the study of consciousness.

How, then, does *Verneinung* lead us to the *split*? Analysts had not, unlike Freud (according to Lacan's re-turn), been good enough Hegelians. They had 'overlook[ed] the consequences of what Freud says about *Verneinung* as a form of avowal' and failed to acknowledge that 'negation by the subject cannot be treated as equivalent to drawing a blank' (E: 497). There is, Lacan contends, no pure vocalised negation; disavowal is not tidily distinct from avowal. The statement 'not my mother' demonstrates this perfectly.

¹² See E: 276, 277, 278, 297, 308 & 313.

Before seeing how, it's worth observing that Lacan's appraisal of Hyppolite's Hegelian reading of *Verneinung* and his own contributions, are, in the context of our discussion, very telling. Lacan's two interventions, the first of which opens with reference to 'my *method* of *returning* to Freud's texts' (E: 308), 'still bear traces of the violent *novelty* they brought with them' and thus warrant *returning* to, not least because 'the subjects they deal with have yet to be taken up by others' (E: 303). We might also argue that the early seminar sessions from which these *écrits* are taken amount to a localisable point of departure for Lacan's own circuit. A significant tribute is reserved for Hyppolite who has, in a fashion that recalls both Freud and Lacan's own Möbian circuits, by 'allowing himself to be led in this way by the letter of Freud's work, up to the spark that it necessitates, without selecting a destination in advance – and by not backing away from the residue, *found anew at the end, of its enigmatic point of departure*': *Spaltung* (E: 304).

It is precisely the two facets of Lacan's re-turn – the proposition that the split is fundamental and caused by the signifier – which Hyppolite's reading demonstrates. The status of an articulated negation is particularly awkward; it cannot be read as the defensive response of a unified consciousness because it brings something into existence precisely by stressing its non-existence (censorship). In other words, a far more efficient and effective barring of the signifier 'mother' would have been to not say it at all. Instead, 'mother', in being raised as a denial ('not my mother'), is now a positivized negative; a 'nothing' or 'not' that counts as something. It is not simply 'equivalent to drawing a blank' and nor is it to be made equivalent, through hasty understanding, to an avowal ('it is my mother'). Negation, then, should not be apprehended as an act within the imaginary theatre of defence and aggressivity but should be read as a logical equivocation. Alenka Zupančič (2011: 42-43) illustrates this strange 'negativity introduced or *discovered* by psychoanalysis' – that 'is not pure absence or pure nothing, or simply the complementary of what it negates' – with a brilliant example from Ernest Lubitsch's *Ninotchka*. A customer, upon ordering coffee without cream, is informed by the waiter that, since the restaurant is out of cream, they can only offer coffee without milk. The disavowal ('without milk' or 'not mother') is thereby lent an existential weight that distinguishes it from 'pure' negativity.

Zupančič asserts that 'what is unconscious in the given case is first and foremost the *censorship*, and not simply its *object*, "mother"' (2011: 42). Lacan and Freud are urging us to think in terms not of the *content* of the unconscious but of the *function* of the

unconscious: ‘The unconscious sticks here to the distortion itself (the negation), and is not hidden in what the subject supposedly really saw in his dream’ (ibid:42). The shift of the ‘place’ of the unconscious from content to content’s distortion – from a localisable point to an *ex-sistent* twist – means that even if the analysand were to be persuaded of an interpretation’s ‘well-foundedness’, even if the analysand were to retract the censorship and say ‘yes, you’re quite right, I really was dreaming about my mother’, this would not abolish the *function* of repression which will continue to distort the analysand’s speech: ‘The repression, the symptoms persist after the analysand has become conscious of the repressed, which could also be formulated as follows: we can accept the (repressed) content, eliminate it, but we cannot eliminate the structure of the gap, or crack that generates it’ (ibid: 42).

Unconscious distortion is derived from the logic of the signifier which can entertain a disconcerting, *undecidable* negation that does not obey the logical law of non-contradiction – a “*with without* cream” as irreducible to both alternatives (cream/no cream)’ (ibid: 43). Through this distortion, which cannot be cured by the restoration of a single sense (i.e. it *is* mother), the truth of unconscious desire speaks, *splitting* the subject for whom the self-conscious production of meaning invariably falters, exceeding intention. He both says too much *and* fails to say it all. An equivocal *double-loop* operates (S1/mother – S2/not mother or S1/*aber* – S2/*Abwehr*).

Here, we can recognise Lacan’s distinction between the two subjects of enunciation and the enunciated. The elusive, insubstantial subject of the unconscious is to be found at the level of its *enunciation* – the split that emerges within *enunciated content*. The distortion in enunciated negation announces the presence of the subject of enunciation. We are not dealing with a split between the conscious and the unconscious but with the unconscious *qua* split; the structural fault that generates distortion. The enunciation is not the undeformed truth of an enunciated statement (i.e. ‘mother’), but the undecidability (between ‘mother’ and ‘not mother’) that decompletes the content and splits coherent (intentional and communicated) meaning.

A self-identical consciousness would have as its aim the unification of the enunciation and the enunciated; that is, the circular closure of the Möbian topology of signifying self-difference in a *single turn*. There can be no cosmological envelopment of one sphere by another (meaning of meaning) – no set of sets – and no tautological denial of difference (i.e. if $a=a$, the meaning of ‘meaning’ *is* meaning). For Lacan, ‘[t]he apogee

of meaning, it can be felt that it is the *enigma* [*énigme*]' (1973: 1). The 'apogee of meaning' is not, then, the greatest concentration of meaning or its globalising completion but a point of *non-meaning*. 'An *énigme*', Lacan declares somewhat enigmatically, 'is an enunciation [*énonciation*] whose enunciated [*énoncé*] cannot be located' (SXXIII: 13/1/76). The subject of the enunciation and the enunciated cannot be stitched together to produce an ideal, intentional subject, announcing itself as 'I' in speech, that would always say what he means and mean what he says. If the *lapsus* cannot be recuperated by a conscious articulation – if the enunciation cannot be accounted for by an enunciated statement (neither 'mother' nor 'not mother' are satisfactory meanings) – the enigma remains. Lacan, exercising his powers of repetitious equivocation for yet another *encore*, states that:

Indexing the couple, [the signifier] introduces division into the subject whatever is thus *énonce* as fact. The fact remains suspended by the *enigma* of *énonciation*, which is nothing but the *closing-in upon itself* of fact – the fact of fact [*fait du fait*], as one might *write* it, or the making of fact [*faîte du fait*], or the fact of 'things made' [*fait du faite*], as it is *said* [*dit*], the same in fact, equivalent in equivocality, and as such the *limit of the said* [*dit*]. (SXXIII: 18/11/75)

A grammatical equivocation occurs (a verb, *faîte* [S1], becomes a noun, *du fait* [S2]), rupturing the single loop of *returning* self-identity – a *circular* formula such as '*fait du fait*' or 'meaning of meaning' – and installing the topological double-loop of *repetition*. It is this failure of the loop to close itself without an inverted redoubling that announces the discontinuous presence of the subject of the *énonciation*, rendering any *enunciated* appeal to fact suspicious; a fact is always *made* and *said*. Since '[t]here is no fact without the fact that the speaking-being says so', there is 'no fact without artifice': any *fait* is always *faîte* (SXXIII: 13/1/76). The fact of fact – 'the *closing-in upon itself* of fact' – is disfigured by the apogee of fact; the equivocal slip that generates a resonance beyond the intentional, enunciated statement – 'the limit of the said [*dit*].'

In a distinction roughly equivalent to that between the enunciation and the enunciated, Lacan contends that there is a subject of the *dire* (saying) and a subject of the *dit* (said). The truth can only be half-said (*mi-dit*) since any *enunciated* statement cannot close the split that generates distortion. This is why, evoking other broken circles like the 'meaning of meaning' and the 'fact of fact', Lacan states that 'I do not say the *truth about truth*' (SXXIII: 11/5/76). We cannot say the *whole* truth since there is no 'universe of discourse' or Other of the Other. Lacan's prosopopoeia ('I, truth, speak')

‘goes beyond allegory’ because in its rigour, rather than its apparently excessive poetic license, it hits upon a logical impasse and grazes the real: ‘there is no such thing as a metalanguage.... This lack of truth about truth... is the rightful place of *Urverdrängung*’ (E: 736-737). Either way it is received (i.e. as manifest disavowal or latent avowal), the statement ‘not mother’, is always ‘half-said’. Nevertheless, this *failure* is superior to the imbecilic success of egoic self-knowledge. If Lacan’s repetition ‘tell[s] the truth about Freud’ (E: 737), this is only insofar as, following the trace of his thinking, he abuts upon the mainspring of truth’s failure and thereby *holds onto the real*: ‘What Freud brings us concerning the Other is this: there is no Other except in saying it [i.e. no unified, totalised Other *qua* One that is beyond the logic of re-presentation], but it is impossible to say completely. There is an *Urverdrängt*, an *irreducible* unconscious, the saying of which is not only defined as impossible, but introduces as such the category of the impossible’ (SXXII: 17/12/74).

In *Seminar XI*, Lacan – following a passage in which he refers to the unconscious as a ‘gap’ that neo-Freudians have attempted to ‘stitch up’ – reasserts the stakes of his second circuit as a re-turn that requires him to ‘go back and trace the concept of the unconscious through the various stages of the process through which Freud elaborated it – since we can complete that process only by *carrying it to its limits*’ (SXI: 23-4). It is just such a method that Lacan and Hyppolite exercise in their reading of ‘*Verneinung*’, arriving at a limit which is the unconscious ‘defined as impossible’. Instead of attempting to subsume this limit, one should, Lacan seems to suggest, adopt an intellectual stance with respect to this *gap* akin to the ‘surprise’ of the subject who ‘feels himself overcome’ by the unexpected eruption of unconscious distortion (SXI: 25). The analyst, for whom Picasso’s maxim ‘I do not seek, I find’ obtains a practical pertinence far beyond the convenience of a slogan, offers an approving nod toward ‘the astonishment by which [Hyppolite] entered into the proceedings’ (E: 304). Freud’s texts, writes Lacan, ‘have surprised me and those who attend my seminars as only genuine *discoveries* can’ (E: 337). The unconscious, and Freud’s *discovery* of it, never stops being unprecedented. Again stressing that the unconscious is not a preserved archive of repressed content awaiting the illuminatory evacuation of distortion to which any ‘*search* for meaning’ or ‘return to sources’ aspires, Lacan asserts that ‘[i]n the spoken or written sentence something stumbles... What occurs, what is produced, in

this gap, is presented as the *discovery*' (SXI: 25) – the Freudian discovery; the *Spaltung* from which he departs and to which he re-turns and *rediscovers*.

Kenneth Reinhard puts it well when he observes that 'Lacan represents psychoanalysis less as the discovery of the lost secrets of the unconscious than as the endless re-discovery of the unconscious *as lost*: as a primary rupture, a traumatic encounter, a missed appointment' (1996: 74 [Italics original]). When one discovers the unconscious, one is not discovering an enduring, unchanging and constant entity – be it a material organ-source to which biology reduces the psyche or an exhumed archaeological artefact – but a gap irreducible to theoretical knowledge. The discovery will always demand rediscovery: 'as soon as [the discovery of the unconscious] is presented, this discovery becomes a rediscovery and, furthermore, it is always ready to steal away again, thus establishing the dimension of loss' (SXI: 25). These (re)discoveries do not amount to the systematic accumulation of information through samples and examples which might eventually provide a complete epistemological picture. Lacan humorously parodies this fallacy:

The analyst who listens is able to record many things. With what your average person today can state... one can compile the equivalent of a small encyclopaedia...Afterward one could even construct a little electronic machine... And this is moreover the idea that some people can have – they construct an electronic machine so that the analyst only has to pull out a ticket that will give them their answer. (SXVII: 35)

Despite the patent ludicrousness of such an idea, it re-emerges later in the very same seminar, threatening to domesticate Lacan's own (re-)discoveries, which, transferred from the clinic to the university, finally come to rest in a socialite's drawing room: 'What will you do with all I tell you? You record it on a little machine, and afterward, you have parties which you hand out invitations to – that's a Lacan tape for you' (SXVII: 149). Contrary to this grim banalisation, if psychoanalytic discovery constantly requires rediscovery, each rediscovery is, to invert the formula, always a discovery; it is always *novel* and unforeseeable; perpetually alien to *theoria*.

The subject's 'surprise' and Hyppolite's 'astonishment' alert us to an important equivalence between the unconscious and Freud's text, which Lacan rediscovers and reads through a second circuit that is not, we recall, a simple 'reduplication.' Describing his re-turn as a 'literal commentary on Freud's work', Lacan contends that '[t]here is nothing superstitious in my privileging the *letter* of Freud's work. It is in circles where

liberties are taken with that letter that people render that letter sacred in a way that is altogether compatible with its debasement to *routinized* use' (E: 304-5). A complex interplay of faith and heresy is at work in this *discipline without disciples*: if one is to be faithful to Freud – to do justice to Freud – one must recognise in his discovery not an endlessly reproducible commandment (a *legacy of sens*) but an original heresy (distortion): *Fiat trou...* Freud's disciples are heretics precisely because they 'stitch up the gap' and transform the discovery into a routine (from resistance to egoic rehabilitation): liberties are taken precisely when none are taken. The re-turn's second circuit is not only necessitated by the first; *it is necessitated by that which necessitated the first*: 'not backing away from the residue, found anew at the end, of its enigmatic point of departure.'

What are we to make of Lacan's suggestive reference to 'the letter of Freud's work' beyond an implied philological devotion to scripture, which, if it shows the wrong kind of devotion, debases the letter by receiving it not as sacrilegious but as sacred? If, as Lacan complains, '[t]he *requirement to read* does not take up as much space in the culture of psychoanalysis as one might think', how should one read the Freudian letter, the material letter of the enigmatic *lapsus* that traces the discovered gap? (E: 304 [Italics original]) How should we read the letter of Lacan's work which, as is presented on the back cover of the 1966 edition of *Écrits* – that is, at the culmination of the circuit that we have examined here; at the point at which he re-turns to his first Seminar in which he and Hyppolite read '*Verneinung*' –, is 'the discovery of Freud by Jacques Lacan'?

3.3. Reading the Letter

Much has been made of the compliment extended by Lacan to Miller – that ‘[h]e who interrogates me also knows how to read me’ (T: 1) – in a prefatory statement appended to the transcript of their 1973 televised interview. Lacan’s depiction of Miller’s response to his teaching is worth noting, especially when we take into account the derision Lacan reserves for the orthodox reception of Freud, which had, instead of paying attention to ‘the *gap* that opens up in his thought’, ‘engage[d] in the *morose* operation of obstructing it’ (E: 306): ‘For the first time, and particularly with you [Miller], I felt I was being listened to by ears that were other than *morose*: namely, ears that didn’t hear me Otherizing [*Autrifiant*] the One’ (T: 24). Moroseness is an affective response to *Spaltung*; it is the attempt to close it up; to obscure it with meaning and signification by saying it all: ‘Affect... befalls a body whose essence it is said to dwell in language... [without] finding dwelling-room, at least not to its taste. This we call *moroseness*’ (T: 23-4). The ‘original *Un*, namely, the cut’ (SXI: 43) of the signifier (S1) or the ‘one of the split’ (SXI: 26) cannot be ‘Otherized’; it cannot be *explained and cured* by a totalised Other of the Other that would itself be a universal and unified One. This frustrates the narcissistic idealism of the neurotic who ‘wants to be the One in the field of the Other’ (SXVI: 26/3/69); a field that is itself a ‘topological structure... which means that the Other is not complete, is not identifiable in any case to a One’ (SXVI: 14/5/69).

Closely aligned to the morose attitude is ‘sadness [*tristesse*]’ which Lacan, embarking on an unusually overt theological turn, describes as a ‘moral failing’ (T: 22). He is alluding here to the crippling guilt experienced by the subject with respect to the obscure nexus of castration, prohibition, original sin and loss that Freud sought to narrativise with myth and which is so integral to Christian doctrine. It is, of course, this nexus (of language and *jouissance*) that constitutes the unconscious. Opposed to the ‘moral weakness’ of a puritanical sadness whereby one rejects the scandalous unconscious and protects oneself from sin, is the ‘virtue’ of a ‘gay *sçavoir*’ that revels in the knowledge (*savoir*) produced when the unconscious speaks (*ça parle*). However, even the virtue of this Gay Science ‘cannot but meet in’ this bitty *jouissance* ‘the Fall, the return into sin’ by ultimately learning that the *jouissance* accessible to a subject that dwells in language cannot be enough to return him to a state of prelapsarian *Oneness* (T: 22). Nevertheless, this virtue remains a considerable improvement on sadness and one

that Lacan himself adheres to: ‘Everyone knows that I am cheerful [*gai*], even childlike, so they say: I amuse myself. In my texts, I am constantly indulging in jokes that are not to the taste of academics. This is true. I am not sad [*triste*]’ (2012a: 271). To dismiss Freud’s *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* as mere frivolity is to morosely obstruct the gap of unconscious distortion, whereas the cheerful attitude of gay *sçavoir* consists in ‘not understanding’ or ‘diving at the meaning [*sens*]’ but instead ‘flying over it as low as possible without meaning’s gumming up this virtue, thus enjoying [*jouir*] the deciphering’ (T: 22). At stake here is an interpretation that is not bound by ego psychology.

A few pages later, Lacan reproduces one of his own jokes: ‘Who, upon reading... *Seminar XI*, does not sense the advantage of not translating *Trieb* by instinct, of keeping close to this drive by calling it *drift* [*dérive*], of *dismantling and then reassembling its oddity, sticking, all the while to Freud?*’ (T: 24) As noted, Lacan’s translation of *Trieb* as ‘drift’ was emblematic of his approach to a Freudian *legacy* that was manifesting itself in the uncritical, drone-like following of an *instinctual direction* (*sens*) laid down by the Other. There was also an important theoretical point to be made: he calls it drift because the drive is not straightforwardly directed at its aim. The satisfaction attained by the drive is that of a detour that leads it to circle the aim without actually achieving this aim by directly meeting it. This is because ‘*Trieb*... has a relationship to *das Ding*’ insofar as the unattainable object that it loops around obscures the Other’s lack (SVII: 110).

The logic of the Möbian re-turn as the navigation of a twist within a closed circuit wherein Lacan departs from and returns to Freud is clearly operative in his ‘dismantling’ and ‘reassembling’ drive as drift, which, unlike instinct, takes account of the drive’s inherent ‘oddity’; the fact that its (re-)turning circuit has no ‘natural’ object or teleological end-game: it merely ‘*fait le tour*’ (SXI: 168). This absence of a final and total biological determinant of human behaviour recurs as conceivably the most fundamental Lacanian theorem: the non-existence of the sexual rapport. This real impossibility gives rise to an ‘annoyance [*ennui*] [or] *moroseness*’ (T: 30); a response that consists in a delusional “divine’ approach to love’ (a union with the enveloping sphere of a loving God), a ‘oneyance [*unien*]... [b]y which I designate the *identification of the Other with the One*’ (T: 23). Again, moroseness entails suturing a particular gap from which the subject suffers; here, the impossibility of fantasmatic unity is

unsuccessfully mitigated by an imaginary fiction; a ‘gumming up’ of *Spaltung* with meaning.

In reference to what he dismisses as the facile ‘sexo-leftism’ of permissive modernity, Lacan critically observes that these same ‘affects [annoyance and moroseness] are betrayed – through speech, and even in deed – in those young people dedicated to relations without repression’ (T: 30-31). Relations, that is, without *distortion*. Lacan, speaking in the wake of the student unrest ideologically propelled by a Maoism that seduced many of his own students, including Miller, and perhaps with Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* in mind, laconically remarks that ‘[n]o amount of excitement’ or synthetic liberalism ‘can lift away the evidence of a curse on sex’ (T: 30). The classicism of an ideal ‘divine’ love and non-traditional forms of free love (which abuts upon the same problem as ‘free thinking’) are, as far as Lacan is concerned, no different. Attempts to enjoy ‘without repression’ – to challenge the Oedipal model of a patriarchal family – are doomed to failure since they are merely attacks on a particular manifestation of a *structural impossibility*, an incurable real.

‘Even if memories of familial suppression weren’t true’, Lacan continues, ‘they would have to be invented, and that is certainly done’ (T: 30). Parochial barriers to an absolute *jouissance* (a prelapsarian union anterior to original sin *qua* ‘original Un’) will still be erected, even by the subject who has thrown off the shackles of the nuclear family and entered a commune, since episodic and meaningful *impotence* is far less threatening to the ego than an acknowledgement of the *impossible*: ‘Sexuality, as it is lived, as it operates, is... something which represents a prohibiting oneself [*un se defendre*] from following the consequences of this truth that there is no Other’ (SXIV 25/6/67). The people of liberal capitalist societies, far from being liberated, find themselves subjected to a new, unrelenting superegoistic imperative that has re-energised ‘familial suppression’: ‘Enjoy!’

What does the absence of the sexual rapport have to do with reading the letter (of Freud’s work)? For Lacan, reading takes place on the basis that signifier and signified are detached. There is a bar, which Lacan refers to as the phallic function, between the two components of a sign (S/s): ‘the function of the bar is not unrelated to the phallus’ (SXX: 39). It is through an inherent property of language – the slippage from signifier to signifier – that castration operates and the sexual rapport is inhibited. Desire cannot be perfectly communicated between subjects and thus the satisfaction we receive is

always inadequate. Lacan calls this disappointing *jouissance* derived from speaking phallic *jouissance*. The absence of an ideal ‘relation of signification’ (ETD: 1) between signifiers and subjects gives rise to the *impossible*: ‘the signifier is not proper to give body to a formula that would be of the sexual rapport’ (R: 7-8). As a *real* effect of the signifier, the sexual rapport does not stop not writing itself.

The bar has a further consequence: the psychoanalyst, rather than *hearing meaning*, now *reads the letter* as that aspect of the signifier in its detachment from effects of meaning. Lacan’s aside that we would ‘know it’ if we ‘read what I write’ alerts us to the fact that, in this oral seminar, the bar between the signifier and signified is an *écrit* (S/s) and that this ‘algorithm’ is to be taken at ‘the level of a writing [*unécrit*]’ (SXX: 33). The bar is not only written in the obvious sense (mathematical algorithms and calculations are always supported by a writing) but it also signals the dimension of the written in speech; by separating and distinguishing the signifier from the signified, the consequence of the bar is that desirous speech is read to the letter. Lacan moves seamlessly from the problematic consequences of the installation of the bar for the intended communication of meaning to the difficulties one might have in reading his own work which not only theorises the bar but actively deploys it through a stream of puns: ‘The bar, like everything involving what is written, is based only on the following – what is written is not to be understood. That is why you are not obliged to understand my writings... The bar is precisely the point at which, in every use of language, writing [*l’écrit*] may be produced... [T]he effects of the unconscious’ – the slips and lapses that occur in conscious speech – ‘have no basis without this bar’ (SXX: 34).

Reading and understanding are two very different acts: ‘reading in no way obliges you to understand. You have to read first’ (SXX: 65). Understanding is often a sure sign that one has not read *Écrits*, rather than being an ideal point towards which reading should tend. ‘[T]his situation that I am undergoing’, Lacan melodramatically laments, ‘[is] a sickness of our epoch...the cult of competence. Namely, of a certain idealness [*idealite*] to which I am reduced...my *Écrits* are an example... one of them is translated into English; *Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage* has been translated as *The Language of the Self*’ (SXVIII: 9/6/71). Lacan is referring here to the title of the book containing Anthony Wilden’s 1968 translation and commentary which introduced the French Freud to an Anglo-American audience. It is easy to see why the new title, with its resuscitation of the self and the suggestion that language is ‘*of*’ the self (i.e. as that which the self owns and controls) as opposed to being a foreign field into which the

subject is maladaptively inserted, would have rankled with Lacan. This particular ‘sickness’ rehabilitates the plague by transforming the bungling, stumbling barred subject into a ‘*competent*’ ‘self.’ The stinging reproach that Lacan levels at several of his *readers*, becomes more pertinent when we realise that it was often a criticism of their capability as *analysts*. The reader who understands and regurgitates psychoanalytic scripture is further from being an analyst than he was before he began, having grasped nothing of the nature of psychoanalysis as a ‘*docte* ignorance’ quite distinct from the programmatic communication and accumulation of knowledge that takes place on a first aid course (E: 300). The unconscious is read, not understood.

If, for Lacan, a principle of psychoanalytic reading is that the subject’s half-said ‘truth must be followed *to the letter*’ (E: 391), we owe this practical foundation to ‘Freud’s *discovery*’ which reveals what the ‘truth... of the unconscious owes to the letter of language’ regardless how ‘*sacred* or *profane*’ this literality is (E: 305). A *disciplined* approach to the letter does not, in other words, treat it as a symbolism or message conveying a transcendent Truth; its truth is entirely bound up with the literal and distorted rebus itself. An ‘inflexible *discipline*’ is required ‘in following its contours, for these contours run counter to intuitions’ – intuitions not unrelated to the geometric intuitions that topology upsets – ‘that keep it all too comfortably safe’ (E: 305).

These awkward circumlocutions, that trace the structural contour of some Thing that is impossible to vocalise, can also be grammatical, and Lacan provides an elliptical example of this in *Seminar XIX*:

I demand that you refuse what I am offering you because: it is not *that*.
[*Je te demande/ de me refuser/ ce que je t’offre/ parce que: c’est pas ça.*](SXIX: 9/2/72)

‘You know what “it” [*ça*] is; it’s object (*a*)... the void presupposed by every demand’, the interminable chains of which lend an uncertain ‘substance’ to ‘a desire that is based on no being’ (SXX: 126). This statement serves a dual purpose: it is both an ethical imperative for the subject of desire who, were he to accept what he is offered, would see the extinguishing of his desire or style and a demand that the reader refuses anything that Lacan might be misread as offering in the form of answers and solutions. He associates the erroneous belief that one could produce a ‘direct saying [*dire*]’ – thereby doing away with the problematic ‘relation’ that the *mi-dit* ‘truth entertains with the real’ – with an empirical medical discourse charged with the task of ‘say[ing] what is’ in the

style of a concrete diagnosis (ETD: 4). However, are the mathemes and topological diagrams not evidence of just such an attempt? In order to see why this is not the case, we will examine an example from *Seminar XIX*.

In this seminar, Lacan introduces an interesting distinction: the above maxim ('I demand...') constitutes a 'serious amusement' which he deploys alongside the 'funny amusements' of wordplay (SXIX: 9/2/72). 'The serious... can only be the serial' (SXX: 19) – the extensible numerical *series* wherein an eccentric 'property... is transferred from 0 to 1' which is both *necessary* for the serial's initiation and *impossible* for it to either assimilate or annul (SXIX: 9/2/72). This is the basis of the count or creation *ex nihilo* that numbers or names the void as *one* nothing. The libidinised repetitions that occur in the subject's 'serial games of speech' are both funny and serious; free association's *Witz* revolve around an irreducible hole carved out by S1 (E: 263). This *serious* consideration is what separates psychoanalysis from a 'gay *sçavoir*' that derives its purpose entirely from a 'free' enjoyment of the libidinal chains in an effort to surmount the effect of 'original *Un*' as the prohibition of absolute *jouissance*.

The aphorism is itself comprised of three verbs or 'ones' (demand, refuse, offer) that are the components of a '*knot* of meaning' from which the object (*a*) 'arises' (SXIX: 9/2/72). In reference to Wittgenstein, Lacan notes that whilst the object (*a*), negatively designated by 'it's not that', is 'what one cannot speak about', we are, nevertheless, 'confronted with it at every instant of our' serial 'existence' (SXIX: 9/2/72). It is not, in other words, uncomplicatedly silent and Lacan will turn to topology in order to better circumscribe this 'bit of real.'

Prior to doing so, he experiments with various flat diagrams and linguistic roadmaps in an attempt to schematise the 'place' of *a* (denoted below as Ç ['that' or 'ça']), which is neither definitively separate to the statement's tangled weave nor incorporated as another serial one:

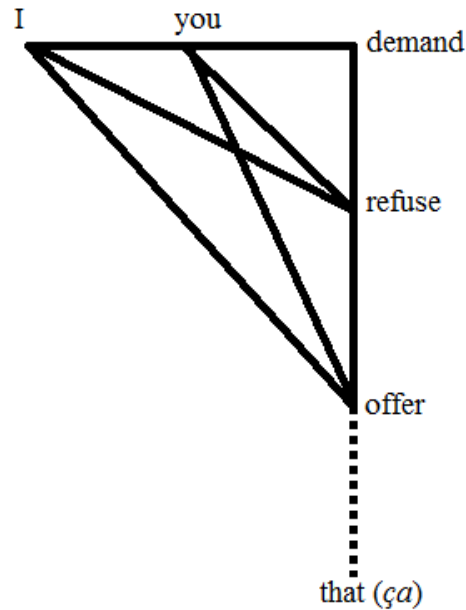


Fig. 9 (SXIX: 9/2/72).

Reflecting on this aphorism, Lacan asserts that it was ‘designed to have an *effect*’ (SXX: 111). Its effect cannot solely be accounted for by recourse to its meaning: whilst it can certainly be said to mean something (as, for example, a flamboyant *theoretical* statement on the impossibility of desire’s satisfaction), it also does *something else*. The sentence is a *performance* of desire: an odd, unnamed remainder, an extimate ‘bit of real’ ‘arises’ as the effect of its signifying structure. Lacan patiently demonstrates how, if one assumes the object’s straightforward exclusion, the serial collapses: ‘if it is because *it is not that* that I ask you to refuse it, it is not what I am offering you that you refuse, so then I have no need to ask you for it’ (SXIX: 9/2/72). There is a sense that the grammatical *structure* of this stylised statement makes it unamenable to metalinguistic capture since attempts at clarification become even harder to follow than the statement itself. The object does not pre-exist the statement; it is instead an *effect* of the knotting of verbs – a knot that subsists either as a three or not at all. Remove any of the rings (verbs) and the statement collapses.

The failure of ‘objective schemas’ to present a structure that has *no direct links* provides an apposite prelude to the Borromean knot’s grand arrival. It fits Lacan – this analyst for whom the sexual rapport does not exist – ‘like a ring on a finger’ precisely because none of its rings are straightforwardly bonded to produce one from two. This is the inalienable ‘real-of-the-structure’ embodied by a knot that only holds up if all of its

component rings remain intact. In later presentations of this topology Lacan placed the object in the knot's central hole – the hole that only exists when three rings are bound together.

This is merely the knot's minimum; the serial-chain redundantly and interminably progresses through 'other Ones', other signifiers. Each 'One' or ring '*encloses but a hole*': incited by the hole of the previous One, the subsequent One serves only to produce a further hole, anticipating a further such additions (SXX: 127):

The knot embodies a unity or *Oneness* – the fact that it is either One conglomerate or, via dispersal through cutting, nothing at all (the signifier's logic dictates that no single One can sustain itself) – that coheres only on the basis of: 1) The hole 2) The lack of a *directly* unifying linkage.

The occasion of this topology's introduction is noteworthy. Lacan's audience had been expecting a lecture from the linguist, Roman Jakobson. Since the latter could not make it, Lacan stepped in, telling his audience that 'you will not have a lecture. Because in truth I do not give them. As I said elsewhere very seriously, I amuse myself' (SXIX: 9/2/72). Lacan's topologisation of grammar is serious because it goes beyond the insight into the funny play of signifiers afforded by structuralist linguistics. With regards to Lacanian structure, *jouissance* – what is always 'not that' – occupies a topological place of *extimacy*, posing as both impetus and obstacle to the serial. In this respect, the knot offers a corrective to an earlier presentation of signifying structure: the 'topological substratum' or 'signifying chain' comprised of 'links by which a necklace *firmly hooks* onto a link of another necklace made of links' (E: 418). Due to the direct rapport established by its links, no inherent impasse *arises* from the chain and *jouissance* is thereby excluded.

In a session of the following year's seminar that Lacan introduces by warning analysts to 'leave Jakobson his own turf [i.e. linguistics]', we are informed that whilst '[t]he signifier', by introducing a hole, 'is the cause of [phallic] *jouissance*', 'the signifier is also what brings *jouissance* [i.e. the absolute *jouissance* that would supposedly exist beyond language and castration] to a halt' (SXX: 24). The signifier's inbrication with *jouissance* and the particular manifestations of this knot in what he calls '*lalangue*' will not be explained by the science of linguistics. Topology and *lalangue* – unequivocal

silence and equivocal speech – gradually begin to supplant linguistics as chief aspects of *Lacan's* circuit.

3.4. The ‘Millerian’ Repetition

We have seen how Lacan argued against the ‘morose operation of obstructing’ the ‘gap’ in both Freud’s thought and the subject itself by presenting his re-turn in terms of a *reading* of repetition and distortion, but have yet to address what is at stake in Lacan’s contention that in Miller he had a reader not given to moroseness. Whilst what has been produced by some of Lacan’s readers, such as Slavoj Žižek and Derrida, has garnered considerable critical attention, comparatively little has been written about Miller’s approach and what there is is politicised and quite one-dimensional. Bearing this, and Lacan’s insistence that Miller ‘knows how to read’ him, in mind, it is worth scrutinising the stakes of Miller’s reading through a cluster of papers presented in the early 1980’s – the moment at which Lacan’s *legacy* was most fiercely contested following dissolution.

In ‘Two Clinical Dimensions: Symptom and Fantasm’, Miller, echoing the concerns examined in 3.1, comments that:

[I]t is hard to focus on your own place, your own novelty within psychoanalysis.

The question is whether we Lacanians are condemned to repeat Lacan’s discourse or not. And, if we wish not to repeat it, how can we invent? There is one way of inventing and that is delusion... [T]here is a delusional component in knowledge. The only question is... whether that delusion of knowledge can be used by others. (2010: para. 5-6)

Perhaps mindful of a statement Lacan made at Caracas in 1980 (‘It is up to you to be Lacanians if you wish, for my part, I’m a Freudian’ [2011: 18]), Miller is clearly wary of explicitly posing a ‘Millerian’ invention. Any reflection on the *particularity* of his own ‘novelty within psychoanalysis’ must first be submitted to a framing presupposition; his inclusion in a wider grouping – ‘we Lacanians.’ This title both legitimises and confines output; apparently condemning it to the status of a *disciple’s* faithful reduplication of an unquestionable *precedent*. Miller’s conception of repetition differs from the conception that we have established. In this passage, repetition is equivalent to reduplication (S1-S1) whilst invention comes closer to how Lacan regards repetition (S1-S2). What is delusional about non-reduplicative repetition or invention (S1-S2)?

In another paper titled ‘The Invention of Delusion’, Miller outlines how the subject’s associative chains of signifiers constitute an ‘invention of knowledge’ about ‘elementary phenomena’ (nonsensical primordial signifiers [S1]) (2008: 22). This is an interpretation on the part of the paranoid psychotic who has, and enjoys, a delusion that

is constructed in the wake of a traumatic encounter that has not been properly mitigated by the Name-of-the-Father. Through an irregular meshwork of manic associations, to which the delusional subject devotedly clings, contingent signifiers are recruited as the components of a narrative pattern in a procedure perfected by today's conspiracy theorists. According to Miller's analogy, 'Lacan's discourse' is a traumatic illegibility that must be retroactively lent significance by being placed in a chain with other signifiers through 'interpretation delusion' (SIII: 16).

What, then, has been Miller's own repetition-delusion? It is the distinction between fantasy and symptom, considered to be essential for effective practice, derived from 'my analytical practice' and 'my reading of Freud and Lacan' (2010: para. 7). According to this reading, a vital shift concerning the event that marks the end of analysis occurred in the mid 1970's. Having previously held that the analysand is to be taken to the point of traversing his fantasy, enabling him to assume his own castration and properly encounter the Other's lack, Lacan now argued that analysis concludes when the analysand has identified with his symptom as the singular fashion in which he not only recognises but also *enjoys* the Other's lack. We will concentrate on the matter of interpretation in greater detail below; for now, however, it is raised only to indicate that what's at stake in Miller's (delusional) interpretation is *the outlining of an interpretation in the clinic that would not be delusional*; that would not merely seek to add more signifiers and knowledge. Identification with one's fantasy or the analyst's ego would both constitute delusional outcomes. Whilst, in this respect, the fantasy's disarticulation is certainly an improvement, it remains a *universal* conclusion. Each analysand is reduced to the same state thanks to the universality of lack. The symptom, since it concerns the *singularity* of the subject's *jouissance*, remains beyond the signifier and beyond the recuperative influence of delusional knowledge. Interpretation – the direction it will take and the conclusion it will reach – cannot be *known* in advance because the symptom radically delegitimises generalities and universals.

This 'Millerian' reading's genesis holds a privileged place within the chronology of 'Lacanianism.' It began with a paper – pointedly titled 'Another Lacan' – of an 'inaugural nature', presented in Caracas in 1980, at the very same conference in which 'Lacan gave his last public seminar', telling this public that they may become 'Lacanian' should they wish (Miller, 2010: para. 8). Miller's invention owes its novelty to the 'amendment' it proposes to the 'standard, received reading' of Lacan which, from the theory of the unconscious as 'structured like a language,' produced a wild

extrapolation, according to which Lacanian interpretation is concerned only with the signifier and not affect (*jouissance*) (ibid). Despite Miller's insistence that a 'Return to Lacan' that would 'imitate Lacan in his relationship to Freud' being 'not at all the slogan under which I imagined I was doing this course', he invites such associations by comparing the reading that reduces Lacan's teaching to the signifier with the reading that reduced Freud's teaching to the second topography (2013: para. 1).¹³ The caricature of the Lacanian analyst as a post-structuralist quack, *ineffectively* prating about with puns and etymological obscurities, called for a firm rebuttal. If clinical practice is to have an impact, it cannot devolve into an interminable wallow in the delights of 'idealinguistry' (see 2.4).

As Miller notes, Lacan considered the object (*a*), and not the signifier to be his *invention*. The latter, Lacan argued, was *already present* in Freud's work. To devote one's attention, under the auspices of the "'influence" of Lacan', solely to the signifier is a 'distortion', akin to the ego psychology performed under the auspices of the influence of Freud (his *legacy of sens*), which leads to a 'stagnation of theory', condemning praxis to the invention of delusion; an ineffectual 'play of signifiers' that fails to ask *why* a subject repeats (Miller, 2009: para. 2). An analysis concerned only with the signifier does little for an analysand in thrall to the paltry phallic *jouissance* realised in the slippage from signifier to signifier. With this 'rock of castration' – the phallic function that prevents the sexual rapport from being written – Freud '*discovered* an impasse' resulting from the logic of the signifier (ibid: para. 11). If Lacan's *discovery* poses a 'pass' in response to the Freudian impasse, it is a typically ambiguous form of progress: 'Is the pass a passage beyond the castration complex? That would be a nice title, but perhaps a little too neat. I would prefer to emphasize Lacan's allegiance to Freud, the Freudian Lacan more than the Lacanian Lacan' (ibid: para. 13).

Lacan's solution both preserves the impasse and circumvents it: 'The question of the end of analysis cannot be solved if such a solution requires the sexual relation. It can only be solved on the basis of its absence' (ibid: para. 18). The absent referent of the complaint 'that's not *it*'; the 'object (*a*)... that could satisfy *jouissance*', the object that the Other is erroneously supposed by the subject to harbor as a hopelessly dissymmetric, '*a*-sexual' partner, falls away in the traversal of fantasy, freeing the subject from the suffering that this repetition can cause (e.g. recurring self-destructive

¹³ As we will see in Part Five, Lacan held this topography partly responsible for the advent of ego psychology.

life choices) (SXX: 127). Nevertheless, '[t]hat will not be a progress since there is nothing that does not cause... regret for a loss' – the loss, that is, of the subject's fantasmatic support (ETD: 31). In contesting the faux Freudianism of developmental psychology (i.e. the passage to the 'genital drive'), Lacan is not proposing that the sexual rapport is eventually realised; rather, that which does not stop not writing itself, having been encountered, *as an incurable impossibility*, by the subject, now no longer gives rise to a debilitating misery that does not stop writing itself. Miller's reading of a Lacan beyond the signifier – a reading of what Lacan discovers beyond Freud's discovery – constitutes not so much a return to Lacan as a 'return to the clinic' (Miller, 2010: para. 18).

We return, then, with Miller's repetition-invention to a fundamental difficulty that marks the *novelty* of psychoanalysis: the relation between 'thought and the real.' Lacan's 'advance' with respect to Freud, is, following a re-discovery of the 'unconscious structured like a language [which] realizes essentially the first Freudian discovery', to ask what 'treatment' can be 'deduc[ed] from the unconscious structured like a language?' (Miller, 2013: paras. 5-6) What treatment can be offered when unconscious desire cannot be articulated – or, to put it another way, when desire can *only* be articulated? This return constitutes 'a *re-launching* of a fundamental difficulty which is not Lacan's difficulty, but which is what I think of as the difficulty of psychoanalysis. What he revives in this way is the same thing as psychoanalysis itself' (ibid: para 3). This difficulty is, of course, sexuality. That Lacan's teaching is an 'indefinite renewal' in confrontation with 'failure', is, Miller states, 'my point of view' – a reading of 'Lacan against Lacan' that 'fight[s] against banalization' and forms the purpose of 'our Lacanian *koinè*'; the common ground that makes 'we Lacanians' not just Lacanian but, more importantly, psychoanalysts (ibid: para. 52). In the sections that follow, we will see how Lacan tackled this essential difficulty of psychoanalysis.

This is perhaps a depiction of Miller's reading that diverges with a more prevalent narrative – most forcefully propagated by Elisabeth Roudinesco – which holds that a 'Millerian' hijacking of 'Lacanianism' effected a whole-sale sterilization of an unruly, seething mass of creativity: 'Lacan's gradually evolved concepts, detached from their history and *stripped of the ambivalence that had been their strength*, were now classified, labeled, tidied up, sanitized, and above all cleansed of their polysemic complexity' (Roudinesco, 1997: 305). Miller stands accused of distorting distortion itself by morosely stitching up gaps in the Lacanian rebus. Is there a Lacan before the

Fall? At what point did this ideal Lacanianism *qua* ideal obscurity become obscured by Miller's influence? Scott Wilson (2008: 3) – in a cultural analysis of *jouissance*, no less – follows this dubious line of argumentation even more trenchantly by explicitly posing a divide between a 'hyperrationalist Millerian Lacanianism and the Lacanianism of Lacan himself.' In such formulations, the pure 'Lacanianism of Lacan himself' starts to resemble the Kantian thing-in-itself; no longer is 'Lacan's discourse' merely 'elementary *phenomena*' but becomes an untouchable *noumenon* to which no classification or re-presentation is adequate.

For his part, Miller considers 'this conflict over the *matheme*' to be 'completely secondary' to the '*difficulty* which launches itself again and again in Lacan's teaching' and which Miller's reading aims to 'exploit' with a view to making 'it worth something in the practice of psychoanalysis' (2013: para. 4). As we will see, Lacan developed his *mathemes* and topology not in order to distract from or resolve this difficulty but in order to better 'hold on to the real.' If the reader can forgive such clumsy and vertiginous formulations, there appears to have been a Roudinescoian misrepresentation of the Millerian renewal of the difficulties in the Lacanian renewal of the difficulties in Freud. Lost amongst the fuss provoked by Miller's placement of the requisite *mathemes* alongside Lacan's 'polysemic complexity' in *Television* are the questions he asks (remember: 'He who *interrogates* me also knows how to read me'). Posing as a critic who, in response to Lacan's proposal that the unconscious is structured like a language, complains that "[t]hose are merely words, words, words" (T: 17), Miller prompts Lacan to rehearse his thesis regarding the intersection between the signifier and *jouissance*, modestly posed as a mere '*rereleas[ing]* [of] what Freud states... namely that affect is displaced' – *not replaced* – by the signifier (T: 20). Reading Lacan reading Freud has thus identified a difficulty but the question remains: how can this difficulty be *effectively* tackled? How does a praxis supported by topology and *mathemes* succeed where the play of signifiers does not? How do Lacan's 'serious amusements' help his 'funny amusements' to accomplish something that they cannot do on their own?

Explaining his decision to place various *mathemes* and aphorisms in the margins of *Television*, Miller argues that the text's 'difficult rhetoric' required such 'schemata' in order 'to indicate that Lacan's rhetoric constitutes a commentary of a very *precise* nature' (1996: 30). Rather than instinctively recoiling from this brusque formalism we should ask how it is that an unlikely marriage of distortion and rigour allows one to better read the unconscious – itself a 'very *precise* thing' rather than a vague obscurity –

without morosely stitching up the gap. In a fashion that recalls Lacan's reading of the *Entwurf* as the 'substructure of Freud's thought', Miller comments that his marginalia were designed to show that '*every rhetorical flourish is in fact built upon a structure, and that his playing with language corresponds to lines of reasoning*' (1990: xvii-xviii). For Miller and Lacan, structure is not synonymous with systematic coherence. To read structure is to '*cerne*' the topological 'real-of-the-structure.' If Lacan's reading is to 'complete that process' by which Freud 'elaborated' the '*concept* of the unconscious' by 'carrying it to its limits' (SXI: 23-4), this is to recognize not just the limit of (conceptual) elaboration but to rediscover the unconscious *as limit*: 'The subject in himself, the recalling of his biography, all this goes only to a certain limit, which is known as the real' (SXI: 49). This is itself the 'discovery of repetition' as the relation between thought and the real (sexuality).

When Lacan reminds us that 'the intervention of the signifier makes the Other emerge as a field' he is well aware that in such statements it can look as though his research is interminably '*going around in circles*', departing from, and returning to, language (SXVII: 15). This redundant turning only allows for an effective re-turn when we consider '*jouissance* [thereby] enable[ing] us to show the [signifying] apparatus's *point of insertion*', the rigorous isolation of which allows us to '*refer to the limits to the field of these limits as such, the field that Freud's words dare to confront*' (SXVII: 15). It is Lacan's approach to these limits that will mark his *second circuit*: a transformative confrontation with the limit beyond the play of signifiers. This requires a formalisation of the effect of the signifier (the 'one of the split') that does not neglect the affect caused (the 'pathos of the cut' [SX: 214]) or morosely 'Otherize the One.'

Before moving on, a further word on the status of the '*gai*' Lacan's 'serious amusements.' In *Topologies of the Flesh: A Multidimensional Exploration of the Lifeworld*, Steven M. Rosen, having noted that Lacan's topology of the Möbius strip materialises the structural dynamic that prevents the desirous subject from attaining Oneness in the slippage of signifiers, goes on to ask how this theatre of the 'open-ended play of language' can possibly be compatible with the 'clear-cut definitions, equations, proofs, or any of the other positivistic appurtenances of modernist mathematics' (2006: 8). Satisfied that this is a rhetorical question, Rosen declares Lacan's use of topology to be 'postmodern' or 'post-structuralist' which 'at bottom... involved something of a

joke’ – aligned to the *witz* of the unconscious – ‘since it demonstrated “precisely” the inescapable *imprecision* of language’ (2006: 8).

Whilst I would not disagree with this last assessment, I cannot follow Rosen in his appending the tag of post-structuralism to Lacan’s topology. Lacan, Rosen contends, indulged in an extended period of intellectually untenable ‘self-deception’ throughout which he attempted to balance both a recourse to the ‘positivity of mathematics’ with an antinomic ‘negative, post-structuralist side’, leaving his work wracked by an irresolvable ‘ambiguity’ to which ‘he [chose] to blind himself’ (2006: 8-9). Following this damning charge, Rosen (2006: 13) traces a lineage of ‘post-Lacanian topology’ manifested in the work of figures such as Deleuze and Guattari, whose mantra – ‘Subtract the unique from the multiplicity’ – is realised in an anarchic ‘topology of multiplicities’ abandoned to a constant flux and continuous transformation in a permanent state of ‘becoming’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 533). We must recall, however, that it is the fact that topology is ‘not condemned to total liberty’ – *that it somehow entertains one form of liberty or imprecision (quantity) within a precise limit or irreducibility (quality)* – that makes it an appropriate support for psychoanalysis. There is more to the Lacanian subject than the indistinct drift of signifiers.

3.5. Reading Structure in its Impossibilities

Having read Lacan's return through *Spaltung* and its various manifestations (e.g. *Verneinung*, *dit/dire* etc.), and through various responses to the Freudian subversion (e.g. understanding, moroseness etc.), we have perhaps reached the end of a circuit, which is, of course, a re-turn to *origins*, not just Lacan's own but those of Freud and, indeed, psychoanalysis itself. What is this source of repetition that unsettles the distinction between progression and regression? As Lacan puts it in one of his final seminars: '[T]here is no sexual relationship. It is the *foundation* of psychoanalysis' (SXXV: 11/4/78). Lacan's re-turn here acquires its chief purpose: to read in Freud – in the various 'memories of familial suppression' that populate his myths and cases – the *impossible*. This is Lacan's difference from Freud, a difference established by a *style* of *reading*:

[My teaching] is without precedent, other than that of Freud himself. And precisely insofar as *it defines the previous one in such a way that one must read its structure in its impossibilities*.

Can one say...Freud formulated *this impossibility of the sexual relationship*? Not as such. I am doing it... it is written everywhere. It is written in what Freud wrote. It only has to be *read*. Only, you are going to see later why you cannot read it. I am trying to say it...[and] say why I for my part do read it. (SXVIII: 17/3/71)

This does not, however, license the interpretative stance of 'wild psychoanalysis' which – as exemplified by the 'debasement [through] routinized use' that the 'letter of Freud's work' underwent at the hands of early 'Freudian' literary critics¹⁴ – provides sex as a foundational and final referent to all signification. The sexual non-rapport is not the underlying 'meaning of meaning'; it is that which irrevocably ruins any such pretension. Lacan is critical of Freud himself on this point. Whereas 'Freud stops when he has discovered the sexual *meaning* of *structure*', analysis must reach the sexual *non-meaning* of structure (1973: 1). Indeed, '[i]f analytic discourse indicates that meaning is sexual, that can only be by explaining its limit', the real impossibility that undergirds fantasmatic signification (SXX: 79). With the impossibility of the sexual rapport, Lacan returns anew to the impossibility of ever achieving the unification of the divided subject that would occur by way of a lackless union with the Other. In *Seminar VI*, Lacan announced that 'the great secret of psychoanalysis' – its *unprecedented* revelation – is that 'there is no Other of the Other' (SVI: 8/4/57). By *Seminar XIV*, this castration of

¹⁴ We will examine how this came to pass in Part Four.

the Other, which ensures that the subject will never be able undo his own castration by ‘saying it all’, has a new consequence: ‘the great secret of psychoanalysis is that there is no sexual act’ (SXIV: 12/4/67).

Lacan was keen to emphasise, as many have before and after him, that the psychoanalytic *discovery* (which is also the psychoanalytic *difficulty* discovered in repetition...) was made possible by the hysteric’s *mi-dit* truths: ‘The hysterics are the ones who, as regards what is involved in the sexual relationship, tell the truth. It is difficult to see how this path of psychoanalysis could have opened up if we had not had them. *This is where we should start from to give its meaning to the Freudian discovery*’ (SXVIII: 19/5/71). We are then – with Lacan, with Freud – as late as 1971, *beginning again*; re-turning to the original discovery of the unconscious to reread Freud. Lacan’s repetition will return us to where ‘hysteria places us... on the track of some kind of *original sin* in analysis. There has to be one. The truth is perhaps simply one thing, namely, the *desire of Freud* himself, the fact that something, in Freud, was *never analysed*’ (SXI: 12). This will amount to a reading of the heretical origins of psychoanalysis – the *Spaltung* that Freud theorises and Freud’s own *Spaltung* – without ‘morosely’ ‘obstructing’ the gap. By returning to the hysterics we return to Freud’s missed encounters with the ‘limits’ of feminine sexuality.

Before we do so, it’s worth embarking on a brief detour to further examine Lacan’s statements on structure and impossibility whilst seeing how this relates to the non-existence of the sexual rapport.

3.6. The Topology of Revolutions and Systems

We begin with a point of difference between Lacan and Freud, one that bears precisely on the *impossibility* of a perfect *return*. As is well known, Freud proudly regarded his discovery as constituting a further Copernican *revolution* that once again ousted man from his comfortable position at the centre of things. Lacan, however, does not find this characterisation entirely satisfactory: even Freud himself, Lacan claims, misses the full extent of his subversion when he characterises it as a (Copernican) *revolution*, since this latter term cannot but evoke the cyclical process of turning in a circle: '[T]he Copernican *revolution* makes a *metaphor* appropriated beyond what Freud comments on, and this is why from having *returned* it to him, *I take it up again*' (R: 13). At stake in this particular episode of the 'return to Freud' is nothing less than the necessity of replacing the ideal of the return with the topology of the re-turn.

Part of the reason for Lacan's disinclination toward Freud's metaphor lies in 'our epoch's devolved sense for the word: revolution. One could mark its passage to a superegoistic function in politics, to the role of an ideal' (R: 12). For Lacan, 'the idea that knowledge can make a whole is... immanent to the political as such' insofar as ideals such as the Hobbesian *body politic*, with its constituent parts united, are macro projections of the ideal ego, derived from the 'imaginary idea of the whole that is given by the body, as drawing on the good form of satisfaction' (SXVII: 31). Even revolution itself, as an apparent disruption of 'good form,' becomes a 'superegoistic' *master-signifier* to which all individual concerns are either peaceably nullified by the collective will or reductively dialectised, in a resurgence of Mirror Stage aggressivity, as counter-revolutionary. Either way, utopic or bloody, the projected synthesis – itself, of course, *impossible* – makes political action a 'metaphysics... [that] occup[ies] itself with plugging up the hole of politics' (1973: 2). Revolution does not constitute an unprecedented 'invention' – an injection of disorder into the order of things – it is instead compelled by a synthesising impulse: the creation of a unified society by jettisoning the perceived obstacle.

Revolution, Lacan avers, ultimately entails 'a *return* to the master' (R: 15). In this historical wheel, one ruling faction is usurped by another, which then requires years of Terror euphemistically dressed as consolidation, so that the *structure* is left unaltered by a change in *form*. Lacan is alluding here to his formalisation of the social in terms of four discourses, each of which hold in place four essential elements of structure, with

this particular placement and the relation it produces determining the nature of the discourse itself:

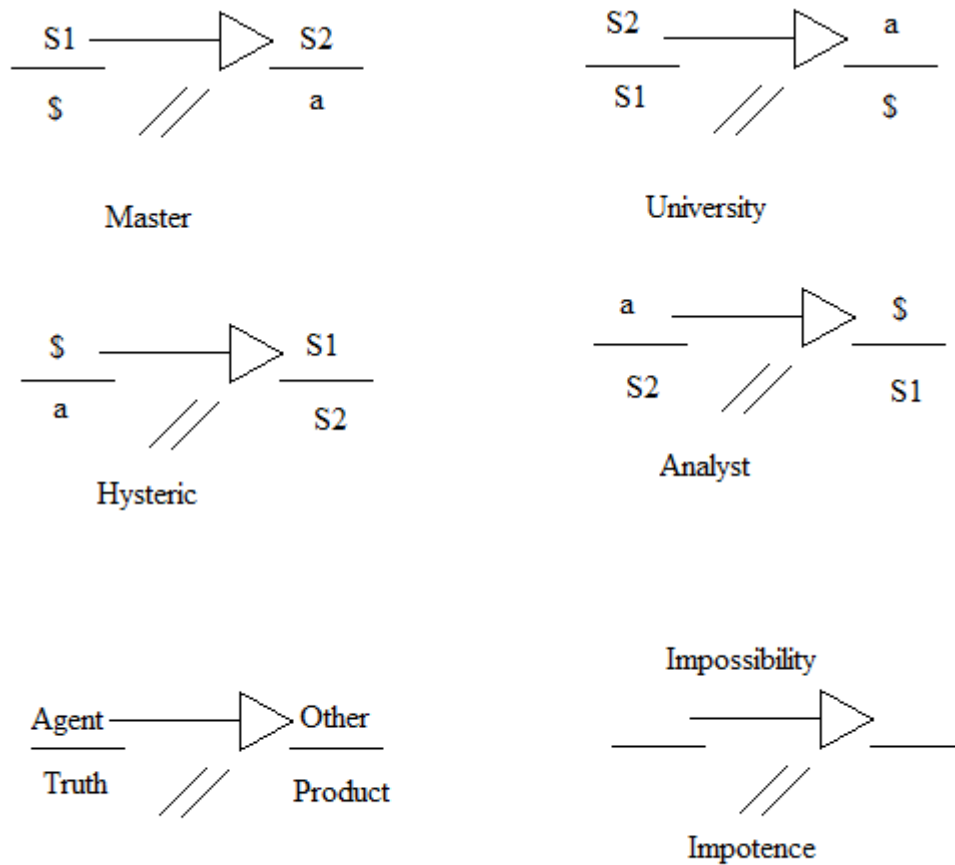


Fig. 10

These quadrupeds (r)evolve into each other by virtue of a quarter turn. Given that it poses the constitutive combinatory of the barred subject ($S1/\$ - S2$), the master's discourse enjoys a certain foundational priority. In accordance with Lacan's schema, if a full 360^0 turn, or *revolution*, is effected, the status quo is reasserted: 'The master's discourse accomplishes its own revolution in the other sense of doing a complete circle' (SXVII: 87). Perhaps the most pertinent example of the 'retrogressive' result that accompanies any 'attempt at transgression', is that of the neo-Freudian autonomous ego: 'For a *return* to the master's discourse', warns Lacan, 'one could do no better' (SXVII: 73). If psychoanalysis is to *remain novel* (still, again, *encore...*), then it must instead be directed by the re-turns of repetition and not the specious return to an ideal, original state.

For discursive structure to emerge, a link between an agent and the Other is required. However, each discourse is afflicted by an axiomatic *impossibility* (top row); that of making *agent* and *Other* unite in faultless conformity (the sexual rapport), which in turn results in *impotence*; the inability of the compensatory *product* of the misfiring rapport to agree with the agent's *truth* (bottom row). Impotence masks a more vital structural impossibility; the former is regarded as the primary obstacle to final satisfaction (e.g. without immigrants we would have the perfect society) that allows one to ignore the *real* obstacle (e.g. the perfect society does not exist). The object (*a*), in whichever function it takes on, is an inassimilable point of inconsistency; it permanently remains at odds with the subject (\$) that cannot attain it and the signifiers (S1-S2) that cannot articulate it. The perpetual failure of each discourse to attain ideal closure drives structural adjustments; the discourses 'turn... not by being progressive' but because if they don't, they will 'grind away, there where things raise questions' (SXVII: 179).

For example, the surplus *jouissance* (*a*) that the master's discourse yields is ineffectual in resolving the master's truth (castration: \$). No matter how much financial or political capital is accumulated, no matter how productive the slave's labour is, the master can never "empirise" the universe' by forcing the Other to align with and reflect his self and thereby negate the primordial *Spaltung* that characterises the human condition (ETD: 14). Whatever the master does manage to attain, it is always the case that 'it is not *that*.'

The master's ideal is that of a society that functions in his own mistaken self-image: 'the *mirroring*' between world and subject, upon which delusions of mastery repose, is 'what allowed for the chain of beings that presupposed in *one* being, the Supreme Being, the good of all beings' (SXX: 127); a universalised 'good *sens*' or form that reigned in the Germany of 1933: *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer* (1973: 2). The master's aim is that 'things should go in step for everybody. Well, that is in no way the same thing as the real, because the real, precisely, is that which "won't go," that which gets in the way of the chariot; or better: that which unceasingly *repeats* itself in order to hinder this advance' (Lacan, quoted in Thurston, 1998: 145). There is no Other of the Other because – and this is the inalienable crux of Lacan's reading of Freud's myths – there is no exception to castration.

Contra Freud, Lacan considered Kepler, not Copernicus, to be the scientist that most merited the attribution of significance. Copernicus had simply switched the axis of

centrality from the earth to the sun and thus the very principle of centrality remained unaffected: ‘the figure of the sun is... worthy of imaging the *master-signifier* [of centrality] that remains unchanged in the measure itself of its concealment’ (R: 13). In the fundamental structure of Copernicus’s cosmology the master had returned. Lacan argues that this ‘revolution’ had already been accomplished by Aristotle’s conceptualisation of the ‘eternal turning of the stellar sphere’ around an unmoved mover – a ‘*point-maître*’ which the Copernican revolution did not unseat and thanks to which man’s ‘world view... remains perfectly spherical’ (SXX: 41-42). Lacan’s critique is aimed not at a particular centre but at the intuitive geometry of centrality in general.

Planetary bodies turned around this newly crowned ‘Sun-King’ in a *circular* fashion which, as we have seen, results only in the eternal return of a single turn – an imaginary illusion of self-identity (R: 13). Kepler demonstrated how a planet’s orbital circuit is elliptical and not the ‘imaginary’ and ‘perfect form’ of *circularity* (R: 13). With the abandonment of an intuitive cosmology that spans out from a centre, the title of master was not simply shifted from one figure to another; the master was instead castrated. The imaginary consistency of the circle’s form is *subverted* by the ellipse. This new trajectory is characterised not by a steady process of (re)turning, but of *veering*; a superior metaphor for the Freudian subject’s lot. It is unlikely to have escaped Lacan that ‘ellipse’ is derived from the Greek *elleipsis* (ἐλλειψις) meaning to lack or ‘fall short.’ Structure is the organisation of a hole that gravitationally directs desire in an ‘*orienting, attracting, relationship*’ as a paradoxically *extimate* centre, such that Lacan can observe that ‘human desire is an *acosmic* function’ (SIX: 13/6/62). The metonymic drift of language cannot close itself in a circular unity; desire can only be formulated ‘*elliptically*: it is precisely because desire is articulated that it is not articulable’ (E: 681). The elliptical, self-differentiating double loop of (dis)articulated desire engenders not the immaculate replication of an ‘eternal return’ of ‘signifying unicity’ – the single loop of revolution – but, as *repetition*, always abuts upon what “won’t go”.

As with the return to Freud, the Copernican revolution required a series of subversive re-turns, an effort that ‘would extend to other authors of said revolution’ (R: 13). These authors included Kepler and the introduction of the ellipse, Galileo’s law of inertia and Newton’s theory of gravity – all of which ultimately meant that *turning* was replaced by *falling*: a striking ‘corrective to the image of the centre’ (SXX: 43). Nevertheless, “‘it falls” only takes on the weight of *subversion* when it leads... to this and nothing more: $F=(GMm)/d^2$ ’ (ibid). The Newtonian *écrit* ‘rips us away from the imaginary function...

of revolution’ (ibid). Having shifted from a bad metaphor (Copernicus) to a more adequate one (Kepler), metaphorical meaning is now completely jettisoned. We are no longer in the domains of the image or of intuition, which invite the lapse into the illusory avatars of ‘perfect form’ – sphericity, circularity and centrality – and are instead faced with the letter: formulas that ‘one does not *imagine*’ and which ‘make an assembly with the *real*’ without, strictly speaking, meaning anything (R: 14). Like topology, the equation is not a *metaphor* of structure: it *is* structure. For the physicist, the letter is not a more refined representation of the ‘thing-in-itself’, it instead replaces this thing. The theoretical physicist can arrive at laws and consequences by working with equations and formulae long before these same results are finally verified by empirical experimentation. Lacan’s topology and ‘mathemes’ were attempts to provide the Freudian subversion with Newtonian booster shots; it is in these attempts that, far from ruinously diverting psychoanalysis from its inaugural purpose, the ‘revolution’ is, through a series of supplemental *re-turns*, extended to another author; namely, Lacan.

This was the purpose of Lacan’s algebraic four discourses. It is through the ‘formalization of discourse... [that] we encounter an element of *impossibility*. This is what is at the base, the root, of an effect of structure’ and it is in encountering impossibility that we abandon the ‘imaginary function... of revolution’ and ‘mak[e] a step forward in an order of *discovery* that is nothing other than what is called *structure*’ (SXXVII: 44-5). *Subversion*, contrary to the intuitive complaint that ‘structures don’t march in the streets’, can only take place on the basis of this transformative encounter rather than a retreat into Utopian ideals: ‘only structure is propitious to the emergence of the *real* from which a new revolution might be promoted’ (R: 15).

Given the scepticism with which Lacan regarded the comparison Freud drew between himself and Copernicus, we can well understand why it would not have thrilled Lacan to happen upon Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy’s ‘*circular diagram*’ (SXX: 70) in *The Title of the Letter*, the composition of which was designed to demonstrate the classicism of Lacan’s thought as a totalising cosmology which they pointedly named “‘System” of “The Instance of the Letter,” or *De revolutionibus orbium litteralium*’ (1992: 110).¹⁵ Lacan did not consider his work to be a strict and concretised system but a topology that, in its undogmatic flexibility, ‘is consistent with

¹⁵Copernicus’s tract was titled *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*.

the structuralism that it highlights... this *network relationship* of the determining functions of the structure of language’:

[I]f this *network structure*... has one advantage it is precisely that of belonging... to a *topological world*, which means that the *connections are not lost because the shape is distortable, flexible, elastic*... In such a way that this is what ensures that the edifice does not collapse, does not crumble and is not torn apart because of the modifications of proportion in the measuring of the whole when I contribute new terms. (SXIII: 8/12/65)

Topology, whilst being elastic, is not condemned to a liberty that would paralyse effective interpretation: the *qualitative relations* between ‘terms’ (replaced by letters in mathemes [i.e. $\$ \diamond a$]) remain unaffected by any *quantitative* change. Presaging the role of his formalisation of structure in the form of the four discourses,¹⁶ Lacan states in *Seminar XI* that ‘[m]y discourse proceeds in the following way: each term is sustained only in its topological relation with others’ (SXI: 89). A striking example of this topological plasticity that characterises network relations can be found in the *Écrits* when the graph of Schema R is transformed into the cross-cap. Despite being *visibly* distorted by its topologisation, the fundamental relations between terms remain, proving that ‘there is *nothing measurable* that need be preserved in the structure of the Möbius strip, and that this structure boils down – like the real with which we are concerned here – to a fundamental temporal dynamic: ‘the [signifier’s] cut itself’ (E: 487). Like any topology, Lacan’s elastic ‘system’ can withstand any number of distortions and yet, as an organisation of the hole *cut* by the signifier, is not so given up to free play that it loses track of the structural real to which psychoanalysis owes its clinical efficacy and which renders every system incomplete and inconsistent: ‘*My discourse is founded on a hole*, the only hole that is sure, that constituted by the symbolic’ (SXXII: 15/4/75).

It is this unusual blend of detour and focus that Lacan recognises in Freud’s work, the study of which ‘shows us that its different stages and changes in direction are governed by Freud’s inflexibly effective concern to maintain its original rigor’ (E: 336). Since the veering of Freud’s elliptical trajectory – his ‘repetition thinking’ – comes to the fore most famously in his *retroactive* footnotes, it is worth noting that Lacan’s remodelling of Schema R, ‘indicat[ing] the current stage of my topological work’ appears in a footnote produced some eight years after the *écrit* to which it is appended was written

¹⁶Of course, the form of letters in which we inscribe this symbolic chain is of no great importance, provided they are distinct – that is enough for some *constant relations* to become clear’ (SXVII: 15).

(E: 487). Both Freud and Lacan pass and re-pass through the same junctures, repeating and re-turning – recall here Lacan's description of his own and Freud's Möbian trajectory: the circuit is both closed and twisted; one re-turns to renew, rather than reduplicate, the original point of departure. '[H]ow is a network mapped?' Lacan asks: 'One goes back and forth over one's ground, one crosses one's path, one cross-checks it always in the same way' (SXI: 45). If this mode of theorising as repetition compulsion sounds decidedly symptomatic, that's because it *is*: 'The function of the structure of the *network*, the way in which the lines – of *association*, precisely – come to overlap one another, to cross-check with one another, to converge at elective points from which they depart again electively, this is what is indicated by Freud' (SXIV: 7/12/66).

Lacan's is a repetition of, or 'symptomatic response' to, Freud's thinking *qua* 'repetition thinking', a tracking of *les tours dit as détours*. If one purpose of Lacan's return to Freud lay in the discovery of the 'logic of the signifier' in his work, this same logic directs the reading itself. '[I]ndications' of the signifier's theorisation in Freud's work constitute a network of repetitious associations which 'cross-check one another and these cross-checkings assure us too that we are *rediscovering* Freud' (SXI: 46). These 'cross-checkings' – both theoretical and clinical – obey a logic. If Lacan is presented here as a logician rather than a surrealist poet, this is not an opposition drawn between the chaos of an aesthete's amusements and an arch systematicity, but between a 'free thinking' luxuriating in language and a serious and funny thought rigorously preoccupied with the real that thwarts systematisation.

We should be wary, then, of the sort of systematising gesture made, surprisingly, by Derrida (1998: 39), who refers to a grand Heideggerian '*Kehre*, a "turning point" in Lacan following the *Écrits*' concerning the question of writing. Whilst we could quibble with the chronology that Derrida's reading poses by referring to texts such as *Seminar IX*, in which references to writing abound, this would be to miss the point which is that Lacan's 'system' – like the subject with which it is concerned – is not linearly developmental. It twists and (re-)turns around the real, *repeatedly* cross-checking itself, referring to and (re)reading itself, lending renewed or retroactive significance and sense to prior formulations. Lacan's suggestion that his written summation of *Seminar XII* should be read by his students as 'function[ing] like a hinge' perfectly captures this dynamic (SXIII: 20/4/66). Each *écrit* is a turning pivot; in what direction it turns, to what larger frame this hinge is attached, what passage it opens or bars, is up to the reader.

If we must date a ‘revolution’ in Lacan’s work, we might point to the moment in *Seminar IX* when he ominously announced that ‘we are going to have to make an enormous *circuit*’, the importance of which is evidenced by an uncharacteristic reticence that sees him ‘tremble’ upon ‘unveil[ing]’ ‘one of my *turns*’ (SIX: 7/2/62). This would prove to be a topological turn made in order to support an acosmic system, a circuitous tour through and around tori, Möbius strips and cross-caps. If Lacan considers himself to be ‘Freud’s heir’, this is, he contends, because no other reader of Freud has ‘followed the path I describe as *logical*’ (SXXIII: 18/11/75), a process that has seen him laboriously construct a ‘French garden’ out of Freud’s ‘paths’ (ETD: 6). Lacan’s horticultural analogy – referencing the imposition of a strict geometry on untamed nature popular in 16th-17th C France – can leave us in little doubt as to what he considers to be the guiding principle of his renewal of Freud. Nevertheless, the introduction of topology would enable a ‘presentation’ of a paradoxical structure distorted by *logical impossibility* that far more closely resembles the architecturally impossible Hanging Gardens of Babylon or Escher’s *Waterfall* than it does the ordered harmony of the grounds of Versailles. A year after he unveiled his topological turn, the IPA placed the French Freud on permanent gardening leave and his ‘*bande de Möbius*’ – the slippery ‘line-without-points’ that is so emblematic of the Lacanian challenge to ego psychology and the stability of institutional *sens* – became ‘contraband’ (ETD: 25).

Whilst the concern raised by Tim Dean (2000: 55) is certainly valid – that a ‘problem with topological formalizations of subjectivity is that they’re cognate with the impulse to *systematize* psychoanalytic theory’ – it is important to note that Lacan’s topological structuralism does not produce a classical system in the sense of a complete organisation that plugs the gap and ‘says it all.’ Dean suggests that the problem is partially mitigated by Lacan’s ‘haphazard’ ‘use of topology’ which ‘make[s] it that much harder for us to systematize his thinking’ (ibid). This appeal to the unwitting virtue of a nobly ignorant layman, hamstrung by a ‘rudimentary grasp of advanced mathematics’, is an attractive defence of Lacan’s topology (ibid). However, at the very same moment that it rescues topology through an appeal to *imprecision*, this appeal completely negates topology, the functional purpose of which lies in its structural and immutable *precision* – a precision that is primary to the slapdash liberty that it *appears* to license.

We should not confuse rigor with systematisation. Whilst Lacan never doubted that the motivation for logic was the realisation of a harmonious system – that the logician’s

‘conquering ambition’ is to produce a ‘network [that would] close itself into a *universe* that is supposed to embrace and cover like a net anything that was involved in what was offered to knowledge’ (SXIX: 12/1/72) – he also stridently insisted, without fear of contradiction, that ‘no elaboration of logic... has ever proceeded except from a core of paradoxes’ (ETD: 30). The history of logic is littered with foiled attempts to construct a consistent and perfectly self-reflexive mathematical knowledge that knows itself; it always encounters contradictions and paradoxes that undermine uniform coherence.¹⁷ Logic holds a value for analysts when its formalisation abuts upon an impasse:

[W]e put our finger, *in a domain that is apparently the most certain*, on what is opposed to the whole grasp of discourse, of logical exhaustion, what introduces into it an *irreducible gap*. This is what we designate as the real... The real... can be defined as impossible, this impossible insofar as it proves from the very grasp of discourse, the discourse of the logician... this real ought to be privileged by... analysts. Because it shows in an exemplary way that it is the paradigm of what puts in question what can emerge from language. (SXIX: 12/1/72)

In other words, logic grasps the real when it is pushed to the point of confronting its own impossibility – a *rigorous* variant of *castration* as the discursive impossibility of ‘saying it all.’ There is, for the topological subject, an *irreducible* gap or lack that cannot be reduced to a circle or a point. It is not enough to merely note the endless differential drift of language. If, to cite a very simple logical rule inherent to language, ‘a’ is not equivalent to ‘a’ – if, that is, there is no self-identical signifier – it is precisely in this irresolvable logical impasse, this point of *impossibility*, that the subject can be *rigorously* localised. The ‘unconscious’, we recall, is ‘the logical implication of language’: it is *rediscovered* at the point at which re-presentation falters: ‘There, at a given point of the link, namely the altogether initial one between S1 and S2, it is possible for this fault we call the subject to open’ (SXVII: 88). The fundamental appeal of logic, then, lay not in the siren call of metalanguage but in the precise encounter with the *failure* of metalanguage that it allows. This is the ‘irreducible gap’ or split that transforms the closed circle (the ‘*sens du sens*’ or ‘*fait du fait*’) into an inverted redoubling (*non-sens* or ‘*fait du faite*’) – a dynamic that is even better demonstrated by the ‘elastic logic’ of topology (SIX: 21/2/62).

¹⁷By way of example, Lacan points to Bertrand Russell’s paradox which famously demonstrated the inconsistency of ‘naive’ set theory (does the set of all sets which do not contain themselves contain itself?).

For their part, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (1992: 107-108) acknowledge that, regarding their diagrammatic rendition of Lacan's 'system', there is, for the sake of '*sensible intuition*', 'nothing geometrical or topological here', before adding that it is a '*flawless and remainderless circle*' – an immaculate organisation of a hole. The authors argue that Lacan's systematic *revolutionibus orbium* comprises a series of '*concentric turns*' that make up an intellectual trajectory orbiting a *central* principle: the bar of primary repression effected by the cut of the signifier and the hole that it creates: S1/\$ – S2 (ibid: 114). This bar 'is *foundational* and *originary*. It is the *archē* of a system which, while systematising the division, the lack or the hole in the places of origin, has nevertheless maintained its own "*archaic*" value of systematicity, that is, of origin and centre' (ibid: xv). In other words, Lacan's '*fiat trou*' – his 'discourse... founded on a hole' – is effectively no different from the theological '*fiat lux*'; castration, like the Copernican 'revolution', does not dissolve centrality altogether; it instead merely replaces one centre with another.

The same goes for Lacan's *text* ('The Instance of the Letter') which, despite exhibiting a topological elasticity through the 'borrowings, perversions, subversions or *repetitions*' that, taken together, constitute 'a procedure of diversion', also 'makes use of yet another movement – a *turning movement*', the upshot of which is that 'something installs, *accomplishes*, and *encloses* itself with all the characteristics of systematicity' (ibid: 105). The authors reflect that 'it appeared necessary to us to *reconstitute* a certain philosophical discourse as one of the *geological strata* of Lacan's discourse, and as one of the *branches of its genealogy*' (TL: xxviii). These untopological metaphors seem strangely at odds with the sophistication of the project that they represent. Posed alongside the revelation of a hidden source ('geological strata') that recalls the depth psychology of Freud's archaeological digs is the conventional, unidirectional arborescence (genealogical 'branches') of which Deleuze and Guattari (2004: 234) were so critical. Such is the uninspired and generic character of these interpretative clichés, it is hard not to avoid the conclusion that the authors were being deliberately provocative – the intimation being that if Lacan required such a reading it is precisely because his 'system' is either a cartographic tree or a layered accumulation of concepts both of which begin from a philosophical origin/centre.

The almost total absence of the real from Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's study – a study that unifies the *hole* of the symbolic with the *circular consistency* of the imaginary under the banner of 'system' – is conspicuous to say the least. It makes a

single appearance in a footnote in which the authors mention that any consideration of ‘the Lacanian theory of the real... would entail commenting on other texts’ and thus falls beyond the remit of their close reading (1992: 132). They are not above doing so, however, provided it suits their effort to establish Lacan’s disavowed debt to philosophy – an effort that takes the form of a conventional interpretation, a dissolution of ambiguity: ‘it is possible and necessary to *clarify what is implicit* in [‘The Instance of the Letter’] with regard to Hegel by referring to some of Lacan’s other texts...’ (ibid: 121)

We have, then, in Lacan’s own words, a topological ‘discourse... founded on a hole... constituted by the symbolic’ which Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy transform into a mapped *system founded on a hole*, the edge of which comprises a ‘flawless’ circle. In ‘*L’étourdit*’, following a discussion of the phallic function (apparent as the *bar* between signifier and signified [S/s]), Lacan does acknowledge that ‘[i]t is obvious that “to express myself thusly” as will be translated what I am saying, I slip to a “conception of the world”’ (ETD: 19). Is this bar the unusual foundation of a classical *Weltanschauung*? The function is *not itself expressed* and nor does it act as the basis for a universalising expression or conception: it is instead both expression’s condition of possibility and impossibility; turning every *Weltanschauung* into a *style of failure* that holds to the real. With the quotation marks (“to express myself thusly”), Lacan opens up a gap within his own discourse by taking a distance from himself. This is the effect that the phallic function has: one cannot, in an expression, achieve self-presence. The bar is precisely that which renders any centre or the *single turn* of a ‘remainderless circle’ *impossible*; it institutes a ‘*real edge*’ that is impossible to suture (R: 10). If the bar ‘is foundational and originary,’ its function lies in the operation of *repetition as the foundation*.

The authors also describe Lacan’s project as a ‘rigorous repetition of negative theology’ and as an ‘ontology that opens onto – and is founded (that is, *closed*) on – a gaping hole... whose outline can be discerned’ (1992: 126-7). Neither the closure nor the hole that structure’s double-looped edge demarcates are conventional. The topology of the cross-cap ($\$ \langle \rangle a$) demonstrates how the hole is as much nowhere as it is everywhere, its *ex-sistence* as the ‘real-of-structure’ haunting every ‘edge.’ ‘[W]hat we have to *present*,’ Lacan argues, is the ‘*system of nowhere [nulle parte]*’ that can account for both the signifier and *jouissance* (SXVI: 21/5/69). Referring again to a structural paradox articulated in 1.2, just as the fact that the subject’s real escapes us *cannot*

escape us, the ‘nowhere’ at stake is *jouissance* as ‘nullibiquity’ – an ubiquitous absence, a nowhere that is felt everywhere (ibid). If accession to subjectivity (via castration) means that ‘*jouissance* is excluded [and] the circle is closed,’ this ‘exclusion of *jouissance* is only stated from the *system* itself’ (ibid). It is *as excluded* that *jouissance* is experienced. In other words, the fact that the ideal Oneness of absolute *jouissance* does not stop not writing itself does not stop writing itself. By means of an analysis of the subject’s ‘relation to *jouissance*... insofar as it is excluded,’ one finds that *jouissance* ‘has become everywhere again’ because it is precisely through exclusion that ‘it is realised’ (ibid). Strangely enough, whereof one cannot write, thereof one cannot but write: ‘Everything that is written stems from the fact that it will forever be impossible to write, as such, the sexual relationship’ (SXX: 35).

It was topology’s dynamic materialisation of nullibiquity that allowed Lacan to break with the last vestiges of philosophical discourse that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy detected in ‘Instance of the Letter.’ The subject’s ‘existence’ is not derived solely from an egoic illusion (imaginary *consistence*) or an ‘archaic’ hole (symbolic *insistence*) but from a topological *ex-sistence* (real). This *ex-sistence* is not a content, substance or negative theology but a nullibiquitous, Möbian twist that makes the similarly nullibiquitous hole of the asphere that its double-looped edge organises irreducible: ‘topology converges with our own experience... [because] it never resorts to any substance, never refers to any being, and breaks with everything smacking of philosophy’ (SXX: 11). Antinomic to the stability of being, whether this is straightforwardly positive or negative, the topological subject is an irregular spatio-temporal dynamic inflected by an ineradicable gap.

3.7. From Myth to Structure

The question remains; how can structure be read in its impossibilities? How does structure function in Freud? How will its discernment enable *effective* interpretation? How will reading it allow Lacan to ‘break new ground’, complete his own circuit and crash through the limit that defeated Freud?

‘[M]yth,’ argues Lacan, ‘is the attempt to give an epic *form* to what is *operative* through the structure’ (T: 30). The import of this contention becomes clearer when aligned with the observation that the father in, for example, Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, fulfils the function of a ‘structural *operator*’ (SXVII: 123). The *structurally necessary* operation at stake is *castration* presented in myth’s epic form as an internalised prohibition. In myth, a *logical function* – the impossibility of ‘saying it all’ or ‘enjoying all the women’ – is *represented* by a *particular* and actual figure who bears language’s blame. Furthermore, as the perceived *agent* of castration, the tyrannical father of Freud’s myth is an *exception* to castration, an aspirational horizon beyond the law. He has realised an absolute *jouissance* of the sexual rapport that is out of, and without, bounds. In its *avoidance* of the ‘real-of-the-structure’, the mythic *dit-mension* presents a *mi-dit* truth: ‘The sexual impasse exudes the fictions that *rationalize the impossible* within which it originates. I don’t say they are imagined; like Freud, *I read in them the invitation of a real that underwrites them*’ (T: 30). Even that which has the ‘structure of fiction’ – as any articulation in language does – can be *read for its impossibilities*.

Through an exhaustive collation of myths followed by a reduction of their narratives to a relational combination and the discovery that the purpose of myth was to stage and resolve a contradiction that troubled civilization’s discontents, Lévi-Strauss had convincingly demonstrated the affinity that mythic reasoning shares with scientific reasoning. Lacan, however, was not entirely convinced about this apparent unity of purpose; instead he contends that whereas logic can rigorously delimit the real (as an impasse), myth always partially obscures the real, diffusing and dispersing it through a number of contingent narrativised particularities. While myths ‘operate according to laws of transformation that are precise’, they nevertheless remain ‘short on logic’ (SXVIII: 9/6/71). If the analyst is concerned not merely with a continuous ‘genealogy of desire’ – whether this desire be systematised as internal to a particular case history or placed alongside other cases in accordance with diagnostic typology (i.e. mythic archetypes) – but with ‘how [desire] is *caused*’, he requires ‘a more complex

combinatorial than that of myth' (ibid). There is, for the subject, an *extimate* limit to the purely symbolic narrative, a real which infinitely complicates the *genealogical combinatorial*.

We have seen the awkward complexity of the structural combinatorial with which Lacan's psychoanalytic 'science... of the real' – these topological demonstrations of irresolvable paradoxes and impossibilities – is concerned (ETD: 1). Indeed, the 'psychoanalytic discourse', through which 'our mathematics enriches this [mythic] combinatorial', hereby finds 'better things to do than to devote itself to interpreting these myths in a style which does not go beyond ordinary commentary' (SXVIII: 9/6/71). We move, then, from the Freudian mytheme to the Lacanian matheme. To paraphrase Lacan's contention regarding Newton's formula, psychoanalysis takes on the weight of subversion when it leads to the *écrit* which reduces the imaginary function of myth's epic form; a formalisation through which 'we encounter an element of *impossibility*.' There are, then, two distinct operations at stake in Lacan's re-turn: first, the ellipsis of 'repetition thinking' is re-discovered and, second, the *real* which metonymic, metaphoric and mythic meanings *repeatedly* miss is rigorously formalised in the famous 'logic of sexuation' as impossible.

A major feature of the re-turn to Freud will be its treatment of Freud's myths as a *writing* – that is, as a formal set of (topological) relations between entities (the subject, the Other and the object) and functions (castration) which can be detached from the specific content of a *dit-mension* and replaced by a letter. It is through formalisation that the impasses of *Spaltung* and the non-existence of the sexual rapport are rigorously discerned. It is worth repeating Lacan's insistence that his work 'defines [Freud's] in such a way that one must read its structure in its impossibilities' such as 'the impossibility of the sexual relationship' which 'is *written* in what Freud wrote.' Why, then, if it is *written*, has it required Lacan's unprecedented reading and necessitated a 'teaching', the purpose of which is to 'say why you don't read it' and 'why I do read it'? If 'the letter of Freud's work is a *written* work', it is nevertheless one that, thanks to a reliance on myth, produces 'a *veiled, obscure* truth' (SXVIII: 16/6/71). The *mi-dit* truth is read by Lacan as holding to the real: it is 'one that is stated by the fact that a sexual relationship...can only be established' through a logical combinatorial: the 'composition between enjoyment and... castration' (ibid). There was, Lacan contends, an effort by Freud, discernible in the myths to which he constantly referred and the treatment of cases that these same myths influenced, to back away from and to disavow

castration's universality by rescuing the father. The truth of the master's discourse (castration or \$) was placed under an obscuring veil. Rediscovering this *Spaltung* and reviving the real *qua* impossible that ensues, Lacan refuses to 'routinize' the unprecedented 'letter of Freud's work.'

Lacan has in mind a particular 'written work', the '*énoncé* of the myth of *Totem and Taboo*, the Freudian myth [which] draws an equivalence between the dead father and *jouissance*' (SXVII: 123). The original, castrating master-father was himself an *exception* to castration; he enjoyed '*all* the women', a privilege that led to his murder by his deprived sons who, following this act, were afflicted by a guilt that effectively instituted prohibition. Freud's myth illegitimately posits a space of unfettered *jouissance* free from 'familial suppression' and before the Law. Whilst Freud's myth of the ideal master who is not subject to castration produces a 'veiled, obscure truth' it is nonetheless 'the sign of an impossibility' that is to be read as such (SXVIII: 17/3/71). Whilst this project differs from the one examined in previous sections, distortion will not be replaced with *the* truth or meaning; instead, distortion's half-said truths will be read and reduced to the point that the impossibility that induces them is circumscribed. If this method bears a striking resemblance to that which is deployed in the clinic, Lacan's reading will nevertheless not constitute an example of applied psychoanalysis. We will not be able to fully investigate this claim until Part Four.

There is no 'real father as *agent* of castration' (the *real* father here being the *impossible* and uncastrated tyrant of the primal horde); instead, castration should be considered as 'a *real operation* that is introduced through the incidence of a signifier [S1], no matter which, into the sexual relation' (SXVII: 127-129). *Spaltung* is an insurmountable consequence of speech; even the 'language of the master cannot be anything other than a demand, a demand that fails' (ibid: 124). The 'permanent downfall of the Other', the revelation that the Other is also barred and castrated, is, Lacan tells us, 'not to be considered as a happening due to [an *occasional*] defect' experienced as *impotence* in the face of prohibition or circumstance, 'but as a *fact of structure*' (SXIV: 15/2/67). Having been demoted from the role of an unimpeachable ideal, the father should still less be thought of as the genetic forebear 'in reality.' As Lacan, rather facetiously treating the doctrine of biological determinism to an amusing *reductio ad absurdum*, explains; the 'only one real father... is the spermatozoon, and at least up till now, nobody has ever thought to say that he was the son of this or that spermatozoon' (SXVII: 127).

Through the radical reduction of myth to structure ('[t]his myth can have no other sense here than the one I have *reduced* it to, an *énoncé* of the impossible' [ibid: 125]), Lacan's reading thereby re-turns to 'the impossible at the centre of Freud's *énonciation*' (SXVII: 123). The *splitting* of Freud's work between enunciation and enunciated gives a clear signal that Lacan provocatively regards this myth as being akin to an analysand's construction: a readable rebus limited by the real. Since the logical function of castration can be identified as 're-emerging at every instant in the discourse of the *neurotic*, but in the form of a fear, of an *avoidance*', Lacan comes to a striking conclusion:

Totem and Taboo is a neurotic product... without for all that my questioning in any way the truth of the construction. *That is even how it bears witness to the truth.* One does not psychoanalyse an *oeuvre*, and that of Freud less than any other, is that not so? One criticises it, and far from a neurosis making its solidity suspect, it is the very thing that solders it in this case. *It is to the testimony that the obsessional contributes about his structure, to the aspect of the sexual relationship that proves to be impossible to formulate in discourse, that we owe the myth of Freud.* (SXVIII: 9/6/71)

If, for Lacan, *Totem and Taboo* is symptomatic of '[Freud's] own impasses' – if, in other words, *Totem and Taboo* can, as a 'written work,' be reduced to a logic that abuts upon the real – this judgement is arrived at not from a crude applied psychoanalysis that searches for (sexual) meaning, but from *a reading of structure in its impossibilities* (ibid). In Lacan's insistence that the evasiveness of a neurotic's constructions does not make the formation's 'solidity suspect' but is instead essential in its quality of 'bear[ing] witness to the truth', we are to detect the return to a vital interpretative principle outlined in *Verneinung*: that the 'truth' at stake lies not in some prospective vault behind distortion waiting to be *wholly* enunciated but is in fact this *mi-dit* distortion itself. Through the reduction of myth to structure, the re-turn to Freud rediscovers a fundamental and *repeated difficulty*: the relationship between Freud's *thought* and the *real*.

No less striking is Lacan's contention that the Oedipus myth/ complex should be demoted from its position as a paradigmatic clinical template and instead be referred to as 'Freud's dream' (SXVII: 117), an avoidance of impossibility that 'is dictated to Freud by the dissatisfaction of the hysteric' (SXVIII: 9/6/71), whose discourse Lacan *writes* like so:

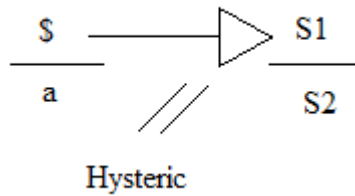


Fig. 11

Here, the castrated subject (\$) addresses herself to the master (S1), who, following interrogation by the hysteric, produces knowledge (S2) which invariably fails to satisfy and cure the hysteric's truth (lack itself taken as the object cause of desire [*a*]). The hysteric refuses to recognise that the *impotence* of various answers and solutions are due not to the deficiencies of a *particular* master – deficiencies from which, the hysteric hopes, another ideal master might not suffer – but are instead signs of a *universal impossibility*. The all-knowing, *uncastrated* master who knows 'what woman wants,' and, through knowing, can allow the sexual rapport to function, does not exist. The hysteric's psychic malaise is, according to Lacan, due to '*structure, and not meaning*'; that is, the particular organisation of the hole (1973: 4). Underwriting the hysteric's desirous elucubrations is the fact that these chains of signifiers produced in the clinic are determined by 'lack taken as an object, not [by] the cause of the lack' (ibid).

Lacan's critical assertion is that Freud elides the real of hysterical structure by relying on the explanatory clout of the myth of the Oedipus complex in his treatment of Dora, which, for long periods, amounted to little more than an assault on *resistance*, a protracted battle of wills for which the ideal endgame was Dora's acknowledgment of Herr K. as the object of her desire. Freud never stopped insisting that the curative answer to Dora's predicament lay in a master-father who could make her a mother. In this respect, 'the Freudian *énoncé* cannot do otherwise than set out from the master's discourse' (SXVII: 127). As Russell Grigg notes (2008: 49), Freud's unrelenting faith in the Oedipal myth's universality as a final referent, an answer *for all*, 'short-circuits the question of the hysteric's desire by guiding the hysteric's desire in the direction of the father', thereby lending 'consistency to the figure of the idealized father in the clinical setting', the very same ideal that it is the purpose of analysis to dissolve. Instead of reading desire *literally*, Freud crudely delivers to desire a signified. Despite the hysteric's insistence that 'it's not *that*,' Freud continues to believe that he can say what

that is. Not for lack of trying, neither Freud nor Herr K. measure up to the ideal of an omnipotent and unimpeachable master. Dora's rejection of Herr K. doubles up as a rejection of Freud's 'masterful' *knowledge*. The Oedipal template fails to hit upon the truth of the hysteric and she remains trapped in a debilitating and interminable cycle in which impossibility is perpetually misrecognised as mere impotence. Whereas for Freud '[t]he Oedipus complex plays the role of [theoretical] knowledge with a claim to truth' (SXVII: 99), Lacan's *post-Oedipal* analyst will, in addressing the barred subject in such a way that reveals the master signifiers that determine this subject's psychic life, seek to 'question knowledge [S2] in terms of truth' (SXVII: 109):

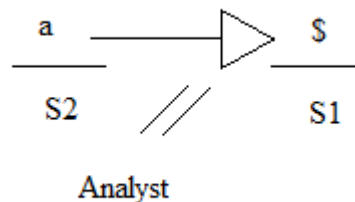


Fig. 12

The half-said truths of clinical material are always unpredictable; the moment they are *understood* as conforming to a pre-existing template (theoretical *connaissance*), they cease to be *read* (as a *savoir* that circles the real).

This was the 'original sin' of psychoanalysis, not just the objective *theorisation* of *Spaltung* but also its *effects* on 'the desire of Freud himself' (SXI: 12). Indeed, Lacan will repeatedly emphasise the extent to which the discovery of the split actually *splits* Freud's texts; they are to be read in such a fashion that privileges their difficulties, contradictions and paradoxes. This gives Lacan's re-turn a subversive *twist* that prevents his second circuit from simply being a revolution performed by a disciple (the ideal, tautologous return to origins). Referencing his aborted seminar of 1963, Lacan states that:

What I had to say on the Names-of-the-Father had no other purpose, in fact, than to *put in question the origin*, to *discover* by what privilege Freud's desire was able to find the entrance into the field of experience he designates as the unconscious. It is

absolutely essential that we should *go back to this origin* if we wish to put analysis on its feet. (SXI: 12)

If ‘a certain *original* desire’ has had immense influence in ‘the transmission of psychoanalysis’ (SXI: 13) – orthodox transmission rarely occurs without reference to the Oedipus myth – this desire, its distortions and avoidances, must be *read* ‘to the letter’, ‘the letter of Freud’s work’, in order to discern the impossibility which orients this desire: the *original Spaltung* from which Freud departs and to which he *returns*. The *discovery* and its theorisation requires constant *rediscovery* and doctrinal renewal, a *retroactive* re-turn or repetition of ‘repetition thinking’ that, rather than simply confirming and consolidating prior knowledge, puts the Austrian master’s knowledge to the test of truth (\$):

For a long time, what was situated in this field appeared marked with the characteristics of its *original discovery* – the desire of the hysteric. But soon, as the discovery proceeded, something quite different made itself felt, something that was always formulated somewhat belatedly. This was because the theory had been forged only for the discoveries that preceded it. As a result, *everything has to be revised*, including the question of the desire of the hysteric. This imposes on us a sort of *retroactive leap* if we wish to mark here the essence of Freud’s position concerning that which occurs in the field of the unconscious. (SXI: 33-34)

To this end, Lacan (SXVII: 122) returns to a prefatory origin, observing that *The Interpretation of Dreams* was shaped by the death of its author’s father.¹⁸ What is the significance of Freud’s admission? Freud himself regarded dreams of the father’s death as manifestations of a desire on the part of the child to murder the father and thereby possess the mother. The dream of murdering the father is a response to his death, a response that affords the subject the illusion of responsibility and control: ‘Freud wished to be guilty for his father’s death’ (ibid: 122). Such dreams are due, Lacan argues, not to a nascent and universal Oedipus complex but to a neurotic ‘avoidance’ of the fact that the father was a *castrated* master – impotent, mortal and fallible – long *before* he died. The Oedipus myth as ‘Freud’s dream’ is an obscuration of a logical function through particular and contingent *meaning*. In other words, a more fundamental *structure* undergirds the myth’s ‘epic form.’ This is a *novel* reading of the origins of psychoanalysis which has little respect for the precedents of convention and tradition.

¹⁸ ‘[T]his book has a... subjective significance... It was, I found, a portion of my own self-analysis, my reaction to my father’s death – that is to say, the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man’s life’ (SE IV: xxvi).

‘[O]ne has to begin’, *again*, ‘by expounding [the Oedipus myth] properly’ (ibid: 120), in order to correct the logical fallacy to which it gave rise: the intuition that desire and the law ‘stand in the same relation as do two sides of a wall’ (SX: 106). Castration initiates the metonymic trajectory of a desire that, by always missing the same thing, amounts not to a transgression of the law but to its perpetual consolidation: ‘*masked beneath the myth of Oedipus*, is that the terms that seem to stand in a relation of antithesis – desire and law – are but one and the same barrier to bar our access to the Thing... [D]esiring, I go down the path of the law’ (SX: 81). Re-turning to Freud from *l’envers* will entail an application of the *topological method* to his myths in order to better account for desire’s relation to the law:

When I say that *I re-make the circuit a second time* [*refais une seconde fois le tour*], when *I go twice around* [*redouble*] the *Freudian Möbius strip*, you should see in it *not at all an illustration* but the very fact of what I mean in the fact that the drama of the Oedipus complex... has *another aspect* [*face*] by means of which *one could articulate it from one end to the other and make a complete circuit of it* [*faire tout le tour*]. (SXIII: 15/6/66)

‘The Oedipus myth,’ observes Lacan, ‘at the tragic level at which *Freud appropriates it*, clearly shows that the father’s murder is the condition of *jouissance*.’ That is, at least, ‘how this myth... is presented to us in its *énoncé*’ (SXVII: 120). This ‘front’ face of the Möbius strip ‘reveals to us the generating drama of the foundation of the law.’ However, with this aspect taken in isolation, a quandary arises: ‘the matter remains in suspense... because of the fact that Oedipus... did not have an Oedipus complex, namely, that he did it in all tranquillity... *he did it without knowing it*’ (SXIII: 15/6/66). The law of incest prohibition – internalised or external and explicit – is strangely absent from much of the narrative, hurriedly asserting itself at the tragedy’s gruesome conclusion. One must, then, ‘illuminate the drama in another way and say that the drama of Oedipus... [is] engendered by the fact that Oedipus is the hero of the *desire to know*’ (ibid). It is the desire to know, not the law – or, more accurately, desire *qua* law – that sees Oedipus arrive at his fate, embodying the master’s truth as a blind, castrated wretch.

At the level at which Lacan appropriates the myth, the ‘tragic mainspring’ is derived not from Freud’s ‘crude schema’ (i.e. that patricide is the result of the subject’s desire to enjoy the mother) but from Oedipus’ desire to masterfully know it all, to ally knowledge with truth, that sees him ultimately confront and embody this truth as a castrated master

(SXVII: 117). The father's murder is only one face of the tragic plot: 'Oedipus was admitted to Jocasta's side because he had triumphed at a trial of truth' (ibid). This trial consists of both the Sphinx's riddle and a further enigma: the question that was plaguing Thebes: who killed Laius? The law becomes evident only through desire. Lacan's *rereading* of the drama demonstrates how desire and the law, rather than constituting 'two sides of a wall', co-exist in a Möbian coil:

[I]t is just as permissible to translate this tragedy onto this reverse side as to pose it in front where it reveals to us the generating drama of the foundation of the law. The two things are equivalent for the very reason which ensures that the Möbius strip only really connects up with itself when two circuits have been made [*faire deux tours*]. (SXIII: 15/6/66)

Lacan's re-turn completes the 'Freudian Möbius strip' by reading it from the 'other side'. This method of 'repetition thinking' reveals that what appear to be *dichotomous* stances (the law's prohibition and desire's defiance) emanate from the *same* locus: the locus (*Spaltung*, castration, \$) from which Freud departs and to which Lacan re-turns, having identified both aspects. 'The two things' (law and desire) are, once the Möbian circuit has been completed, revealed to be 'equivalent'. Castration, exemplified by the blinded king, is 'the end, the conclusion and the sense of the tragedy': the tragic dimension of subjectivity (SXIII: 15/6/66). This in itself entails a retroactive circuit through which the tragic hero *re-turns* to his origin *qua Spaltung* and is made man at the hour he ceases to be. The circuit, in its temporal double-loop, is completed at this 'essential moment which gives its whole meaning to Oedipus's history' (SII: 250).

The contingent particularities of mythic narrative, rather than being treated as a clinical template that will allow the master-analyst to know (what woman wants), are reduced to a 'fact of structure': castration as the *truth* of an all-knowing master.

3. 8. From Riddle to Logic

Ultimately, Freud's mythic accounts of the accession to sexed subjectivity would be replaced by the formulae of sexualisation: an unprecedented logic that accounts for the two positions (masculine [left] and feminine [right]) open to adoption by a subject *vis-à-vis* the phallic function (Φx):

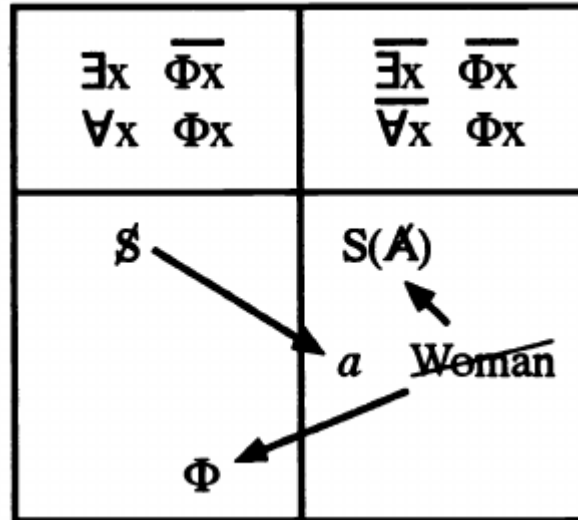


Fig. 13 (SXX: 78)

Lacan's *writing* is a reduction of Freud's: referring ourselves again to *Totem and Taboo* as an *écrit*, we can discern the logic of *masculine* sexualisation at work. Whilst on the bottom row *all* (the sons) are subject to ($\forall x$) the law of castration (Φx), we learn from the top row that this law nevertheless resides upon an *exception*: there exists an x ($\exists x$) that is *not* subject to this law ($\sim \Phi x$). This exception is embodied by the primal horde's father who, not being subject to the phallic function, experiences an *impossible* mode of *totalised jouissance* (he enjoys *all* the women). He is, quite simply, the exception that proves the law – a necessary 'beyond' that enables the law's geometric bounds to be defined. This stubborn belief in an exception to the law (of desire) – a belief that the sexual rapport exists – is precisely what sustains the wretched metonymy of phallic *jouissance*. It also supports a neo-Freudian Oedipal clinic that heaves its analysands along a path of developmental maturation: through the affective Oedipal labyrinth, away from polymorphously perverse partial objects (a) that occupy the oral, anal, invocatory and scopoc drives, toward the (post-castration) normalised 'genital drive' and, if the stars align, conjugal bliss. The Oedipus complex serves only to 'metaphorise' the *structural impossibility* of the 'relation of man and woman' 'in the relations between the child and the mother' (SXV: 28/2/68). That the impossibility of the sexual rapport

‘should be *metaphorised* in the prohibition of the mother is after all something that is historically contingent and the Oedipus complex itself is only attached to that’ (SXVI: 23/4/69). It would prove necessary to formalise this impossibility in logic as a fact of structure, in order to wrench it away from the stories of occasional defects (the ‘metaphor’ of prohibition).

Below Lacan’s logical quantifiers, we see that \$, both intrinsically proximate to and detached from ‘the Φ [i.e. whilst they are in the same box, there is no linking arrow] that props him up as a signifier and is also incarnated in S1’, ‘never deals with anything by way of a partner but object (*a*)’ in a fantasmatic conjunction (SXX: 80). This jaunty rapport is inherently ‘perverse... insofar as the Other is reduced to object (*a*)’ (SXX: 144). The phallus is not an organ or an object, but, as the originary signifier without a signified, instead functions like the bar between signifier and signified, displacing *jouissance* (object [*a*]) along the signifying chain in accordance with the pleasure principle.

Some five years prior to this presentation of the completed formulae, Lacan had lamented the incapacity of analytic literature ‘to make anything other, around this mythical reference [i.e. the Oedipus complex], than an extraordinarily sterile kind of *circular* repetition’, and went on to declare that he himself will not attempt to return to an event that had acquired a certain mythic status within the Lacanian corpus: the abandoned seminar titled *Names-of-the-Father* (SXV: 20/3/68). ‘Things taken up at this level are hopeless’; the analyst has a ‘much surer way of tracing’ ‘the structure of all our experience’ when he learns that it ‘has to do with *logic*’ (ibid). Father – as either a biological entity or a mythic figure that guarantees the Other from a point of transcendent exception – is replaced by *function* (Φx). It is precisely the phallic function (the fact that no signifier can signify itself) that ensures that there is *no exception* and no Other of the Other, whilst a ‘belief in the father is a typically neurotic symptom’: a belief in the Other of the Other, a morose identification with the Other as *One* (ibid).

As is clear from the number of references to paternal figures in religious discourse made in the single introductory session of *Names-of-the-Father* (a relativisation of the Father is already apparent in the title), the ‘Name-of-the-Father, to make a place of its beach’ subsists as ‘the one in charge in keeping with *tradition*’ (ETD: 8). If, in other words, we naively conceive of the ‘Name-of-the-Father’ as a *topographical* contour separating arid *terra* from limitless, oceanic *jouissance*, we misconstrue the topological nullibiquity of the bar (function), thereby falling for the notion of the totalised Other

that occupied traditional thought. The Father is simply too intimately associated with a number of misapprehensions that it is the task of analysis to dispel. Turning to logic was, for Lacan, both a renewal of the subversive novelty of psychoanalysis and an assertion of the advance he makes on Freud: ‘the Name-of-the-Father is not something I am *inventing*... it is *written* in Freud’ (SXVI: 29/1/69). The ‘Name-of-the-Father’ is no longer a Lacanian concept: as an *inherited sens*, it was Freud’s fault all along! Even so, the severance is not absolute. A peculiarity is evident in the way in which Lacan, reflecting on a previous *écrit*, writes ‘I introduce [*j’introduis*]’ – *not* introduced – ‘the Name-of-the-Father’ (ETD: 7). ‘Perhaps,’ suggests Fierens (2014: 86), ‘we can read this form (*j’introduis*) as the affirmation of an act that he does not succeed in renouncing even though it has been overtaken by the advances of his own theorisation: he insists again [*encore*] and always on the function of introducing.’ Lacan’s ‘repetition thinking’ rarely poses an uncomplicated cut: even at the moment at which Φx was being presented in its most pared down and unequivocal fashion, the signifier – here *demonstrating the equivocal excess that is the result of this function* – returns to save the father obliquely in an instance that speaks of Lacan’s debate with his own precedents and with (paternal) precedence itself. As was made clear in *Seminar XXI: Les non-dupes errent* (repetition has generated a homophonic lapsus [*Le-Nom-du-Père*]), he did not consider it the role of psychoanalysis to crudely purge the world of paternal fictions, thereby fostering a new generation of mature, ‘non-duped’ subjects, since even these subjects *err*. The trendy and self-satisfied cynicism of a generalised atheism with respect to the father has not automatically engendered a state of post-neurotic enlightenment: it is precisely those that *believe* themselves to be non-dupes – standing detached from the Other, expressing a knowing amusement at the deceptions of ideology or the silliness of theology – that are the most comprehensively duped. Without their own symptomatic attachments being acknowledged (e.g. the particular mode of *jouissance* derived from occupying the place of an *exception*), these non-dupes, as far as clinical praxis is concerned, remain a stage behind the duped.

Given that this is all *written* in Freud, how exactly does the logic proffered in *Encore* break new ground? What, in the Lacanian re-turn, prevents it from being merely a *circular reduplication*? There is, Lacan uncertainly proposes, ‘something which operates, perhaps, at the basis of the fact that *Freud did not complete... his second circuit*’ (SXIII: 15/6/66). Even more suggestively, Lacan then coyly muses that there

exists ‘some reason’ which prevented him from giving his *Names-of-the-Father* seminar and which ‘also touches precisely at this delicate point of the *limit* at which Freud stopped’ (ibid). What obstructed father Freud and the Name-of-the-Father? It is, of course, the ‘question Freud *repeated*’, the inscrutable *real* which his *thought always missed*: what does woman want? Certainly, Freud’s attempts, reliant on the Oedipal framework, to ‘say what *that* is, exactly’ with regard to Dora, did not meet with much success.

Backpeddling a little, it’s worth noting that the inability to achieve scientific objectivity in the field of dream interpretation and ‘say what is’ had long been a source of frustration for Freud: ‘The dream business itself I consider to be unassailable; what I dislike about it is the style, which was incapable of finding the simple, elegant expression and which lapses into overwitty, image-searching circumlocutions [*Umschreibung*],’ (quoted in Weber, 2000: 122). This is Freud’s acknowledgement that there is no metalanguage: the rebus is not a compliant object-language; it taints the interpretation with its slippery *Umschreibung*. In an instance characteristic of the notorious polysemic richness of the ‘Dream of Irma’s Injection’, Freud tells us that Irma ‘*sträubt sich*’, which Lacan translates as ‘*hérissier*’: Irma bristles or stiffens up in resistance. ‘The use of the term *sich sträuben*... [is] in this *style*, this *Umschreibung*, this *twisted* [*tordu*] *style*, almost the only case where I can reconcile mine with his’ (SXIII: 15/6/66). *Umschreibung* means both circumlocution – to circle around something – and reinscription. Taken together, these two actions constitute the Möbian double-looped circuit of repetition thinking. This relation between thought and the real recurs in Freud, for whom ‘when all is said and done... a woman *sträubt sich*’ (ibid).

A few sessions earlier, Lacan had offered his own idiosyncratic definition of *Umschreibung*:

Umschreibung, [Freud] said, enraged at not being able to reproduce the *style* of his previous little scientific reports, *Umschreibung*, which means: mannerism. Throughout the historical cases of the crisis of the subject, the literary and aesthetic explosions in general of what is called mannerism always corresponds to a reorganisation of the question about the being of truth. Yes. It is a matter of finding a *short circuit* to *rediscover* our object (*a*). (SXIII: 20/4/66)

Since it would require another book-length study to evaluate the wonderfully brief history of culture expounded in the above passage, we will stick with the particular crisis influencing Freud’s mannerisms, which, like those of his analysands, make up a

style of failing to ‘say what is’; repeatedly coiling around the object (*a*) as that which is always ‘not *that*.’ The truth can only be a half-said mannerism. We have already seen how Lacan, in *Seminar XIX*, ‘rediscovers’ the object in a topological *knot* of meaning (‘I demand that you refuse...’). How else might Lacan produce a ‘short circuit’ that bypasses the convoluted circumlocutions of language? Is Freud’s ‘scientific’ ideal of the ‘simple, elegant expression’ possible?

The object (*a*) arises, *as a loss*, as that which ‘is always between each of the signifiers and the one that follows’; it is an absent product of the signifying structure’s formal properties (ΦX) (SXIX: 21/6/72). This real is not an unspeakable *noumenon* beyond or prior to language; rather, it is a nullibiquitous impasse internal to structure which Lacan demonstrates, immediately following his comments on *Umschreibung*, with another *serious* amusement. The following is *written* on the board:

1 2 3 4

The smallest whole number which is not written on this board.

An audience member is tasked with writing on the board the smallest whole number which is not written on this board and comes up with 5. The problem is, that once this is done the task’s completion is displaced since the written command reiterates itself. The smallest unwritten number is now 6. The serial is endless; its resolution is eternally deferred: ‘what is written as Φx ... [has] the effect that one can no longer have at one’s disposal the totality of signifiers’ (SXIX: 15/12/71). In this *dynamic demonstration*, the object is only ‘rediscovered’ as a loss. This is, then, not the successful act of saying ‘that’; rather, it is an elegant failure; a stylistic improvement on more inelegant pedagogic poses: ‘It’s not a matter of analyzing how [the sexual rapport] succeeds. It’s a matter of *repeating* until you’re blue in the face why it fails... *The failure is the object*’ (SXX: 58). Contrary to what is often suggested, this formalisation of Freud’s ‘twisted style’ is not a morose stitching up of the gap that accounts for ‘Freud’s quality as a writer’: ‘Freud’s *success* can be explained on the basis of this impasse; people capitulate when they *understand* his success so as not to *encounter this impasse*’ (E: 305-6). Whilst the encounter with such a fundamental impasse can only ever be *missed*, Lacan’s repetitition of this failure represents a considerable improvement on any disavowal.

The obstacle to totalisation that this amusement presents is an early example of the ‘not-whole’ (*pas-tout*). It is this logic, we recall, that constitutes Lacan’s ‘difficult,

ground-breaking course': 'it is on the basis of the elaboration of the not-whole that one must *break new ground*. That is my true subject this year, behind *Encore*, and it is one of the meanings of my title. Perhaps I will manage, in this way, to bring out something *new* regarding feminine sexuality' (SXX: 57). First, there is a rejection of the masculine logic of the exception: there *does not exist* an x ($\sim\exists x$) that is not subject to the law of castration ($\sim\Phi x$). Despite this, woman is *not-wholly* ($\sim\forall x$) subject to this law (Φx).

Until the introduction of an *unprecedented* logical category (*pas-tout*) – a 'never-seen-before-function in which the negation is placed on the quantifier' resulting in a subject that 'grounds itself as being not-whole in situating itself in the phallic function' (SXX: 72) – things had made intuitive sense. Regarding feminine sexuality, questions arise. How can there be both *no exception* to Φx and a refutation of its universal hold? How does the *pas-tout* (x is not-wholly subject to Φx) differ from the exception (there exists at least one x that is not subject to Φx)?

As Lacan acknowledges, 'this not-whole [$\sim\forall x\Phi x$], in classical logic, seems to imply the existence of the One that constitutes an exception [$\exists x \sim\Phi x$]' (SXX: 103). The former appears to imply the latter's existence insofar as they both amount to an objection to the universal:

But that is true on one sole condition, which is that, in the whole or the not-whole in question, we are dealing with the *finite*. Regarding that which is *finite*, there is not simply an implication but a *strict equivalence* [between $\sim\forall x \Phi x$ and $\exists x \sim\Phi x$]... The not-whole becomes the equivalent of that which, in Aristotelian logic, is enunciated on the basis of the particular. There is an exception. *But we could, on the contrary, be dealing with the infinite*. Then it is no longer from the perspective of *extension* that we must take up the not-whole. (ibid)

This requires a non-Euclidean topology resistant to image and thought. The masculine set is *closed* and *finite* thanks to the *exception* that constitutes its limits and constitutes it *as a limit*. There is a bounded universal defined by a beyond. The feminine set is *open* and *infinite* precisely due to the lack of an exception that would seal it. This set is 'not-whole', offering no support to universalisation or totalisation.

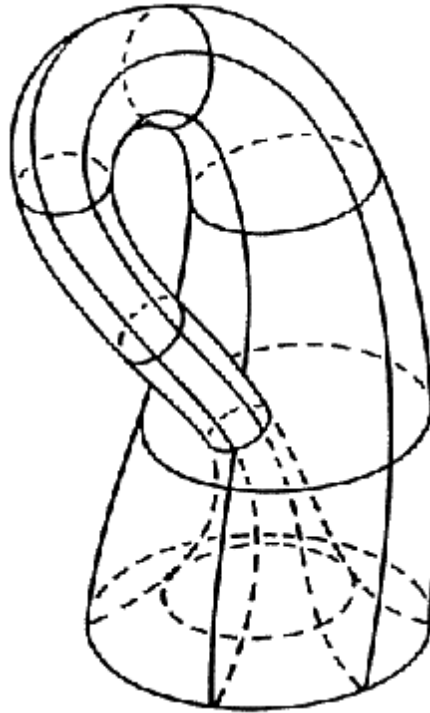
Grigg (2008: 85-86) provides a useful example of an alternative to the 'perspective of extension': there is a difference between saying 'not every apple is red' and 'no apple is completely red'. It is in this second sense in which Lacan's " $\sim\forall x\Phi x$ " is to be taken: No woman comes entirely under the phallic function.' Just as the apple is at once red *and* 'not-wholly' red, a woman is subject to Φx but *that is not all*: 'It's not because she is not-wholly in the phallic function that she is not there at all. She is *not* not at all there.

She is there in full. But there is something more [*en plus*]' (SXX: 74). We have to be particularly careful with this 'something more', which pertains to feminine *jouissance*, lest it becomes a part with which to reconstruct a whole. Whereas male sexuality is predicated on the closed set of finite totality (i.e. the 'whole' of universality or the unitary: there exists 'all men' or 'one exception'), feminine sexuality is predicated on the open set of the infinite not-all.

This has led to a notorious confusion which Lacan, pre-empting the delirium of *écriture féminine*, ridicules as a '*jouissance* beyond the phallus' that reduces the *not-whole* [$\sim(\forall x) \Phi x$] to the masculine *exception* [$(\exists x) \sim\Phi x$] of *whole jouissance* (ibid). Granted, Lacan does not help himself by referring to the ineffable experiences of medieval mystics and the mute rapture of Bernini's Saint Teresa for models of feminine *jouissance*. Nevertheless, whilst phallic *jouissance* is directed toward the object (*a*) that, once attained, would produce a *whole* in the form of a seamless and lackless union with the totalised Other recalling the *spherical, imaginary* body, woman's '*jouissance* is *radically* Other' insofar as it is derived from 'the Other in the most *radical* sense'; the Other that limps in the wake of the revelation that there is no Other of the Other: $S(A)$ (ibid: 81-83). Rejecting the fantasmatic reality that makes of the object-partner a cork in the lack of the Other – this way lies the phallic '*Lustprinzip* [which] is, in effect, based only on the coalescence of *a* with $S(A)$ ' (ibid: 84) – woman enjoys this lack, thereby attaining an authentic and individualising distance that evades non-dupes. If analysis entails the traversal of fantasy, it also aims at directing the analysand toward a feminine logic.

With this letter, $S(A)$, designating a woman's partner, '[w]hat was I,' Lacan asks, 'writing for you? The only thing one can write that is a bit *serious* – a love letter' (ibid). Whilst the relative success of this love letter's wooing of feminist theorists is certainly debatable, Lacan well knew, to cite one of his comic '*(a)murs-sements*', that the love letter is usually '*la lettre d'(a)mur*': expressing love in language, it abuts against the 'wall [*mur*]... [which] is simply the locus of castration' – an unlocalisable barrier which Lacan equates with a circle 'homogenous over the whole surface' of a Klein Bottle (SXIX: 3/2/72).¹⁹

¹⁹ Lacan also refers to his Borromean sentence ('I demand that you refuse...') as a '*lettre d'(a)mur*' (SXIX: 9/2/72).

Fig. 14²⁰

This ‘wall’ is a topological subversion of the notion of the Name-of-the-Father as a stable beachhead. It is ‘impossible’ to reach ‘beyond the wall’ because the wall is not the boundary of a closed and finite set but nullibiquitously felt across the infinite (SXIX: 3/2/72). Topology allows a theorisation of the real that effectively answers Fredric Jameson’s critical query:

It is a simple but dialectical observation: namely, that the moment we recognize a boundary or a limit, we are already *beyond* it – calling something a limit is a way of transcending that limit towards a plane on which the ‘limit’ itself is little more than a category and no longer a genuine boundary. So it is that anything identified as the unassimilable gets assimilated by virtue of this very act of identification.... [I]s not the very fact of naming all this the real a first move towards domesticating it and finding it a place within symbolization? (2006: 391-392)

Topology permits a spatialisation completely alien to this intuition; it somehow materialises the real without ‘domesticating’ it. Lacan’s topology and *letters* – both serious and comic – constitute his *style*; the “‘baroquism” with which I accept to be clothed’ since they, like the baroque ‘exhibition of the body evoking *jouissance*’ that Lacan encounters in ‘an orgy of churches in Italy’, are concerned with a *jouissance* ‘without copulation’; a subversive ‘obscenity’ (SXX: 113) or an ‘*obrescène*’ (SXXIV: 19/4/77); another scene beyond the ‘*père-version*’ but not ‘beyond the phallus.’

²⁰ Figure taken from ‘*Les schémas de Staferla II*’.

Let us return here to Oedipus, who sought ‘to answer what presents itself as an *enigma*’ posed by the Sphinx; a being ‘made, *like the half-saying* [*mi-dire*], from two half-bodies’ (SXVII: 120). These two ‘halves’ do not make a *whole*. As mentioned above, the enigma is an *énonciation* without a discernible *énoncé*. It is a ‘half-said’ truth which seductively invites completion at the hands of a master who *knows* – the challenge posed to the master by the Sphinx’s enigma is ‘*precisely the original characteristic of the hysteric’s discourse*’ – a figure for whom truth and knowledge can be united in a totalised *dit* (SXVII: 36). Supposedly, the master can identify and speak the ‘meaning of meaning’; he disavows the primordial *Spaltung* that ensures that truth can never be more than ‘half-said’. ‘I charge you with the task of making [the *énonciation*] into an *énoncé*,’ goads Lacan, ‘[s]ort that out as best you can – as Oedipus did – and you will bear the consequences. That is what is at issue in an enigma’ (SXVII: 37). The analyst, tempted as he might be to demonstrate his knowledge to the hysteric-Sphinx, must refuse the bait; he knows only that one cannot assimilate truth into knowledge and that no *enunciated* content cannot subsume the *enunciation*. In analysis, the subject does not come to know the truth; rather, truth transforms knowledge. Whilst the analyst has taken everything that he knows from the hysteric, this is only ever the knowledge that he should not presume to know it all. Should he be tempted, like Oedipus, to be ‘chosen as the master, for having effaced the question of truth’, this truth, in the form of the master’s castration, ‘will re-emerge for him’ (SXVII: 121). Bearing in mind that ‘feminine *jouissance* has remained... *d’énigme* in analytic theory’, one might well ask what, if Lacan were to be brought before the Sphinx, his answer would be (SXVI: 14/5/69). Can the not-all be answered? This is precisely the scenario that ‘*L’étourdir*’ plays out, and it will be the greatest test of Lacan’s pseudo-algebra.

Lacan precedes this extraordinary show-trial by reminding his readers that if man ‘floats on the isle phallus’ – clearly outlined by the paternal beachhead –, attempting to direct a ‘history... made of naval manoeuvres where the ships do their ballet with a *limited number* of figures’ (numeration and limitation being the two fundamental properties of the totalisable serial/set of phallic signification/*jouissance*), ‘the not-whole,’ as Freud found, ‘comes to say that it does not recognize itself in those’ acts (ETD: 13-14). This rejection of knowledge, or, more specifically, a rejection of the identity offered by diagnostic typology (saying ‘what is’), *is* the enigma: *Was will das Weib?* When the enigma is posed by the sphinx, when “I sphynx [*sphynge*] my not-all”,

‘what does it say, except what it finds in what I have brought to it’ (ETD: 14). What does Lacan offer to placate the sphinx? How is his answer different to that of a master?

1). Mimicking the original riddle’s pattern (‘What is the creature that walks on *four* legs in the *morning*, *two* legs at *noon* and *three* in the *evening*?’), Lacan opens his answer by proffering the *four* discourses as comprising the structural foundation or *morning of interpretation* (the link between agent and Other). The inaugural ‘morning’ internal to the discursive dynamic itself is the combinatorial established by the master’s discourse. The subject is castrated when one signifier comes to represent it for another signifier ($S1/\$ - S2$), a mechanism that, in the master’s discourse’s bottom row, produces the object of phallic *jouissance* and poses it in fantasy ($\$ \langle \rangle a$).

2). ‘The *bipod* of which the separation shows the *ab-sense* of the rapport’ (ETD: 14). Φx , acting like the bar that dismantles a sign’s bipod – the conjunction between signifier and signified (S/s) that ensures *sens* – produces an ‘*ab-sens* [that] designates sex’ (ETD: 3). First revealed in discursive structure, the resultant slippage ($S1 - S2$) of metonymic desire renders the rapport of the sexual bipod (man and woman) impossible. The analyst’s discourse places a bar between signifiers in order to emphasise the production of *lalangue* and not meaning. This is the *noon (midi)* of the half-said (*mi-dit*) which makes up the material of analysis.

3). ‘The *tripod* which is restituted by the return of the sublime phallus which guides the man toward his true bed, because his way, he has lost it’ (ETD: 14). Φx ‘renders impossible the statement of sexual *bipolarity*’ (SXIX: 12/1/72); knotting the two not to each other but to a *third* with respect to which they adopt radically divergent stances: ‘it is rather with Φ ’, and in conflicting ways, ‘that each one has a relationship with the other’ (SXIX: 3/2/72). Recognised not as a terrestrial organ or object but as a *function*, the ‘sublime phallus’ directs man toward his ‘true bed’. This is not ‘a *myth* that converges with the bed’ (SXX: 6) that bears the weight of mythic Eros but an end to a man’s suffering – his interminable, desirous wandering – that is the result of an irreconcilable clash in masculine logic between the universal ($\forall x \Phi x$) and the exception ($\exists x \sim \Phi x$) (*closed set*). Come *evening*, the castrated master meets ‘the absolute master’: *death* (E: 316). With this acknowledgement on the part of man that castration has *no exception*, he touches upon the first formula of femininity ($\sim \exists x \sim \Phi x$) that opens onto

the second formula: the not-whole ($\sim\forall x \Phi x$) (*infinite set*). ‘There is no progress but marked by death...’

Responding to Lacan’s presentation, the Sphinx declares that “[y]ou have satisfied me, littleman [*petithomme*]” (ETD: 14). Unlike the master, Lacan is well aware that his knowledge is holed; rather than offering an absolute knowledge in the form of a new theory or *myth* of feminine sexuality, he has sought to rigorously demonstrate why this is impossible with a *logic*. The attitude adopted by the modest ‘*petithomme*’ is markedly different to Freud’s ‘allmanness [*touthommie*] [which] admits its truth in the myth he creates in *Totem and Taboo*’ (ETD: 10). The Sphinx continues: “there is not too much *étourdit* for *it* to return to you *after* being *half-said* [*l’après midit*]” (ETD: 14). It’s not exactly self-evident what ‘it’ is, but if we follow the circumlocutory path from which ‘it’ emerges, things may become clearer. *After* (*après*) the *noon* (*midi*), the *bipod*’s inability to produce a self-identical and totalised *dit* is made manifest by what it does produce: the *mi-dit*. Following Φx , signification is always subject to *les tours dit*: the lapsus of repetition demonstrated in Lacan’s title, itself *repeated* in the equivocation between noon and half-said: $S1/l’\acute{e}tourdi/midi - S2/l’\acute{e}tourdit/mi-dit$. From this ‘ab-sense’, the enigma’s *énonciation* or ‘*dire* is *demonstrated*, and as escaping the *dit*’ (ETD: 4). As an infinite not-whole, ‘it’ remains irreducible to the *enumerable dits* of phallic signification, tormenting its ‘naval manoeuvres’ not from a utopic place beyond the symbolic but from within, frustrating totalisation.

The Sphinx concludes:

Thanks to the hand that will respond to you, insofar as Antigone you call it, the same that can tear you apart because I sphynge my *notall*, you will be able even toward evening to make yourself the equal of Tiresias, and like him, from having made the Other, to divine what I have said to you. (ETD: 14).

Antigone, perhaps the most notorious feminine enigma that Lacan studies, tears apart the limits imposed by Creon’s universalizing law ($\forall x \Phi x$) with her *unquantifiable jouissance* ($\sim\forall x \Phi x$) that makes it so difficult for any individual to say *what she wants*. Lacan is also alluding here to Ovid’s Tiresias, who, having been transformed into a woman for seven years, is asked by Zeus and Hera to reveal which of the sexes experiences the most enjoyment. Upon hearing that a woman’s *jouissance* far exceeds that of a man’s, Hera, angry that the cat is out of the bag, blinds Tiresias whilst Zeus

gifts him prophetic sight. As Fierens has pointed out (2014: 136), if Lacan can ‘divine’ what the sphinx said this divining does not constitute the application of a new theoretical knowledge: the diviner is *blind*; his interpretations come not from a self-assured cogito that sees itself seeing itself: ‘We know well that we cannot operate... in our position as analysts the way Freud, who took on in analysis the position of the *father*, operated’ (SVIII: 10/5/61). Through the morning, noon and evening of interpretation and his quadruped, bipod and tripod of letters, Lacan does not divine an answer to the enigma; instead, he discloses its sexuated logic and structure.

The reason why Lacan presented his work in *Seminar XX* as a radical breaking of new ground instead of a continuation of his *repetition* of Freud’s thinking is now clear. Logic and topology allow ‘the *limit* at which Freud stopped’ to be surpassed because they rigorously conceptualise the absence of a limit in the form of an ‘actual infinite’ (unlike deconstruction which, bound to language, only feigns an opposition to totalisation by posing the infinite as infinite postponement) which explodes the phallic logic that underlies repetition and opens a space for *invention*.

3. 9. Topology and the University

If it is to be a suitable support for the divination of, and *action* in, structure, topology cannot be treated as the product of a surveying operation carried out on the psyche by a disconnected observer. In *Seminar XIII*, Lacan had trumpeted his engagement in an ‘operation of *démythification*’ which entailed relieving the would-be analyst of the delusion that he is taking part in a ‘drama of the analyst’; a drama in which ‘as a being of *knowledge*’ he, like Oedipus, confronts the sphinx and is ‘made a hero’ (SXIII: 20/4/66). Whilst this mythic scenario invites the entirely sensible assumption that the analyst is ‘not uninvolved’, it also, by analogising interpretation as an answer to a riddle, encourages a further leap, whereupon ‘it is the observer who settles the affair’ and not ‘the affair [that] has an eye on the observer’ (SXIII: 20/4/66). This ‘illusion’ – this mythology of the *knowing master* – can only be eradicated by the ‘structural... recasting of the topology of the question’: the introduction of the ‘combinatorial’ which is ‘*not at all of the order of connaissance... [and] something which we no doubt make function but which for all that does not surrender itself to us*’ (SXIII: 20/4/66). Lacan considers it his purpose to construct the ‘topology of this mechanism’; an effort that does not amount to a mapping – the *detached* attempt ‘to *master* the why of this adventure’ –, but rather to ‘get your finger caught in the machine’, to *involve* oneself and *affect* its functioning (SXIII: 8/6/66). This clumsy act typifies a praxis dependent on the material produced by a blunderer (*étourdi*); the symptomatic lapses of *les tours dit* that betray the presence of a *real cause* irreducible to egoic *connaissance*.

Since psychoanalysis owes much of its *effectiveness* to the fact that it does not function on the basis of an accumulated and consolidated knowledge, it is foreign to the discourse of the university:

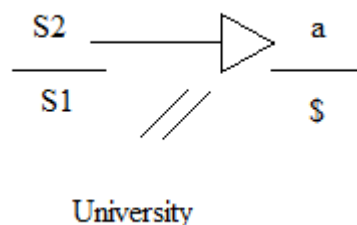


Fig. 15

In Lacan's formalisation of the university discourse we can perceive the domination of the *a* – which is the position of the students – by a knowledge (S2) that is transmitted to them; a knowledge that they must receive and regurgitate. The actual product of such a relation is the barred and alienated subject, who, crushed by the weight of a foreign knowledge over which he has no ownership or control, fades. Whereas the analysand will ultimately be divested of any belief in an omniscient Other, the student remains alienated and 'engulfed' by 'having to suppose an author to know' (R: 29). Furthermore, when knowledge occupies this position in a discourse it becomes a certain kind of knowledge; it becomes the absolute, unquestionable authority – all events must have a reason, a reason provided by the blind, unchanging, pre-existing body of knowledge. This knowledge is not tailored for individuality; it is a *universal* knowledge for *all* ($\forall x \Phi x$) – this universality is the condition for its being teachable. It also seductively dangles the possibility of an *exception* ($\exists x \sim \Phi x$) to death (castration) through reference to the "eternal" memory of knowledge' excitedly worshipped in a dead poets society (ETD: 19).

The analyst's discourse, on the other hand, 'excludes domination... it teaches nothing. *There is nothing universal about it*, which is precisely why it cannot be taught' (2013b: 3). Psychoanalysis, we recall, must have no *disciples*. The analytic discourse is unteachable because it is concerned with the irreducible particularity of the individual analysand and not the universality of a stable corpus of transferrable knowledge. Lacan's public endeavours were a teaching but not as we know it: 'I have been led to put myself in a very particular position as a teacher, as my position consists in starting again at a certain point, in a certain field, as though nothing had been done. That is what psychoanalysis means' (2008: 97). It is not the analyst's knowledge in the form of a tool or theory that is at stake here but an untotalisable half-said truth particular to each analysand – the garbled and unpredictable articulation of which, makes each analytic *experience* an *experiment*.

Of particular interest to Lacan at the time of his elaboration of the four discourses was *l'Université expérimentale de Vincennes*. As head of the philosophy department, Foucault had begun to establish the 'Experimental Centre' to which he wished to recruit psychoanalysts. Serge Leclaire, with Lacan's approval, became head of the psychoanalytic faculty and subsequently, in Lacan's absence, Lacanian thought became predominant. The term 'experimental' is worth noting because it is one that recurs throughout Lacan's work since, in French, *expérience* also means experiment. In *Écrits*,

Lacan uses the word ‘experience’ just over 420 times, the commonest uses of which are phrases such as ‘our experience,’ ‘analytic experience,’ and ‘Freudian experience.’

In December of 1969 Lacan made an impromptu visit to Vincennes – finding there ‘an *experiment* which seems rather exemplary’ – during which he was asked a question that goes right to the heart of what we are addressing here: ‘Why is it that Vincennes students, at the conclusion of the teaching... can’t become psychoanalysts?’ (SXVII: 197-198) Lacan’s answer reveals much about the vexed relation between psychoanalysis and traditional forms of knowledge:

Psychoanalysis is not something that can be transmitted like other forms of knowledge. The psychoanalyst has a position that sometimes manages to be that of a discourse. He doesn’t thereby transmit a body of knowledge, not that there is nothing for him to know, contrary to what is foolishly asserted. This is what is called into question – the function in a society of a certain form of knowledge, the one that is conveyed to you. (SXVII: 198)

In a subsequent re-working of the four discourses in *Seminar XVIII*, Lacan ‘called into question’ the knowledge ‘conveyed’ by the university by insisting that despite pretensions to the contrary, the agent is never more than a ‘*semblant*’; a make believe (*faire semblant*) akin to the infant’s mirror stage *semblable* that offers the tenuous experience of autonomy. Analytic knowledge, on the other hand, owes its fundamental property as a fragmented truth to the real that it repeatedly misses. It is a *savoir* generated in analysis which has pertinence only for that particular analysis. One can only ‘enter this field of knowledge by way of a *unique experience* that consists, quite simply, in being psychoanalysed’ (2008: 9).

Nonetheless, Lacan still finds himself asking ‘[h]ow does one go about teaching what cannot be taught?’ (2013b: 3) With Lacan’s answer to the question of how the singularity of clinical *experience* might survive importation into universal knowledge, we bear witness to a thought struggling with the consequences of its own necessary transmission or *repetition*:

I strive to say things that tally with *my experience* as an analyst. This experience is rather slight. *An analyst’s experience is never based on enough people to allow him to make generalizations. I attempt to allow him to make generalizations.* I attempt to determine what an analyst can learn from, to sketch out what the function of the analyst implies by way of a *rigorous conceptual apparatus*, and to indicate the guardrail one must hold onto so as not to overstep one’s function as an analyst. When one is an analyst, one is constantly tempted to skid, to slip, to let oneself slide down the stairs on one’s backside, which is, all the same, not very dignified as

regards that analyst's function. One must know how to remain rigorous, in such a way as to *intervene* only in a sober and preferably *effective* way. I try to spell out the conditions required for analysis to be *serious and effective*. (2013e: 84)

Lacan named his 'rigorous conceptual apparatus' the *matheme*, which, he insisted – evoking the distinction between funny and serious amusements – should be the 'pivotal point of any teaching. In other words, the only teaching is mathematical, the rest is a *joke*' (SXIX: 15/12/71). As pared down structural axioms, the *mathemes* guarded against an unhelpful reliance on the trivial and variable *semblants* that comprise the slippery content of communicated meaning. It was this rigor that Lacan aspired to in his writings: 'My *Écrits* are unsuitable for a thesis, particularly an academic thesis: they are antithetical by nature: *one either takes what they formulate or one leaves them*' (1977a: vii). One either takes the *matheme* or one leaves it. Whilst for Lacan – permanently and earnestly suspicious of the university's innate ability to metabolise and reproduce knowledge, rendering the most exciting thought a dull common place through an incessant process of banalization that transforms psychoanalysis into a (syn)thesis – this was a most appealing quality, it was not without its problems (see 2.2). Lacan approvingly referred to the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* as being 'in a way induced by the field of my teaching' (SXVI: 18.6.69). Given that he was, at best, ambivalent with respect to the majority of the 'poubellications' that his teaching gave rise to, we should take careful note of the reason for his satisfaction here. The journal, produced by several E.N.S graduates such as Miller and Jean-Claude Milner, and representing the high point of what the latter refers to as 'hyper-structuralism', married the respective Lacanian and Althusserian formalisations of Freud and Marx in articles populated by terse logical arguments and staccato deductions.

Exactitude, rather than being tantamount to the ideal of conscious knowledge – which, because it is *already* known, changes nothing – was the best guarantor of *efficacy*. If, as is commonly done, the *matheme* is only understood as the result of Lacan's yearning for absolute knowledge, it will offer little more than a refinement of the interpretative stance that he witnessed during his tutelage under Clérambault who 'taught' about 'interposing a very pretty little theory between me and... the madman... [Psychiatrists] sometimes even put so many "faculties of arts" between themselves and their madmen that they could not even see the phenomenon' (2008: 24-25). Lacan's appeal to an *experiential* purity, shorn of theory, is typical of his stance regarding what he adjudged to be the major weakness of the university discourse – the stultifying replication of

knowledge, ‘sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.’ The *semblant* inhibits transformative action:

It is never so happy, this discourse, than at the level of knowledge that no longer means anything to anybody, because the university discourse is constituted by the making of knowledge a *semblant*. Here it is a matter of discourses which constitute in a tangible way, something real. *This frontier relationship between the symbolic and real, we live in it, make no mistake.* (SXIX: 2/12/71)

We return, then, to the essential experience of psychoanalysis which an already known knowledge avoids: the relation between thought and the real. How does topology support an *effective* experience?

It is simply ‘not worth the trouble to talk about anything except *the real in which discourse itself has consequences*. Whether you call that structuralism or not, it is what I call... the condition of *seriousness*’ (SXVI: 20/11/68). It is, in other words, entirely pointless discussing a real that is considered *beyond* discourse – the *noumenon* that no signifier touches – because discursivity becomes little more than a nominal description or an epistemological *semblant* wonkily patched onto the real. This patching is open to historical variation (take, for example, the development of poetic approaches to nature) but so long as the real is considered as exterior to its representation (nature outside culture), it remains unchanged by discourse. This is the ‘realist’s argument’, for whom, regardless of any discursive apprehension or construction, ‘nature is always there’, preceding and exceeding its representation:

I absolutely do not dispute it. Nature is there. The way physics distinguishes itself from nature is that physics is worth saying something about, that discourse has consequences in it. In nature, as everyone knows – and that is even why it is so loved – no discourse has any [consequences] at all!... To be a philosopher of nature was never taken at any period as a certificate of materialism. (SXVI: 20/11/68)

Wittering on about nature, or whatever other name we might give to that virginal, pre-discursive gloop that sits outside culture, is a poor indicator of a materialist project. Affording to matter a radical primacy or exteriority locks one within a discursive hamster wheel: the ‘*ritournelle*’, or *retour éternel*, ‘of philosophical logic’ which, by ‘mak[ing] a *semblant* of the master-signifier [S1] or knowledge [S2]’ interminably alternates between the master and the university (ETD: 2). In this respect, the post-structuralist argument – the real is an effect of discourse (e.g. gender is a socio-linguistic construct), therefore: the real does not exist – is just as irresponsible as the

realist's position – the real is absolutely outside discourse, therefore: it is the only thing that authentically exists – since neither allow for a *discourse that has effects*.²¹ In its scepticism, post-structuralism arrives at the apparently scandalous conclusion that 'it must be of the real that nothing be at all' (we are touching here on the distinction drawn between idealism/ representation and demonstration in 2.4) (ETD: 21). Alternatively, there is 'the stupidity of attaching oneself to noumena', the pure thing-in-itself where being and truth reside (ETD: 21).

If the *exact and effective* science of 'physics does indeed give us a model of a discourse that is worthwhile', it is because it does not benignly 'extend, like the goodness of God, across the whole of nature' (SXVI: 20/11/68) and instead aggressively cuts into it, transforming it with events such as atomic explosions or the 'moon landing, where thought becomes witness to a performance of the real, and *with mathematics using no apparatus other than a form of language*' (T: 36). As the title of his eighteenth seminar suggests (*On a Discourse that might not be a Semblant*), Lacan was searching for a way to guarantee the effectiveness of analysis by disjoining it from standard logics of representation: 'our practice is bathed in this kind of precise indication that... words *have an import*... [Without this import] psychoanalysis would be... a sham... a *semblant*' (SXXIV: 8/3/77).

How, indeed, can words have a real effect if the real excludes sense? It is at this juncture that topology persuasively recommends itself as enabling a dynamic demonstration of the *effects* of the signifier without being an endlessly applicable 'pretty little theory' that prevents the analyst from getting his 'finger caught in the machine':

To make you sense what I mean by a discourse that is valid, I would compare it to a scissors' cut in this material that I talk about when I talk about the real of a subject. It is through this scissors' cut in what is called structure... that [structure] is revealed for what it is. If one makes the scissors' cut somewhere, relationships change in such a way that what is not seen before is seen afterwards. (SXVI: 20/11/68)

We will reserve an explanation of the precise clinical implications of the cut for the following section; the important point to remember here is that topology's appeal lies in its material performance of the *change* induced by the effect of the signifier *qua* cut. This change is not superficial or trivial (quantitative) but fundamental (qualitative): a

²¹The most effective and influential Lacanian account of a (sexual) real that is neither biologically nor linguistically determined can be found in Copjec, 1994: 201-236.

‘topological subversion’ is brought about, radically altering the structural real which topology, without the secondary interposition of metaphor and *re*-presentation, innately embodies.

Lacan’s audience were frequently corralled into *experimenting* with this topology themselves by playing with scissors and paper, since it was precisely the paradoxical quality of psychoanalytic insights, such as the counter-intuitive spatial relation between conscious and unconscious which eluded Freud’s second topography, that topology so strikingly foregrounded. One might also be reminded here of Lacan’s pedagogic demonstration of the ‘real-of-the-structure’ in the attempt to successfully write the smallest whole number. Lacan presents the experimental topology in which analysis is practiced. To see how, we must turn to ‘*L’étourdit*’ – a text that Lacan fittingly referred to as the ‘*the cutting edge of my discourse*’ (SXX: 9).²²

²²I should stress here that my comprehension of this extraordinarily difficult text is heavily reliant on the commentary provided by Fierens (2014).

3. 10. The Topology of Interpretation

If '[t]here is *no progress*' and '[m]an goes round in circles' because the 'structure of man is toric', it is wholly apt that psychoanalytic *action* in topological structure will rent apart this *impotent* toric roundabout of demand and desire between the subject and the Other (SXXIV: 14/12/76). Analytic transference commences with a *demand* put by a wounded *desidero* to the analyst as an omniscient Other: "I think, I speak, I suffer, therefore I am... but *what* am I and *why* am I this way?" Rather than attempting to answer these demands (the spirals to which the 'neurotic torus' owes its volume [figure 4]) like an agony aunt, the analyst combines the subject's circuits of demand and unconscious desire by *reading* the latter in the former – giving the torus a Möbian cut, moving from *revolution* to *re-turn* (figure 6), inducing 'an effect of topological *subversion*' (ETD: 17). 'Only the discourse that is defined from the *turn* the analyst gives it...returns to [the subject] the key of its division' (R: 6). Analysing \$ instead of supporting the ego, the analyst is able to reconstruct the analysand's fundamental fantasy, supplementing the Möbius strip with a 'point-out-of-line' (object [a]) to arrive at the cross-cap as the subject's particular organisation and avoidance of the hole (*qua* lack in the Other that he must confront). Repetition thinking can then be read in its relation to the real.

As an '*experimentum mentis*' that demonstrates action in structure by 'tracing certain cuts' (SXIII: 8/12/65), '[w]hat this topology *teaches*, is the necessary tie which establishes itself of the *cut* to the *number of turns* it comports so that is obtained a modification of structure or of the asphere, *the only access conceivable to the real*' (ETD: 25). The analyst remains an inscrutable enigma, *causing* the analysand's desire by offering no response to the demands for love and recognition. Analysis, *contra* ego psychology, which is 'terminated by identification with the analyst', goes 'beyond... this identification' by demonstrating 'the distance of the object (*a*) to the idealizing capital I of identification' (SXI: 271-2). In other words, the analyst demands of the analysand that he refuses what he might offer because it is not *that*.

Let us examine the structural *effect* of the first of these two cuts, remembering the emphasis Lacan places on the number of turns involved. Demand effects a cut comprised of a 'single turn' which passes *once* through the cross-cap's imaginary line of intersection (fantasy's 'line of identification' [SXI: 271]), transforming the entire subjective asphere into 'a strip *spherically stable* in introducing in it the effect of the

supplement that it takes from the *point-hors-ligne*' (ETD: 25). If, throughout the reconstruction of the analysand's fundamental fantasy, the analyst responds to demand and allows himself to become the analysand's ontological crux, if he states that what he is offering is indeed *that*, then analysis concludes with a restoration of a 'spherically stable' and ill-conceived ego that closes the hole – 'the fiction of a surface in which structure dresses itself' (ETD: 24).

But what exactly is the cut? 'In our aspheres, the cut, a *closed cut*, is the *dit*': the closed cut comprises the minimum number of signifiers required for re-presentation; departing from one signifier (S1) it immaculately *closes in upon itself* and produces a comprehensible and self-identical *dit*: 'The cut, makes a subject: whatever it circles...' (ETD: 17) The subject of the demand is the spherical effect of a univocal circular turn: the analysand has said what he means, the analyst has understood what he means and acts in accordance with his demand. In this '*semblant* of communication', no deficit or surfeit of signification occurs when the demand travels from source (subject) to recipient (Other) (ETD: 28). Analysis relies on other material.

There are other cuts that have the *effect* of 'topological *subversion*' – transformations that can be denominated 'topologically: cylinder, strip, Möbius strip' (ETD: 17). Reasonable protestations can be heard: whilst the deployment of topology as a *theoretical* 'presentation', superior to language, of the aporetic psychic geography is justified, surely language, now that *practice* is at stake, should take precedence over the abstractions of topology? Can clinical interpretation be credibly characterised as the journey from a torus to a Möbius strip? Dany Nobus argues that what Lacan 'seemed to forget at this stage is that psychoanalytic practice... [relies] on the production of speech. Topology may have taken Lacan to the real heart of psychoanalytic experience, it also drove him away from its necessary means and principal power' (2003: 65). But Lacan's topological support does not exclude speech; on the contrary, its entire *raison d'être* is given up to a presentation of the effects of speech that create and modify structure: 'finding there [topology] what there is of [change] in analytic discourse, can only be done in interrogating the rapport of the *dire* with the *dit*' (ETD: 17). Topology enables a non-trivial distinction to be made between two means of intervention (a response to demand and a reading of desire) without which, psychoanalysis loses its 'principal power.'

'That one *say* [*Qu'on dise*] remains *forgotten* behind what is *said* [*dit*] in what is heard [*entend*]' (ETD: 1). In the single turn of *univocal* signification (demand), the *dire*

– the subject of the unconscious – is forgotten; obscured by *understanding* (*entendu*). When, however, the *equivocal dits* are *read* to the letter (S1/l'étourdi – S2/l'étourdit), the Freudian Thing speaks. Between the *dits* that comprise a closed cut, lies the *dire*: 'The unconscious is... the cut in action' (E: 712). Topologically, the *dire* is the *existent* and unlocalisable twist in the Möbius strip that botches the immaculate *revolution* of a return (single loop: $a=a$), leaving only the *repetition* of a re-turn (double-loop: $a\neq a$). Surprised by a slip, 'the subject remains at the mercy of its *dit* if it *repeats* itself' (ETD: 25). Topology allows Lacan to non-metaphorically present the differing effects of two cuts: the single, circular loop of demand (S1-S1) and the double, Möbian loop of desire (S1-S2-S1).

The 'imagined' Möbius strip – its representation as an image – *appears* to have two sides; materially, however, the strip 'puts in reach of all hands what is *unimaginable* as soon as its *dire* in *forgetting* itself, makes the *dit* endure', which is why Lacan insisted we experiment with these structures ourselves lest we think of speech as an untwisted relay that leaves only the *dit* (ETD: 23). In analysis, 'it is necessary to make two... circuits... to grasp what is authentically involved in the division of the subject' (SXIII: 11/5/66). What is grasped is neither a 'spherically stable' being nor an alienating identity but the castrated subject of the signifier. Lacan distinguishes between signification (understanding *dits*) and sense (not *forgetting* the *dire*): 'interpretation is of sense [*sens*] and goes against signification' (ETD: 22).²³ Suitably, Lacan produces another equivocation when defining how 'sense [*sens*] effects' are produced by the signifier's 'double direction [*sens*]' – the temporal double-loops of retroactive and anticipated signification (SXXIV: 15/3/77). Before we observe the effect of the second closed cut on the cross-cap, it's worth taking a brief look at how the interplay of the *dit* and the *dire* functions in Lacan's own work.

Occasionally, muses Lacan, 'I *forget* myself [*m'oublie*] to the point of publishing [*p'oublier*]' (SXX: 61). The act of publication treats the dynamism of *sense* to the ossification of *signification*: Lacan's copious double-looped re-turns and renewals are

²³ The elevated status Lacan grants to sense (*sens*) in its opposition to signification only seems to apply in 'L'étourdit' and some of the surrounding seminars. *Sens* is referred to derisively elsewhere (as, for example, that which is produced by the overlapping of the imaginary and the symbolic in the Borromean knot). Alternatively, it could be that there are two potential directions for *sens*: either one does not 'forget the *dire*' and *sens*, by being *read*, becomes 'ab-sens' (double-loop) or one does and *sens*, by being *understood*, becomes *signification* (single loop).

concretised into an *oeuvre*, a generalisable theory or a *legacy*. The *dire*, the unconscious action responsible for distortion, ‘remains *forgotten* behind what is *dit*’ in what is understood as, for example, an official and published *Œuvres complètes*, a systematisable *Weltanschauung*. Here, Lacan derives inspiration from the example set by Alexandre Kojève, whose notorious seminars on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* were published in the form of edited notes written by his students rather than as a finalised *dit*: ‘[Kojève] only philosophized as titled by university discourse where he was *positioned provisionally*, but knowing well that his knowledge only functioned there as a *semblant* and treating it as such’ (ETD: 3). Lacan, confronted by a bank of tape recorders every time he entered a lecture hall, would never be afforded such liminal provisionality. He chose, in his own inimitably awkward fashion, the postface that accompanied the publication of *Seminar XI* to complain ‘that people have been publishing/*forgetting* [*qu’on p’oublie*] that I say [*ce que je dis*] to the point of *turning* it on the university lathe [*le tour universitaire*]’ (2012b: 18). The *single turn* of *signification* and *semblant* predominates in *le tour universitaire*; it forgets the *dire* and silences the unconscious, thereby negating the ‘*effect of sense*’ (ETD: 25) that cuts and modifies structure: ‘the university is designed to ensure that thought never has any repercussions’ (Lacan, 2008: 26). What Lacan is attempting to transmit with topology is not a *dit* – a consolidated knowledge that we are perhaps missing – but ‘the rapport of the *dire* with the *dit*’, as that which induces *effects of sense* (ETD: 17). Lacan is teaching a *practice*, not a philosophy, in an equivocal *and* topological performance that forces the *reader* not to forget the *dire*.

An understanding mechanically extracts from a text a series of key-points and applicable laws. Of course, none are more famous in this field than the thesis that the unconscious is structured like a language (to which Lacan’s entire output was often reduced). However, ‘[t]he fact that I say [*mon dire*] that the unconscious is structured like a language is not part and parcel of the field of linguistics’ (SXX: 15). Linguistics, in its guise as a university discourse, ‘define[s] the linguistic object’; this object (language) becomes a known field operating in accordance with general laws (SXVIII: 10/2/71). However, as a reading of libidinal *lalangue* makes felt, ‘this language-object is ungraspable’ (ibid). Linguistic laws and semiology are repeatedly challenged by the *jouissance* enriched *particularity* of *lalangue*. Language, as an ‘object’ defined by linguistics, is no more than ‘knowledge’s hare-brained lucubration about’ the nonsensical letters of ‘*lalangue*’ (SXX: 138-9). Therefore, ‘the unconscious,’ despite

what the university thinks it knows from Lacan's formulation, 'cannot adapt itself to a research, I mean linguistics', as long as this *research forgets the dire*. (SXVIII: 10/2/71).

Tasked with modifying structure, 'the analyst is beginning with Freud much in advance on this over the linguist' who neglects to radically disjoin signifier and signified with the bar (Φx) that causes sense's double-looped-direction. '[T]his advance' is the advance of the double-turn: 'linguistics unlike analysis advances nothing'; the Freudian sense – the '*dire* of analysis insofar as it is *effective*' – is to 'the benefit, and second-*dire*, of linguistics' (ETD: 28). Psychoanalysis has induced a renewal, a second saying, of linguistics that consists precisely in its advancement of the logic of the second loop itself – the temporal inverted redoubling the produces *lalangue*. This is also a pertinent rejoinder to the criticism levelled by Derrida at Lacan's return to Freud: '[i]f the Freudian break-through has an historical originality, this originality is not due to its peaceful coexistence or theoretical complicity with this linguistics' (2001: 249). We should not conceive of Lacan's 'second saying' or circuit as the application of linguistics to Freudian thought since the former, according to Lacan, was *already present* in the latter. Psychoanalysis is not folded back into linguistics; the originality of repetition radically subverts this science because its material is *lalangue*. This knotting of *jouissance* with the signifier (as per Lacan's *second* circuit) in the 'speaking-being [*parlêtre*]' replaces 'the UCS of Freud (unconscious, we read it): move over, it's my turn now... [The unconscious] is discovered all at once, still [*encore*] after the invention the inventory has to be done...' (Quoted in Soler, 2014: 62-63). Beyond Lacan's brassy usurpation (move over!) it's worth noting that his *encore* is not an invention but an inventory, a re-branding of the unconscious in light of developments that have arisen *in the course of repetition* – as both a reading of the analysand's symptomatic repetitions and Lacan's 'symptomatic response' to, or repetition of, Freud. We should not forget, either, that this is a repetition and revaluation of his own *dire* (i.e. '*mon dire* that the unconscious is structured like a language is not part and parcel of the field of linguistics').

Once read, *lalangue* betrays the real. What is, then, also *original* in Lacan's *repetition*, its further demonstration of the 'relation between thought and the real', is the *logical* re-articulation of what always eluded Freud: the feminine not-all which can only begin to emerge once the totalised language-object of linguistics is jettisoned in favour of *lalangue*. With the bar and sense's double-loop, '[t]he signifier... [is] structured in

topological terms' (SXX: 18). This Möbian topologisation, concordant with the equivocation of *lalangue*, demonstrates how '[t]he languages' (note here the generality of 'the', typical of linguistics, to which Lacan is opposing his own 'like *a*') 'fall under the blow of the *not-whole* in the most certain fashion since structure has there no other *sense*, and this is in what structure arises from my *topological recreation*' (ETD: 27). Lacan's re-turn is nothing less than a topologisation of linguistics and, consequently, of Freud, that, by *advancing* Freudian thought in its constriction around the real, concerns itself with the particularity and originality of the analysand's repetition thinking:

This *dire* only proceeds from the fact that the unconscious, from being structured like *a* language, which is to say the *lalangue* it inhabits, is subjected to the equivocation by which each is distinguished. A language among others is nothing more than the integral of the equivocations that its history has let persist. This is the vein by which the real... that there is no sexual rapport, has made a deposit there in the course of ages. (ETD: 28)

In the respective histories of an analysand and psychoanalytic thought itself, there *exists* an impossibility around which the topological structure of repetition thinking organises itself.

Freud himself, in the recourse to biology and myth when theorising castration, 'grafted over his *dire*' with a 'parasitic organism' (the phallus), making it difficult in this 'graft of *dits*' for 'the reader [to find] a *sense*' (ETD: 6). Indeed, far from reading a sense, Freud's disciples had understood a signification, believing that the phallus had a discernable signified. Rediscovering repetition as that which is compelled by a function (Φx) not an organ, Lacan better circumscribes 'this real which I try to situate for you in its proper *dit-mension* by this *dit* which is mine; to wit, by my *dire*' (SXXII: 15/4/75). However, even those instances of Lacan's *dire* that are most evidently and radically opposed to any systematising graft are prone to being uncritically regurgitated like a catch-phrase – a point emphasised by his use of quotation marks: '[There is] something that I say [*mon dire*], which is *énoncé* as follows, "There's no such thing as a metalanguage"' (SXX: 118). In *Seminar XXIV*, Lacan wistfully reflected that in '*L'étourdit*' he 'almost' manufactured a metalanguage, settling instead for 'a *semblant* of metalanguage' by 'writing *s'emblant*, *s'emblant* to metalanguage. Making a reflective verb of this *s'emblant*, detaches it from this coming to fruition which being is' (SXXIV: 8/3/77). In Old French, *emblem* (to steal) is derived from the Medieval Latin *imbulare*, itself a variation on the Classical Latin *involare* for which the modern French equivalent

is *voler* – meaning both to purloin and fly (we might think here of the link in English between to steal and steal away). In ‘*L’étourdit*’, the word appears when Lacan recites his assertion that the existence of an exception to castration is ‘only sustained in seeming [*sembler*] there, in being embled there [*s’y embler*]’ (ETD: 8). In this Lacanian *lalangue* the reader must find what sense he can. What I think Lacan is getting at is that ‘*L’étourdit*’, by revealing the tyrannical father of *Totem and Taboo* to be not a being but a *s’emblant* who only *seems* (*sembler*) to *steal* (*embler*) *jouissance* (leading one to confuse circumstantial impotence with the structural impossibility [Φx] that causes being and *jouissance* to ‘exist’ in perpetual metonymic *flight*), through an apparently metalinguistic presentation of the (topo)logic of sexuation, constitutes his purest and most unreadable (that is, most metalinguistic) demonstration of the impossibility of excepting oneself from castration and producing a metalanguage (saying it all).

Beyond the single turn of demand, there is ‘[a]nother *dire*... it is interpretation... it is particular, from interesting the subject with particular *dits*, which are *not-wholly* (free association) modal *dits* (demand among them)’ (ETD: 17). In the material of free association, subjective *particularities* steadily challenge the subject’s spherizing self-apprehension as the not-all makes its first tremulous appearance in the impossibility of saying it all. As what remains once need has been subtracted from demand, desire, read to the *letter*, emerges from the lapses in signification. A double-looped cut is traced.

‘This development [of the cut] is to be taken as the reference... of my discourse... A reference which is not at all metaphoric’ (ETD: 16). Here, Lacan is talking about both his topological presentation of the cut and the spoken material that creates this cut. Metaphor, as the substitution of one signifier for another, produces the *effect of meaning*, whereas this cut is equivalent to desirous metonymy – the displacement or ‘resistance of meaning’ (E: 515). Due to the phallic function, the impeccable ‘signification relation’ between S1 and S2 does not exist; an ‘ab-sense’ prevails. In the ‘stuff of this [analytic] discourse’ (i.e. the impotent, barred relation between truth and product that underlies the link between *semblant* and Other) S1 and S2 are disjoined (figure 16) (ETD: 16). In order to examine ‘the rapport of the *dire* with the *dit*’, so that the former won’t be *forgotten*, the rapport between *dits* is held in suspense, the circle is not closed in a single turn. Concerning itself with the *dire*, the analyst’s discourse, ‘metonymically of ab-sense’ and ‘dispensing with all metaphor’, works toward a reduction of signification (ETD: 20). But ‘[w]hat does it mean for us to situate ourselves

as subjects in a reference that is *not metaphorical*?' It is to reject a 'metaphor of the subject' and to isolate the 'foundation of its position, *not at all in any effect of meaning*, but in what results from the *combinatorial* itself' (SXIII: 4/5/66). The subject of the unconscious occurs as the Möbian twist of a temporal combinatorial.

Rather than expunging the twist that distorts the combinatorial's meaning effect, the analyst reads the 'ab-sense' produced. Consequently, Lacan proposes a striking and overlooked consonance between what might intuitively be regarded as antinomies – equivocation and the matheme. As it is treated by Lacan, the interplay between *dit* and *dire* – the cut and the distortive, twisting 'cut in action' – dislocates signification with *lalangue*; jumbles of letters divorced from a universal symbolism or any representational adequation to reality which he refers to as a 'pure matheme', a pure, non-metaphoric combinatorial (ETD: 16). Like the letters of physics, *lalangue* is not a meaningful description or analogy. Psychoanalysis's disregard for traditional explanations of, or reasons for, a subject's speech, is not a rejection of reason outright; it instead switches responsibility from a transcendent, meaningful cause (e.g. I said or did this because God willed it), to a real kernel (the traumatic missed encounter with the Other's lack) that acts as a reason only insofar as the subject's signifiers are a response to its radical lack of reason. The Möbian combinatorial circumscribes a hole, the organisation of which is particular to each subject which is why 'not just anything can be a *dit*' (ETD: 16): free association churns out 'particular *dits*' that, provided the *dire* is not forgotten, can be evacuated of signification in order to delineate the real that they contour in a fashion not unlike mathematics: 'The real is what commands the whole function of significance. The real is what you encounter precisely by not being able, in mathematics, to write just anything whatsoever' (SXIX: 12/1/72).

Topological cuts teach 'a matheme by which is situated the relation of the *dire* to the *dit*' (ETD: 22) 'without recourse to some experience' (ETD: 16). The case studies and presentations by means of which experience is normally taught encourage the memorisation of interpretative templates and lack the rigour of the topological presentation that, as a '*experimentum mentis*', demonstrating the difference between cuts, is equivalent to analytic experience (which is itself topological). 'Of this appearingbeing [*parêtre*]' – the Möbian double-loop comprising the insubstantial \$ – which 'interpretation makes', 'I do not have to expose the status otherwise than by my progress itself' (ETD: 27). In other words, the barred subject that is produced by

experience, has no status (as content or substance) other than as ‘what results from the combinatorial itself’ which, as non-metaphorical ab-sense, is a ‘pure matheme.’

The subject this cut makes is quite different to the spherically stable strip: ‘Looping it double, this turn obtains something else: a fall of the cause of desire from where is produced the Möbian strip of the subject’ (ETD: 25):

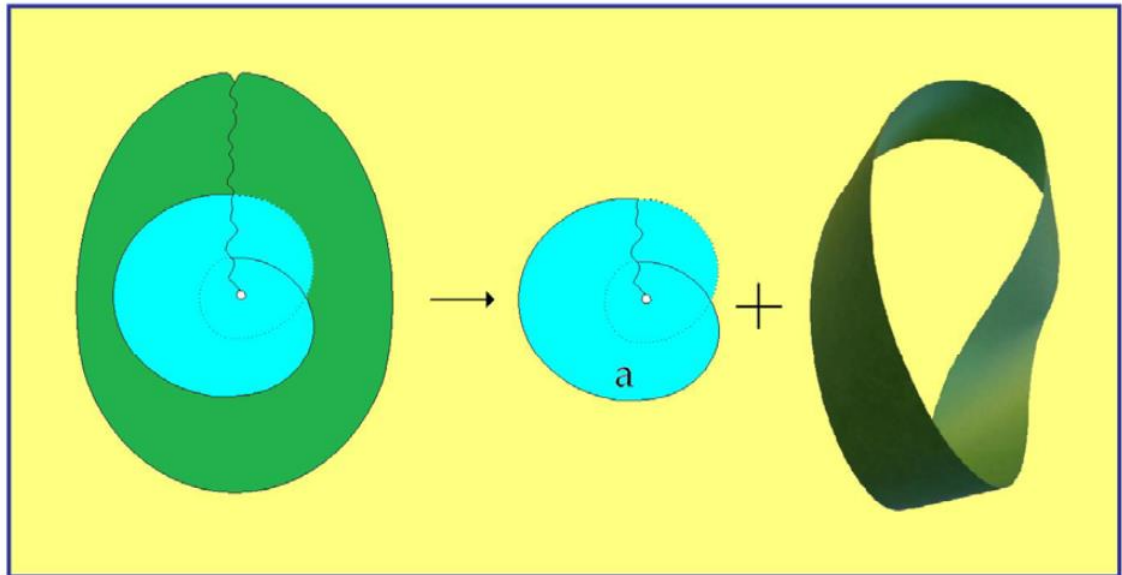


Fig. 16²⁴

In the course of analysis, the analysand’s fundamental fantasy – the fantasy formed from the traumatic encounter with the Other’s desire and the loss/protection imposed by castration – is carefully constructed so that this *reality* can be made to demonstrate his *real*: ‘It is at the point where every significance is missing, is abolished, at the nodal point called that of the desire of the Other, at the phallic point, insofar as it signifies the abolition as such of all significance, that the object (*a*), the object of castration, comes to take its place’ (SIX: 27/6/62). Once constructed, fantasy is then *traversed* by means of a series of interpretative ‘cuts’ applied to the asphere. The analyst’s cutting interventions between S1 and S2 isolate an instance or insistence of equivocation that betrays the analysand’s particular organisation of the hole. The imaginary sphericity of the fantasy is deflated when the subject is made aware of the contingent character of his constrictive master signifiers through a reading of the equivocations produced by the inverted redoubling of his signifying articulations – when, in other words, the ‘whole truth’ is

²⁴ Figure taken from ‘*Les schémas de Staferla II*’.

reduced to a litter of letters tracing ‘the approach to this point of *impossibility*, of this *point at infinity*, that is always introduced by the approach of sexual contact.’ (SXVI: 21/5/69). As the imaginary consistency of the analysand’s symbolic scaffold grows progressively more uncertain, the ‘organising object’, around which the libidinal chains loop, is ultimately cast adrift as a *semblant*. Unlike the *irreducible* interior eight which remains in its real *ex-sistence*, the disc, cut from the cross-cap, ‘in making a circle there... can reduce itself to a point’ and, as a dimensionless point, it doesn’t exist (ETD: 16).

The fallacious ‘assurance’ of substantial being that the subject receives from his fantasmatic ‘window onto the real’ dissipates as he comes to assume his destitution as ‘disbeing [*désêtre*’] (Lacan, 2001: 254). The analyst, having stimulated desire, is now discarded once the neurotic confronts the impossibility that determines his desire and the seeming sphericity of the subjective asphere is, like the torus, deflated. Since ‘the psychoanalyst persists in causing [the subject’s] desire’, he is not a detached, knowing observer (ETD: 26). In “‘realizing the topology,” I do not depart from the fantasy to account for it’ – he is entirely implicated in the analytic construction and he ‘pays for it from a duty to represent the fall of a discourse, after having permitted sense to tighten itself around this fall to which it devotes itself’ (ETD: 28).²⁵ The object, holding together symbolic-imaginary fictions (fantasy), is revealed to be a ‘*semblant* of being... it only dissolves, in the final analysis, owing to its failure, unable, as it is, to sustain itself in approaching the real’ (SXX: 95). Neither *semblant* of being nor *semblant* of knowledge, the subject that results from this cut and the traversal of fantasy is a particular and ‘pure matheme.’

The analyst’s interventions (i.e. his reading of desire as opposed to a response to demand) are vital because, left to its own devices, the metonymy of desire, blossoming from the fundamental fantasy’s obscuration of castration’s *real* effect and the groundless ground of *das Ding*, produces chains of associative signifiers from which the subject derives pleasure. ‘Desire... is interpretation itself’, but it is a poor interpretation insofar as it seeks further signification in an effort to avoid an encounter with S(\bar{A})

²⁵There is nothing more ‘*dishonouring* to analytic discourse’ than an analyst who, refusing his destiny in rejection (the result of a successful analysis being a subject who no longer believes in the object or a subject-supposed-to-know), seeks prestige as either an ideal-ego or through the ‘formation of societies’ (ETD: 31). Here, Lacan senses a kinship with Beckett, whose bleak vision of humanity’s lot ‘makes refuse of our being, saves the *honour* of literature, and relieves me of the privilege I believed owed to my place’ (L: 1). Dissolution thus amounted to not just another example of the tiresome self-destruction to which psychoanalytic institutions are so prone, but more importantly, to nothing less than the traversal of a collective fantasy.

(SXI: 176). Therefore, unconscious desire *qua* interpretation cannot be too liberally indulged since it compels a *ciphering* of signifiers; a production that is potentially interminable: ‘saying whatever – the very watchword of the analysand’s discourse – is what leads to the *Lustprinzip*’ (SXX: 84). The clinic becomes an expensive stage for the humouring of phallic *jouissance* if the perverse coupling of \$ and *a* is not rent apart by an assumption of castration that would direct the subject toward the not-all ($S[\bar{A}]$).

Through *les tours dit* of repetitious *Umschreibung*, a successful analysis ‘has looped this loop to its end’ (SXI: 274). The analysand will have to be skilfully escorted along the descent of tightening sense without being forcefully directed. The analyst’s reading of *lalangue* has an *effect* on the analysand. During the course of transference, individual history emerges not through reproduction but repetition – the insistence of the subject’s most formative and disruptive signifiers. Subjects are thereby made to ‘repeat their lesson’ (ETD: 29) and, from the repetition of material, ‘learn how to read’ letters (SXX: 37). This ‘teaching’ can only take place in the analytic experiment; the pure matheme-experience of sense: ‘I cannot any more than Freud account for [psychoanalysis] “from what I teach,” except in following its effects in analytic discourse, an effect of its mathematization’ (ETD: 23). It’s worth noting here that matheme is taken from the Greek ‘mathêma [μάθημα]’, meaning ‘lesson.’ The matheme, then, is not solely a pseudo-algebraic formula that pops up in Lacan’s *écrits* but also something that materialises in analysis as the subject’s most reduced and individual inscription of a logical impasse.

The analyst is the ‘subject-supposed-to-know-how-to-read-otherwise. The otherwise [*autrement*] in question, is indeed what I write, for my part in the following way: $S(\bar{A})$... Otherwise designates a lack. It is a matter of lacking differently [*autrement*]' (SXXV: 10/1/78). Following the dereliction of fantasy and the fall of *a* and shifting from impotence to impossibility, the Möbian and feminised subject assumes castration ($\sim \exists x \sim \Phi x$) without perversely annulling the real void ($S[\bar{A}]$) with a fictional cork. As we will see in Part Five, it was not until *Seminar XXIII* that Lacan definitively outlined what he meant by ‘*manquer autrement*’ as a way of deriving *jouissance* from the not-whole Other ($\sim \forall x \Phi x$). ‘*L’étourdit*’ closes instead with a breathlessly rhapsodic appraisal of the newly minted subject, whose *progress* consists in the apperception that ‘the woman’ (*qua* faultless complement that would satisfy the desire to be One) is a ‘lure [*leurre*] of truth’ that previously prevented the ‘hommodit’ from passing to ‘the hour [*l’heure*] of the real’ when the bounded ‘heaven’ of the constellated Other is

‘broken’ by ‘being not-whole’ (ETD: 30-31). The ‘impasses of logic’ presented by the ‘not-all’ ($\sim[\forall x] \Phi x$) and the ‘*hommoinsun*’ (the ‘at-least-one-man’: $[\exists x] \sim\Phi x$) ‘show the issue outside of the fictions of *mondanité*’ (a neologism indicating that the universal pretensions of *worldliness* never surpass the *mundanity* of a fictional *dit-mension*) by allowing one to ‘make another *fixion* of the real: that is, of the impossible which fixes it by the structure of language.’ This is a *fixion* that is not that of fantasy’s fictions: logic ‘trace[s] out the path by which there is discovered in every discourse the real around which it is coiled, and dispense[s] with the *myths* by which it is ordinarily supplied’ (ETD: 21).

It was with topology and logic that Lacan’s ‘second saying’ sought to transform psychoanalytic practice into a rigorous science of the real: ‘If my *dire* imposes itself, not, as one says, as a model, but for the purpose of articulating topologically discourse itself, it is from the default in the universe it proceeds, on the condition that one can no longer claim to fill it in’ (ETD: 20). With the completion of this second circuit, the double-loop cut of sense, Lacan’s re-turn, by reading structure for its impossibilities, exceeds Freud’s intellectual terminus – the ‘rock of castration’ as the cause of *Spaltung* and the sexual rapport’s non-existence.

In Part Four, we will see what distinguishes a literary criticism influenced by this science of the real from applied psychoanalysis. How might Lacan’s (topo)logical presentations help us to read the literary letter?

4. Reading from the Split

4.1. *Poème* and *Mathème*

Jane Gallop's (1985: 160-161) claim that Lacanian psychoanalysis veers 'in the direction of science – first, linguistics and later, mathematics – by ridding itself of the dramatic, the figural and the anecdotal, in short by ridding itself of literature,' appears striking, certainly, but, having examined the aggressive truncation to which Freud's myths were subjected, cannot be dismissed here as unwarranted hyperbole. We have seen how Lacan's admiration for two inter-related qualities of scientific discourse (exactitude and efficacy) informed a sparse doctrine of interpretation that is to be practiced in a topology evacuated of metaphor and *figuration* (the entire range of representational *semblants*, from indistinct images to quantifiable geometrics): 'It is a matter, for us, of situating our topology; to situate ourselves, we analysts, as acting in it' (SXIII: 4/5/66). This action is a 'pure matheme' (the cut of ab-sense) derived from the logic of castration (Φx) which itself 'cannot in any way be reduced to an *anecdote*' or a 'universal sexual *symbolism*' or even an Oedipal *drama* (SXIX: 12/1/72). Nonetheless, Lacan apparently sees no contradiction in advising that '[d]oing a bit of mathematics would not be bad training for psychoanalysts' whilst also, rather incongruously, demanding that '[t]he least we can ask might be for psychoanalysts to notice that they are poets' (2008: 40-41). What have these two domains – which common *sens* tells us are diametrically opposed – got to do with each other? Is Lacan suggesting that they are, essentially, the sameor, perhaps, two distinct halves of a whole? Or does their affinity instead concern the not-all? Are they two different methods of *cernant le réel*?

We can return here to a statement first quoted in 1.3: there operates 'a thinking that is not I: such is, from a *first vague approach*, the way in which the unconscious is *presented*' (SXIV: 18/1/67). If Lacan considered it his purpose to improve on such nebulous formulations through recourse to more rigorous modes of *presentation*, paving the way for effective praxis, we should not be surprised to learn that, having approvingly cited Rimbaud's deduction that '*je est un autre*' as evidence that the 'poet's intuition' (E: 96) precedes psychoanalytic insight, Lacan would, almost twenty years later, argue that such 'vague, even though poetic' formulations must be replaced with 'a more precise logical articulation' (SXIV: 18/1/67). We have seen how Lacan arrived at such an articulation with respect to Freud's myths by rejecting the path of redundant academic commentary and instead reading them as 'indication[s] of an impossibility.'

An encounter with such impossibility allowed Lacan's *encore* to 'break new ground.' Similarly, argues Zupančič (2011a: 171), Lacan's reading of *Hamlet* was a 'first attempt at "formalizing" analytic experience, not an attempt to "poeticize" this experience', since such tragedies 'articulate... something which cannot be directly transcribed in the symbolic, *something visible in the symbolic only by means of its consequences and impasses*. It is precisely this function that Lacan's later formulae (or mathemes) will serve.'

In this chapter we will see how the *poème* and the *mathème*, rather than belonging two utterly separate and divergent domains that can be sectioned off and quarantined by a 'literary' or 'scientific' reading of Lacan's thought, are two ways of writing the same impossibility – two ways, that is, of producing a writing that is somehow inflected by what does not stop *not* writing itself. What would a psychoanalytic literary criticism that did not ignore Lacan's formalism look like? What could a discourse that has made sworn enemies of metaphor and mimesis have to tell us about literature? It was, of course, Lacan's contention that repression functions exactly like the linguistic mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy that saw him enthusiastically received by literary critics (see 4.4), who, by tracing the operations of these mechanisms, would perhaps gain access to a textual unconscious or 'censored chapter' (E: 259). How might this method – characterised here in an admittedly reductive fashion – change when Freud's discovery is topologised – when, that is, the 'navel of the dream' or the 'censored chapter' cannot be adequately accounted for by a 'search for meaning'? Principally, this will amount to an interpretative method that reads 'structure in its impossibilities' by ascertaining the *effects* of these impasses on both narrative structure and readers. First, we will approach an example of artistic sublimation and examine Lacan's claim that it is '[p]recisely to the extent that we restore the point of view of *structure* in the libidinal relation' that 'our new *algorithms* allow us to articulate... what is involved in artistic creation' (SXI: 111).

4.2. Structure and Historicism

Gallop candidly admits to finding ‘Lacan’s stories and poetry more sympathetic, more pleasurable, and easier than his graphs and later “mathemes”’ (1985: 161). What *pleasure* does the literary offer that the logical withholds? Might this pleasure have something to do with why analysts must ‘*advance* with something other than little stories’? (SXVI: 5/2/69) As the result of such progress, the logic of sexualisation, even if it does constitute a ‘love letter’, is no great romance; these formulae tender no protagonists with which to identify, to sympathise with or be angered by, and no narrativised histories. The matheme leaves us cold: it is without pathos; the entire panoply of emotive responses outlined by Aristotle are voided. Even when verisimilitude is disjoined and disbelief must be suspended, when the narrator as the foundation of perception proves to be unreliable or when the literary mirror is a fractured kaleidoscope and the portrait unfinished, the reader can find some purchase, some *pleasure*, even if this goes no further than the ‘*jouissance* of the idiot’ (SXX: 81): Vladimir, Estragon and ourselves, *duped* by the ‘Name-of-the-Father’ and left hopelessly, but rather enjoyably, longing for Godot to turn up. The globalising consistency of a setting or a narrative *telos*, is utterly alien to a logic that confronts the real and a topology in which the foundations of orientation, localisation and perspective disintegrate all the more radically.

Gallop’s reference to the ‘pleasurable’ experience derived from stories and poetry is most prescient since it calls to mind the pleasure principle – the principle that inhibits *effective* analysis. Accepting the dubious distinction between *poème* and *mathème*, predicated on the notion that the former moves us while the latter does not, literature, by this criteria (the sliding scale of efficacy), *is not literary enough* whilst the ‘pure matheme’, taking the subject beyond the pleasure principle, is more literary than literature itself. In ‘*L’étourdit*’, Lacan, following a lengthy disquisition on how logic and mathemes allow the analyst to divine and *modify* subjective structure, appears to support precisely this distinction when he argues that, of the ‘blows [*coups*]’ – the cutting ‘*effects* of sense’ – inflicted on the subjective asphere during analysis, ‘poets make a calculus’ whilst ‘the psychoanalyst serves himself there where it is suitable... for his end: that is for, by his *dire* which *re-sunders* the subject’ (ETD: 29). Whereas the poet assembles a limited and quantifiable *dit-mension* with its own laws and

conventions, the analyst is tasked with re-turning such formations, which do not stop writing themselves, to *what does not stop not writing itself*.

The literary work, in service to the pleasure principle, as that which ‘lead[s] the subject from signifier to signifier, by generating as many signifiers as are required to maintain at as low a level as possible the tension that regulates the whole functioning of the psychic apparatus’ (SVII: 119), constitutes a sublimation that mediates *das Ding* – the unbearable void that ‘rises up’ ‘*beyond* the pleasure principle’ (SVII: 73) – by ‘rais[ing] an object... to the dignity of the Thing’ (SVII: 112). A signifying scaffold identifies, contextualises, narrativises and *cernant le réel* by ‘encircling the Thing’ that the object (*a*), put in place by sublimation, obscures (SVII: 141). If Lacan, in a sweeping fashion bound to make any critic uneasy, announces that ‘[a]ll art is characterized by a certain mode of organization around this emptiness,’ he also adds a self-aware caveat, arguing that this is not ‘a vain formula, *in spite of its generality*, in guiding those who are interested in explaining the problems of art’, since the ‘emptiness’, ultimately resistant to any recuperative articulation – artistic or critical – is precisely that which renders any universal inconsistent and incomplete (SVII: 130). In league with the *Lustprinzip* – which is ‘based only on the coalescence of *a* with $S(\bar{A})$ ’ (SXX: 84) – sublimation fashions pleasurable aspheres of varying degrees of stability and volume by ‘colonis[ing] the field of *das Ding* with imaginary schemes’ and *semblants*; ‘an imaginary function... for which we will use the symbolisation of the fantasm ($\$ \langle a \rangle$)’ (SVII: 99). Such schemes opacify the structure (of which Lacan would eventually produce a precise, logical articulation).

Whereas sublimatory ciphering tends toward an inflation of the asphere, analytic *deciphering*, through a series of double-looped cuts, tightens sense ‘around a hole of that real from which is announced that to which after-the-fact [*après-coup*] there is no pen’ – artistic or otherwise – ‘that does not find itself testifying: that there is no sexual rapport’ (ETD: 30). Psychoanalysis sets itself up not so much to re-articulate the literary fantasy as to disarticulate it: ‘our whole business, which is the story of sexual relationships... revolves around [*tourne autour*] the fact that you think it could be written’ (SXVIII: 17/3/71 [translation altered]).

Lacan devotes considerable time to the study of an exemplary attempt to write the sexual relation: the poetics of courtly love, which ascetically puts in the place of the void ($S[\bar{A}]$) an inaccessible object – the capricious Lady – thereby avoiding, through a series of missed encounters, a traumatic encounter with the Other’s lack. Impotence

mitigates impossibility: union with the Lady is invariably deferred by circumstance and prohibition, thereby allowing the fantasy to remain intact: ‘*all* [*tous*] of us invent something to fill up the hole [*trou*] in the real. Where there is no sexual relationship there is a “*troumatisme*” (SXXI: 19/2/74). If this is what the *all* accomplishes, what sort of art might the not-all, operating on the basis of S(A) rather than *a*, produce? Are there some artworks that are more *troumatique* than others?

In what Giorgio Agamben (1993: xviii) has referred to as a poetic ‘topology of joy’, the *approach* is an end in itself (provided the Lady remains out of reach, desire is stimulated and the ideal of the sexual rapport is maintained). The artist *fait le tour* in response ‘to the impossible task of appropriating what must in every case remain unappropriable. The path of the dance in the labyrinth, leading into the heart of what it keeps at a distance, is the spatial model symbolic of human culture and its royal road toward a goal for which only a detour is adequate’ (ibid: xviii). Taking tenuous ontological succour from the perversity of phallic *jouissance*, the reverential knight, like Achilles chasing the tortoise in Zeno’s paradox, ‘approaches... the cause of his desire [*a*]... That is the act of love. To *make* [*faire*] love, as the very expression indicates, is poetry’ (SXX: 72). Courtly love owes its specific style to a synthetic *making*: the symbolic code that regulates a poetic *faire semblant*. Rivalling the marriage bond, this poetic calculus was an artificial refinement of *das Ding* rather than an ode brimming with ‘authentic’ affect; it was ‘a poetic exercise, a way of playing with a number of conventional, *idealizing* themes, which couldn’t have any real concrete equivalent’ (SVII: 148).

The distinctiveness of Lacan’s formalism is thrown into sharper relief by his disregard for the historicist approach to literature. On this point, Lacan does something that is, for him, relatively unusual. Noting that historicism has struggled to account for the genesis and success of courtly love through the reconstruction of a causal strand (the veneration with which the Lady is regarded stands in stark contrast to her previous role as an object of feudal exchange), Lacan explicitly offers up his own psychoanalytic epistemology as an aid to literary critics:

[The attempt to] *reduce* the phenomenon of courtly love in its historical emergence to an identifiable form of conditioning... is only a way of *displacing* [*reporter*] the problem. [Scholars] tell us that the origin of the problem is to be found in the transmission of something that happened somewhere else. Yet we still need to know how that happened somewhere else. But in the event that is precisely what gets lost.

In this case, the recourse to influences is far from having illuminated the problem...[but] Freudian theory is of a kind to shed a certain light there. *Thus in this way I take up the problem not only for its value as example but also for its value relative to method.* (SVII: 128-9)

This triumphant entry into a critical scene at a loss as to how to grasp a literary event calls to mind Freud's similarly confident entry into the scene of *Hamlet*, where critics had similarly failed to produce a successful, restorative *sens*. A deficit of explanatory influences gave all interpretations the appearance of unsatisfactory conjecture: there remained 'no reasons or motives for [Hamlet's] hesitations' (SE IV: 264-265). Freud's solution was to reveal an unconscious *history* belonging to both *Hamlet* and literature itself. The intractable 'event' was *displaced* into a meta-literary precedent, an Oedipal ur-scene that, once acknowledged, dispelled ambiguity and restored meaning. Lacan's solution is not *methodologically* equivalent (hence this example's 'value' for *analysts*): if he offers the non-existence of the sexual rapport as an answer to the question of courtly love's 'reasons or motives', this is a reading that *reads* structure rather than narrativising it: 'For us, the interdiction of incest [castration] is not historical, but structural – why? Because there is the symbolic. The interdiction consists in the hole of the symbolic, so that appears... something that I do not call the Oedipus complex' (SXXII: 15/4/75). At stake, in courtly love, is *a historically specific response to a problem that is not itself historically specific but instead structurally necessary*. This is a key principle of Lacan's *method*: gaps in a narrative are not to be sutured: instead, such gaps should be read as indications of structural impossibility.

Lacan is not suggesting that one should completely ignore history or that every subjective production can be efficiently and correctly accounted for by writing $\$ \langle \rangle a$, but that historicising, as a *method*, can only take the analyst-reader so far: 'The subject in himself, the recalling of his biography, all this goes only to a certain limit, which is known as the real' (SXI: 49). The process of (re)constructing a narrative is invaluable but only insofar as it *fails*. There remains an *irreducible* impasse that cannot be 'reduce[d]... to an identifiable form of conditioning.' If, however, we delude ourselves into believing that the 'whole truth' can be said, historicism ('a way of displacing [*reporter*] the problem') becomes merely a reversal of religion's 'obscurantist' treatment of truth 'as [the] final cause, in the sense that it is *deferred* [*reportée*] to an end-of-the-world judgment' (E: 741). The event – the *troumatique* real that warps the material of artistic *mi-dit* truths – is deferred to a beginning-of-the-world judgement in

an imaginary totalisation that ‘make[s] us believe that [history] has some sort of meaning’ (SXX: 45-6). Lacan is not simply saying that there is really nothing instead of something but that this nothing is the reason why there is something (meaning). However, this nothing is, of course, some *Thing*; it is not non-existence but *ex-sistence*. If only it were nothing: then we would be able to stop writing the fact that it does not stop not writing itself.

If art is organised around emptiness and ‘[r]eligion in all its forms consists of avoiding this emptiness’, then historicism amounts to a religious sanitation of art; a desperate organisation of organisation or narration of narrative that answers the troubling question posed by the artistic organisation by gesturing to a larger one (SVII: 130). Structure, as an organisation of the hole, is obscured when this hole is plugged and the asphere becomes a sphere enveloped and explained by a larger sphere, an Other of the Other that encloses one fantasmatic *conception du monde* inside another.

Lacan was stridently opposed to any totalising ‘imaginary hold’ that posits the ‘world conceived of as the whole [*tout*]’, declaring that ‘analytic discourse’, since it reads against the narrative chain by *cutting* S1 from S2, ‘can introduce us to the following: that every subsistence or persistence of the world as such must be abandoned’ (SXX: 43). In the university discourse, history, as it is ‘taught’, is a ‘replastering job... designed to *delude* you into thinking that the various stages of thought engender one another’, whilst the history with which the analytic discourse is concerned is one not of continuity but of discontinuity, in which ‘everything originates... in breaks’: there has been ‘a succession of trials and openings’ that by no means permit us to ‘launch into a totality’ (Lacan, 2008: 94-5). If Lacan rejects the historicist ‘interpretation delusion’ (see 3.5), he does not simply advocate an ahistorical approach. Instead, he boldly advances a psychoanalytic historicism: whereas conventional historicism, or ‘evolutionism’, as the restoration of an entirely intelligible chain, is motivated by ‘religious ideals’ (i.e. the imposition of *sens* and order), psychoanalysis, if it is to do justice to ‘the enigmas that historians raise’ (the *impossibility* of a universal historical *dit*), must think ‘in *creationist* terms’ (SVII: 126).

A fundamental tenet of Lacan’s thesis is the proposal that ‘poetic creation’ (assublimation) amounts to ‘a certain systematic and deliberate use of the signifier *as such*’ (SVII: 149). We should recall here the work of the potter (see 2.2), deemed by Lacan to be the paradigmatic artistic gesture, as an act of creation *ex nihilo*. It is not a totalised conception of the world that is created: the count, name or cut (S1) does not

constitute a universe but *a* nothing. As Marc de Kesel (2009: 179) explains, the poetic creation of courtly love, as an artisanal organisation of the field of signifiers that regulate societal relations, is a creation *from nothing* because it brings ‘erotic desire’ and ‘social reality’ ‘back to what Lacan calls its true ground: the autonomously operating field of signifiers.’ Exploiting the malleability of a signifying system, poetic artifice demonstrates how symbolic reality, experienced by the subject as fixed or even natural, is in fact grounded on *nothing*. Emerging ‘out of nothing,’ each cultural renewal is a *break* that can only be partially accounted for through recourse to the engendering power of historical influence: ‘all cultural realizations – including ethics – come down to a “creation *ex nihilo*,” that is, to signifiers that, thanks to their “negative” power, can break with what exists – and with the real as such – so as to call something new into life purely on the basis of their autonomous operation’ (de Kesel, 2009: 179). The ‘problem,’ ‘origin’ or ‘event’ of one signifying organisation is therefore only ‘displaced’ when we refer to another signifying organisation as its *ground*, the *something* from which it was created. We ignore what the signifying cut strikes into *existence* or, to put it another way, what the signifier ‘as such’ renders *impossible*.

Lacan has a quite different idea of structure to that of the familiar image of a monolithic arrangement directing the subject’s every move. Indeed, when ‘structuralism... [is] understood as a *comprehension of the world*’ it becomes complicit in ‘the puppet show by which is represented for us “literary history”’ (ETD: 24). Artists are treated as over-determined cogs in a production machine controlled by a puppet master – the metalinguistic, historicised Other in its various forms (e.g. capital or the anxiety of influence). The historical specificity of a creation is lost when each event is traced back to, or rediscovered in, another. However, if Lacan’s historicism does not shunt history ‘under the rubric of the collectivity’ (a ‘puppet show’ determinism), nor does it, despite the vigour of its ‘creationist’ thesis, amount to a celebration of ‘the individual’ (the Romantic genius bursting from a vacuum), instead referring itself to the ‘rubric of culture’ (SVII: 107). Despite his immersion in the signifying matrix of the Other, the subject, due to this system’s groundlessness, can exploit its flexibility by articulating his perverse desire ($\$ \langle \rangle a$) in the diverse forms that make up culture as a discontinuous field of breaks. Instead of endorsing a (Freudian) historicism, according to which sublimation entails the re-direction of asocial drives into a more palatable form of cultural production – an alignment with *known* social mores – Lacan investigates sublimation as that which ‘*creates* socially recognized values’ by asking ‘[w]hat does

society find there that is so satisfying?’ (SVII: 107) How indeed, scholars ask, did courtly love, as an invention belonging to a few aristocratic circles in southern France, obtain such influence?

It is precisely because culture/sublimation is ‘built on nothing’ that it satisfies the subject. If the ‘organisation of emptiness’ succeeded in completely eliding this emptiness by producing a coherent sphere securely grounded on *something* (e.g. the loving identification with which ego psychology concludes), desire, and the pleasure derived from its stimulation, would evaporate, making the subject a vegetative lotus eater. Recalling the equivalence drawn by Lacan between God and ‘*The woman*’, this would be the perfection of God’s love in which desire and divine will, subject and Other, meet in harmony: ‘the virtue of charity brings quiet/ To our will,’ Dante (1993: 362) is informed by the souls of the first celestial sphere, ‘so that we want only/ What we have, and thirst for nothing beyond that.’ If ‘[n]othing’ in the historicist method ‘offers a *completely satisfying* explanation’ – clearly, there is a projective satisfaction in the sublimatory organisation and in its subsequent meta-organisation – ‘of the success of... codes that regulate the relations between man and woman’ (SVII: 125) emerging from a period offering little potential for any such consensus, this is because further organisations have failed to ‘judge the function of this sublimated creation in features of the *structure*’ (SVII: 149). Structure has not been isolated and *read for its impossibilities*: ‘the feminine object is introduced... through the door of privation or of inaccessibility’ (SVII 149). In this poetic calculus of the sexual rapport, object (*a*) as ‘*The Woman*,’ has taken the structural role of S(*A*), in a fashion that supports desire without extinguishing it by either completely eliding or presenting the emptiness.

This, then, is the psychoanalytic method:

Freudian aesthetics... which means the analysis of the whole economy of signifiers – reveals that the Thing is inaccessible. (SVII: 159)

Like all authentic quests, the quest of criticism consists not in discovering its object but in assuring the conditions of its inaccessibility. (Agamben, 1993: xvi)

How, if ‘[a]ll art is characterized by a certain mode of organization around this emptiness’, might this critical quest distinguish between one organisation and another? How do the conditions of *das Ding*’s inaccessibility vary?

4.3 Beyond Beauty

Even if, due to its inherent perversity, it is ‘in opposition to reigning norms... that art attempts to operate its miracle’, the success of this miracle is predicated on its acceptance as a new normative organisation, a perversion that many can enjoy (SVII: 142). Nevertheless, just as the artistic *making* never accomplishes the radical effects of the analytic *unmaking*, it also fails to produce a perversion so spherically perfect that subject and object are One, the Other is whole and the sexual rapport exists. ‘[C]omplete sublimation is not possible for the individual’ (SVII 91): the impossible continues to haunt art in moments of inconsistency or incompleteness, stimulating the desire operative in ‘the poetic fantasy *par excellence*, the one which obsessed Mallarmé: of the absolute Book’ (SXIV: 23/11/66). This book’s realisation, which would somehow achieve the transcription of the not-all that does not stop not writing itself without incorporating it into a totalised ‘all’, is always ‘to come’ and thus endlessly pleasurable.

Returning to the act of the potter, the ‘nothing’ around which art organises itself does not pre-exist the signifier – the latter is not a secondary adornment – rather, the signifier ‘*as such*’ is plagued by a logical impossibility ($a \neq a$) the consequence of which is that each signifier *creates a void* at the very same moment that it organises, names or counts it. And whilst the void’s creation naturally ‘introduces the *possibility* of filling it’ this will ultimately prove to be an interminable labour (SVII: 120). As Paul Valéry put it: ‘God made everything out of nothing, but the nothingness shows through.’ How might this nothingness, since it is *not* nothing, obliquely show itself?

According to Lacan’s topological aesthetics, the signifier is not an element in a representational grid that hovers airily over *noumena*. The contingent and material *effect* of the signifier is to *create* topological space by cutting into the real and introducing an irreducible lack. Zupančič writes that:

Art is founded upon the presupposition that the real is at the same time *immanent* and *inaccessible*. The real is what always ‘sticks’ to the representation as its other or reverse side. This reverse side is always immanent to the given space, but also always inaccessible. Each stroke always creates two things: the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, sense and nonsense, the imaginable and the unimaginable. In this manner, art always plays with a limit. (1999: 41)

Lacan would probably perceive in the famous literary call to arms issued by a young Beckett (quoted in Perloff, 2010: 216) – that language is a ‘mask’ or ‘veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it’ – a certain naiveté,

a failure to recognise that language is itself permanently warped by an *immanent*, and not just inaccessible, ‘Nothingness’ that is itself the inescapable consequence of art’s constitutive gesture and every stroke thereafter. If only it were simply inaccessible: life would be a good deal simpler. The recognition of this human circumstance, of a ‘Beyondless’ *topos* in which the *nullibiquitous* source of one’s enjoyed suffering is ‘Thenceless, thitherless there’, dominates Beckett’s late works (Beckett, 1990: 104).

The ‘limit’ with which art experiments is an integral structural feature of sublimation’s organisation of the hole. Desire is stimulated by the limit as a supposed barrier to satisfaction that obscures the fact that the sublimation is built on the nothing that its constitutive gesture introduces. We might, for example, think of the endless *asag* (love trials) to which the Lady subjects her knight. The particular way in which art skirts ‘the wall of the impossible’ (ETD: 3), makes each creation not a *conception du monde* but a *stylistic* curvature which, as per Lacan’s topological aesthetics, can articulate itself in, and as, any number of wildly divergent forms without altering the axiomatic ‘real-of-the-structure.’ This axiomatic limit is by no means limiting; the limit can just as easily be one of horror as it can be, as is usually the case with courtly love, that of misfortune and fanatical reification. To illustrate this point, Lacan, in a supplementary note titled ‘A Curious Case of Sublimation’, refers to a poem by Arnaud Daniel in which a Lady demands that her admirer lick her anus. It is, Lacan enthusiastically remarks, ‘a *hapax*, a single occurrence’ – a break in the continuity of literary history’s evolution, a quixotic spasm at odds with its generic precedent – of such overt vulgarity that ‘specialists’, much like the poor knight, ‘literally don’t know what to do with [it]’ (SVII: 161). Again, this ‘event’ is not made legible by dissolving it in the genealogical soup – that which is *already known* – but by reading its structure: ‘I believe that we analysts are perhaps alone in being in a position to situate things properly’ (SVII: 161). Despite replacing the sublime with brute corporeality, the poem constructs a limit every bit as insurmountable as any idealisation: desire is checked, diverted and ultimately saved in this instance not by an impossible love trial but by disgust: ‘we find the same structure, the same model of emptiness at the core, around which is articulated that by means of which desire is in the end sublimated’ (SVII: 163).

Despite *appearing* quite different to the limit posed in Daniel’s poem, beauty fulfils the same structural function as ‘the limit of the second death’ (SVII: 260) by ‘hold[ing] the subject back in front of the unspeakable field of radical desire that is the field of absolute destruction’ (SVII: 216). If ‘beauty’ is a perspectival ‘vanishing point [*point de*

fuite]' (SXX: 101) that fixes the limit of fantasy, then Antigone, by cathartically 'revealing to us the line of sight [*point de visée*] that defines desire', is a sublimely beautiful figure (SVII: 247). Lacan frequently refers to her remarkable '*éclat*' – a splendour that is, for the audience, both captivating and unbearable – which is owed to the perilous place that she comes to occupy through her desire. This is, for Lacan, the catharsis at stake in sublimation as tragedy: the audience, grimly fascinated by the suicidal trajectory, are shown desire's authentic structure as Antigone, rejecting the ideals, universals and laws that support the imaginary-symbolic sphere and, thereby, showing that Creon's diktat is built *ex nihilo* and without any natural or transcendent basis, gradually, inexorably follows her desire toward the 'second death' beyond biological mortality: the unconditional annihilation of symbolic subsistence, the nothingness that is the real of desire.

With this theorem – that, in art, '[t]he beauty effect derives from the relationship of the hero to the limit' and that 'catharsis is the beauty effect' (SVII: 286) – Lacan proffers a psychoanalytic aesthetics that, writes Charles Shepherdson (2008: 63), combines 'a passive and contemplative theory of "rest" and "disinterestedness," organized around the "pure form" of the image (Kant), with a more active and affective theory of "emotion," in which the passions of the soul are mobilized (Aristotle).' Antigone, having already accepted the first, biological death, becomes this 'pure form' as *nothing but a signifier*, nothing but a beautiful, shimmering limit, hovering on the edge of absolute destruction. As we have seen, there is, for Lacan, no contradiction in the theorisation of a form emptied of signification (the 'ab-sens' of 'pure form') that has *effects*; indeed, analysis requires it. We might even suggest that, as a pure limit/form, cathartic beauty ('the purgation of the παθήματα [Pathémata]' [SVII: 247]) amalgamates *patheme*, *poème* and *mathème*. Similarly, Shepherdson argues that the audience's Kantian-Aristotelian experience *parallels analytic experience* since:

The engagement of desire that [psychoanalysis] (like art) entails, is not like the emotion one feels in everyday life, but occurs within a horizon of *deliberate artifice*, a specific and highly controlled *discursive operation*. In analysis, emotion is not engaged at the level of immediate experience, but (like the mythical material presented in tragic drama) is remembered, *repeated*, and worked over again, in a *deliberate labour of symbolization* (*Durcharbeiten*). Like tragedy, the analytic setting presents us not with the unfolding of a real event, but a *representation of some kind, a repeated or reduplicated experience*, recalled from ancient times and staged or *mediated by language*. Like artistic representation, the analytic experience is in fact a genre, a discursive form whose setting is governed by a series of highly

determined (though performatively malleable) rules and techniques – a form whose *Poetics* one might almost write. (2008: 63-64)

However, before we equate analysis and art as ‘discursive operation[s]’ that produce artificial constructions, it’s worth reasserting that what is repeated is a *failure* of representation: the ‘experience’ or encounter cannot be simply ‘reduplicated’ because it derives its entire traumatic value from the very fact that it occurred outside the generic ‘setting’ of any ‘discursive form.’ The encounter with *das Ding* is repeatedly *missed* because it was missed *in the first place*; the subject is traumatised precisely because the experience would not acquiesce to be understood and represented. This is, to recall Fink’s wording, the subject’s eventual *cause* (see 2.4) – a cause that cannot be rehabilitated by a totalised *history* or a coherent *narrative*: ‘Cause is to be distinguished from that which is determinate in a chain, in other words the law’ (SXI: 22).

Indeed, if analysis ‘is sensible to the beautiful, to which nothing obliges it, it will situate itself by the *between-two-deaths*, and if some one of these truths appear to it good to make *heard* [*entendre*], it is only to the *midire* of the *simple turn* that it will trust itself’ (ETD: 27). The effect of the ‘simple turn’ is, we recall, the transformation of the asphere into ‘a strip *spherically stable*’. The subject’s precarious fantasmatic reality is delusively *stabilised* when it is reduced to an imaginary abstraction by an identificatory fixation (the closed circle of *signification*) that inhibits the *double turn* of *ab-sens*. Can art *experiment* with the limit in such a fashion that leads it to accomplish the Möbian double-loop that *splits* the subject rather than halting at the limit? Can the poem rival the effects of the matheme and take the reader beyond the pleasure principle? Would such an act be logical or literary? Would this distinction survive such an act? How would it relate to the psychoanalytic act?

If structural modification (the ‘second death’ of subjective destitution) is to be achieved, fantasy’s limit must be approached and disbanded through a series of double turns (*reading to the letter*, not the hearing or *understanding* (*entendre*) that forgets the *dire*) that reveal each truth to be a half-said fiction; a subjective artifice rendered inconsistent and incomplete by logical impossibility (castration). Analysis’s end ‘is not the *return* of a *form*, an imprint, a *eidos* of *beauty* and good, a supreme truth coming to us from beyond’ (SXI: 47). Lacan’s associative ensemble (beauty, good, truth) invites us to link the trope of the ‘return’ – the immaculate return to origins (‘*simple turn*’) without the blunders of the split subject’s inverted redoubling – with sublimation itself:

‘[the subject] sublimates with all its might, it sees Beauty and the Good – not to mention Truth’ (SXX: 121). What’s required is a topology of the re-turn that reveals each of the ‘spherically stable’ abstractions, that bind and limit sublimation, to be a lowly ‘*mi-dit*’ that, in its gaps, demonstrates ‘three *dit-mensions* of the impossible: such as they deploy themselves in sex, in sense, and in signification’ (ETD: 27). Let us briefly run through these three ‘truths’ – none of which should be considered ‘good to make *heard* [*entendre*]’.

As regards the third (signification): ‘judgement’, as the conclusive verdict of absolute knowledge, ‘until the “last”’ – think here of the totalising ‘end-of-the-world judgment’ teasingly inferred and deferred by religion – ‘remains fantasy’, and fantasy ‘only touches on the real in *losing all signification*’ (ETD: 26). ‘[B]iblical studies’, Lacan caustically concludes, ‘have not yet [*encore*] saved anyone’ which, perversely enough, is precisely ‘why nothing will prevail against the Church until the end of time’ (ETD: 25). The uncertainty of a generalised purgatory (the last judgement’s deferral) sustains an institution that keeps its parishioners enthralled by the dangled promise of a completed ‘labour of symbolization’ and signification. Whereas the *disciples* of ‘biblical studies’ produce and stabilise signification, the *disciplined* psychoanalytic reader mobilises the cut that reduces signification.

As regards the first (sex): ‘the dialogue of one sex with the other’ is not a telepathic communication of desire in *dits* but is in fact ‘prohibited [*interdit*] in that a discourse, whichever it be [e.g. master, university etc.], founds itself” on an imperfect social link (language) between agent and Other ‘by excluding what language brings there of the impossible, to wit, the sexual rapport’ (ETD: 26). The phallic function impedes desire’s articulation and unitary being is lost in the metonymic slide. In the clinic, there is an ‘*intra-dit*’ that occurs in the failure of communication ‘between-two-subjects’ (E: 677). The ‘talking cure’ is not reliant upon a communicative ideal; in fact, it tends toward a dissolution of the analysand’s belief in an unhindered *rapport* ‘between two’ – absolutely contrary to an imaginary identification with the analyst’s ego. The psychoanalytic ‘rapport can only be *inter-dit*’ (ETD: 5): it is a series of misunderstandings and bungled demands that provides the material for the analyst to *read*:

There is some relationship of being that cannot be known. It is that relationship whose *structure* I investigate in my teaching, insofar as that knowledge – which, as

I just said [*dire*], is impossible – is prohibited [*interdit*] thereby. This is where *I play on an equivocation* – that impossible knowledge is censored or forbidden, but it isn't if you write '*inter-dit*' appropriately – it is said between the words, *between the lines*. *We have to expose the kind of real to which it grants us access*. (SXX: 119)

To write “‘*inter-dit*’ appropriately” is to put the *bar* in *interdit* – to, in other words, recognise that a specific embargo is actually a manifestation of a structural defect inherent to language (S/s). If analysis is effectively to take the subject *beyond* the pleasure principle and catharsis, any clinical *Poetics* of representation and its ‘labour of symbolization’ (the artifice of the subject’s fundamental fantasy that psychoanalysis (re)constructs in accordance with certain rules) must be subjected to a repeated tightening and reduction of sense (*inter-dit*) that ultimately dissolves the beautiful limit that fixates and ‘forbids’ (*interdit*) us (SVII: 247).

Here, we move to the second (sense): in the analyst’s discourse, mythic prohibition (*interdit*) is *read* as *inter-dit* and the perceived *limit* is recognised for what it is: a structural fault (the impossibility of unified *sens*). In analysis, we come to realise ‘that nothing would be able to say [*dire*] itself “*seriously*” (that is, to form of a *series a limit*)’ (ETD: 26). We cannot, to recall an earlier example, complete the task of writing the smallest number not written on the board; the series cannot ‘say itself’ as a closed set of *dits*. In order to cope with this immanent inaccessibility – that is, an impossibility topologically inherent to structure itself rather than merely being ‘beyond’ structure – an artificial *limit* must be posed so that sense can be stabilised through a *closure* of the *series*’ open set. For example, our efforts to write the smallest number not written on the board would meet with success if the command were given a *limit* (e.g. write the smallest whole number under 25). Something must be excluded (e.g. numbers after 25) and rendered inaccessible for imaginary-symbolic reality to be secured. This is sublimation: one might ‘tak[e] sense’ from a limit such as the ‘sublime (see Dante...)’ (ETD: 26).

The beautiful limit upon which Dante’s artistic sublimation reposed (the courtly love poetics of *La Vita Nuova*) was, of course, Beatrice, whom he fleetingly encountered just twice: once at a May Day gathering when both were children and again nine years later, momentarily crossing paths in the Florentine streets that Dante had frequently paced with an eye toward just such a prospect. The stability of the artifice was ensured when, at the tender age of twenty-four, Beatrice passed away (the *first* death), thereby acceding to absolute inaccessibility; allowing her name to become a ‘pure form’ or

beautiful limit around which Dante's sublimation was organised. Those illustrious emerald eyes captivate the pilgrim who, in *The Divine Comedy*, 'gets an *idea of beatitude*' – again, 'a form, an imprint, an *eidos* of *beauty* and good, a supreme truth coming... from beyond' – 'an *idea* which is forceful enough for him to feel himself *exiled* from it' (T: 23). This exile from 'her whom he, Dante, *cannot satisfy*' is the necessary condition, as a structural *limit*, for the fantasy of courtly love to hold. It is a fantasy reliant on 'only... this look, only this object [*a*]' being put in place of S(*A*), the *limitless* feminine not-all, 'that Other whom we can identify only through her *jouissance*' (ibid).

Structured by a *limit*, Dante's poetic calculus (his *series*) also adheres to a precise numerology derived from the Holy Trinity (the number three or multiples thereof: Dante first met Beatrice when he was nine, nine years passed between meetings, Beatrice died at 9 o'clock, June 9th and guided Dante through the nine celestial spheres etc.). This organises *contingent encounters* into a fated and *necessary rapport* which does not stop writing itself: 'love' arises 'from a calculus of possibilities which leaves to it only the tiny chance that Dante's poem was able to realize' (EDT 19).

There is, however, nothing beautiful, sublime or calculable about analysis: 'We have nothing beautiful to say. A different resonance is at stake, one founded on the witticism. A witticism is not beautiful' (SXXIV: 19/4/77). Here, Lacan is again insisting upon the distinction between *interdit* and *inter-dit*. Having previously referred to analysts as 'artists of analytic speech' (SVII: 102), he would later compare their station with that of abjected saints, denounced and maligned during their own lifetime. The analyst, rather than being the focus of a loving identification, 'acts as trash': the object that he comes to function as in the analysand's reassembled fantasy is eventually discarded as '*trashitas*' rather than idealised as beautiful '*caritas*' (T: 15). With the distorted material of '*lalangue*... [which] is an obscenity' (SXXIV: 19/4/77), a litter of letters, the analysand repeatedly *fait le tour* in a process that makes interpretation less of an explanatory *tour de force* and more of a Joycean '*tour de farce*' (Lacan quotes this witticism in 2001: 569).

If love, and the 'fantasy...[that] gives material for poetry' (SXXV: 20/12/77), are directed by the '*impotent*...desire to be One', sublimation will not amount to a materialist writing cure since it eschews subjective destitution (SXX: 6). In analysis, the subject is taken beyond the bounded 'space of relaxation where it may', as in the case of courtly love, 'delude itself on the subject of *das Ding*' (SVII: 99). Psychoanalysis is not

an artifice culminating in the inertia of a loving identification but an *act* – ‘there is’, Lacan notes (SXX: 72), ‘a world between poetry and the *act*’ – that only reconstructs the subject’s chronicle and demarcates the object so that the former can be emptied and the latter, revealed to be not *the* Thing but a *semblant*, can be dropped. Like Mallarmé (1988: 77), destruction is the analyst’s Beatrice: ‘The analysand speaks. He produces poetry... The analyst, for his part, slices. What he says is a cut... the analysand says more than he means to say and the analyst slices by reading what is involved in what he means to say’ (SXXV: 20/12/77). Reading the analysand’s witticisms (S1-S2), the analyst cuts the primordial signifiers from their disjunctive entanglement in the narrative chain (S1/S2).

Let us concentrate further on what exactly Lacan is getting at when he refers to an act that poetry cannot accomplish. In the opening session of *Seminar XV: The Psychoanalytic Act*, he loosely remarked that ‘it is supposed... that psychoanalysis does something... [P]oetry also does something.... [However,] what is at stake is psychoanalysis, which does something, but certainly not at the level, on the plane, in the *sens* of poetry’ (SXV: 15/11/67). In the previous year’s seminar he had provided a helpful definition of what’s at stake: ‘how to define what an act is? *It is impossible to define it otherwise than on the foundation of the double-loop, in other words, of repetition*. And it is precisely in this that the act is foundational for the subject... The subject, in the act, is represented as *pure division*’ (SXIV: 15/2/67). This is not a substantial or ‘spherically stable’ subject, enveloped by a limited fantasmatic reality. When a subject unwittingly produces an equivocation, he is *split*.

Whilst this contention – that, whilst poetry and psychoanalysis both *do something*, psychoanalysis does something that distinguishes it from the poetic ‘plane’ (which, we recall is a geometrical figure that cannot support a double-looped cut [2.4]) – was one that Lacan frequently reiterated, his doing so should not necessarily be taken as a sign of a coherent and settled theory of poetry, or art more generally. It is far more likely that Lacan exploited the pedagogic usefulness of a straw-man erected in the form of art (as sublimation) against which he could better define psychoanalysis by stressing its most vital implement: the *effect* of the signifier. When, in ‘*L’étourdit*’, he argues that the artist cannot mobilise that effect – that ‘poets make a calculus’, a limited series and a narrative of the ‘blows [*coups*]’ that the psychoanalyst weaponises in order to ‘re-sunder the subject’ – he does so in order to make a point about clinical praxis. Poetry is here (in

an *écrit* devoted to the logic and topology of interpretation) an incidental, albeit useful, example.

Indeed, if we were to assume that these loose generalities are the principles upon which a mature theory has been erected, we would have to agree with Badiou (2005: 7) when he argues that such a theory reveals more about the disappointingly conservative disposition of the psychoanalytic approach to art than it does about art itself:

Psychoanalysis is Aristotelian, absolutely classical... In Freud and Lacan, art is conceived as what makes it so that the object of desire, which is beyond symbolization, can subtractively emerge at the very peak of an act of symbolization. In its formal bearing, the work leads to the dissipation of the unspeakable scintillation of the lost object. In so doing, it ineluctably *captivates* the gaze or the hearing of the one who is exposed to it. The work of art links up to a transference because it exhibits, in a singular and contorted configuration, the blockage of the symbolic by the real, the “extimacy” of the *objet petit a* (the cause of desire) to the Other (the treasure of the symbolic). *This is why the ultimate effect of art remains imaginary.*

In sublimation, the object ‘emerge[s]’ through what Shepherdson terms a ‘labour of symbolization’ and what Badiou terms an ‘act of symbolization’, whereas in analysis such a ciphering is merely the necessary prerequisite to a deciphering, which is why the ultimate effect of analysis is *real*. The construction of a (hi)story organised around this object seems to be what Lacan is referring to when he asserts that poetry ‘does something.’ Halting at the limit of, for example, beauty, art enacts a ‘simple turn’ that allows the ‘spherically stable’ *semblant*-object to arise in a secure frame. Just as he was when he first intuited a ‘spherically stable’ being from the Mirror Stage, the subject is *captivated*: he is caught and fixed by an ‘idea of beatitude’ that is just ‘forceful enough for him to feel himself *exiled* from it.’ In this cathartic experience of an artwork that, by halting at the limit does not quite unveil *das Ding* – or, to put it another way, does not unveil the fact that there is nothing to veil (S[A]) – the pleasure principle is not subverted; the subject’s desire is both piqued and protected. The *effect* of this *transference* therefore ‘remains *imaginary*.’ The psychoanalytic act reverses the ‘act of symbolization’: the object, once it has emerged, is cut from the poetic ‘calculus’ of ‘blows’ – those stories we tell ourselves – and the subject comes to encounter both his own and the Other’s incurable lack. The ‘work of art’ ‘exhibits’ the object: we, as readers or spectators taking in this exhibition, are situated *outside* the ‘labour of symbolization’; we are not *implicated* and thus emerge relatively unscathed from the

transference. We are *captivated* in our awe (or revulsion, or fear etc.) but we are not *destituted*.

There is, however, another, quite different, ‘theory of art’ in Lacan’s thought – one where art is neither a bloated matheme nor a pleasurable but *ineffective* perversion. The efficacy at stake here is the splitting of the reader or spectator – an act that no generalisable ‘theory of art’ could adequately account for.

4.4. Reading from the Split

In ‘Freud’s Masterplot’ Peter Brooks theorised the reader’s implication in a text’s ‘labour of symbolization’ by arguing that ‘desire must be considered the very motor of narrative, its dynamic principle’ (1982: 281). Whereas formalist and structuralist narratology had tended to rely on metaphor to account for the transformation that occurs throughout a plot (the beginning and the end are, like the two components of a gradually enacted metaphoric substitution, the ‘same-but-different’ and thus bind the plot’s events within a closed *series*), Brooks concentrated on metonymy, contending that the ‘problem with “the same-but-different” as a definition of narrative [is] the implication of simultaneity and stasis in the formulation’ – as evidenced by attempts to ‘make manifest the structures of narrative in *spatial* and *atemporal* terms’ (ibid). All the various forms, possibilities and conventions of narrative were plotted onto intricate graphs – *static* models that formalised temporal transformation by making it a legible cartography that can be apprehended *at once*.

It was precisely an aversion to ideal, static and metalinguistic *models* informed by geometric intuition that led Lacan himself to switch from graphs to topology. His deployment of the latter was, to paraphrase Brooks, an attempt to make manifest the structure of subjectivity and its possible *transformations* in (non-Euclidean) *spatial and temporal* terms. The subject, split by ‘signifying involution’, is the Möbian topology of retroaction. The *spatio-temporal* dynamic of this topology is the divided subject’s being: ‘If we make of repetition the directive principle of a field, insofar as it is properly subjective, we cannot fail to formulate what unites in material – in the style of a copula – *the identical and the different*’ (SXIV: 15/2/67). The temporal dynamic of repetition is Lacan’s answer to what ‘unites’ a subjective plot that loops back on itself in a fashion that produces the ‘same-but-different’ subject, the subject foreign to himself. Just as Brooks (1982: 285) stressed the need for ‘a properly *dynamic* model of plot’, so too did Lacan require a properly dynamic model of the subject – one that makes a logic of inverted redoubling the ‘directive principle of a field’. It’s worth remembering that the reason this repetition does not simply result in a *reduplication* of the same *without difference* and that we are discussing an involution not a revolution, is that the *qualitative* ‘real-of-the-structure’ is an *ex-sistent twist* that distorts the ‘simple turn’, making it a double-loop. Are there plots that are affected by this twist?

In terms that recall Lacan's own formal turn, Brooks (1982: 294) discerns in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* a psychical 'masterplot', 'a *formal dynamic* the terms of which are not substantial but *purely relational*' and explains how this dynamic operates in a narrative such as Dickens' *Great Expectations*. The protagonist's plot is *caused* by a traumatic primal scene (Pip's missed encounter with the Other's desire [Magwitch]) that is experienced as an incomprehensible, overwhelming and invasive surge of *jouissance* or 'energy' (the sexual *über*). Throughout the subsequent desirous metonymy of the plot:

We have repetitions serving to bind the energy of the text in order to make its *final discharge* more effective. In fictional plots, these bindings are a system of repetitions which are returns to and returns of, confounding the movement forward to the end with a movement back to origins, reversing meaning within forward-moving time, serving to formalize the system of textual energies, *offering the possibility (of the illusion) of "meaning" wrested from "life"....* The most salient device of this novel's "middle" is literally the journey back [following a series of unsatisfactory 'bindings' and stilted *progression*] – from London to Pip's home town – a repeated return to apparent origins which is also a return of the repressed, of what Pip calls "that old spell of my childhood"... [The narrative's "discharge"] appears as the image of a "life" *cured* of "plot," as celibate clerk for Clarrikers. (Brooks, 1982: 296-298)

It is at this point that Brooks reintroduces metaphor: the plot's 'middle', its metonymic repetitions, tends toward the conclusive binding that is offered by a metaphor that substitutes the end for the beginning as the 'same-but-different.' A *curative* 'discharge' occurs when the metaphor *works* – when, that is, 'the right death', as a conclusion that would retroactively confer meaning on the origin of narrative and desire, is realised (ibid: 295). The curative metaphor with which the 'search for meaning' culminates is *a rephrasing or explanation of trauma*. Following the 'discharge' that sees the problem of the excessive energy that causes and compels traumatic neurosis finally resolved, the narrative '*return[s]* to the quiescence of the non-narratable' (ibid: 296). Insofar as narrative is driven by 'a desire for the end' (ibid: 282) and this end is the *end of desire*, the ideal homeostasis that results from 'discharge' is non-narratable because the energy that spurred narrative desire is gone. Once life is cured of plot (or plot is cured of life), the *desidero* dies in the arms of a restored Other.

Ultimately, then, for all the detours, repetitions and *re-turns* that comprise the necessary metonymic 'middle', the metaphoric *binding* that occurs when the beginning is eventually substituted for the 'same-but-different' end ensures a *return* to a pre-

historical origin of ideal ‘quiescence’ where there is no difference, no metonymy, no desire, no narrative. As Brooks puts it, ‘the end is a time before the beginning’ (ibid: 297). It is a collapse into what we might term an *absolute sameness*.

Lacan’s ‘masterplot’ is quite different in that the ‘middle’ (the re-turns) is not merely a trial preliminary to the completion of a *return*. If the function of the pleasure principle is to manage the trauma of the subject’s *missed* encounter with *das Ding* by ‘lead[ing] the subject from signifier to signifier’ in an extended circumlocutory series of re-turns (the compulsion to repeat this missed encounter) that aim toward keeping at ‘as low a level as possible the tension’ experienced by the subject, the function of analysis is not to lead the *desidero* to the ‘right death’ by somehow expelling this tension and *returning* him to the homeostasis of *absolute sameness*. We must distinguish here between 1) an interpretation that accords with the pleasure principle and 2) an interpretation that goes beyond the pleasure principle. The first option can itself be divided into two outcomes: the *ideal* and the *actual*:

1a). *Ideally*, the narrativised search for meaning ultimately results in a conclusive restoration of meaning that sees desire resolved (i.e. the ‘right death’, the curative metaphor, the satisfactory discharge etc.). This is interpretation as *Bildungsroman* – a journey of self-discovery and formation – that takes the idea that the ‘[e]vent *gains meaning* by repeating (with variation) other events’ to its logical conclusion by supposing that an accumulation of meaning (repetitions) will eventually allow one to say it all (Brooks, 1982: 288). What appears to be a *progression* is ultimately a *return* to a radical origin, ‘a time before the beginning’.

1b). What *actually* happens when one interprets in accordance with the pleasure principle is that analysis becomes interminable: we cannot say it all, ‘the metaphor reached through the chain of metonymies’ (ibid: 283) that would *limit* and bind the *serial* hi(story) as a closed set simply does not arrive. Brooks only mentions this outcome in passing, briefly referring to a ‘fear of endlessness’ as the antinomic correlate to a fear of premature or improper death, and chooses literary examples (the *Bildungsroman* and the detective fiction) that, by convention, lend structural priority to an *ending* (1982: 296). For an example of the *actual* outcome, we might point to Kafka’s *The Castle*, whilst also noting that biological death (the ‘*first death*’) is no guarantee of a resolution – indeed, it is precisely because Kafka died that this work is

unfinished. Alluding to Kafka's *The Burrow*, Lacan states that man is 'a burrow animal, a torus animal': he endlessly turns in circles, neither *returning* nor *progressing* (SIX: 21/3/63).

2). The two above outcomes (closure and 'bad' infinity) are the result of interpretation *as narrativisation* – that is, the production or construction of meaning. In Lacan's 'masterplot' (of course, this term is now no longer appropriate) meaning is *reduced* by 'dispensing with all metaphor': rather than *binding* the subject's narrative with a suitable metaphor, the analyst reads the 'ab-sense' produced by the metonymic double-loops, thereby *disjoining* meaning (S1/S2), *cutting* the fantasmatic asphere ($\$ \triangleleft a$) and '*re-sunder[ing]* the subject' ($\$$). Contrary to expectations, the accumulated *re-turns* of a 'working through' do not result in a *return* to origins (absolute sameness) or an interminable restaging of the 'same-but-different' but an '*absolute difference...* which intervenes when, confronted with the primary signifier, the subject is, for the first time, in a position to subject himself to it' (SXI: 276). The analysand assumes his castration ($[\sim \exists x] \sim \Phi x$) and subjects himself to the S1 that divided him by introducing 'difference *as such*', the phallic signifier, the signifier that has no signified, the signifier that 'with respect to meaning, symbolises the failure thereof' (SXX: 80). This is the 'second death': the master signifiers that had determined and *limited* symbolic life are disarticulated into 'absolute difference' and '[t]he subject, in the act,' – the *something* that psychoanalysis *does* – 'is represented as *pure division*.' This allows the subject to make radical *progress* by fashioning his own singular place in the symbolic (his irreducible, 'absolute difference' to restrictive and inhibitive precedents): 'there is no progress but marked by death...'

The reader's investment in the narrative's 'labour of symbolization' is accounted for by equating psychical and textual energetics, such that 'discharge' is interchangeable with 'meaning' in the following sentence: 'the passion that animates us as readers of narrative is the passion for (of) meaning' (Brooks, 1982: 282). But what happens if there is no *ideal* discharge? Perhaps the *reading* is itself a narrative, perhaps we should retrace our steps and repeat our reading, perhaps we missed something the first time round and this is why we cannot say what this text *means*. Perhaps, suggests Brooks in reference to Freud's more pessimistic 'masterplot' ('Analysis Terminable and Interminable'), '[i]t is the role of fictional plots' to 'recapture us in its doomed energies'

by imposing ‘an end which yet suggests a return, a new beginning: a rereading’ (ibid: 297). In both cases (1a and 1b), however, the pleasure principle, as that which leads the reader ‘from signifier to signifier’, is not subverted and the fantasy is upheld. Is it possible for literature to rival the psychoanalytic *act* and *do something* that forces the reader to confront his ‘pure division’?

Shoshana Felman (2003: 273) argues that literature ‘is always linked to an *act*... it *does something* to us... something that *can only be known in its effects*’. The ‘literary experience’, like the analytic *experience* – the *practical* and *effective* experiment that takes place without a comprehensive *theoretical* knowledge (a ‘theory of the unconscious’ or a ‘theory of art’) of what will occur – is an ‘*event*’. That is, something happens in a text, or *something happens to the reader*’ (ibid: 271 [Italics original]). Literature is a *discourse that has consequences*: like psychoanalysis, it is stifled and shorn of its *efficacy* when it is housed in the university discourse and integrated into, and processed by, a body of knowledge that can be smoothly transmitted without anything so messy and unpredictable as an ‘event.’ ‘[T]he literary thing is *not just academic*... There is an *action* to the literary thing’ (ibid: 285). We might recall here the terms of Lacan’s invective against any psychoanalytic *theoria* as that which would fail to ‘afford any place to what would be the realisation of anything *new*, a *Wirken*, an *action*, properly speaking. Nothing could be further removed from the Freudian *experience*’ (SII: 222).

If, according to Brooks (1982: 296), ‘repetition as binding works toward the generation of significance, toward recognition and... retrospective illumination’, a ‘recognition which is the moment of the *death* of the [desirous] reader in the text’, it is striking that Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* – a text Felman (2003: 143) deems one of the ‘*most effective*... of all time’ – *concludes* with a death that accomplishes precisely the opposite. The governess’s reading adventure – that is, her efforts to compel the children to ‘say it all’ and avow a hidden knowledge that would confirm the ghost’s existence – culminates with a violent *binding*. In an action that recalls both physical seizure and mental apprehension, she ‘grasp[s]’ (James, 2010: 120) Miles, determining his meaning with such determination that he expires, having, so the governess believes, finally discharged the *name of a sexual trauma*. The narrative energy dissipates and life, cured of plot, ends. The discharge is that of a ‘dispossess[ion]’ (ibid: 120), an expulsion of malign influence that is made possible by

the governess's 'show of self-possession' (ibid: 60) as the subject who supposes herself to know. However, even the supposed 'supreme surrender of the name', the *proper* name that would weld signifier to signified and arrest the metonymic slippage, is wracked with irresolvable ambiguity: "'Peter Quint – you devil!'" His face gave again, round the room, its convulsed supplication. "*Where?*" (ibid: 120 [Italics original]) What sort of *topos* does this question imply? In what kind of structure can there be a 'place' for ghosts?

As Felman notes, *The Turn of the Screw* has *split* its readers. If he seeks undivided meaning, the reader must place himself on one side of a divide: either the ghosts exist (and the governess is sane) or the ghosts do not exist (and the governess is mad). We can illuminate not the *meaning* but the *structure* of this distinction by referring again to a different 'case': that of 'mother/ not mother' (see 3.3) and abbreviate this new split accordingly: 'ghosts/ not ghosts.' The governess's very first attempt to *communicate* the existence of a ghost – to *name* him in language – amounts to a *failed metaphor*, a *negation*: "he's *like nobody*" (2010: 48). The ghosts' arrival is a non-arrival; neither avowed nor disavowed, their *effect* derives from the undecidability that they *are*. A few lines later, the governess has another go, but only succeeds in sinking further into the mire: "He gives me a sort of sense of *looking* like an actor... I've *never seen* one, but so I suppose them" (ibid). Another metaphor, another negation: an actor is other to himself, and this ghost, to give another turn of the screw and take us beyond everyday dissemblance, only *looks like* a subject who, by definition, *looks like* somebody else. This metaphor, which serves only to reiterate the *split* rather than *binding* meaning, is itself negated: the governess has 'never seen' what it is that the ghost resembles. This is *repeated* when the governess attempts to inform Mrs Grose of the presence of a second ghost: "'Was she someone you've *never seen*?' "Never"' (ibid: 56).

In the context of this discussion, Zupančič's assertion that negation has a 'positive, albeit spectral quality' is particularly prescient (2011b: 43). The ghosts are neither straightforwardly affirmed and nor are they simply struck out into non-existence by negation: irreducible to both alternatives (ghost/ not ghost), they are a *distortion*, an *action*, a *split* that cannot be resolved by a reader's choice of undivided meaning. Rather, this 'literary thing' can only be known in its *effects*. To 'grasp' a (half-said) truth as *the* truth, regardless of whether one agrees with the governess or not, is to *repeat* her reading: '[i]n repeating as they do the primal scene of the text's meaning as division, the critics can by no means master or exhaust the very meaning of that

division, but only act the division out, perform it, be part of it' (Felman, 2003: 160). To pick a side in this conflict of interpretations is to pick a side of a Möbius strip without realising that there *ex-sists*, rather than simply *exists* or does *not exist*, an unlocalisable and irrecoverable *twist*, a turn of the screw, a structural *action* that distorts the signifying economy, making it an unorientable 'line-without-points.'

Whilst the *result* of Edmund Wilson's 'psychoanalytic' reading ('not ghost') differs from that of the governess and the numerous puritanical critics ('ghost') he so offended, the *methodology* is the same. When the governess witnesses Flora screwing a fragment of wood into the hole of another fragment, she reads this action as an oblique *avowal* of knowledge: the screw is 'a phallic *symbol*, a *metaphor* connoting sexuality itself... [It] convinces her of the perversity of the children: "They know – it's too monstrous: they know, they know!" The screw... constitutes for the governess a key to *meaning*, a *master-signifier*' (ibid: 214). Similarly, when Wilson attempts to step *outside* the signifying economy of the text and observe the observer from a point of perspectival mastery, he ends up *repeating* the governess's reading: 'Observe... from a Freudian point of view, the *significance* of the governess's interest in the little girl's pieces of wood' (Quoted in ibid: 150). Convincing Wilson of the governess's perversity, the act of turning a screw again becomes a metaphor signifying *the* hidden truth rather than a phallic *signifier* that renders every reading a *half-said* truth. Just as Freud offered the Name-of-the-father as the signified of Dora's desire, so too does Wilson identify an unavowed desire for the master as the driving force behind the governess's actions.

We cannot say what Flora's gesture means. It is the performance of a textual dynamic, not a sign. It's apparent *fixion*, as a *tightening* master-signifier that holds the text together and a mast to which readers can cling, is a *fiction*. It is 'the primal scene of the text's meaning *as division*', an incurable *twist* that sees the community of readers, seeking to ascribe to this signifier, this S1 as 'difference *as such*', its signified, themselves 'represented as pure division.'

Summarising her own method in a fashion that accords with Lacan's conviction that one should not mimic Oedipus and make oneself the hero of a drama by answering an enigma but instead divine the structure, Felman states that she reads 'not so much to solve or answer the enigmatic question of the text, but to investigate its structure... The question underlying such a reading is thus not "*what* does the story mean?" but rather "*how* does the story mean?"' (2003: 165 [Italics original]) Perhaps nowhere is the distinction Lacan insists upon – that between *reading* and *understanding* – more clearly

demonstrated than in the reading of letters. The momentous *effect* of the letter that the governess receives from Miles' school informing her of his expulsion is *caused* not only by what the letter does say but also by what it leaves *unsaid*. The (hi)story is incomplete since the causal *origin* is missing: we do not know why Miles was expelled. The governess will set about restoring this narrative chain by filling in the gaps; indeed, her entire narrative as an investigative moral saviour is itself caused by this absent cause. If, for Lacan, 'the Freudian unconscious is situated at that point, where, between cause and that which it affects, there is always something wrong' (SXI: 22), a reading does not try to make this *right* by (re)constructing a linear chain, thereby deleting the unconscious, but instead examines how 'the unreadable... determines... the narrative structure of the story' (Felman, 2003: 188).

This is precisely what Lacan had accomplished with his reading of Poe's 'The Purloined Letter', by illustrating how 'the story [*conte*] and its count [*compte*]' – its *serial* repetitions of a primal scene – 'are sustained without any recourse to [the letter's] content' (L: 2). Setting in motion a narrative, the letter has effects despite the fact that its meaning is unknown; indeed, it retains its effective hold over the participants precisely because it remains *unread*. The Minister, for example, only preserves his leverage provided the letter's content is not divulged. Lacan's reading does 'not... make a *metaphor* of the epistle', he does not attempt to substitute it for another signifier and thereby make it mean something (ibid: 2). It is as without a 'message' that the 'letter makes its *peripeteia*', *turning* the plot and reversing (*perí*) the fortunes of the protagonists (ibid). This *peripeteia*, kept in motion by the subject's desire to possess the letter and cease its displacement, is repeated by the text's critical scene when Derrida argues that Lacan does make the letter mean something. By contending that, in Lacan's *écrit*, the letter is a symbol of the phallus – that this *écrit* 'always [leads] back... [to] the *same* signifier (the phallus)... the transcendental signifier' which 'guarantees the unity of the signifier to signified' (Derrida, 1988: 195 [*Italics original*]) – Derrida *repeats* the very same interpretative error that he accuses Lacan of committing. Derrida says what is *unsaid* in Lacan's text, he fills in a hole left by the fact that Lacan never once *explicitly* mentions 'the phallus' in his text, referring only to the letter's castrating *effects*. Indeed, references to 'the phallus' became increasingly scarce as Lacan sought to disjoin this concept from any notion of a substantial object or a unitary and unifying transcendental signifier. What's at stake is the phallic *function* that has the *effect* of castration by introducing 'difference as such', interminably deferring the revelation of a signifier's

meaning or a letter's content. As Lacan put it, rereading his own text, 'in these pages, I am very precisely only speaking about the *function* of the phallus... as it is articulated in a certain discourse' (SXVIII: 17/3/71).

The *precision* of the analyst's discourse derives from its reading of castration in its *effects* (the slippage of the analysand's speech) rather than attributing to it a stable content. Lacan's reading holds to this method: by not naming 'the phallus', it is all the more precisely that his text discerns and *performs* its function: 'no one has ever spoken better about it' (SXVIII: 10/3/71). A select number of terms become synonymous and interchangeable with one another: he refers to the 'phallic function', the 'feminising function', 'the letter's essential function' and its 'feminising effect' (SXVIII: 17/3/71). These terms denote dynamics and actions (phallus = the *turn* of the screw) rather than symbols (phallus = the screw itself). To reduce them to the latter, as Derrida does, is to be swept into the *peripeteia* and castrated at the very moment one becomes a master-reader, a victim of 'the *effect* [the letter] brings to those who turn-by-turn detain it, all arguing for the power it confers if they be there to claim it' (L: 2). Lacan's text does not ascribe a meaning to an action that *is* the displacement of meaning; instead, it enacts this action and, like the literary text itself, *does something*.

If, as Felman (2003: 143) argues, 'the strength of literature could be defined by the intensity of its impact on the reader, by the vital energy and power of its effect... the quantity and intensity of the echoes it has produced', then judging by the wealth of material collected in *The Purloined Poe*, Lacan's text, like James's, is highly *effective*: 'my *Écrits* are a literature... it is literature because it has some effects... This is *difficult to grasp*. Why would I not grasp myself as an effect?' (1975c: 2) A text is most effective when it is not easily graspable as a content; when, rather than amounting to a gradual removal of an envelope that reveals a message, it retains and performs a dynamic resistance to meaning. Lacan avers that 'what I wrote... takes on its importance', its *effective* value, 'from the fact that it is unreadable' and, if this is so, it is because the 'function' of the letter that his text is traversed by 'is... unreadable' (SXVIII: 17/3/71). With his 'second text' (Lacan is referring here to his *first* reading of 'The Purloined Letter'), he 'redoes [*refais*]' Poe's text; it is a repetition, a re-enactment to which he returns in *Seminar XVIII* in order to 'further question again what is involved in the letter' as a '*value* that I designate to read myself' (SXVIII: 19/5/71). This is not a reading that transforms the unreadable into the readable but one that discerns the effects of the unreadable on the readable.

It is as if, the first time around, having not developed his logic, he was unable to *precisely* write the letter as a function that has effects, not content, without ascribing a meaning and so he left it as an enigmatic blank, admitting that ‘my whole text plays a little too much on [the letter’s feminising effect], but that’s what it takes in order to make oneself *understood* [*entendre*]’ (SXVIII: 17/3/71). As he slowly released himself from this requirement – telling his audience, as he inscribed the first incarnation of the logic of sexuation on the board, not to ‘complain that you cannot hear me... I am going to write... and precisely this [writing] is what is at stake’ – he tackled the difficulty of writing what is lost when it is heard or understood without simply producing a blank page (SXVIII: 17/3/71). The function of these letters that Lacan wrote was *not to signify* a concept or object: ‘I used the letter Φ , to be distinguished from the merely *signifying* function that had been promoted in analytic theory up until then with the term “phallus”’ (SXX: 28-29). Strictly speaking, these asemanic letters do not mean anything.

In *Seminar IX*, we can see Lacan summarising the progress of his work on the letter in a way that appears to confirm Gallop’s contention that he was expunging the literary from psychoanalysis. The letter was brought ‘into play for you first of all in a sort of poetic fashion’ in ‘The Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”’ and then lent ‘a more *precise* account’ through the linguistic science outlined in ‘The Instance of the Letter’ (SIX: 20/12/61). At this point in his work a vague allusion to a ‘poetic fashion’ was more than likely a reference to the creative use of metaphor: ‘a definition of poetical style could be to say that it begins with metaphor, and that where metaphor ceases poetry ceases also’ (SIII: 218). We might also say that where metaphor ceases, psychoanalytic reading begins. By *Seminar XVIII*, however, Lacan had decided to retain both the letters of logic and literature, uniting them under the banner of *writing*: ‘I stated to you what precisely a writing is, I mean something that presented itself in a literal, or literary form’ (SXVIII: 19/5/71). There is a fundamental disagreement between Gallop and Lacan regarding what literature *is*. Having previously referred to ‘The Purloined Letter’ as an ‘apologue’ (E: 21), a re-presentation of castration, Lacan comes to refer instead to a ‘literary *demonstration*’ (L: 4). This literary letter is no longer an allegory since it has *effects*: ‘castration... is [here] demonstrated’ (SXVIII: 17/3/71).

From Felman’s writings on the ‘literary thing’ and Lacan’s work on logic, we can outline two arguments:

It is as a logical function, and not as a metaphor, that the literary letter has effects.

Therefore:

It is when it is at its most logical that literature is at its most literary.

If, like Gallop, we retain an instinctive uneasiness about the idea that logic and literature have anything to do with one another, preferring instead to see the former as the restrictive straitjacket to the latter's exciting and challenging madness, it's worth reiterating an important point: rigour is not the same thing as coherence. In the same way that Lacan's formalisation of psychoanalysis was antithetical to any 'theory of the unconscious' (because it was produced in order to *cerne le réel* by dynamically demonstrating its effects on the signifying *topos* or by detecting its manifestation as an unsolvable impasse that renders all theories incomplete), his conceptualisation of writing as a literary-letter-*cum*-logical-function is not the foundation of a 'theory of art' that would cure literature of the 'literary thing.' What would a literary criticism that operated on the basis of these two tenets look like?

Lacan did not produce literary criticism for literary criticism's sake – it is not straightforwardly present in Lacan's discourse as a self-contained, isolatable and separable discipline –, being instead far more interested in seeing what literature has to teach the analyst about the psychoanalytic subject. However, '[a]n asceticism of writing' – by which he means a taciturn logic – 'takes nothing away from the advantages that we can find in literary criticism' (SXVIII: 12/5/71). What are these advantages? Does Lacan have a particular mode of criticism in mind? Whilst it is tempting to present things in terms of a zero-sum game in which the necessary consequence of peak formalisation is the evacuation of literature, with logic representing an improvement on 'a whole literature, a whole *imagery* that we continue to inhabit as far as our relations with women are concerned' (SVII: 112), we will instead examine what a literary criticism that operates with this logic would do and what advantages it retains.

Certainly, any advantages would be negated if one were to produce a particular variety of criticism: 'the [letter's] ellipsis cannot be elucidated by means of some aspect of [Poe's] psychobiography; rather this would clog it up... My own text would no more resolve itself by mine: the wish I might form for example of finally being read suitably' (L: 2). Lacan's text is only resolved when it is not 'read suitably': to read is to set oneself against a resolution whereby the unreadable is understood and its effects

nullified by its being folded back into what is already known. Whilst Lacan is specifically alluding here to Marie Bonaparte's attempt to discern the *cause* of Poe's work in a hypothesised sexual impotence (a psycho-historicism that provides a meta-narrative), thereby explaining the letter's ellipsis by making it a *symbol* of the missing maternal phallus, he also has in his sights the entire sclerotic field of applied psychoanalysis, complaining, with considerable justification, that there is no evidence that 'the criticism of texts, a game until now reserved for university discourse, has received more air from psychoanalysis' (ibid: 1-2). What lies behind Lacan's assertion that literary criticism has '*until now*' been the preserve of the university discourse? Is he suggesting that psychoanalysis, provided it is structured by the analyst's discourse and not the university discourse, might help literary criticism to become something other than the application of knowledge?

We can return here to a previously examined statement (see 3.7). Seeking to explain why his assertion that *Totem and Taboo* is a 'neurotic product' does not constitute applied or wild psychoanalysis, Lacan makes an instructive distinction between a reading that 'psychoanalyse[s] an *oeuvre*' and one that 'criticises [*critique*] it' (SXVIII: 9/6/71). The former procedure is a misnomer: 'Psychoanalysis is applied, strictly speaking, only as a treatment and thus to a subject who speaks and hears' (E: 630). Lacan's use of the word *oeuvre* is very deliberate: not only is it a corrective to the suspect equivalence between *oeuvre* and life upon which Bonaparte's reading relies (*Edgar Poe, sa vie – son oeuvre: Étude analytique*), it also draws our attention to the fact that the *critic*, notwithstanding appeals to intertextuality and dissemination, is dealing with a collected corpus, *les Oeuvres complètes*, that is established in a way that a subject simply is not. A text has effects but it cannot be affected in the same way a subject can. This is doubtless why Lacan cryptically remarks that the subject is not a birth certificate, fixed by a master-signifier, but a 'poem that is being written' (SXI: xl).²⁶ Nonetheless, the *critic* can still deploy the 'psychoanalytic method' by 'deciphering... signifiers without concern for any form of presumed existence of the signified', and, in doing so, read structure for its impossibilities (E: 630). This

²⁶ Of course, there are rare works of criticism that *do* appear to affect the literary text. Can anyone say, after having read Felman's critical intervention, that James's text has not somehow been affected or even rewritten by this reading (just as it owed its status as a 'wicked' book to the reactions of contemporary critics) or that this text owes its particularity to the scene of reading? However, should a distinction not be drawn between affecting a text and identifying its effects? Was the text not having these effects on readers (*splitting* the critical community) *before* Felman's intervention? But, of course, the text cannot have these effects if it is not read...

impossibility – the impossibility of attaching signifier to signified and formulating the sexual rapport – determines the narrative structure of Freud's stories as 'sign[s] of an impossibility' (SXVIII: 17/3/71). Whereas for Bonaparte sex is the meaning of the letter, the signified to its signifier, for Lacan sex is the name given to the logical impossibility of signifier and signified fusing in a fashion that would halt the metonymic slippage of meaning.

Lacan's *critique* shows that in order to be able to *write* the sexual rapport, *Totem and Taboo* necessarily posits an exception to castration who enjoys *all* the women. We might note the similarity between Lacan's appraisal of the logical procedure (as that which allows the real to be encountered as a rigorously demarcated impasse) and his reading of the literary text as a 'sign of an impossibility.'²⁷ As the *real* effect of the letter, it 'is what accounts for the fact that my discourse is not easily followed [*suivi*]. It is very *precisely* insofar as there is something that, in the discourse of the analyst, creates an obstacle to a certain type of inscription' (SXVIII: 19/5/71). This discourse does not stop writing that the rapport does not stop not writing itself. As such, it is a discourse without obvious attraction; it offers no *sens* to follow. Unlike the university discourse, this discourse *reads effects and is itself only readable in its effects*. It cannot be followed, grasped or applied – hence why the 'psychoanalysis of art' is a '*delusional* [*délirante*] notion' (SXXI: 9/4/74).²⁸

Contrary to the procedure of application, in which a psychoanalytic text is used to explain a literary text, Lacan introduces a method whereby one text is used to *demonstrate* how another *fails* as an applicable, explanatory knowledge:

[I]f I propose to psychoanalysis the letter as in sufferance, it is because it shows there its failure. And it is by this that I shed light on it: when I thus evoke the Enlightenment, it is to *demonstrate* where it makes a hole...

A method whereby psychoanalysis better justifies its intrusion; for if literary criticism could effectively renew itself, it would be in that psychoanalysis be there so the texts can measure themselves against it, the *enigma* being on its side. (L: 2-3)

²⁷How is this impossibility manifested in 'The Purloined Letter'? The effect of the (potentially) scandalous letter is a dissymmetry between the King and Queen appropriately played out in the *boudoir*: the former is a blind, castrated master with no idea of the latter's *jouissance*. This is especially pertinent in a royal Court, an 'order founded on artifice' (a sublimation, in other words); the 'organised distribution of *jouissance*' according to which the rapport is realised in the socio-biological continuation of bloodlines (SXVIII: 19/5/71). The introduction of the letter demonstrates that desire does not have a *telos* such as legitimate reproduction.

²⁸Lacan doubtless has in mind the subject's delusional interpretation which consists in the construction of a narrative (S2) that retroactively explains the non-sensical 'elementary phenomena' (the letter or S1) that affects him (see 3.4).

For application to be straightforward, the tool and object of application need to be clearly defined. In this passage, however, as the pronouns pile up our grasp on the referent becomes less and less certain until we reach an aporic apotheosis which leaves us completely undecided as to which ‘side’ the ‘enigma’ belongs. Insofar as an enigma is an *énonciation* without an *énoncé* (see 3.2) – that is, a *distortion* (i.e. ghosts/not ghosts) that no interpretative recuperation of the statement (*énoncé*) can adequately account for (i.e. ghosts *or* not ghosts) – the above passage is itself an enigma; a passage that *demonstrates*, rather than merely theorising, the literary *action*.

The ‘*énonciation* [is] the enigma’ and ‘[w]hen the enigma is taken to the *power* of writing, it is something worth pausing over’ (SXXIII: 11/5/76). It is an *irreducible* double-loop that cannot be grasped as a ‘simple turn.’ ‘[P]sychoanalysis here receives’ much from the literary writing of letters – its theory is renewed and its analysts learn how to *read* – provided ‘it takes of the scope of repression an idea less psychobiographical’ (L: 2). Taking priority over any psychobiographical anecdotage, to which the conjectural psychoanalytic understanding commonly reduced literature, *Urverdrängung* and castration are *structural* dynamics (a letter [S1] is constituted by *its* erasure in a double-loop [see 2.2]) that make it *impossible* for the subject to tell the whole truth through a simple (re)turn to the origin of meaning as the meaning of meaning. However, the structure is not entirely characterised by slippage: for the governess, the narrativisation and grasp of a biography abuts upon a *precise* limit: ‘I made constant fresh discoveries. There was one direction, assuredly, in which these discoveries stopped: deep obscurity continued to cover the region of the boy’s conduct at school’ (2010: 43). It is at such moments that ‘literature... turns to *litraterre*’: the letter is erased (*litura*) and yet it is not simply non-existent or lost in the *différance* to which it gives rise (L: 4). Its ellipsis is keenly felt, the letter jolts the governess and the reader as a presentified absence, it constitutes an edge or a ‘littoral’ (*terre*), the ‘edge of the hole in knowledge’ that structure both organises and is organised by (ibid: 3).

For Lacan, both literal and literary letters are to be read as demonstrations of the *same* impossibility:

[The matheme’s] very writing constitutes a medium [*support*] that goes beyond speech, without going beyond language’s actual *effects*. Its value lies in centring the symbolic, on the condition of knowing how to use it... [t]o retain... the *mi-dire*, the truth that is borne out by guarding against going as far as *avowal* [*l’aveu*] (SXX: 93).

My critique, if it is its place to be taken for literary, could only bear... on what Poe makes of being a *writer* in forming such a message on the letter. It is clear that in *not* saying so, it is not insufficiently, it is all the more *rigorously* he *admits* [*avoue*] it. (L: 2)

According to Lacan's critique, a writer (of myths, literature or logic) is someone who produces a truth that has the structure of fiction, a truth that is incomplete. If he is to do justice to the writer, the critic ought not to attempt to reconstruct *the* truth by recourse to some repressed *content*; he should have of repression an 'idea less psychobiographical' and instead read the letter's *effects*, its distortions and repetitions. If the story, as Douglas puts it (James, 2010: 25), 'won't tell' in a 'vulgar', totalising fashion, the reader's task is not to make it tell, to transform disavowal into avowal, but to discern *how* it is in not telling that it all the more rigorously admits it. However, this is not a covert metalanguage; *rigour* has nothing to do with univocal meaning but instead concerns the real that arises from an impasse in formalisation. *The Turn of the Screw* is neither a 'telling' nor a 'not telling,' neither unfettered confession nor stubborn silence, but a 'not-telling' (like 'not-mother' or 'with without cream') irreducible to either positivity or negativity. It is an *enigmatic* spectre that, in passing beyond the 'simple turn', tells of its own negation, its incurable *Spaltung*.

Lacan's structuralist logic, according to which philosophical 'being is succeeded by the letter' (from *l'être* to *parlêtre* to *parlettre*), directs his rather schoolmasterly 'response on literary criticism' (1977b: 5). Now, intones Lacan, whilst this criticism might concern itself with 'the structure of language' such as it is theorised by linguists, little will be gained 'if it does not school itself in this extendable *logic*... [of] a subject *divided* in its being. Criticism, and literature as well, will find occasion to stumble there into *the structure itself*' (ibid). Despite the strikingly ambitious nature of his claim to offer aid to readers *and* writers, it is not a point that is often remarked on or one that he himself spent much time developing beyond a reference to 'the literature called *avant-garde*, which is itself made of the littoral: and thus does not sustain itself by the *semblant*' (L: 7). Development of this point would require a decidedly idiosyncratic typology: whilst 'The Purloined Letter' 'turns to *lituraterre*' by sustaining its narrative by a letter and not a *semblant*,²⁹ few critics would refer to this tale as *avant-garde*. As for criticism, whilst linguists theorise an imaginary-of-the-symbolic, a metalanguage

²⁹ It's worth noting that this distinction is not entirely clear-cut: the letter is at its most effective when its unreadability functions in tandem with *semblants* (e.g. the proprieties of a monarch's court [Poe] or conservative, Victorian attitudes concerning the innocence of youth [James]).

that treats language as a totalisable and sensible object, psychoanalysts concern themselves with the real-of-the-symbolic (or the ‘real-of-the-structure[*-of-language*’]), the real of the ineliminable *division*, the division that is demonstrated by the material (*lalangue*) the analytic experiment produces or the *ex-sistent* (unlocalisable and yet *effective*) twist in a Möbian topology or the literary turn of the screw. The (what we might very tentatively call Lacanian) ‘poet... manipulates the *structure* of language and *not simply the word*’ – the letter he writes is not resolvable by recourse to a message, the structural fault of repression is not resolvable by recourse to a repressed content – and thereby ‘reintroduces... this topology of the [Möbian, double-looped] *edge* and the articulation of structure’ (SXIII: 19/1/66).

In the context of this study, what is particularly striking about Lacan’s proposed renewal of literary criticism is its symmetry with the re-turn to Freud. As with applied psychoanalysis, Neo-Freudianism, by erecting an institutional ‘church’, had ‘not reconstituted the order of virtues that would be necessitated by the status of the subject that it installs at its base’ (1977b: 3). If they are to be ‘Lacanian’ – or properly ‘Freudian’ – both reading disciplines must discard disciples and reconstitute themselves on the basis of the (topo)logical structure of *Spaltung*.

Nonetheless, to suggest that criticism and literature might ‘stumble [*achopper*]... into the structure itself’ is not the same thing as to suggest that the critic or author might stumble into the unconscious itself.³⁰ The opposition Lacan draws up between applied psychoanalysis and structural critique makes clear that there is a precise, although easily elided, distinction between attributing a text to an authorial neurosis and arguing that a text has a neurotic structure. As he puts it in an *écrit* dedicated to Marguerite Duras: ‘all that I shall show is that the practice of the letter *converges* with the workings of the unconscious’ (1987: 124). Lacan’s alignment of the two linguistic mechanisms outlined by Jakobson with the ‘workings’ of an unconscious structured like a language (prose’s metonymy with displacement and poetry’s metaphor with condensation) led to critics such as Ben Stoltzfus (1996: 5) effusively declaring open ‘a royal road between literature and the unconscious’. Modernity’s unconscious – a scatty creative font ejecting all manner of felicitous metaphoric and metonymic combinations – had replaced the Romantic imagination. However, when the unconscious is conceived of as

³⁰ Of course, since this structure is Möbian, one never really gets ‘*dans la structure*’ or in the unconscious; neither are a voluminous *container*. The operative word here is *stumble*: it is only as a literal *lapsus* rather than a deeply buried content that the unconscious can be read.

an assemblage of illegible letters (SXX: 47-48) constituted by an unlocalisable twist (or, to put it another way, an ellipsis produced by distortion), the points of convergence between literature and the unconscious become more *precise* (because it is a matter of qualitative structure) but also *less generalizable*. Whereas the image of a royal road suggests that a *single direct link* exists between literature and the unconscious, with one leading to or engendering the other, Lacan's notion of convergence suggests two *distinct* lines meeting. If Freud had attempted to 'see in art a sort of testimony to the unconscious', Lacan will instead argue that the points of convergence are 'absolutely punctiform': psychoanalysis is not an enormous explanatory grid to be laid on art. (1975d: 9). Here, we should recall what's at stake in *topological* equivalence (as opposed to analogical or metaphorical similarity): a shared structural real.

In his final statement on the matter, Lacan argued that literature and the unconscious are equivalent not in a *trivial* sense – where the former is a manifestation, representation or 'imitation' of the latter (a pseudo-Platonic conception of art as a suspect reproduction of, or 'testimony to', unconscious reality) – but in a *rigorous, topological* sense insofar as both are radically determined (as indeterminable) by the 'real-of-the-structure[-of-language].' This statement is definitive and precise but it is also (due to our standard understanding of equivalence as an unrigorous resemblance founded on quantification, appearance or generic categorisation etc.) counter-intuitive and provocative. In order to mitigate its unfamiliarity, I have chosen to present it with a parenthetical commentary:

It is because the unconscious necessitates the primacy of writing that the critiques will slip into treating the written work as the unconscious is treated... [To do so] is to suppose [writing to be] the act of a counterfeiter, since *inasmuch as it is written...*

[i.e. inasmuch as writing is a manipulation of 'the *structure* of language and *not simply the word*', inasmuch as the written work is animated by a structural *division* that can only be *read* for its effects rather than understood for its signification.]

...it does not *imitate* the effect of the unconscious.

[It is not the author's unconscious *re-presenting* itself in a linguistic formation. It is not to be read *as* an effect (product of the unconscious) but as that which *has* effects ('practice of the letter').]

It poses its *equivalent*, no less *real* than it, in *forging* it in its curvature [...]

[In French, the verb *forgier* refers only to the vigorous act of sculpting and is not used, as it sometimes is in English, to refer to criminal imitation (forgery). We might think here of the creative act of the potter, only this time the edge of the hole/pot is not a closed circle ('simple turn') but a Möbian *edge* (double-loop), qualitatively defined by the structural real of its twist or 'curvature' (*Spaltung*).]

[T]he literary work succeeds or fails, but not in imitating effects of structure. It only exists in the curvature which is that itself of the structure. This is not there an analogy. The curvature in question is no more a metaphor of the structure than the structure is the metaphor of the reality of the unconscious. It is the real of it and it is in this sense that the work does not imitate anything. (1977b: 5)

[In repeating his point, Lacan changes terms (from 'the effect of the unconscious' to 'effects of structure'), highlighting an *equivalence*: 'the structure... is the unconscious' (ibid: 4). Again, he is able to do so because structure is topologically defined only by the curvature, this irreducible real to which all other properties can be homotopically reduced. Likewise, literature – when it '*turns* to *litraterre*', when it is forged with the letter and not made from *semblants* (resemblance, imitation and metaphor), when it 'succeeds' precisely by *failing to tell* – derives its 'existence' not from any imaginary-symbolic *mélange* that would hypothetically constitute the original element that the work *qua* metaphorical product has substituted itself for (e.g. a contextual *zeitgeist* that is said to have produced it, a style or work it might have imitated or an unresolved Oedipus complex that underlies it), rather, it *ex-sists* in the curvature of its 'not-telling' or (dis)avowal and, as such, can only be read (topo)logically.³¹ As he puts it in *Seminar XXI*: 'the entity of writing... is defined above all by a certain *function*, by the *place* of the *edge*' (SXXI: 9/4/74).]

At stake in *litraterre* is a topology – logic ('function') and *topos* ('place') – that is neither a spherical unity (a narrative that, as a binding metaphor, tells all with its final, secure *terre*) nor an infinite plane (the indefinite extension of metonymic *différance* and pure *litura*). Instead, it *ex-sists* in the torsion of an irreducible edge that its repetitions trace. The letter constitutes the *terre* of these repetitions precisely by being placed under *erasure*. This is what Felman (2003: 253) refers to as a '*topos* of madness' that cannot be mapped by a metalinguistic narratology: as a non-geometric *topos* of the *split*, a

³¹This goes for critics *and* writers. Lacan contends that the *forgier* risks becoming a 'counterfeiter' when, like Valéry, he attempts to unify the critical and creative temperament in a fastidious self-analysis so that he might '*understand*' his *litraterre* 'in the process of being made' (PWRG: 5).

function, an *effective* action thwarting critical mastery, it announces itself only as an impasse in formalisation. Let us return here to a question posed above: in what kind of structure can there be a ‘place’ for ghosts (*qua* ellipsis)?

Noting the repetition of the *act* of turning in *The Turn of the Screw*, Felman asserts that the text ‘is organised as a veritable topography of turns’, a ‘spiral consist[ing] of a series of repeated circlings in which what turns is indeed bound to *re-turn*’ in a fashion that never realises the completed coherence of the circle (2003: 220-222 [Italics original]). We can further develop this point, not by observing another turn of the screw, but by noting a *split* within the titular action *itself*. Put simply, a screw turns in order to go *straight*. A conflict between a sane geometry and a mad *topos* is played out in the numerous scenes of unsettling curvature that Felman extensively documents. The word ‘straight’ is often used in conjunction with the act of seeing (conscious apprehension) or a deed backed by assured judgement. Furthermore, it frequently reappears, sustaining its incessant textual duel with the ‘turn,’ in scenes where the ghosts – an unsolvable mainspring of the text’s enigma – are ‘present’ as either the subject of conversation or a figure encountered by the governess.

‘Mrs. Grose looked straight out of the window’ as she offered information about Miss Jessel which the governess ‘turned... over’ (James, 2010: 36). Several chapters later, Mrs. Grose ‘turned round’ to further detail Jessel’s infamy, thereby enabling the governess to ‘see it now so straight’ (ibid: 58). A cognitive calm precedes the governess’ first vision of Jessel: ‘[t]here was no ambiguity in anything’ – a ‘conviction’ formed by ‘what I should see straight before me and across the lake as a consequence of raising my eyes.’ All ambiguous hell breaks loose when the governess spots Jessel and then transfers her ‘eyes straight to little Flora’, who, whilst busying herself with the task of twisting one piece of wood into the hole of another, had ‘turned her back to the water’ (ibid: 54-55).

In the first encounter with Quint, the governess finds herself locked in a ‘straight mutual stare’ before ‘he turned away’ (ibid 40-41). Later, having ‘turned in’ to recover her gloves, she is shocked by the sight of Quint ‘on the other side of the window and looking straight in’ (ibid: 44). Eager to verify this presence without the minimal mediation of a pane of glass, the governess ‘bounded straight out of the door’, ‘turned a corner’ and ‘came in full sight’ of what was ultimately a ‘sight of nothing’ (ibid: 45). Prior to the third encounter with Quint, the governess, engrossed in a book and ‘at the turn of a page’, becomes aware of ‘something *undefinably* astir’ and ‘look[s] straight

up', goes 'straight out of the room' and 'straight along the lobby' until she reaches 'the great turn of the staircase' and spies Quint, who eventually 'turn[s]' 'straight down the staircase and into the darkness in which the next bend was lost' (ibid: 67-68). Upon returning to her room and seeing Flora pattering 'straight over to me' she entertains the idea of 'giv[ing] it to her straight' (ibid: 69), just as she will later demand of Miles that he speak 'straight out' (ibid: 115).³² Having resolved instead to maintain a less invasive nightly vigil by taking 'noiseless turns in the passage', she awakes one night 'to sit straight up' and marches 'straight' to Flora's bed from which the girl was again absent (ibid: 70). Convinced that Flora is engaged, from her station at the window, in a wordless communion with Jessel, the governess endeavours to find another window 'turned to the same quarter'. At Miles' door, she weighs up the possibility of going 'straight in' to make use of his window before thinking better of it and 'turn[ing] away' (ibid: 71). Having found a suitable vantage point, she sees Miles on the lawn, 'looking... not so much straight at me' (ibid: 72) as at what she presumes, in an uncomfortable realisation that she will later recall 'straightaway... turned on me' (ibid: 81), to be Quint standing at a window several floors above her. Upon taking to the lawn and seeing Miles 'come to me as straight as possible', she is restored as the central reference point (ibid: 73).

The expectation with which we implicitly began – that the actions, turn and straight, are diametrically opposed as figures of obscurity and clarity, or, like a personality trait, are the sole province of one character (e.g. the governess speaks, travels or looks straight whilst the ghosts and children turn) – is radically overturned by the text. For example, if Miles won't come 'straight out' with it, it is because he is *too* straight: describing a tangential conversation with him, during which the governess was 'turning... over' his questions, she recalls that 'I couldn't look as straight as he' (ibid: 84). This poker face masks some malevolent turn, its apparent rectitude only misdirects the reader who must stay the course and apply 'another turn of the screw of ordinary human virtue' (ibid: 111) – regardless of whether one's resolve can look to others like a 'dreadful turn' (ibid: 102) – and 'spring straight upon him', forcing the turn straight out (ibid: 119). As these textual repetitions accrue, what might first appear to be a clean opposition (between going straight and turning, sanity and madness, 'ghosts' and 'not ghosts') is an undecidable split that is only made more enigmatic by the governess's (or,

³² The governess will resolve the situation with Flora by sending her '[s]traight to her uncle', despite concerns that he might 'turn on me' (ibid: 106).

indeed, any reader's) attempts to grasp a screw that *effectively functions* by turning as it goes straight and going straight as it turns. In the text's final scene, Miles performs this double action; following the governess's entreaty to see what is 'straight before us', he jerks 'straight *round*' and sees nothing 'but the quiet day' (ibid: 120). Similarly, the governess, having commanded her object of interpretation and applied a turn of the screw/child, possesses nothing but the 'dispossessed'. As for the ghost itself, its final figuration is that of both *terre* and *litura*, 'the *stroke* of the *loss*' (ibid: 120), the 'first stroke and of what effaces it', a trace created by erasure, a Mallarméan shipwreck giving rise to further readings and repetitions. Its *topos* is that of a nullibiquitous 'Thenceless, thitherless there.'

I will complete this section with one further example of Lacan's method. If, according to Felman (2003: 254), the extent of a text's 'madness' is determined not just by its resistance to interpretative rehabilitation but also by the extent to which the 'specific modes of its resistance to reading constitute its "subject" and its literariness', then Velázquez's self-reflexively abyssal *Las Meninas* (a painting about sight, framing and representation), is an incurably mad work rivalling *The Turn of the Screw*. In reference to this painting Lacan remarked that, in a straightforwardly therapeutic sense, 'for the artist we deal with, namely, the ones who consult us, the work of art [as sublimation] is for internal use. It helps them make their own loop [*boucle*]. But when we are dealing with a master like the present one, it is clear that at least what remains from any apprehension with this work is that the one who looks at it is fastened onto it [*y est boucle*]' (SXIII: 11/5/66). We have seen how courtly love poetry allowed the drive to loop around the object in a style that was so effective (inasmuch as its object stimulated the drive without being attained) that it *created* a convention and was made for *external* use as a neurotic avoidance of castration. I would suggest, however, that Lacan is not making the same point *vis-à-vis* Velázquez: the distinction implied here is not that between a lone masturbatory activity and a public service but between degrees of madness. The *effect* of buckling that *Las Meninas* has on the spectator is far more disquieting because its mad *topos* actually undoes the distinction between the internal and external. It is, according to the criterion we have established, more *effective*.

It is from an examination of the painting's effects that Lacan proceeds, asking once again not *what* it means but *how* it means (or refuses to mean). One of the first questions we ask ourselves upon seeing this work is what, in the painting, is Velázquez

painting on the canvas that we are barred from seeing? What conclusion does Velázquez (or Poe, or James...), painting himself painting, intend us to arrive at? A familiar dynamic is in play: we desire (to know) the Other's desire and, in doing so, are caught in the trap the painting lays out for the neurotic subject. This is 'certainly the wrong position to take up, because we are not in a position to analyse, I would not say the painter, but a picture' (SXIII: 11/5/66). As far as Lacan is concerned, this question cancels itself out because 'we pose it in the name of what he has already done' (ibid). It stands before us, it is *done*, we cannot *return* to its origin and *re-do* it. We cannot psychoanalyse the work as *an* effect (of an unconscious or historical context) but as that which *has* effects. This is a reading of repetition (re-turn) not reduplication (return): 'there is a circuit already made and we have only to make the other one. Only to do that we must not miss out the first one' by re-tracing and obscuring it with *our* conjecture (ibid). Just as the unreadable determines narrative structure, this canvas, represented *as unrepresented*, the *terre of litura*, is 'the point around which one has to make *turn* [*faire tourner*]... the whole *function* of this picture' (ibid).

Asking not what Velázquez wants to do but what he has done and what this does to us, Lacan advances a striking thesis: that the 'experience of perspective', for which developments in non-Euclidean projective geometry account, is a 'structural experience' founded on the subject's division and, as such, has a *structural* affinity with the 'analytic experience' (ibid). The painting *splits* the viewer: we can 'find in it the topology of $\$$ ' (SXIII: 4/5/66). Following Alberti's 'legitimate construction' proffered in *On Painting* (1434), a coherent 'experience of perspective' is guaranteed by a fundamental principle: all non-horizontal lines converge toward a vanishing point that is obtained by isolating the point on the horizon line that aligns with the external viewer's eye. In addition (as Lacan is at pains to make clear in his discussion of *Las Meninas*) the painting's horizontal lines are organised with respect to a *second* point, the distance point.

When the division or gap between the two perspectival 'subjects' is exaggerated, the effect produced is that of anamorphosis. As is well known, Lacan illustrates his point by referring to Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. Immanent to, and yet detached from, the painting's meticulous testimony to the *vanitas* and assorted accoutrements of man's epistemological mastery of the observable world, sits a distorted blemish, the full import of which only becomes apparent when the viewer is positioned at a particular *distance* from the painting. Jolted, the viewer recognises that there is something his

intuitive apprehension has missed and that his *conception du monde* is incomplete. The painting demonstrates to the subject the fallacy of an ideal and global perspective *outside* of representation that might allow one to see everything. He is ‘literally called into the picture’ as the unwitting object of a gaze (SXI: 92). What distinguishes this gaze from the hawkish, Foucauldian panopticon, and thereby makes it *more* disconcerting than the everyday fact of surveillance, is that the skull’s hollow sockets do *not* see us. It is a blind gaze emanating not from an all-knowing, all-seeing Other but from a barred, lacking Other.

Responsibility for the effect of one’s disquiet does not lay entirely with the skull itself: this would be to *reduce* the structural split to a legible image. If the effect produced had a localisable cause that could be seen and known it would be momentary and relatively trivial – as if one had been made the butt of a joke. Lacan refers to the skull as the ‘*imaged* embodiment of the minus-phi ($-\phi$) of castration’ and not the *function* (SXI: 89). The split, which prevents one from seeing it *all*, remains *irreducible*. The non-incidence between the two subjects cannot be sutured, we cannot be in two places *at the same time*; either we see the ambassadors and the skull is distorted or we see the skull and the ambassadors are distorted.

Returning to *Las Meninas*, we can see that the vanishing point is occupied by the queen’s chamberlain, Don José Nieto Velázquez whilst Diego Velázquez, the painter himself, emulates the distance point – that is, *a taking of distance* from the painting *within* the painting. He has managed to both insert himself within, and detach himself from, the painting. Commenting on Velázquez’s ‘*ghost-like* form which specifies this self-portrait among all the others’ (SXIII: 11/5/66) – his distant, unfocused gaze, his odd, uncertain presence, ‘thitherless there’, out of joint with everything else –, Lacan argues that ‘he gives the impression of putting himself into it, but you only have to look at him to see... the point to which he is in it in a state of absence’ (SXIII: 18/5/66).



Fig. 17

It appears that Velázquez has schooled himself in the very same ‘extendable logic’ that Lacan urged writers to familiarise themselves with: there is a ‘difference between good and bad painting, between the good and the bad conception of the world’, between a symbolic and imaginary *topos*, and proponents of the latter ‘never do anything but their own portrait’ and see in the world ‘the macrocosm of the microcosm that [they] are *supposed* to be’ (SXIII: 25/5/66).

As noted, the consequence of this spectral, negated presence is that we ask ourselves what it is that he is painting. To begin like this is to miss the point: the painting is a ‘not-painting’; it won’t exhibit itself in a ‘vulgar’ way. The ‘very multiplicity of interpretations, one might even say their embarrassment, their awkwardness, is there sufficiently designed to underline’ the ‘disarray’ that this painting introduces into the

spectator (SXIII: 11/5/66). The first of these interpretations is that Velázquez has painted himself painting the king and queen who would be sitting where we stand. Here, the ‘royal couple play exactly the same role as the God of Descartes’: as a regal linchpin securing representation, they allay the subject’s disarray, providing the *ergo* that binds him (SXIII 11/5/66). He now sees it *all* and is no longer split. However, if we accept the evidence supporting this interpretation (that the presence of the royal couple is confirmed by their reflection in a mirror at the back of the room), we must also accept that the Spanish master has committed a gross error – an occurrence Lacan deems unlikely. For the scaling to be correct, the reflection should be half as small as it is. The second ‘embarrassed’ interpretation has it that Velázquez has produced an elaborate self-portrait by painting what he saw in a mirror again placed where the viewer stands. As Lacan astutely notes, we have no evidence that Velázquez was left-handed, which he would need to be if what he produced was a mirror image: ‘Velázquez, even when he introduces himself into the picture in a self-portrait, does not paint himself in a mirror, any more than this is done in any *good* self-portrait’ (SXIII: 25/5/66). By attempting, in both mutually exclusive interpretations (like ‘ghosts/ not ghosts’), to reduce art to the unitary meaning of a mirror image, critics have failed to do justice to its irreducible split. By contrast, Lacan’s ‘is a properly structural and strictly scopic’, rather than specular, ‘interpretation’ (SXIII: 18/5/66).

The dizzying *effect* produced by this extraordinary composition is not merely that of a ‘simple turn’ or reversal, whereby the viewer becomes the viewed by occupying the position of the painted painter’s model, but an *undecidable* split or double-loop because it is the very same sight of this painted painter that forces us to recognise that we are, of course, standing in his position as the viewer *par excellence*. ‘Buckled’ on to this loopy *topos* and split as a viewed-viewer, the befuddled subject is ‘in it in a state of absence.’ One has the sense of being swept within and without the plane of a cross-cap, fastened onto its double-looped curvature, where what is most exterior becomes most interior. When Felman (2003: 169) notes that the interplay between protagonists, narrators and readers within and without *The Turn of the Screw* produces a topological narrative frame as ‘a kind of exteriority which permeates the very heart of the story’s interiority, an internal cleft separating the story’s content from itself, distancing it from its own referential certainty’, she could quite conceivably be talking about *Las Meninas*.

‘[T]he important thing’, avers Lacan, ‘is not so much the *definition* of the act, as its *consequences*’: the psychoanalyst ‘distinguish[es] what is involved in terms of the incidence of the act, not so much in the *determination* as in the *mutations* of the subject’ (SXIV: 15/2/67). Psychoanalysis and art converge at an ‘absolutely punctiform’ point when they both go beyond *theoria* and *do something*. I have attempted to demonstrate how this ungeneralizable method of reading, which cannot be considered apart from Lacan’s work on the dynamic (topo)logic of the double-loop (re-turn), can inform criticism without becoming a listless application of knowledge: ‘Can I play the scholar in speaking about the psychoanalytic act? Certainly not... I am the logician of it... [T]his logic makes me odious to everyone’ (SXVI: 4/6/69). It is hoped that readers are persuaded that it would do critics no harm to be a little more odious, a little more *Lacanian*.

5. The Borromean Knot: Toward a Rigour without Coherence

5.1. Figuring the Knot

You will tell me that I run on, and even to the point of tiring you. It's that I make an effort to disentangle myself from what is fundamental to thought... the typical imbecility... of the human humour in regard to the real, which, however, it has to deal with.
(SXXII: 11/3/75)

We can return here to the question posed at the conclusion of **1.1**: did Lacan succeed in his self-professed aim to '*give* you a bit of real'? On the basis of what criterion would such an attempt be judged? Would we *know* about it if Lacan had succeeded? We are, to recall Badiou's depiction, left with the unfathomable spectacle of a man who continued to gesture toward the real, leaving one uncertain as to what the gesture itself indicates or implies. How can we overcome the critical paralysis that risks equating this final 'gesture' with a vague mysticism without doing the very same thing that makes baffled paralysis look like the only suitable attitude – without, in other words, *understanding* this gesture by imposing upon it the common *sens* of an indicated direction and a meaningful implication?

Let us first note that Lacan's gesture was not groundless: he pointed his finger at an unspeakable real that he had *written* in the form of the Borromean knot. To what extent is a 'reconstrual' of the knots, that Hogan found so intellectually repellent, possible? If the real is strictly unthinkable, it is an indication of this writing's *effectiveness* that 'thinking-the-Borromean-knot will *give* [*donnera*] you pain. Because it is not easy to *imagine*, which gives a proper measure of what all thinking is' (SXXII: 8/4/75). Lacan's hyphenated bloc warns against forcing the knot into the same *space* as conscious *theoria* – the rehabilitative act of combining it with an egoic thought that misrecognises the 'real-of-the-structure' for a coherent *image*. But how, exactly, does thinking this 'bit of real' give us pain? What is the obstacle that it poses to the imbecilic thought that Lacan sought to 'disentangle' himself from?

If this knot *gives* pain rather than *bequeathing* knowledge, psychoanalysis, as either a pedagogic or curative discourse, is perhaps at its most problematic when it is, during Lacan's final seminars, presented through such a topology. The teacher and doctor's closing remarks in the eighth session of *Seminar XXII* exemplify the inscrutable posture he adopted in these final years: 'Whether this clarifies the practice of analytic discourse, I leave you to decide' (SXXII: 18/3/75). Figure it out for yourself, don't ask me – I just write the damn things! The problem is, of course, that '[f]iguring the knot is not easy. I

do not say “figuring it for yourself”, because I completely eliminate the subject. I take my departure, on the contrary, from the thesis that the subject is determined by the figure in question. *Not that it would be its double*’ (ibid). The problem we face is that the break, demanded by topology, with the intuitive logic of representation is drastically reasserted: the conscious subject, as one who perceives and apprehends the object (figure), cannot operate here; he is instead apprehended by the knot to such an extent that he cannot be detached from it (it is not even his specular double) without this knot being the ‘thing-in-itself.’ Therefore, the knot made the process of teaching – of figuring something in such a way that allows others to figure it out – utterly torturous: ‘last time I was too tangled up in my knots... to have the least wish to talk to you. I was uneasy... [But] I think I’ve found [*trouver*]... some transmissible things’ (SXXIII: 11/5/76).

These ‘things’, transmitted as paratactic jabs which I will attempt to thread together, were often the result of unanticipated discoveries made by Lacan and his mathematician friends in the *act of writing* knots. Psychoanalysis, at times lost under the tide of a Borromean fascination – the knot, like any insoluble symptom, is a source of both unease and ‘infatuation’ (ibid) –, reappears, altered, not by a historicisable influence or a clinical incident, but *by an alteration made to the knot itself*. How can this extraordinary claim to the knot’s *practical* fecundity (which distinguishes it from the previous topology of surfaces that only embodied psychoanalytic paradoxes or demonstrated psychoanalytic acts) be justified?

We can begin by reproducing the statement Lacan made at Caracas regarding the knot, whilst italicising an important detail omitted last time:

My three are not the same as [Freud’s]. My three are the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. I came to situate them by means of a topology... *The Borromean knot highlights the function of the at-least-three. This is the one that ties in the other two that are not tied to each other.*

I gave that to my pupils. I gave it them so that they might find their way in their practice. But do they find their way any better than with the topography Freud passed down to his? (2011: 18)

This is the knot’s qualitative real: it is *impossible* that it be made with anything less than three rings. A *third* ring fulfils ‘the *function* of the at-least-three’ by making *one* knot; it is a structural operator that has *effects*. However, we’ve been here before: it is a curious structural quirk but does it really warrant quite so much fuss? ‘[I]n the intertwining of threads there is something that is imposed as being real... which makes it so that, when

one *thinks* of it', one does so painfully: 'I have indeed *experienced* this... one *cannot imagine* to what point I am worried by these *histories* I have called... "rounds of thread"' (1977c: 2). We are touching here upon the third part of Lacan's 'clearing' operation: the progression from presenting things in terms of Freud's case histories to a presentation of the knot. What is it about these rings that worry us more than any case history could? How is it that they compel a shift from *thought* to *experience* (insofar as imagining 'gives a proper measure of what all thinking is')? If, as Lacan previously put it (see 3.3), analysts might benefit from being put in the position of having to *read* something they don't *understand*, is it in this respect that the knot 'clarifies the practice of analytic discourse'?

The case histories were transformed by Freud's followers into something like a series of interpretative templates. The knot, on the other hand, is not nearly so helpful. It instead heralded a crisis of interpretation. Lacan, taking advantage of the qualitative homogeneity of the knot's components, named each ring real, symbolic or imaginary, thereby undoing any notion that the categories were ordered or absolutely distinct. Given that he had previously insisted that 'one cannot find [*retrouve*] one's bearings' (SXXIII: 9/12/75) with or in the knot we should treat the suggestion that, by referring to this knot, his 'pupils' might 'find [*retrouvent*] their way' better than they did with Freud's topography, with considerable caution. The knot will offer no means of *re-finding* one's self but it will allow one to encounter a 'bit of real' as that which only imposes itself in the absence of order. Preparatory to further exploring this writing, we will look at what Lacan defines the knot against.

5.2. Freudian Topography

Given that Lacan so rarely criticised Freud, it's worth paying attention to exactly what's at stake on the few occasions that he does. Nothing Freud produced attracted his ire and bemusement quite so strongly as the second topography:

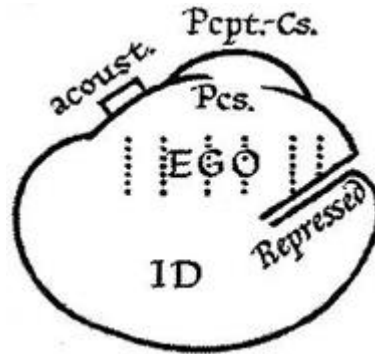


Fig. 18 (SE XIX: 24)

Principally, Lacan held the vertical organisation of this diagram responsible for ego psychology. Trapped at the bottom, 'the *Es* [Id] is not sufficiently emphasized by the way it is *presented*' (SVII: 137). The topography's influence in the development of ego psychology was partly due to interpretative error but this potential for error is, Lacan argues, endemic to topographical representation itself: 'it is the exemplary fate of diagrams – insofar as they are geometrical, that is – to lend themselves to intuitions based on ego-like errors' (E: 560). It is precisely this fate that the knot evades – which is perhaps why so little has been written about it. The sphere is topped off with the eye of perception-consciousness, a single point from which the conscious subject, as a 'Cyclopean egg' sees itself seeing itself (E: 561). This was a significant departure from the first topography: where previously perception and consciousness had been separated by the trace-ridden layers of the preconscious *and* unconscious, here, *à la* depth psychology, the unconscious is relegated to the bottom of the topography and mastered by the ego.

This unifying and 'fantasmic' 'geometry of the sack' 'is supposed to *contain...* the drives' (SXXII: 10/12/74) and is kitted out with the ego's 'acoust' or 'cap of hearing' which Lacan, in reference to the 19th Century inventor of sound recording devices, sardonically labels 'a black box of some contraption worthy of [Étienne-Jules] Marey' (2011: 18). 'What a contrast,' he opines, between this spherical imaginary body that

encloses the drives and ‘the definition Freud gives of the drives as *linked to the orifices* of the body. This is a crystal clear formulation that calls for a different depiction from this bottle, of which anybody could be the stopper.’ In its place, Lacan presents ‘the Klein bottle (figure 15), which has neither inside nor outside’ (2011: 19). Its ‘real-of-the-structure’ is the *impossibility* of it absolutely containing or excluding anything. This is the carved, topological body, the body for which the Euclidean distinction between *Innenwelt* and *Umwelt* does not hold. Nowhere is the continuity between the body’s interiority and exteriority more disquietingly asserted than in the spoken and speaking being’s experience of a voice that both invades this holed body from the outside and escapes from the inside:

There must be *something in the signifier which resonates*... [A] drive is the echo in the body of the fact that there is speech... the body must be sensitive to it. It is because the body has several orifices, of which the most important is the ear – because it has *no stop-gap* – that what I have called *the voice has a response in the body*. (SXXIII: 18/11/75)

The voice is that which in the signifier exceeds this signifier’s instrumental brief. Rather than merely communicating, the signifier has *resonated*: it has had an *effect* on the corporeal subject precisely because it has *not* been understood. The most momentous experience of traumatic misunderstanding is, of course, the missed encounter with the Other’s desire/lack which serves as the *desidero*’s cause: ‘If the desire of the subject is founded on the desire of the Other... [t]he voice is... the instrument in which there is manifested the desire of the Other’ (SXIII: 1/6/66).

Contrary to what is suggested by Freud’s ‘acoust’, which he positions on the sack’s exterior like a separate department, the subject does not simply receive and process signifiers from the Other like a ‘black box’ since these signifiers carry an enigma that exceeds signification – the enigma of the Other’s desire with respect to which the subject’s desire is founded. We should be careful to separate the voice from the sensory experience of understanding phonemes; we do not listen to the voice, the voice is something that *happens to us*. There are certain nonsensical signifiers that invade and resonate in the nascent subject and which cannot be integrated into a narrative chain that would explain them. These ‘primordial signifiers’ are ‘what happens when the signifier is not only articulated, which merely presupposes its nexus, its coherence in a chain with others, but is uttered and *voiced*’ – when, that is, they are shot through with an overwhelming desire that cannot be understood (SX: 249). Whilst ‘[l]inguistics has

accustomed us to noticing that [language] is nothing other than a system of oppositions,’ – an organisation of metaphor and metonymy – ‘[w]hen something from this system passes into an utterance, a new dimension is involved, an isolated dimension, a dimension unto itself, the specifically vocal dimension’ (SX: 249). We can already see, during *Seminar X*, Lacan beginning to distance his ‘return to Freud’ from the tenets of structuralist linguistics whilst continuing to insist on the relevance of topology as a corrective to the more unhelpful elements of Freud’s legacy.

Lacan’s suggestive reference to ‘a new’ and intensely libidinal ‘dimension unto itself’ at odds with the linguistic system, along with his observation that ‘the invocatory drive... is the closest to the experience of the unconscious’, are early indications of the later conceptualisation of *lalangue* (SXI: 104). The subject’s *jouissance* is discernible during precisely those occasions that his speech fails as the carrier of meaning. The repeated slips of the tongue betray the presence of a libidinal charge emanating from an incomprehensible knot of ‘primordial signifiers’ tied to the traumatic void of *das Ding*. The unconscious, once ‘structured like a language’, – structured by a ‘system of oppositions’ and the operations of substitution and displacement – is now structured like *lalangue*: an irreducible and unsystematisable nexus of resonant letters and pleasurable suffering.

The particularity of the object depends upon how the Other’s desire most forcefully manifested itself in the subject’s infancy. There are two objects of demand which do little to contest the subject’s conception of its body as having an interior and an exterior: the subject demands the breast (incorporation) and the Other demands the faeces (expulsion). The other two are objects of desire and are vital in the ‘progressive establishment for the subject of this field of riddles that the subject’s Other is’ (SX: 251). The subject’s fantasmatic reality is an attempt to make sense of this field by organising itself around an object that obscures the traumatic void of *das Ding*. ‘A voice’ can have ‘a function of *modelling* our void’, rather than traumatically evoking it, ‘but... this only happens after the desire of the Other has taken the form of a command. This is why it can play its eminent function of bringing anxiety its point of resolution, which gets called guilt or atonement’ (SX: 277). This is the obsessional fantasy: the riddle of the Other’s *desire* is resolved by recourse to the Other’s *demand*, in relation to which the *desidero* prostrates himself. In a toric intertwining, obsessional neurotics avoid the fact of their own (and the Other’s) castration by submitting their desire to the Other’s demand. For subjects that do not make this switch from the invocatory to the

anal (i.e. subjects for whom the voice continues to confuse and trouble rather than command) the fantasy of a coherent Other enveloping a consistent self is more fragile and less clearly defined: the ear ‘has no stop-gap’; an otherwise inconsequential word overheard on a bus – a signifier animated by a ‘vocal dimension’, the ‘*a... unfastened from phonemization*’ (SX: 249) – might *resonate* with the real of the subject’s unconscious *jouissance*, having *incalculable* effects.

It was with linguistics that psychoanalysis would supposedly ‘hook onto science’ but, ultimately, Lacan concluded, ‘psychoanalysis is not a science; it is a practice’ (1975c: 1). For Lacan, the difference between psychoanalytic practice and science lay in calculability: the ‘effects [of psychoanalytic interpretation] are *incalculable*. It testifies to no knowledge, since to take it in its classical definition, knowledge is insured by a possible *foreseeing*’ (1973: 5). Inspired by Dupin’s spectacularly dull ruminations on probability and game theory, the appendix to ‘The Seminar on “The Purloined Letter”’ exemplified Lacan’s early hyper-rationalist and anti-humanist project which had as its aim the theorisation of a *calculable* and *insubstantial* subject. A signifying chain mechanically unfolds (‘repetition automatism’) in accordance with *a priori* logical parameters (i.e. language as a ‘system of oppositions’) and the pure subject ‘exists’ as nothing more than a perpetual fading. Thanks to the reintroduction of two radically uncertain factors in the form of the body and *jouissance*, ‘the analytical thing will not be mathematical’ and, as such, it will require a *non-mathematised* and *substantial* topology (SXX: 117).

Clearly, ‘[s]tructure... *demonstrates* nothing if not that it is of the same text as *jouissance*’ (SXX: 111). *Jouissance* does not lay *beyond* structure, accessible only through an extraordinary transgression of repression. What the Borromean knot allowed Lacan to do was not only to jointly articulate the structuralist ‘system of oppositions’ and the ‘dimension unto itself’ but also to topologically situate different modes of *jouissance* as different modes of enjoying the object (*a*). The obsessional, for example, experiences ‘*J’ouis sens* [I hear sense]’; the *jouissance* effective when what we might clumsily call an imaginatisation of the symbolic takes place (SXXIII: 13/1/76). The Other, when it makes comprehensible *demands*, is a consistent whole, there is no ‘vocal dimension’ that might betray an incomprehensible desire. The obsessional hears sense and thereby makes sense of his enjoyment.

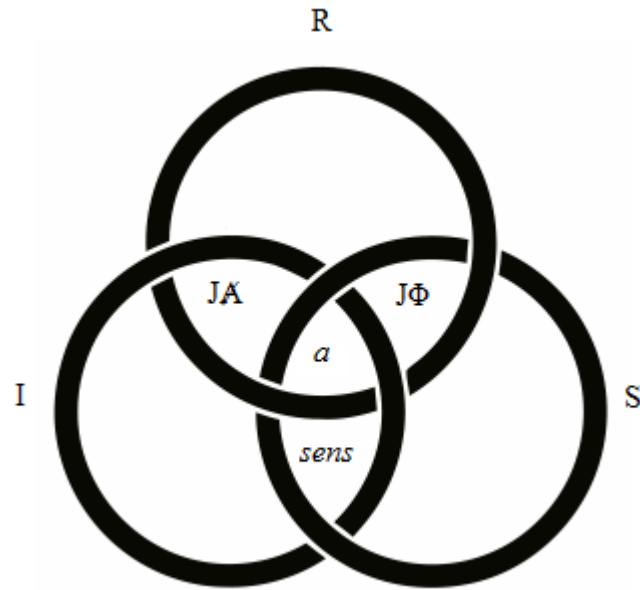


Fig. 19

Lest this exploration of the knot start to resemble too much the operation of aligning jargon with definitions (the articulation of *theoretical knowledge*) – a procedure that leads one to treat the knot as little more than a glorified Venn diagram – I would like to concentrate on what it is that the *writing* of its topology accomplishes as the final part of Lacan’s ‘clearing’ operation. To start with, we should think of its constituent terms not as typological descriptions secondarily appended to the knot but as topological *functions* that, together, *are* the knot. In other words, the knot does not serve as an analogy for the real, the symbolic and imaginary, but instead *is* real, symbolic and imaginary: ‘The triplicity which the knot allows to be illustrated results from a *consistence* which is only feigned by the imaginary, a foundational *hole* which emerges in the symbolic, and an *ex-sistence* which belongs to the real’ (SXXIII: 9/12/75).³³

³³ In what follows, the three terms will be abbreviated as R, S and I.

5.3. Three Supports a Real

Although the vectorial structures of surface topology are ‘doable with a pure literal algebra’ (ETD: 16) – which is to say that they are properly ‘mathematical things’ for which no reference to an illustration or material object is necessary and can, in an image-less text such as *L’étourdit*, be unequivocally named and deployed as a sort of *mathème* – there is no complete algorithm or ‘theory of knots’, ‘no mathematical formalisation applicable to knots’ (SXX: 129). With knots, the dominance of *theoria* over practice (the ability to *see* the theorised object and *foresee* the effect of one’s act on this object) is sternly challenged: Lacan stumbled his way blindly through a Borromean labyrinth, making various adjustments, folding a line here, adding a ring there, and only after learning the consequences of these acts for psychoanalysis. In these late seminars, theoretical developments are not secondarily summarised or clarified by the knot; they are instead compelled by this knot which serves as a seemingly endless reserve of unexpected problems and solutions. These nodal *casse-têtes*, like the unconscious itself or certain literary works, *provoke* psychoanalysis; the latter is called upon to respond to impasses and answers revealed by a revision made to the knot by revising itself.

Lacan recommends that we adopt an uncomfortable intellectual stance *vis-à-vis* the knot: ‘To operate with this knot in a suitable fashion, you must use it stupidly. *Be dupes*. Do not enter this subject in *obsessional doubt*... I invite you to repudiate the hypotheses, and, here, to be stupid enough not to ask yourselves questions about the usage of my knot’ (SXXII: 17/12/74). If, as obsessives, we regard the knot or its writer as an Other of the Other that will command our actions and transform the opacity of our *jouissance* into sense, we will be sorely disappointed. The epistemological attitude called for here is neither that of a knowing, hypothesising ‘non-dupe’ and nor is that of the blindly faithful devotee who unquestioningly believes that a master knows. Whilst Lacan’s statement appears to corroborate the oft-voiced criticism that his discourse not only inspired but actually required uncritical fidelity, he in fact has in mind a third attitude – that of the ‘good dupe’, who, rather than being the patsy of a knowledge or a knower, has ‘somewhere a real of which she is the dupe’ (SXXI: 11/12/73). This dupe’s sex is no coincidence: to be a good dupe is to have a rapport not with a totalised Other via an object but with $S(A)$. The good dupe is the analyst or analysand, who, in order to *operate with the unconscious in a suitable fashion*, must ‘repudiate hypotheses’ and make himself its dupe, allowing his *thinking* to be

challenged by it: ‘my knot’, and, indeed, *all our knots*, ‘will not serve to go farther than there from where it emerges, that is, analytic *experience*’ (SXXII: 17/12/74). The knot will not serve as a generalisable ‘model’ or allow us to make hypotheses: ‘models’, insofar as they are only said to work when anomalies have been eradicated (when, in other words, there are no results of a repeatable experiment that cannot be explained or predicted by the model), ‘recur to the pure imaginary. Knots recur to the real’ (SXXII: 18/3/75). Since knots have only been incompletely mathematised, they do not allow one to make calculated inferences; one must *forge* their *body*. As we will see, this necessity, which profoundly transforms the status and import of *writing*, is the predominant reason for Lacan’s ‘infatuation’ with the knot.

Indeed, the knot arrived at a point in Lacan’s work where the paternal metaphor – which, if we give it its ‘Freudian’ title (the Oedipus complex), had served as *the* psychoanalytic hypothesis, an apparently immutable principle of psychoanalytic theory – had been devalued as *inherently* defective:

The hypothesis of the unconscious, as Freud stresses, can only be sustained by supposing the Name-of-the-Father [i.e. repression]. To suppose the Name-of-the-Father is God. In this, psychoanalysis, when it succeeds, proves that the Name-of-the-Father can just as well be by-passed, as long as use is made of it. (SXXIII: 13/4/76)

It is the hypothesis from which theory proceeded: for Freud, the unconscious exists because *le-non-du-père* (prohibition) has been stated and, for Lacan, the unconscious is structured like a language because it was founded by the paternal metaphor. Once this obsessional hypothesis is repudiated, RSI are mutually entangled: there is no hierarchical order as there was in Lacan’s earlier work where S (the Other) dominated R and I: ‘If there is a real Other, it is not elsewhere than in the knot itself, and it is in this that there is no Other of the Other’ (SXXII: 18/3/75). In this topology, S is now an *equal* partner. The Name-of-the-Father, which had served as the *universal* and transcendental guarantor of all that was theorisable about the neurotic subject, ordering RSI in terms of a normative *père-version*,³⁴ was abandoned as an imaginary ‘*model* of the function’ and its role (i.e. that of allowing the subject to avoid the Other’s lack) was to be performed by a fourth ring: the symptom (SXXII: 21/1/75). In *Seminar XXIII*, analysis is said to conclude when the subject has identified with the *sinthome* – an

³⁴Symbolic distance (Φx) is put between the subject and the object (*a*) that grants his fantasmatic reality an *imaginary* consistency by obscuring the *real* non-existence of the sexual rapport.

utterly singular symptom that is the subject's mode of enjoying the Other's lack (the *jouissance* of not-all [JA]). The *mythical model* of the Name-of-the-Father (as that which holds the Other together) is 'by-passed', whilst 'use is made' of the *structural function* of the Name-of-the-Father (as that which knots RSI), when this responsibility is fulfilled by the *sinthome*. This is, to return to how we left things at the end of Part Three, what Lacan meant by 'lacking differently'. Lorenzo Chiesa (2007: 188) writes that whereas 'phallic *jouissance* (of the object *a*) makes the symbolic One, increasingly pre-tending to obliterate the lack', the not-all *jouissance* (JA) of the *sinthome* 'makes the individual who, as it were, develops "his own" symbolic from that lack.'³⁵

Knots appealed because Lacan was attempting to gain 'access to the real' without a representation (which he had long discounted) or a mathematical/scientific 'model' (which he had more recently given up on). In scientific reasoning a model functions by allowing one 'to *foresee* what would be the results... of the functioning of the real' (SXXIV: 16/11/76). Science is concerned with identifying laws or what Lacan referred to as 'knowledge in the real': the scientific real seems to know what it must do; it *works*. For its part, psychoanalytic *savoir* can only *cerne le réel*. When, distressed by Newton's laws of gravity, people asked '[h]ow can each of these particles know how far it is from all the others?' they 'evoked the unconscious of the particle' (SXXII: 14/1/75). This is, however, the *automatic* and *calculable* unconscious of Lacan's early structuralism, a signifying chain that mechanically unfolds in accordance with the law (Name-of-the-Father) rather than a knot. The question of whether God 'makes the machine work' or whether it 'turn[s] by itself' is only a '[r]efinement of knowledge' rather than a subversion (SXXII: 18/2/75). The symptom that individualises the knot is a sign that the real, following the introduction of the signifier, is not working. Only 'our analytic grasp of the knot' – a grasp that is neither that of the scientific non-dupe nor the religious dupe – 'is the negative of religion' (SXXIII: 9/12/75). The relinquishment of 'obsessional doubt' requires great discipline but it is not the discipline of a doubting Thomas made disciple: the writing of 'the knot in which I have faith' (SXXIII: 9/12/75) is 'an attempt to produce a *foliesophy* less sinister than that of... the Bible' (SXXIII: 16/3/76). This mad tangle will offer little comfort to those seeking the *sens* of prescriptive commandments passed down by the Other.

³⁵ This late definition of 'lacking differently' did not radically alter the practice of analytic reading itself: 'interpretation' still 'operates solely by equivocation' (SXXIII: 18/11/75) and this homophonic, grammatical and logical material can only be produced by the re-turn: 'The end of analysis is when one has gone round in circles twice, namely, rediscovered that of which one is prisoner' (SXXV: 10/1/78).

In modern science, founded on the mathematisation of nature, '[a]ll approach to the real is woven for us by the number' because the scientific real *is* a number: '[s]cience counts. It counts the matter, in the matter' (i.e. weight, volume, distance etc.). The unconscious, in its own 'approach [to] the real' appears to mimic this counting at its most basic level: it is an 'accountant who knows how to do addition' (SXXII: 14/1/75). In the metonymy of unconscious desire, one signifier is counted and added to another signifier. However, the psychoanalytic real is not 'woven for us *by*' the number/signifier (symbolic), it cannot be approached in terms of the *law* of the signifier or the numerical function of the successor; it is instead disjunctively woven *with* the symbolic, arising as that which causes automatic computation to go awry. The psychoanalytic 'real... must be said to be without law': *it cannot be foreseen* (SXXIII: 13/4/76). Replacing the symbolic automaton, the symptomatic unconscious would make for a truly useless accountant: 'it is extremely maladroit [because] it must count in the manner of these knots' that are irreducible to the extendable symbolic chain. The unconscious 'does not find [*retrouve*] itself' in these counts; it is constantly blundering, losing any direction or meaning (*sens*). 'But it is there' – there where it loses itself – 'that it is touched upon that there is *at minimum* a knot' (SXXII: 14/1/75).

To 'count in the manner of these knots' is to begin with a One that is three: 'The Borromean knot *consists* strictly insofar as *three is the minimum*' (SXXII: 10/12/74). There is no one ringed or two ringed Borromean knot: its count begins at three. You can of course add rings but, if just one is broken, the knot's *consistence* dissolves and it ceases to *ex-sist*: 'This property' – this topological, Borromean *quality* that takes precedence over *quantity* – 'homogenises 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' (SXXII: 10/12/74). The count constantly returns to an origin that is not itself countable, a knot that is inassimilable to the chain to which it gives rise, the *ex-sistent* 'point at infinity' that a pursuit of numeration's *virtual* infinity through *quantitative* accumulation (the 'search for meaning') will only serve to miss. The 'function of the at-least-three' is imperative because 'the real only begins at number three' (SXXII: 18/3/75).

How does the knot's integral threeness 'support a real' beyond our simply appending the letter 'R' to one of its rings? To return to a problem raised in Part One – a problem that the knot does not resolve but instead *monstrates* as an embodiment of this irresolvable structural paradox –, how is it that R can be *beyond* S and I without being

an ineffable absolute? The knot shows us how, if ‘the real is not, as such, *linked* to anything’ in terms of a symbolic *chain*, it is nonetheless *knotted* (SXXIII: 16/3/76). In this peculiar *topos*, each ring is both separate and bound:

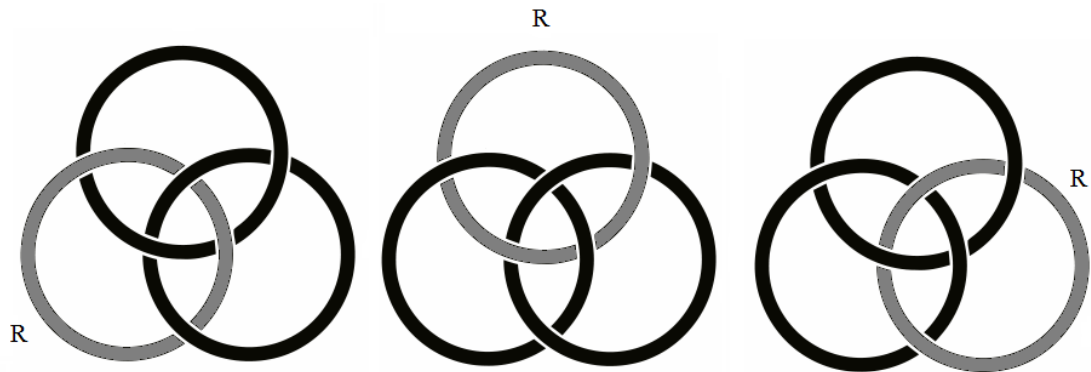


Fig. 20

If the third ring (we can ascribe to each ring the position of ‘third’) *ex-sists* to the two others (it is not directly linked), it is nevertheless necessary for the knot’s consistence, which, in turn, is what grants the third ring its *ex-sistence* (as opposed to the non-existence of an unattached theological real that floats off into the ether):

In its ‘*sistence*’ outside of the imaginary and the symbolic, it knocks up against them, its play is something precisely in the order of limitation; the two others, from the moment when it is tied into a Borromean knot with them, offer it resistance. In other words, the real only has *ex-sistence* – in rather an astonishing formula of mine – in its encounter with the limits of the symbolic and the imaginary. (SXXIII: 16/12/75)

It is only the presence of the two other rings that gives R its *ex-sistence* as an immanent impasse in representation, an anomaly exposing a model’s incompleteness, rather than a (virtually) non-existent thing-in-itself: ‘The mode in which one round of thread *ex-sists* to another is that with which I displace the by itself unsolvable question of objectivity. Objectivity thus displaced seems less silly than the noumena’ (SXXII: 18/3/75). Two positions are argued against here:

1). The scientific position which, with its systematising models, ‘has recourse... to the imaginary to give oneself [*se faire*] an idea of the real.’ Riffing on the homophonic equivocation between *sphère* and *se faire*, Lacan poses his topological entanglement as antithetical to the spherical envelopment of R by I: ‘What I put forward in my Borromean knot of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, led me to distinguish these three spheres and then, afterwards, re-knot them’ (SXXIV: 16/11/76). The necessary

condition of this knotting – which poses the categories as neither completely separate (the pure real or *ding an sich*) nor reducible to the other (‘idea of the real’) – is that each of the spheres are *holed* (as rings). Each ring is *indirectly* knotted to the other *by virtue of this incompleteness*. Whilst it is true to say that the real is ‘not... linked to anything’, this does not mean that it is simply separate: it is instead quite literally ‘linked to nothing’ (SXXIII: 16/3/76). The rings are not three Ones, three self-sufficient and stable spheres, but three rings *ex-sisting* and consisting as One *that derive their specificity of function and effect from an interaction with the other categories at the point at which they are incomplete*: ‘The imagination of consistence immediately extends to the impossibility of rupture, but it is in this that rupture can always be the real... as impossible, which is no less compatible with the said imagination, and even constitutes it’ (SXXIII: 9/12/75).

2). The philosophical (or, more precisely, Kantian) position according to which we can have no ‘idea of the real’ – that, once distinguished (as phenomena and noumena), the ‘spheres’ cannot be re-knotted. What the Borromean knot shows, not as a representation or model (‘idea’) but in its logic of *topos* (the *qualitative* and non-metaphorical ‘real-of-the-structure’ that makes it ‘Borromean’), is that if we cannot have a totalising ‘idea of the real’ this does not mean that the real is ineffable but rather that *it ex-sists as this failure*. The noumenal real stands alone as a spherical totality, tautologically defined by itself. The psychoanalytic ‘real is *not all*’: it is as holed and in ‘bits’ that it interacts with the other rings (SXXII: 15/4/75). S cuts a hole in R, knotting itself with R not by means of a direct concatenation but by striking it into *ex-sistence*. The real upon which *discourse has consequences* is not made non-existent by representation (this is not a matter of the letter straightforwardly killing the spirit) and nor is it brought into existence by representation (the revealed truth of Biblical testimony). It is as a consequence of the signifier that something does *not* work in R: ‘what Freud discovered about what he called sexuality makes a hole in the real’ (Lacan, 1995: 33). It is as this malfunctioning that R is encountered (as missed) by S and I.

The psychoanalyst has a non-religious, non-scientific and non-philosophical ‘access to the real’: ‘we can only get hold of bits of real’; the bits that emerge in its interaction with S and I. It was in order to support this not-all real that Lacan wrote the knot: ‘my knot is... uniquely that by which the real is introduced as such’ (SXXIII: 11/5/76). He

had, of course, spent many years attempting to introduce the real through language and, to recite the instance of unabashed self-congratulation quoted above, produced many ‘astonishing formula[e]’ such as ‘the real only has *ex-sistence*... in its encounter with the *limits* of the symbolic and the imaginary.’ The problem with such verbalisations is that whilst they introduce an R that is distinct from S and I, they do not, following this separation, *re-knot* R. The latter is ‘given meaning’ by the evocation of a *topographical limit*; it is negatively defined in a binary opposition (SXXIII: 13/1/76).³⁶ If, as approaches to the real, *modelling* is a matter for the imaginary, then ‘*demonstrating* is a matter for the symbolic’ (SXXII: 13/5/75). Whilst this performance of *savoir* circling the real is superior to the fallacious success of the spherising model, it can nonetheless become a self-confirming rhetoric of failure (a charge from which Part Four of this study is not exempt), endlessly looking awry at cultural and political signifying formations in order to discover splits and inconsistencies. The knot is different: ‘I have been led to a *monstration* of the knot, although I sought to do a *demonstration* of analytic discourse’ (SXXII: 11/3/75). Rather than negatively demonstrating R as an impasse, the knot *monstrates* it, writing its *ex-sistence* with a surety that surpasses the pyrrhic success-through-failure achieved by the demonstration of our inability to write the smallest whole number on the board. We will return to the matter of monstration in **5.7**.³⁷

‘Language is always *flattened* out’: it reduces the *three* dimensions of RSI to two dimensions – a dualism, dichotomy or dialectic that confers meaning –, ‘and that indeed is why my twisted business of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, with the fact that *the symbolic is what goes above what is above and which passes beneath what is beneath*,... [has] value’ (SXXIV: 11/1/77).

³⁶ This recalls the problem flagged up by Jameson (see **3.8**).

³⁷ Monstration has here taken the role of presentation in **1.2**.

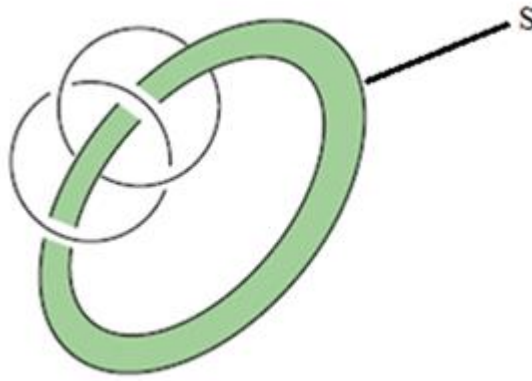


Fig. 21 (SXXIV: 11/1/77)

The knot cannot be flattened; its twisted nodality *resists* because there is no hierarchy. It forces us to construct unwieldy semi-anagrammatic formulations: the first ring that is beneath the second ring is above the third ring that is above the second ring that the first ring is beneath. Of course, it is with equal (il)legitimacy that we refer to any ring as the first, second or third. During the Borromean years (1972-1981), Lacan's trust in language slowly diminished until the autistic knots were virtually all that remained of his teaching: 'Language is a bad tool and this indeed is why we have no idea of the real. It is on this that I would like to conclude... What is most real, is writing' (SXXV: 10/1/78). The *unspeakable* real that plagues the child's *binary* repetitions of *fort-da* as their *ex-sistent* Trinitarian partner, has been *written*: it is neither present (*fort*), such that we could give ourselves an idea of it, and nor is it absent (*da*), such that our self-regarding ideas would be untroubled by it.

If Lacan managed to renew the scandal of Freud's *articulation* ('what he *called* [*apelle*] sexuality...') by *topologising* it ('...makes a hole in the real') – by, that is, *presenting* its naming of the incurable in terms a formal irreducibility – his nodal writing also allowed him to reinvigorate some of his own 'astonishing formulae' such as '*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*.' Even this drastic expression was to be disowned because the 'bit of real' that it was supposed to carry was at risk of being betrayed by the binary logic of language: 'I am trying to give you a bit of real, concerning... the human species. And I say to you that there is no sexual relation. But it's embroidery... because I take part in "yes or no"' (SXXIII: 16/3/76). Reference to the knot, whose rings, unlike the neurotic interlinking of tori, do not link directly but instead disjunctively turn around one another by means of a third (love's overlapping of two

lacks does not make a chain), allowed Lacan to make a subtle shift from stating that the sexual rapport does not exist to *there exists a sexual non-rapport*: ‘A topology is what permits us to grasp how elements that are not knotted two by two can nonetheless make a knot... It is in this that the term sexual non-rapport can be supported in a sayable fashion’ (SXXII: 15/4/75). The knot writes, or *monstrates*, the non-rapport rather than negatively demonstrating the rapport’s non-existence.

If we might be tempted to vaguely refer to the real (of sexuality) as an ‘obscurity’ we should, argues Lacan in a distinctively Borromean formulation, be aware that the word, ‘obscure’, is ‘only a metaphor... because if we had a bit of real, we would know that the light is no more obscure than the shadows, and vice versa’ (SXXIII: 16/3/76). This statement jars with our expectations: we anticipate the dull profundity of an amateur poet or dialectician – that ‘shadows are no more obscure than light’ – and instead find that the *sens* has been given a further disorientating twist. This *dissolution* of the linguistic binary beyond mere reversal, such that the *couple* (light and shadow) no longer exist through their capacity to signify, is induced by the intrusion of a third dimension (‘if we had a bit of real...’). When it comes to the real, metaphorical substitutions, which aim to re-present the real (as an obscurity, a beyond, a limit etc.), can only fail because the real *ex-sists* to any ‘system of oppositions.’

How can Lacan’s contention that there exists a sexual non-rapport not remind us of the strange quality that psychoanalysis identifies in articulated negation? When the subject states that what he was dreaming about was not his mother, no amount of interpretative flattening of this knot into a *binary* opposition (of avowal [‘mother’] and disavowal [‘not mother’]), from which a *unitary* meaning is artificially derived, will have any effect on the symptomatic knotting of RSI that produces such distortions. Just as the knot is a writing that ‘supports a real’, the sexual non-rapport or the real of the subject’s desire, has been ‘supported in a sayable fashion’ by this positivised negative, the two terms of which (‘mother’ and ‘not mother’) are not linked one to one but nonetheless make a knot: there exists a not-mother. This knot is not a riddle that requires from the analyst a response that would turn a half-said truth into the whole truth by naming the referent of the subject’s desire but one that reads it as a symptomatic response on the part of the subject to the lack in the Other (the binding of language and *jouissance* of which ‘*fort-da*’ is a paradigmatic example). It is the real of sexuality, rather than a noumenal referent, that turns the flattened chain into a three-dimensional knot:

The idea of unconscious *representation* is a totally empty idea... it is an *abstraction*. One can only suggest the idea of representation in withdrawing from the real all of its concrete weight... I propose giving [the unconscious] another body... the words constitute a body... Sexuality is entirely taken in these words... This is much more important than knowing what the unconscious means or does not mean. (1977c: 3-4)

The above statement is, I think, a more nuanced reprisal of the eye-catching and no doubt deliberately provocative pessimism with which Lacan began the same 1977 lecture:

The real is in extreme *opposition* to our practice. It is... a *limit* idea of what has no sense. Sense is what we operate with in our practice... The real is this *vanishing point*... Our practice is a swindle [*escroquerie*], at least considered beginning from the moment we start from this vanishing point. (1977c: 1)

This is a naive, pre-Borromean real, *thought* in terms of a dichotomy ('opposition'), a topographical boundary ('limit') or an interminably deferred finality ('vanishing point'). Lacan had, in the previous month's seminar, announced in a deceptively forthright fashion that '[a]nything that is not founded on matter is a fraud [*escroquerie*]' before allaying fears that he was readying a late career move into neuroscience by adding that if 'people want to identify [the real] with *la matière*' then the latter should be *written* as '*l'âme-à-tiers* [third-party-soul]' (SXXIV: 11/1/77). If, in his earlier work, Lacan had endeavoured to articulate why a practice devoted to I at the expense of S was a fraud (ego psychology) before arguing that a practice devoted to S at the expense of R would be interminable and ineffective, he now argued that the Borromean clinic should be founded on R as '*l'âme-à-tiers*.'

5.4. The Knot's Three-dimensional Wedging

With Lacan's declaration that the *idea* of unconscious representation is a weightless 'abstraction' in mind, we can return here to '[t]he body [which] only enters into the analytic perspective inasmuch as it makes an orifice, and is knotted to some symbolic or real' (SXXII: 13/5/75). As neither a sphere nor a point, the psychoanalytic body's qualitative structural feature is the hole (the mouth, anus, eye or ear) that derives *jouissance* from an object that covers over the real lack in S to which this body is knotted. This body – quite distinct from the 'geometry of the sack' drawn up by Freud – is, in Lacan's Borromean aesthetics (with respect to which his reference to the body as a Klein bottle is an inessential but useful didactic supplement), a 'gut-torus' – a term that highlights the visceral nature of his 'rings of string':

One is in the imaginary. However elaborated one makes it – and this is what analysis leads us back to – one is in the imaginary. There is no means to reduce its imaginarity. It is here that topology makes a step. It permits you to think – but it is a thought after the fact [*d'après-coup*] – that the aesthetic, in other words, what you feel, is not in itself transcendental. The aesthetic is tied to what is only a contingency, that it is this topology that is the right one for a body. (SXXII: 18/3/75)

What the subject 'feel[s]' – what *resonates* in a body that is sensitive to *contingent* signifiers rather than transcendental concepts – is the *jouissance* that language, with effects that cannot be anticipated *before* the fact, displaces and stirs up.

If, as is suggested by Lacan's presentation of the knot in terms of guts and cords rather than lines and circles, this psychoanalytic geometry had more substance to it than its Cartesian forebear, this was not in order to re-orient the clinic around a material *ding an sich*. Topology's reduction of the imaginary is instead a matter of dimensions:

[T]here are several ways to approach space.

Being *captivated* by the notion of dimensions, that is, by cuts, is the characterology of a saw technique. It is even reflected in the notion of the *point*, for the fact that it qualifies as one that which has... *zero dimensions* – that is, *that which doesn't exist*.

On the basis, on the contrary, of rings of string, a *wedging* [*coincage*] occurs, since it is the crossing of two continuities that stops a third continuity. Doesn't it seem that this wedging could constitute the initial phenomenon of a topology? (SXX: 131-132)

The ‘saw technique’ to which Lacan opposes his Borromean ‘wedging’ is that of Euclidean geometry: a point is constituted when two one-dimensional lines ‘saw’, or intersect with, each other. However, this point, since it has zero dimensions, doesn’t exist or ‘exists’ only as an abstract mathematical *idea* or a philosophical *ideal* (the unitary cogito). The perceptual ego is ‘captivated’ by the notion that it occupies the central point toward which lines converge. The challenge that the knot was called to answer was that of situating and ‘wedging’ an *irreducible topos* that is not a point. Furthermore, the knot allows us to particularise these holes because there are seven of them (unlike fantasy’s cross-cap which only has one).

‘This geometry is not imaginary, unlike the geometry of triangles; it’s a geometry of the real, of rings of string’ (2013c: 6). The real at stake here is not simply that of the rings themselves, inasmuch as they are ‘real things’ that possess a materiality that lines do not, but what the materiality *conferred by nodality* (*la matière* as ‘*l’âme-à-tiers*’) makes *impossible*. The ring’s resistant materiality does not precede nodality; it is the latter that constitutes the former. This is probably somewhat opaque, so let us examine how this ‘geometry of the real’ comes to be *written*. Suppose we observe the logic of Lacan’s topological aesthetics (according to which matter is a consequence of nodality) and attempt to draw the first component of this geometry – a single circle. This geometrical figure is an ideational abstraction made up of dimensionless points. Prior to its being knotted, it is *insubstantial* and non-existent. Suppose we now draw a second circle that sits atop the first. Whilst we would be forced to include a break in one of the lines in order to show how the second line passes over it, thereby inferring three-dimensional depth, there is *no reason* for our circles to be where they are; there is nothing *stopping* them from being somewhere else and becoming circles in solitude. Now suppose that we produce a writing in which the ‘function of the at-least-three’ is operative. Since three is the minimum, we do not go one, two, three but instead *begin* with a Borromean triunity. Suddenly, our feeble circles have been lent body, not in and of themselves but in their topological entanglement: they knock against each other, each serving as *material blocks* to the other’s movement. With this ‘geometry of weaving [*tissage*]’ (which has nothing to do with Greek geometry, which is made of nothing but abstractions), what I try to articulate is a geometry that resists’ (1977c: 2). Furthermore, the holes that they materially *wedge* are now *irreducible*, having previously completely failed to manifest themselves in the flat circles. The gut-torus, essentially defined by the hole that is the consequence (and condition) of its being knotted, ‘is not a body all

alone. If not for the symbolic, and the *ex-sistence* of the real, the body would have no aesthetic at all, because there would be no gut-torus. The gut-torus... is made from this non-existent relation between the symbolic and the real' (SXXII: 18/3/75). The gut-torus is 'made', as an affective, carved body of the drive, by a real lack that subtends the Other's symbolic demands. It does not 'exist' until it is disjunctively linked with language (S) and the impossibility (R) that language brings with it. We can begin to see how the knot is neither something that the subject figures nor a figuration of the subject, but a *structural logic* that, by its wedging, conditions the subject as an *jouissant* '*corps-sistance*' (SXXIV 14/12/76).

The subject is not constituted at the *intersection* of two or more abstract lines; instead, in the knot's construction, there is 'something that *sins* [*pèche*]... For what prevents [*empêche*] these two lines from *slipping* [*glisser*] over one another?' (SXXII: 10/12/74). Much is at stake in this slippage. Firstly, we should note that Lacan previously used the word *glissement* to denote the sliding of the signified under the signifier (E: 419). Thanks to the bar that separates signifier from signified, signification is fluid and unstable – such is the fate of the subject as that which one signifier represents for another signifier. This loss of a self-identical unity that never existed in the first place is '*le péché, la première faute*' of castration (SXXIII: 18/11/75). Lacan's use of the terms *glissement* and *péché* to describe what occurs in both the signifying *chain* and the *knot* invites us to discern the (dis)continuity between the two. Strictly speaking, the Borromean topology is a chain because it is made up of more than one element. However, unlike a chain, and like a knot, it comes apart with a single cut which is why Lacan comes up with the neologism, '*chaînoeud*' (SXXIII: 10/2/76). The symbolic (chain) is only one component of the knot: unlike the pure chain which can slide indefinitely, the knot also consists and *ex-sists*; its *glissement* *does something more*. It is by slipping over one another that the lines 'realise the *essence* of the Borromean knot... [by] determining, gripping, a point' (SXXII: 10/12/74):

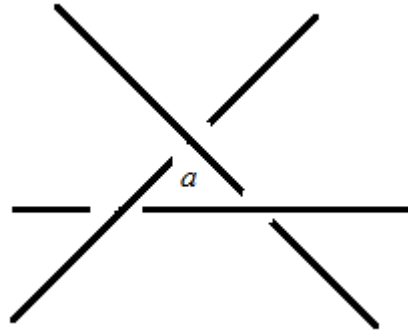


Fig. 22

The slippage is not that of an interminable, post-structuralist indeterminacy: a point that is quite different to the ideic Euclidean point is *wedged* by this dynamic that is caused by the knot's original sin (i.e. the failure of RSI to harmoniously unify or intersect). In accordance with the chronology that governs the *writing* of Lacan's 'geometry of the real', it is not simply the substance of the lines in and of themselves that constitutes this hole but their interaction with the other lines (their slipping over one another). It is a 'Borromean chain... [that] *glisse* towards the knot' (SXXIII: 9/3/76). The wedging of RSI topologically defines, and is defined by, a void (*das Ding*) occupied by the object (*a*). The position adopted by the subject with respect to this void determines his mode of *jouissance* (figure 20). For example, if one were to tug on the rings of S and I as the obsessional does, the space of (*jouis*-)*sens* would get larger and more pervasive whilst the holes of phallic *jouissance* and JÅ would be squeezed to a point, ready to re-emerge with the affective power of a coiled spring's stored energy when the imperia of imaginary-symbolic fictions falter having been spread precariously thin. This specificity and fixity is unavailable in the flat surface topologies that appear in Lacan's earlier seminars.

The qualitative knot, despite the fact that it can be written with lines, cannot be reduced to the two dimensions of a flattened abstraction: '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... that changes nothing' (SXXII: 10/12/74). Similarly, an attempt to flatten '*l'âme-à-tiers*' of not-mother and imagine its *sens* will change nothing in the real. Ultimately, what Lacan refers to as Freud's '*flattened out*' (SXXIV: 11/1/77) topography is a wretched testimony to 'the disadvantages of imaged

figurations' which 'says a lot about the difficulty of the reference to the real' (SXXII: 10/12/74). It quite simply 'doesn't favour the pertinence of the thinking it is intended to convey [*traduire*]' (Lacan, 2011: 19). It is precisely the pertinence of Freudian thought – or, indeed, its impertinence; its shocking, scandalous import that had been nullified by the ego psychology that Freud's topography had legitimated – that Lacan attempted to translate (*traduire*) without remainder by presenting his Borromean knots as a writing that 'supports a real.'

The reader may have noted an incongruity in Lacan's castigation of the second topography: how can it be both 'flattened out' and a 'sack' that 'contains' the drives? Surely, if it were entirely two-dimensional, it could not command the three-dimensional space necessary to enclose anything? Here, we can step back a little and take account of an argument proffered in *Seminar IX*. In this, his most sustained examination of the surface topology that we introduced in Part Two, Lacan, having registering his qualms regarding *depth* psychology, claimed that the subject is two-dimensional (SIX: 7/3/62). The unconscious is not subterranean: if the trajectory of the interior eight's inverted redoubling appears to *slip under* its origin rather than intersecting it in a distortion-free single turn, this is a consequence not of depth but of time (repetition). Lacan had praised the implicit 'topologisation' at work in the first topography (SIX: 10/1/62), observing that 'this envelope that the neurological apparatus is has *no interior* because it's a *single surface*' (SX: 152) – the single, depthless surface of the Möbius strip that solves the structural quandary of a trace's 'double inscription'. In the second topography, the buried unconscious is left very much out of the loop which, in its relative absence, has become an immaculate relay from perception to preconscious to ego. Ten years later, in '*L'étourdit*', the neurotic's suffering is resolved by the *deflation* of fantasy's asphere and the 'the *putting flat* of the phallus... [as] the [Möbius] strip, where analysis finds its end' (ETD: 26). When, in other words, the phallus is recognised not as an object possessed by an agent of, and exception to, castration ($\exists x \sim \Phi x$) who supports a bounded Other (closed set: $\forall x \Phi x$), but as an inescapable *function* that the *desidero* cannot evade ($\sim \exists x \sim \Phi x$), we return to the *insubstantial* subject, albeit one that is freed from any delusional or debilitating identificatory fixation (open set: $\sim \forall x \Phi x$).

In *Seminar XXII*, Lacan adds an important Borromean nuance necessitated by the reintroduction of the body and the joint articulation of structure and *jouissance*. Pondering why it is that he and others find the task of reproducing these knots so tricky, he decides that this difficulty '*demonstrate[s]*' something about the writer himself: 'It is

that, fundamentally, *the being who speaks...* is always somewhere, badly situated, *between two and three dimensions...* [W]e must not *imagine* that *walking* has the least relation with space in three dimensions' (SXXII: 14/1/75). If we were approaching this claim without having read anything else by Lacan, our first, and entirely understandable, inclination might be to regard this as utter gibberish: I know very well that my body is a volumetric substance that moves around a three-dimensional environment. It is, then, vital to recognise the specific nature of this outlandish assertion's object: Lacan is addressing 'the being who *speaks*'. The being who *walks* is the Cartesian extended substance: an embodied *Innenwelt* that navigates the *Umwelt*. For Lacan, the famous dualism with which Descartes distinguished mind (*res cogitans*) from body (*res extensa*) is illegitimate because the body, situated and articulated by the Euclidean geometry upon which the philosopher's theorisation relied, is not separated from thought but is instead a product of it. It is the body that the ego *imagines* itself to have. Contrary to what references to volume and depth might encourage us to assume, the structural aspect most integral to the *imagined* three-dimensional space of enveloped-enveloping spheres is actually the two-dimensional *surface*: 'Flattening out' is the action of 'thought, to which extension is in fact stuck' (SXXII: 18/2/75). Here, we can settle the incongruity noted above: Freud's topography owes its ability to 'contain' the drives to its coherent *surface*, not its volume.

The corporeal *parlêtre* suffers from topological 'extimacy': a voice escapes his interiority, exceeding conscious ownership, and another, radically foreign voice conditions his desire. Psychic space's third dimension is constituted in reference not to the surface but the hole that, we recall, is the fundamental property of the symbolic. Hence why, in an effort to make clear that the dimensions of subjective space are not solely the effect of sight's *méconnaissance*, Lacan contends that the subject 'exists' in three *dit-mensions*. When *topos* and *logos* combine, it is not a walking body but a speaking/ spoken body that is at stake. The latter is a corporeal subject who cannot find his *place*, his central, anchoring locus, with respect to the Other's desire. Uncertainly situated between two and three dimensions – as both a being who walks and *imagines* surfaces and a being who speaks and *experiences* in relation to the hole –, 'it's by means of knots that we think space' (2013a: 16).

5.5. Borromean Holes

In certain diagrams, the nodal writing's advance on topographical representation can be made more readily apparent: it situates a third dimension without recourse to either surface or linear depth (i.e. a ring that is beneath a second ring is above a third ring that is above the second ring):

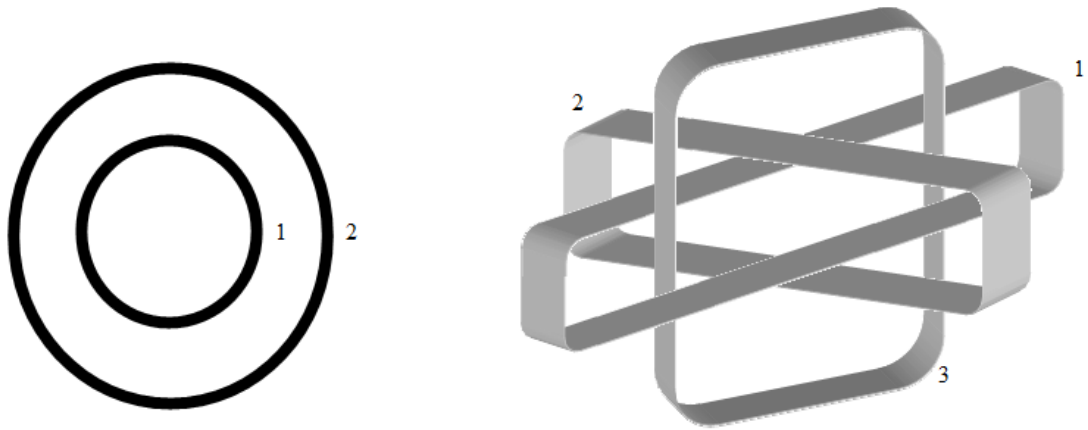


Fig. 23

Lacan's 'trinitary logic' (SXXIII: 16/3/76) is neither that of enveloped-enveloping spheres (as we can see, the coherent space of envelopment is always ruined by an *ex-sistent* third) nor that of bounded Eulerian circles representing the operations of union and intersection. Three holes are the necessary condition of this non-imaginary and material *topos*:

- 1). S cuts a hole in R, making it not-all and accessible only in 'bits.'
- 2). S is holed: the subject can never satisfactorily 'say it all' ('*Urverdrängung*: there is a hole' [1975b: 5])
- 3). The foundation of I, the body, is a gut-torus defined by erogenous orifices.

The hole, *necessary for the knot's construction*, is an affront to the egoic thought that had been so comforted by Freud's topography. In this respect, Lacan's interest in the knot is entirely consistent with the concerns articulated in his earliest *écrits* such as 'The Mirror Stage':

I do not see why a *theory* of knots... 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. (SXXII: 11/2/75)

In the above quotation's first sentence, we can identify a shift from theory to practice. This is not, however, the standard, seamless transition of a shift to practice as the active mobilisation of theory. Instead, it is compelled by the '*extimate*' hole's subversion of egoic thought that renders *theoria* untenable. A conscious 'theory of the unconscious' would always seek to morosely close the gap; to flatten the material (as '*l'âme-à-tiers*') produced in analysis – to *understand* it in terms of the '*idea* of unconscious *representation*' that 'withdraw[s] from the real all of its concrete weight.'

Like Felman's 'literary thing', the knot (as the 'analytical thing') is not solely academic: the toric holes – that subvert the *intuitive* distinction between inside and outside and *upon which the knot is founded as a writing* – make the *act* of writing the knot feel very unnatural and we inevitably *blunder*, as Lacan himself repeatedly did. 'Why', he asks having just corrected a cock-up, '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' (SXXII: 18/2/75). There is something that resists the hypothesising non-dupe's attempts to form a satisfactory theory of the unconscious that would institute a practice free from *experimentation*. It is the resistance to the flattening 'thought that makes a circle', thereby negating the hole necessary for the knot's trinitary (topo)logic to function, that nodal writing allows us to *experience*. The slips and *actes manqués* that betray the difficulty our thought has in handling this knot 'make of this knot something like an example of a *mathesis manqué*... *never familiar in any case*. Why not see in the aversion that this manifests the trace of the first repression itself?' (SXXII: 8/4/75) This is perhaps Lacan's most provocative and suggestive contention regarding this writing: that the knot, as a rigorous *and* mad *topos* (rather than a surrealist dreamscape or an indistinct negativity that, in a metaphoric substitution, words such as 'obscure' stand in for), actually *is*, in a non-analogical sense, the foundational discovery of psychoanalysis:

Practice manipulating [the knot]. *This thing is nothing less than the Urverdrängt, the original, primordial repression*. Manipulating this little knot will give you nothing of the repressed, since this repressed is the hole – *you will never have it*. But *en route* you will familiarise yourselves – at least your hands – with this which you cannot in any fashion understand. (SXXII: 14/1/75)

To put it another way, one will, in this Borromean *practice*, become acquainted with that which one cannot in any fashion *flatten* by submitting it to conscious thought. In this respect, the knot fulfils the same function as the ‘incomprehensible’ *Écrits* which forced analysts to attain to ‘a place from which they can see that they’re talking about something they do not *understand*’, something, that is, that they must instead *read* (Lacan, 2008: 106). Our difficulty in representing the knot derives from the fact that it is not a surface. One cannot ‘have’ or incorporate the repressed by folding it back into pre-established knowledge because, *as it formally operates in the knot*, the *Urverdrängt* is not a content but an ‘*extimate*’ and irreducible hole: ‘That is what the Borromean knot means – the hole of the symbolic is inviolable’ (SXXII: 11/3/75).

Such is this topology’s non-trivial accord with the original psychoanalytic discovery – in the sense that *the difficulty that thought has with the Borromean knot is exactly the same difficulty that thought had with the Freudian navel* since both owe their *ex-sistence* to the hole – that its writing unleashes the plague again: ‘If I was one day taken hold of by the Borromean knot, it was in relation to this order of event... which is called analytic discourse’ (SXXII: 8/4/75). The psychoanalytic subject reappears as *wedged*, as ‘taken hold of’ by this nodal *topos*. As is characteristic of Lacan’s re-turn to Freud, this writing’s relation to the original event is not that of a reduplication (an ideal that leads only to doctrinal and institutional entrenchment) or an explanation but, to recall Miller’s formulation, ‘a re-launching of... the difficulty of psychoanalysis.’ Lacan had prepared the ground for the renewal as early as *Seminar II*:

In every dream, Freud says, there’s *an absolutely incomprehensible point*, belonging to the domain of the unknown – he calls this the navel of the dream. Such things aren’t emphasised in his text because people probably think it’s poetry. It isn’t. It means that there is *a point which cannot be grasped* in the phenomenon, the point where the relation of the subject to the symbolic surfaces. (SII: 105)

Remembering that, at this point in his work, poetry is basically a byword for metaphor, Lacan’s purpose is clear: the navel’s status as ‘an absolutely incomprehensible point’ must be taken *seriously*. With the knot, he attempts to write what ‘cannot be grasped’, to monstrate, and practice upon, what cannot be theorised – a topology that owes its consistency and *ex-sistence* to an irreducible hole.

If Lacan’s radicalisation of the Freudian discovery – typified by his insistence that ‘the unconscious is the real’ (that one should make oneself the dupe of) inasmuch as it

is structurally determined by an *impossible*-to-close hole (*Urverdrängung*) – may itself, through endless regurgitation and commentary, become a ‘pretty fossil’ we can still, with ‘fossilization arriving’ pass the time by ‘making knots between [our] fingers’, partaking in an *experiment* that ‘would suggest... a little more *ingenuity*’ (SXXII: 15/4/75). It will be this very ingenuity (in the absence of hypotheses), rather than obsessional doubt, that will be required when reading the *real* and untheorisable unconscious.

Of course, the claim that the subject’s existence is ‘guaranteed’ by the hole leaves Lacan open to the charge levelled by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy – that he is importing an ontology from philosophical discourse (i.e. negative theology). Lacan’s rejection of *a* philosophical discourse has, so the argument goes, not resulted in a convincing and wholesale break:

Must we understand that the ‘I think’ suffices to insure *ex-sistence*? Certainly not, and Descartes stumbles... [F]or something to exist, there must be a hole. Is not this hole simulated by the ‘I think,’ since Descartes empties it?... Without these holes, it would not even be thinkable for something to be knotted.... *Existence as such is supported by what, in each of these terms, RSI, makes a hole.* (SXXII: 17/12/74)

This is, in the main, reheated material that would have done little to excite the intellectual palate of Lacan’s contemporary audience: the alienated subject is split between thinking and being; there is no suturing instance of the ‘*ergo*’ because thought, once it has been emptied of the content provided by (potentially) deceitful perceptions and intuitions cannot guarantee existence. The insubstantial subject produced by Cartesian doubt is *a* hole or *one* empty set. However, with the Borromean knot (a development exemplified by Lacan’s final sentence), he was finally able to grant the psychoanalytic subject a little more existential heft without lapsing into the classical, substantial ontology that his earlier structuralist endeavours had so stringently circumvented.

Rather than having to choose between the options afforded by a *binary* logic – that is, the dichotomy between imaginary consistency and the symbolic hole –, ‘the function of the at-least-*three*’ holes is to support an existence that is evenly distributed across consistency, the hole and *ex-sistence*. Topologically speaking, the ‘positivity’ of the knot materialises in simultaneity with the ‘negativity’ of the hole: the knot is tied by means of the hole but the hole is only constituted when the knot is tied. How could a subject that is something more than a perpetual, negative fading be presented without

reproducing another variant on the being that the ego believes it constitutes? ‘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’ (SXXII: 11/2/75). We might just as easily ask how a construction can be made to *consist* of which the *ex-sistence* is not *absolutely* outside and get the same answer. Nonetheless, this is not a negative theology: for there to be a hole, there has to be a consistence and *ex-sistence*.

If the knot’s constitutive, holed elements make a whole, this does not occur in a fashion to which we are accustomed. Since each of the rings *ex-sist* to the others, each ring is real and, furthermore, since it is *impossible*, thanks to this structuration of parts, that the knot’s minimum be anything other than it is, ‘[t]he real that is at stake, is the knot in its entirety’ (SXXIV: 15/2/77). Since each of the knot’s elements are circles that comprise a *consistent* unity that hold together by virtue of a consistency imparted by the other two circles through a collective structural accord, both its parts and whole are also imaginary. Since each of the rings organise a hole and it is on the basis of this incompleteness that the knot is formed, the function of the symbolic is equally present and effective.

The knot forces us to think in a Borromean fashion, to keep in mind the structurally interdependent relation between the three categories. If the shift from the walking body (*topos*) to the *parlêtre* (*topos* and *logos*) means that the three dimensions should be thought of as three *dit-mensions* (i.e. S and two others that are affected by their being tied by means of the S’s hole), Lacan takes this contention to an interesting extreme when, in *Seminar XXIV*, he remarks that, as *dit-mensions*, S produces only *mi-dit* truths, the ‘imaginary... is always wrong’ whilst ‘the real tells the truth, but it does not speak’ (SXXIV: 15/2/77). This is not to suggest that R and I are simply discursive, just as they are not simply beyond or primary to discourse, but that this is how they are discursively manifested or experienced:

- 1). S+I: the totalisation of what has been said as the *whole* truth (which is ‘always wrong’ because the universe of discourse is not a closed set).
- 2). S+R: an unsuturable rupture or silence in what has been said.

What the Borromean knot forces us to recognise is that S is not the sole base layer to which the other categories are added or the inalienable prism through which they are viewed. For example, we must also consider how S and I operate with respect to R:

- 1). R+I: this is, as we will see, the Edenic ideal of pre-discursive, unified nature, an ideal to which the speaking subject has no access (*'fiat lux'*).
- 2). R+S: S introduces 'difference as such' into the former, making it not-all (*'fiat trou'*).

It is legitimate to note a further Borromean sophistication and redouble the trinity. For example, with respect to R, S can have multiple and diverse effects:

- 1). The imaginarily symbolic: a geometric surveying or scientific modelisation of R.
- 2). The symbolically symbolic: the endless displacement of the real by the pure *glissement* of the chain.
- 3). The really symbolic: the discourse (be it a physicist's *écrit* or an analyst's intervention) that profoundly transforms the real.

This could also be considered in terms of naming, where R+S(I) is the perfect representation of the referent (e.g. 'Spot the Dog'), R+S(S) is the complete alienation of the subject at the hands of the signifier (e.g. prisoner no. 5290) and R+S(R) is the name that radically alters the named (e.g. being referred to as a blunderer (*étourdi*) during the early stages of symbolic maturation could conceivably have determinative effects on the desirous subject).

If the extraordinary richness of this Borromean architecture allows Lacan to speak with a new clarity about the interactions of his categories and the effects of such entanglements – a conceptual complexity derived from a startlingly simple composite of topological relations and qualities – it can also, by virtue of these very same topological relations and qualities, embody irresolvable paradoxes that prove ruinous for systematic coherence.

5.6. Borromean Paradoxes

Efforts to lucidly verbalise the trinitarian nodality often devolved into a Borromean *Umschreibung* as it exceeded the binary logic of opposition and contradiction:

I explain in the measure of my means what the knot... can add of consistency to [RSI]. One will remark, however, to leave said *consistency on the level of the imaginary* takes here the value of *distinguishing* it in a triad which *keeps its* [symbolic] *sense* [insofar as the rings are *differentiated* solely by the letters RSI], even in *demonstrating that the real is excluded from it*. This is the type of problem I find [*retrouve*] again at every turn (without looking [*chercher*] for it, it should be said). (SXXII: Introduction)

By its very structure, the knot imparts an imaginary consistency to each of its rings. The categories are *homogenised* by being presented as topologically equivalent. However, the very principle of non-distinction (I) has itself now been differentiated and prioritised. It is ‘difference as such’ that is introduced by S as the inalienable condition of sense (the *differentiation* of letters: I is I because it is not S or R). The universe that is inaugurated by the symbolic count has a structural fault: in its *ex-sistence*, R renders S incomplete. Nonetheless, R is the *ex-sistent* means by which the *distinguished* terms of I and S (which do not link directly to form One) combine as topologically equivalent elements in the same, consistent knot. To count to three is to count to one. This homogenisation is a quality of I, which, by being distinguished...

One does not have to seek this aporia since, in a very *real* sense, it *is* the knot. Certainly, in these late seminars we see a thought grappling with an ‘analytical thing’ that is beyond the limits of theory but this was not, to recall Roudinesco’s characterisation, a search for the absolute. The particular problem here is that the ‘limit’ is Borromean rather than geometric: ‘it is not a matter... of a representation – it is matter of the real. This limit is only conceivable in terms of *ex-sistence*, which... means the play by the Borromean knot... to one of the consistencies’ (SXXII: 15/4/75). The knot *is* this dynamic. *Ex-sistence* is the inexpugnable condition of *consistence*: never mind searching for it, we can’t even get rid of it. As Lacan puts it in reference to this structure: ‘when you win something somewhere, it is forcibly at the expense of something else’ (SXXII: 10/12/74). Even the imaginary *ex-sists* insofar as it cannot be considered at the same time as S or R (being antithetical to the problems caused by the interaction between these two categories) or, at least, can only be considered in terms dictated by the knot. We are faced with a carousel of the absolute which, as it turns in

the afternoon sun, invariably leaves one third of its face in darkness before it reappears at the expense of another third. Such is the ‘problem I find again at every turn...’

The topological homogeneity *and* heterogeneity of the three knotted ‘dimensions’ meant that the knot was not simply *beyond* language, but that it ruined language, challenging the very rules and *limits* that govern the production of meaning and forcing Lacan into barely legible rhetorical contortions:

Follow me well: if I state – *which can only be done through the symbolic*, through speech – that the *consistency* of these three loops is *only supported by the real*, it is because I make use of the *distance in sense* permitted between RSI as individualising these loops, specifying them as such. The distance in sense is there supposed taken at a certain maximum... How would a linguist define the *limits of metaphor*...? What is the maximum distance allowed between the two [signifiers]? (SXXII: 17/12/74)

The knot dynamically stages the metaphorical substitution of imaginary *consistence* for real *ex-sistence* and *vice versa* (holding together by means of an *ex-sistent* ring), but, in doing so, metaphor’s binary logic is torn apart at the seams as it stretches to cover the ‘distance’ between R and I and accomplish the same feat as the knot. The substitutive action that would see R and I placed under the aegis of a metalinguistic S fails; there is no credible link that can be established between R and I; they remain, according to a binary logic, axiomatically incompatible or at a ‘maximum distance’ from one another. And yet, whilst the linguistic *chain* comes apart, the *knot* resists: its rings do not directly link but instead ‘*consist* [by] holding to each other *really* [*réellement*]’ (SXXII: 17/12/74). In other words, *the knot holds by virtue of the very same contradiction that disarticulates the chain*. Furthermore, the heterogeneity is put in place by homogeneity. Therefore, were this knot to become a linguistic object, the linguist would be forced to define not only the maximum distance of metaphor but also its minimum since the rings are, topologically speaking, unequivocally equivalent. The gap between R and I that S would suture is, in simultaneity, absolutely maximal and minimal: the binary logic of sameness and difference no longer makes any *sense*. By *consisting réellement*, the knot evades metaphor’s binding of the ‘same but different.’ The binary logic of the linguistic ‘system of oppositions’, which relies upon there being a *quantifiable* ‘distance’ between terms in order for it to make *sense*, cannot account for the knot’s *qualitative* ‘trinitary logic’ that, of course, is itself the result of a *failed metaphor*. We can squash the knot into a ball or stretch it out but nothing will change. The defective imaginary closure of the symbolic and geometric exclusion of the real by the Name-of-the-Father is precisely

why RSI are entangled without normative order. And yet, we would have no means of having this discussion if Lacan had not, ‘through the symbolic’, individualised the loops by *naming* them R, S and I...

What is even more remarkable about the knot’s mutual interdependence of mutually exclusive categories is that, despite lacking a final framing ring (there is no dominant, binding term [see figure 24]), it does not spiral off into a post-structuralist ‘bad’ infinity since it can, without its *ex-sistence* or constitutive *emptiness* being compromised, be written or made as a *consistent* whole that can be contained on a page or held in one’s hands. If the knot thus enables Lacan to once again distinguish psychoanalytic subjectivity from philosophical ontology (insofar as ‘my little knot intervenes’ in the philosophical ‘chatter’ that treats existence as an instantiation of a universal by showing that ‘existence is of its nature *ex-sistence*’ and thus irreducible to the symbolic-imaginary constellations into which syllogistic shifts from the general to the particular attempt to force existence [SXXII: 14/1/75]) it also allows him to settle his accounts with Derrida.

The knot ‘changes the meaning of writing’ – the writing that ‘Derrida has emphasised, namely the result of what could be termed a precipitation of the signifier’ (SXXIII: 11/5/76). Whilst Derrida challenges the apparent solidity of binary oppositions by reading the inherent and permanent vacillation of *différance*, he maintains that access to a third-dimensional *hors-texte* can only occur in a delusional, positive sense (immaculate capture of the referent) or negatively, through a deconstructive performance for which the extra-discursive target is always ‘to come.’ Regarding this precipitous *archi-écriture*, Lacan claims that he preceded Derrida by writing the signifier as ‘S’ in his re-vamping of the Saussurean sign (by, that is, disjoining signifier from signified: S/s) in ‘The Instance of the Letter’ (ibid). By contrast, the nodal ‘writing in question comes from somewhere other than the signifier’ (ibid). The knot’s *glissement* is different to the chain’s metonymic *glissement*.

The knot is somehow *firmer* than the signifier without fixing a signified or posing a master-signifier that would artificially halt the signifier’s slippage. On this point, Lacan makes an important statement in the fifth session of *Seminar XXIII*: ‘Topology is based on this: that at the very least, without *counting* [*compter*] whatever else there is, there is the torus.... [which] must be *imagined* as having some kind of physical *support*’ (SXXIII: 10/2/76). The being who walks imagines a surface-dependent, volumetric support, but we must reiterate that the torus’s three-dimensional firmness is not innate

but is instead a consequence of ‘the function of the at-least-three.’ We can also discern a return to a particular preoccupation (counting) through the striking assertion of the torus’s priority. To *count* in the manner of knots is, we recall, a rather different operation to counting in the manner of signifying chains. In this nodal writing, we do not count the tori one, two, three: the ‘gut-torus’ has no materiality or support until three consists *really* as one. It is in this minimum, irreducible to the symbolic count, that a sliding wedges something that signifying difference does not. With Lacan’s reference to S/s in mind, we might think of this topology as a final radicalisation of a statement made in ‘The Instance of the Letter’ that positioned the titular object as ‘the material medium [*support*] that concrete discourse borrows from language’ (E: 413). The nonsensical materiality of the letter which repeatedly disturbs the intentional meaning relayed in weightless intersubjective communion (‘concrete discourse’) has been undercut by a support that is even further detached from the chain. The knot’s three-as-one, the toric count primary to the signifying count, ‘shows that there is something’ – a knot of consistence, *ex-sistence* and the hole – ‘to which signifiers can be attached’ (SXXIII: 11/5/76). If ‘the torus is reason, since it is what allows for knots’ (SXX: 123), we might suggest a renewal of Lacan’s title on the basis of this topological writing and which marks his distance from deconstructionist writing: ‘The Instance, Ex-sistence and Consistence of the Torus, or Reason since Lacan.’

If ‘[t]he knot is not a model’ but ‘a *support*’, what exactly is it a support for? (SXXII: 15/4/75). A year later, in his rejoinder to Derrida, Lacan returns to this enigmatic proposal by adding that the knot is ‘a *support* for a-thinking [*appensée*]’ which ‘*must be written to see how it functions...* A writing is thus an act [*un faire*] which provides a support for thinking’ (SXXIII: 11/5/76). It is when we *write* the knot that the ‘*function* of the at-least-three’ – which, to recall the fourth facet of Lacan’s *déblayage*, allows for ‘a writing... [that] *supports* a real’ – that the distinction between the knot as a writable, pedagogic tool exploited in the seminar (theory) and the knot as something that is (re)written in analysis itself (practice), becomes highly unstable: ‘The real is characterised by being knotted’, rather than existing as an *unsupportable* thing-in-itself outside the text, ‘[y]et this knot has to be made [*faire*]. The notion of the unconscious is *supported* by this... [O]ne is made by this *act x* by which the knot is already made’ (SXXII: 15/4/75).

We have seen how the knot comes to be *made* through a slipping or sin (the Fall from a non-existent unity between subject and (m)Other prompted by the introduction of

signifying difference that allows the subject to form in the wake of the traumatic ‘act x’), causing the subjective topology of RSI to bind in such a fashion that *jouissance* and the void of *das Ding* are wedged, distinguishing the ‘*chaînoeud*’ from the sliding of the interior eight’s ‘*boucle*.’³⁸ Can knots be made differently? Can they be re-made? What has the *act* of writing a knot got to do with clinical practice?

³⁸ It is hoped that the reader is, by now, more convinced of the profoundly wrongheaded nature of the popular contention that Lacan’s topological writing amounted to no more than metaphorical images of structure. Perhaps the most baffling example of this position is provided by James Mellard: ‘Lacan may wish to claim the topology “is” the structure of subjectivity or whatever because, perhaps, a knot “looks like” gnarly convolutions of an actual brain. But, no, it cannot be that very Real thing. The brain is one thing, topology is another, albeit something made to be “like” or to represent the brain’ (2006: 38-39).

5.7. From ‘thinking-the-Borromean-knot’ to ‘monstrating the cord’: Writing the Lacanian (Dis)solution

We can return here to the concerns elucidated by Hogan in response to a case *presentation* (an ‘abstract’ sentence from Lacan is succeeded by a *writing* of knots, an intervention, a *re-writing* and, ultimately, a ‘result’). Hogan had been left decidedly nonplussed by the inadequately explicated link between theory (the sentence and diagrams) and practice (the intervention). However, *it is precisely this link that topology dissolves*:

Topology is not something that [the analyst] must learn as an extra... [W]hether he knows it or does not... from the moment that he does psychoanalysis, this is the *stuff* [*l'étoffe*] into which he cuts... [but] if his topology is constructed in a mistaken way, [it] will be at the expense of his patient.... [Patients] bring to me in a raw living form these very formulae which on occasion are my own; patients say them *strictly, rigorously, exactly* as they are said here. If I had not had a little hint of this topology, already, my patients would have made me re-invent it. (SXIII: 8/6/66)

Since psychoanalysis acts upon the *parlêtre* and not the geometric body that walks or the ego that sees, its practice cannot be disjoined from topology. If the practitioner thinks or imagines he is solely dealing with a biological organ or a conscious subject, he is no longer dealing with a topology and, as far as Lacan is concerned, he is no longer doing psychoanalysis. Topology is not shuttled in as an extraneous, diagnostic tool; it is inalienably contemporary with psychoanalysis: the psychoanalytic subject is a topology. At this juncture, it's worth returning to a previously cited passage (see 1.2) in which Lacan had jokingly speculated as to whether the analyst should ‘rely on the *reality* expressed by the following – that a subject either has the right *stuff* [*l'étoffe*] or he doesn't’. If, in this statement from 1953, *l'étoffe* referred to personality and myth, in 1966 it referred to the subject as a spatio-temporal locus structurally inflected by the effects of the signifiers and traumatic ‘act x’ that ‘made’ it. Once again, *rigor* and *exactitude* are not secured by apparent similarity or reduplication – analysands do not say “ $\$ \diamond a$ ”, but the material produced by the body of the drive and the subject of the unconscious does, if *structure is read in its impossibilities*, betray an impasse obstructing biography, a *qualitative* ‘real-of-the-structure’ supporting the *quantitative* stuff. In this respect, what advance does the Borromean knot's *monstration* facilitate?

Seminar XXII also contains a discussion of *l'étoffe*, only this time it is held up as a topology ‘constructed in a mistaken way’:

[W]hat can be supposed a *demonstration* in the real?

Nothing supposes it other than the *consistency* of which the cord [or torus] is here the *support*. The cord is the foundation of accord... [and] thus becomes the symptom of that by which the symbolic consists...

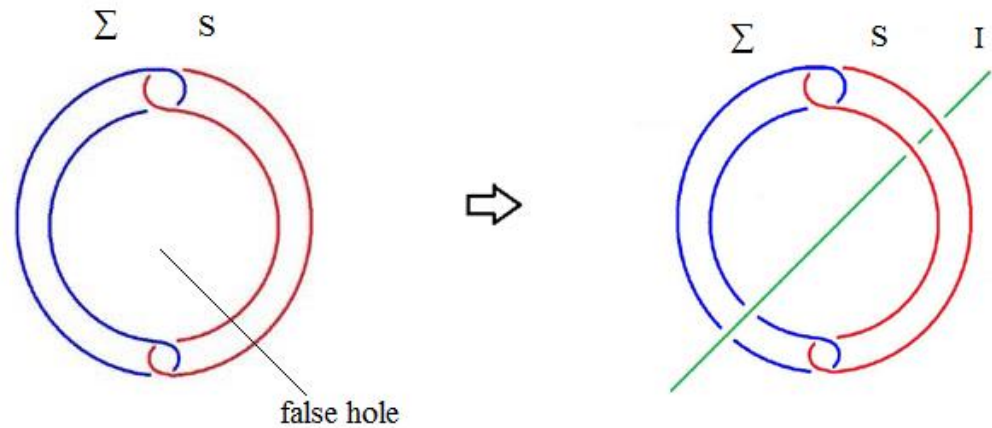
When the cord is *monstrated* [*montrer*], it is because the weave is no longer camouflaged in what one calls the *fabric* [*l'étoffe*]. Fabric is of a permanent *metaphoric* usage – it is what... would give the *image* of a substance. The formula ‘to *monstrate* [*montrer*] the cord’ tells us that there is no fabric that is not a weave. (SXXII: 21/1/75 [Translation altered])

Whereas a *completed fabric* obscures the hole, the *act of weaving* makes evident that *l'étoffe* can only be ‘made’ on the basis of holes. There is a difference between imagining substance and monstrating the cord: much of Lacan’s work on the knot is concerned with elucidating this difference. In a ‘geometry of *weaving*’, positive substance (the consistence by which the knot holds *firm*) and the hole are structurally interdependent. If ‘a circle... is only the consequence of the hole’ (SXXII: 13/5/75) we must still ask ‘what is a hole if nothing surrounds it?’ (SXXII: 18/2/75) Furthermore, neither hole nor circle can ‘exist’ as anything other than pure negativity or lightweight ideation respectively unless, through the writing of a trinitary logic, they support *ex-sistence* – a real that is *demonstrated* in its interaction with the other registers. However, in the above passage, Lacan makes an alteration: rather than trying to demonstrate R as *ex-sistence*, he states that ‘nothing supposes’ this performance other than a *consistent* cord that will instead be *monstrated* through the knot. Such a monstration, which *only* nodal writing can accomplish, implies a provocative affinity between I and R. The import of this final gesture, this terminal (dis)solution, concerns the heart of the question – why turn to topology (monstration) when you have images, models and language (demonstration)? – and it is with an exploration of it that I will conclude this study.

Let us now write the knot belonging to this passage. Whilst Lacan maintained that the determining quality of S was the *hole* of *Urverdrängung* (the impossibility of saying it all), he also argued that the subject derives *jouissance* from this hole – be it either *jouis-sens* (enjoying a fallacious and synthetic totalisation [S+I]) or phallic *jouissance* (enjoying the interminable metonymy of desire [S+R]). Reflecting this intertwining of signifier and *jouissance*, Lacan noted that a fourth ring, the symptom (Σ), redoubles S to ‘make a circle... a new sort of S. The symptom is just as much a part of the

unconscious... In interpreting, we make with the Σ a *circularity*' (MIT: 4). Through a reading of the homophonic and grammatical repetitions in *lalangue*, the analyst *monstrates* the symptomatic cord – the particular fashion in which the analysand organises and *circles* the hole: 'The important thing here is the reference to writing to situate the *repetition* of the symptom, as it *presents* itself in my *practice*' (SXXII: 21/1/75); 'I follow the trail of the hole, and I encounter the Borromean knot', as the insoluble formation (i.e. the knotting of RSI by Σ) arising from 'act *x*' (SXXII: 8/4/75). The writing at stake here is both that which is read in the material letters of speech and, more fundamentally, the cord that underwrites this nonsensical *glissement*. If we assume that *jouissance* is absolutely excluded from S (as Lacan did in his earliest work), then we have no means of localising the hole; the circularity made by the symptom devolves into the pure and unmotivated textuality or 'repetition *automatism*' of the *unknotted* infinite straight line. Lacan gives the 'unary trait' or S1, as that which introduces difference, 'another *support*... [The] *droite infinie*.... [which] has the quality of having the hole all around it' (SXXIII: 11/5/76). This hole is *inexact* and nullibiquitous whilst the line itself 'is not orientable' (SXXII: 8/4/75). Lacking even the Möbius strip's *ex-sistent* twist that produces the distortion in repetition, this 'line-without-points' describes a monotonous and metronomic count from which any trace of the subject is expunged.

We should not *imagine* that symptomatic circularity transforms the symbolic serial into a closed set: 'when the other end of the cord is knotted' – when, that is, the cord's consistence is shown to be dependent upon an unspeakable *ex-sistence* – 'one can hold onto it. This has to do with the real' (SXXII: 14/1/75). Ultimately, as a response to the Other's lack encountered in a causal 'act *x*', the symptomatic 'cord ends up... in the knot of the sexual non-relation', a knot where no two elements are linked (SXXIII: 13/1/76). Lacan writes the circle of Σ +S in terms of two overlapping circles that, because they are not directly linked, only compose a 'false' hole. A *third* component – again presented as the infinite straight line – is required for the constitution of an *irreducible* hole and the knot's weaving:

Fig. 24³⁹

This line has the effect of turning the failed conjunction of $\Sigma+S$ into a toric *support*. Now, since '[t]heir symptom is the most *real* thing that *many* people have', one could write: S, Σ and I, with the latter's effect (consistence) being provided by the infinite line (1975c: 7). This is a common neurotic configuration achieved by rewriting figure 20 in terms of figure 25: S *qua* unconscious is tied to R *qua* Σ by means of I *qua* body. The torus of $\Sigma+S$ and the line of the body are *bound together by ex-sisting to each other*. In figure 20, we can see that phallic *jouissance* occupies the hole wedged by the overlapping of R and S and, as such, *ex-sists* to I (but, of course, it would have no means of existing as wedged if I, instead of binding R and S, was completely absent). This *jouissance*, as the meagre compensation for the accession to subjectivity through the castration instituted by the parasitic phallic signifier, *ex-sists* 'outside the body, as a parasite on the sexual organs' (1975c: 7). For the subject of the signifier, there is no natural instinct or 'genital drive'; there is only repetition and *dérive*.

This is the topology that, with great fanfare, Lacan *gives* to his readers at Caracas as the final result of his return to Freud: 'I think I situate myself better than Freud did in the real at stake where the unconscious is concerned. Because the *jouissance* of the body forms a point where it confronts the unconscious' (2011: 20). This nodal point, around which analytic practice orients itself without recourse to the *theoria* and *sens* *bequeathed* by an institution, is the symptom. With respect to I, the unconscious (S) '*ex-*

³⁹ Figure adapted from 'Les schémas de Staferla IV'.

sists in dis-corps',⁴⁰ making no 'accord with the body' because '[t]he unconscious is what, by speaking, determines the subject as... a being... struck through with this metonymy with which I support desire as for all impossible ever to say as such' (SXXII: 21/1/75). Hence why Lacan refers to '*The woman*' – whose attainment holds the promise of spherical union between subject and Other – as man's (neurotic) symptom.

Breezily remarking in *Seminar XXIV* that psychoanalysis is 'attached' to the idea of 'putting outside what is inside, namely, the unconscious' (much of Lacan's interest in topology derived from its effective destabilisation of this distinction), he proceeds to write the topology (*qua* structural effect of practice) that would result from this imprudent attachment (SXXIV: 14/12/76). If a cut is applied to the surface of a torus, one can turn it inside-out. What also occurs when the internal surface becomes the external surface is that the two holes of the torus (the 'inner' tubular emptiness circled by demand and the 'extimate' void circled by desire [see figure 4]) swap with one another. Now, if we return to figure 22 and apply a cut to S in an effort to drag the unconscious outside, engaging in a search for the hidden truth or buried meaning, what happens is that the ring of S effectively 'envelops' R and I (i.e. having previously been *ex-sistently* knotted to S, the other rings are now knotted *inside* S because this latter ring's holes have been swapped around):



Fig. 25 (SXXIV: 14/12/76)⁴¹

This is the outcome of 'risking' a 'preference given above all to the unconscious', which is to say that interpretation has proceeded in thrall to the pleasure principle (*ibid*). Rather than judiciously intervening by reading the letters of his analysand's speech as symptomatic of a non-rapport between RSI (reading S as $\Sigma+S$), the analyst has

⁴⁰ A neologism condensing discord and body (*corps*).

⁴¹ For visual clarity's sake, I have produced the third 'monstration.'

encouraged his analysand to ramble on (in the hope that he might say *that* or say it all), with the result being an excess of signification that obscures what is actually at stake. In such cases, a second cut or *retournement*, reading the unconscious not as an internal secret but as a distortive, Möbian twist that makes the distinction inside/ outside or *recto/ verso* untenable, is required for the original knot to be restored.

For many of us, our symptom is endured and, on occasion, enjoyed: we have no pressing need for an analyst to show and hold the cord as our ‘foundation of accord’, following the trail of its hole into the knot of the sexual non-rapport. For some, however, there is a fault in the *père-verse* knot. It’s when things go wrong that we can see what there is of psychoanalytic *practice* in the knot’s writing. The knot supports the ‘weight of the real’; it is ‘an *effective* knot which is to say that the cords are *wedged* together. There are cases where this turn-around’, this circularity by means of which each ring and the knot itself achieves consistency in reference to the hole, ‘no longer works because of the triple points that suppress *ex-sistence*’ (SXXII: 18/3/75). In other words, the perfectly balanced trinity of the subjective knot goes awry when the rings do not Borromeanly *ex-sist* to each other. In fact, the ideal balance between three rings does not exist; ‘a knot is something that fails’ and it is either supplemented by the neurotic symptom, fulfilling the structural role of mythic paternity, or one of the triple points (R+I, I+S, S+R), and the *jouissance* wedged therein, comes to dominate in the event of a *direct linkage* between two rings that prompts the loss of a third ring (SXXIII: 17/2/76):

- 1). When R and I are linked rather than Borromeanly knotted by S, as that which allows the subject to take a distance from the Other’s incomprehensible desire, the affect produced is *anxiety*.
- 2). When I invades S in the absence of R, the resulting obsessional subject suffers from *inhibition*: his every action is performed with a view to avoiding an encounter with the real lack in the Other.
- 3). The psychotic, hounded by *extimate* voices, lacks any assurance of bodily consistency (I) and nor does he, unlike the obsessional, hear sense (*‘J’ouis sens’*) through symbolic consistency provided by the Name-of-the-Father (S+I): the ‘verbal parasite’ that plagues him is utterly nonsensical; detached from the signifying chain, it lawlessly emerges from the real (R+S).

In practice, each faulty knot is subjected to *dissolution* before the rings are *reknotted* by means of a fourth term (*sinthome*). Therefore, the Borromean clinic is not solely concerned with a *reading* that prompts destitution (the conclusion of ‘*L’étourdit*’), but also requires the *act of writing* – a nodal writing that, because it *effectively* wedges through a (re)alignment consistence and *ex-sistence*, is not exhausted by the Derridean ‘precipitation of the signifier.’ Insofar as Lacan’s diagrams are not representations but non-metaphorical spatio-temporal topologies of consistence, *ex-sistence* and the hole, the gap between the secondarity of theory and the primacy of practice is crossed when the latter becomes an act of writing. ‘The knot’, *insofar as it is Borromean*, ‘is the *only support* conceivable for a *relation* between something and something else [i.e. the categories RSI]. If on the one hand the knot is abstract, it must at the same time be conceived as concrete’ (SXXIII: 9/12/75). The knot is not a pre-existing, ideal model: ‘it must be done’; it must be *forged* in analysis rather than merely referred to for a diagnosis (SXXIII: 11/5/76).⁴²

Distinct from the symptom, the *sinthome* is not exclusively I, S or R (it was a hierarchical exclusivity that caused an imbalance in the subjective knot in the first place); it instead belongs to all three as the singular fashion in which the missing ring is reintroduced in order to connect *and* separate (or ‘Borromeanise’) the other two (previously *linked*) rings. The neurotic symptom can also be transformed into the *sinthome* following fantasy’s traversal: rather than deriving phallic *jouissance* from the metonymically deferred prospect of the symbolic’s totalisation, the subject enjoys the very impossibility of totalisation (JA) (Chiesa, 2007: 189). To surpass the *impotent* suffering of the neurotic symptom and reconstitute, as Joyce did, one’s own S from this *impossibility* is to induce a new arrangement of I and R, a way of writing one’s *sinthomatique* ‘foundation of accord’ so that neither consistence (ego psychology and inhibition) nor *ex-sistence* (anxiety and psychosis) dominate. Hence why Roudinesco need not be quite so concerned about Lacan’s advocacy of dissolution as a ‘major concept’: if *l’étoffe* of *l’École* had come to be knotted ‘in a mistaken way’, inhibited by group *sens* and obsessional doubt, its dissolution was only the necessary prelude to a reknitting forged in the wake of a traumatic encounter with the fact that ‘the Other is

⁴² It is for this reason that I cannot agree with Geoff Boucher’s assertion that ‘the Borromean knots are a distraction, a lure for the desire to directly comprehend the transmitted message in the form of a spatialized schema’ or his observation that Lacan exhibits ‘an imaginary captivation’ with ‘visual representations for linguistically conveyed concepts’ and ‘symbolic postulation[s] of analogies’ (2012: 146-147).

missing.’ Certainly, all masters die but ‘there is no progress but marked by death...’ (see 1.1)

Topologically, ‘[i]n this set of four, you see two [toric] couples are formed... the *sinthome* and the unconscious [S], and between the imaginary and the real. That is where the *sinthome* emerges’ (SXXIII: 16/12/75):

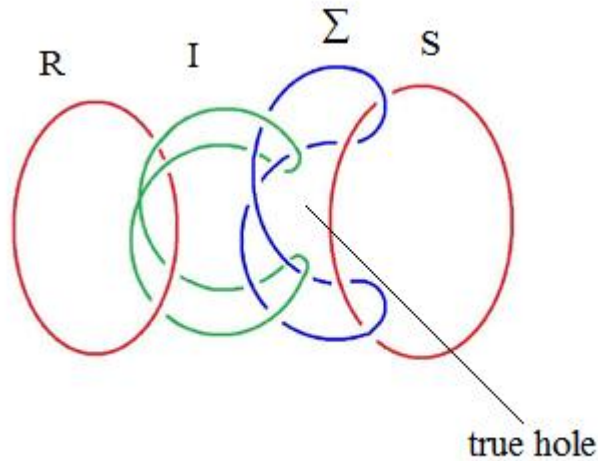


Fig. 26⁴³

In the passage from the neurotic symptom (figure 25) to *sinthome* (figure 27), it is not that the hole of the unconscious *qua* S (*Urverdrängung*), firmed up by symptomatic *jouissance*, has been erased – this remains in one toric couple ($\Sigma + S$) – but that its third component (the line of I) has been replaced by a further toric couple (I+R) which itself constitutes *another* hole: JA (figures 20 and 27). The structural change effected by the *sinthome* is that the neurotic’s symptomatically circled hole of repression is knotted to the hole in the Other. The structure of the neurotic’s lack is fundamentally remodelled by an acknowledgement that he cannot say it all or have *The woman* because there is no Other of the Other. The subject remains castrated – the hole of S remains ‘incurable’ – but the knotting of an additional hole *by means of the sinthome* means that this is *not-all* (s)he is:

⁴³ Figure adapted from ‘*Les schémas de Staferla IV*’.

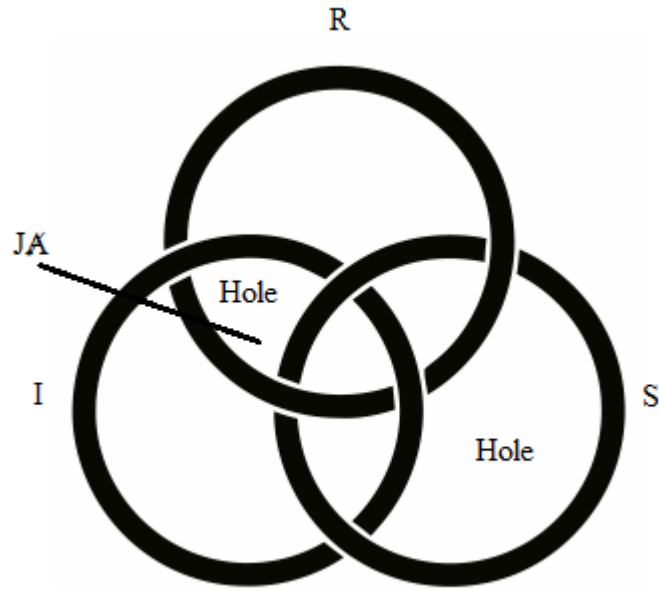


Fig. 27

In *Seminar XXIV*, Lacan opened up the toric circularity of R+I by writing them as infinite lines, emphasising that the hole (x) of JA is an open set:

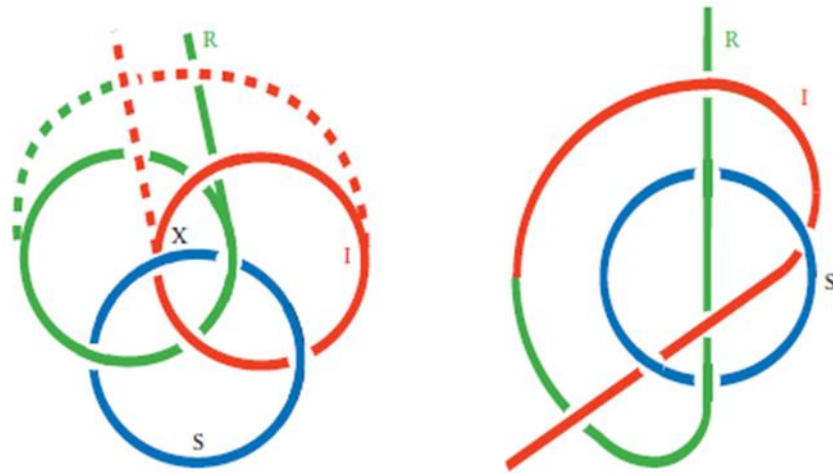


Fig. 28 (SXXIV: 18/1/77)

Whilst in figure 27, ‘the real’, as the impossibility of the sexual rapport, is ‘*very specially* suspended on the body’ – a suspension ‘guaranteed’ by the torus of $\Sigma+S-$, in figure 29, R and I, open up and then merge *outside* S (SXXIV: 18/1/77). It is only when approaching, passing and departing S that the body and R are distinguished by *slipping* over one another. In other words, were it not for the signifier, union between body and

R would be retained, leaving man to enjoy ‘the sexual peace of animals’ (Lacan, 2011: 19). Figure 29 presents a nodalisation of the *vel* of alienation: either one accedes to symbolic subjectivity (in which case R and I are separated by being knotted to S) or one forgoes the existence afforded by representation (there being no *sin* or *slip* [5.4], R and I become *one* line or circle reducible to a dimensionless point). The function of the *sinthome* is to neither engineer a merger between I+R (without S there would be no means of wedging J \bar{A} because the hole made by the flattened circle of I+R would not be a ‘true’, irreducible hole) nor further entrench their dislocation, but to achieve a singular ‘suspension’ of the two on the nodal basis of an individualised, *sinthomatique* S, passing from impossible or impotent *jouissance* to the *jouissance* of impossibility.

5.8. Topology and Time

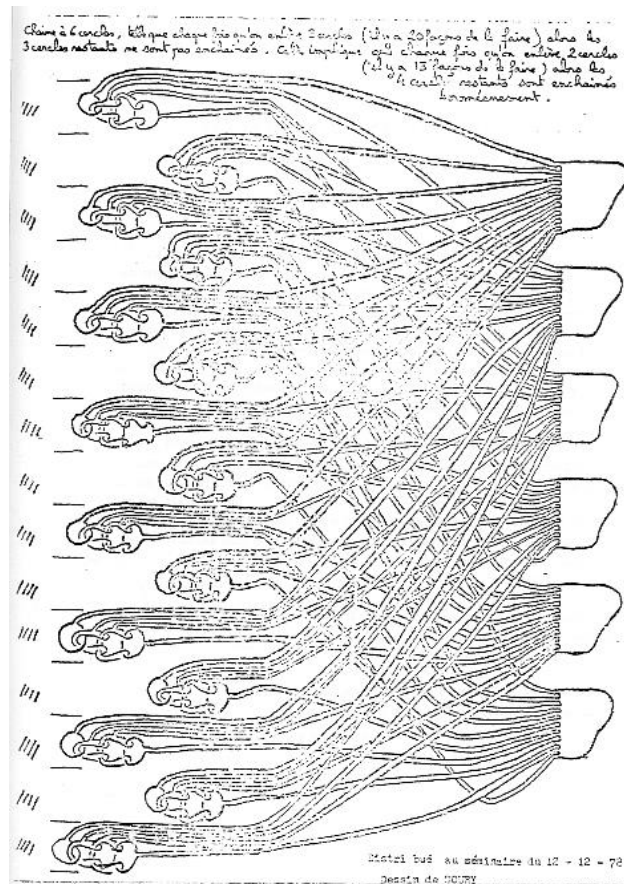
The passage from modelisation to demonstration and on to monstration was not entirely unproblematic. Whilst the first transition – perhaps most forcefully exemplified by the *Möbius* strip's *temporal* demonstration of a structural paradox that overturns intuitive understanding or the demonstrable impossibility of definitively writing the smallest number not written on the board – injected a certain *dynamism* into the static, theoretical overlays of Freudian topographies and Jungian archetypes, the second transition, enabled by the nodal *writing's* support or monstration of the *ex-sistent* real as something more 'actual' than a twist we cannot localise or a number we *cannot write*, demanded *simultaneity*. The two principal acts in Borromean structure (i.e. splicing or (re-)knotting and cutting or dissolution) are directed by the necessity of 'the function of the at-least-three' or, when Σ is involved, the function of the at-least-four. Each ring owes its consistence, hole and *ex-sistence* to its being tied to the other two (or three): either R, S and I (and Σ) are *all* 'present and correct', wedged by one another, or *none* of them are, having ceased, as immaterial and abstract circles, to consist, make a hole or *ex-sist*. In this writing there can be no *temporal* addition or subtraction of components: the only modifications possible are radical and instantaneous. Whilst knots do 'have a dynamics', 'bind[ing] together... [s]omething one supposes to be stuck in these knots' (i.e. *jouissance*), it remains that this dynamic can only occur when the components are *simultaneously* bound together (SXXIII: 10/2/76).

Perhaps concerned that what we might call his immediate '*fiat nœud*' had begun to take on the appearance of a nodal big bang, inaugurating the entirety of the Borromean 'acosmos' in one fell swoop, Lacan, aided by Soury and other mathematicians to whom he turned with increasing frequency, spent much of *Seminar XXIV* and *Seminar XXV* demonstrating the structural homology between tori, *Möbius* strips and trefoil knots, endlessly cutting one from the other in an effort to show how the temporal dynamics of his earlier surface topologies inhabit knots. However, whilst these cuts re-introduced the temporal retroaction of the signifying articulation's 'inverted redoubling', allowing the analyst to once again discern the effects of his interventions (e.g. turning the torus of S *qua* unconscious inside-out [figure 26]), the fact remained that these topological transformations were often too drastic, accounting only for epiphanic events rather than the more humdrum (but also more nuanced, more temporally complex) business of reading each symptomatic repetition as belonging to larger nexus: 'Treating the

symptom as a *palimpsest* is in psychoanalysis a condition of efficacy' (1977b: 5). Strangely enough, what was required was a return to *Umschreibung*, a return to the *multiple* circumlocutions and cross-checks occurring in a *single* structure that the knot's precise minimalism had cleaned up.

Lacan began *Seminar XXVI* – significantly titled *Topology and Time* – by re-asserting that '[t]here is a correspondence between topology and practice. This correspondence *consists* in time [*les temps*]. Topology *resists*, it is in this that the correspondence *exists*' (SXXVI 21/11/78). Topology, practice and time – a Borromean trinity bound together by another trinity: consistence, resistance and existence. The correspondence between topology and practice might well *consist* 'in time' but this correspondence only *exists*, having a firmer basis than the imaginary consistency of an analogical correspondence between two similar things, when topology *resists* in time. Put simply, '[s]ymptoms *resist*' (2013a: 12). The Borromean knot's resistance to what occurs in the time of practice was either absolute or totally absent: either it resists – continuing to consist and *ex-sist* – or it dissolves. It is both too rigid and too fragile. Lacan's pluralisation of the time ('*les temps*') in which the correspondence exists is an indication that the time of practice, as a reading of a palimpsest, is rather more intricate than the time that the knot seems to occupy. The process of 'working-through' (*Durcharbeiten*), of performing local actions in a general structure, none of which singularly transform the structure but instead accumulatively work towards such a transformation, had been elided by topology, leaving the correspondence between it and practice dubious.

In the following session, Lacan referred to the 'generalised Borromean' and presented this string sextet constructed by Soury:

Fig. 29 (SXXVI: 12/12/78)⁴⁴

What is interesting here is that the braid holds if we remove two cords (as confirmed by the knots constructed on the left) but not if we remove three. In other words, action can be taken in topological structure without us going from everything to nothing in a flash. For a period of time, it resists. Having previously stated in *Seminar XX* (129) that knots have only been incompletely mathematically formalised (this, we recall, was part of the appeal), with this ‘generalisation’ of the knot Lacan appears to be working toward a primitive algorithm. This particular construction would be 6:3 – it has six components and three actions are required to dissolve it. What ‘bothers’ Lacan about the knot is a ‘mathematical question, and it is mathematically that I intend to handle it’ (SXXVI: 20/2/79). This particular way of handling the knot (i.e. adding more components) is either a conceptual dead-end or is intended only as an illustration of the necessity for a greater scope for action to occur without structure dissolving. Since the elderly Lacan’s commentary is so sparse in this late seminar, with some sessions consisting of little more than a couple of short paragraphs, it is difficult to tell.

⁴⁴ A much clearer version of this image can be found at:
http://www.lituraterre.org/illettrisme_et_topologie-Lacan_Soury_Vappereau_Thome.htm

Whatever the case, a progression can be discerned in the final sessions at which Lacan spoke.⁴⁵ Importantly, this progression concerned not just the structure itself but also the type of intervention that can take place. Firstly, rather than forming a torus as they did in figures 25 and 27, the two rings of S and Σ merge to become *one* tangled cord to which I and R are bound (figure 31). In this knot it is no longer the case that all three rings are homogenous. Where once S+ Σ made a *circle*, with the *jouissant* cord of the symptom running around the symbolic's hole (*Urverdrängung*), now it makes a palimpsest, a *single* cord that cross-checks and over-writes itself. This is a structure of *times*, combining both locality and generality. Secondly, to the actions of cutting and splicing, of dissolving and re-knotting, Lacan adds 'homotopic inversion' – an intervention that inverts a particular nodal crossing, placing what was above below and what was below above. Such an inversion might be the result of a reading of homophonic *lalangue*, retrieving the primordial signifiers (S1) that were, in this palimpsest, retroactively constituted by being erased in the temporal double-loop of representation (S2). The symptom *resists*, it cannot simply be *cut*. Tracking the subject's symptomatic repetitions in order to isolate and unmoor the fixity of the master signifiers the analyst is able to dissolve parts of the subjects 'foundation of accord' (S+ Σ) so that it can be re-written in a fashion that does not cause the subject so much suffering.

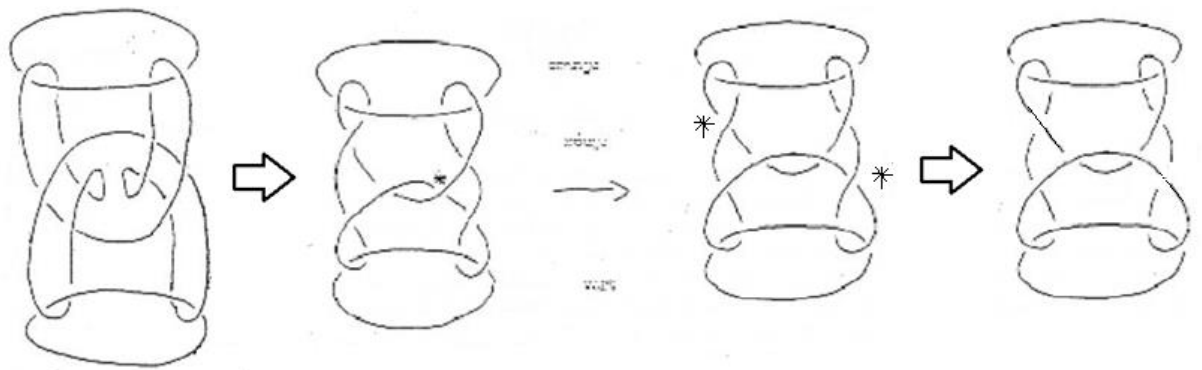


Fig. 30 (Figure adapted from: SXXVI: 20/3/79)

In the first knot, two rings are merged and in the second Lacan placed a star at the crossing point that needs to be inverted for the cord to come loose. He is corrected by an audience member who observes that a further two homotopic inversions are required. In the third and fourth knots, I have indicated these points and concluded the procedure.

⁴⁵ There were two further sessions in May but both were taken up by guest speakers.

It's worth noting that the standard Borromean knot cannot sustain a single inversion without it losing its Borromean quality.

Aside from the insistence that the knot is a 'mathematical question' that is to be handled 'mathematically' and that '[t]he question' concerns 'that which is homotopic within a consistency', Lacan offers precious little else to go on (SXXXVI: 20/3/79). These homotopic junctions are perhaps the local points at which the symptom resists, ensuring its general consistence and *ex-sistence* (that is, its attachment to I and R). They are repeated sticking points for the subject that must be freed up by a reading of the knot that is also a re-writing of the knot. Finally, it is by providing a non-metaphorical (de)monstration of this temporal palimpsest that topology would make exist a correspondence between itself and practice.

'There is', Lacan stated in the opening session of *Seminar XXVI*, 'a gap between psychoanalysis and topology. What I endeavour to do is fill in this gap' (SXXXVI: 21/11/78). Did the development of the 'generalised Borromean' close the gap and ensure the correspondence between topology and practice? Unfortunately, Lacan died before he could provide the necessary explication of the final result of his endeavour and I lack both the space and the mathematical competence to explore it further here.⁴⁶ The above quotation is one of Lacan's final definitive reflections on his purpose. From 1953 until his death, this endeavour preoccupied him. We can certainly argue about the validity of such an enterprise (having done the necessary explication), but we cannot, as is all too often done, dismiss it as an irrelevant distraction or completely ignore it. Topology was clearly important to Lacan so we need, at the very least, to ask why that was. What is topology's *effect*? It is hoped that this study has gone some way toward answering these questions.

⁴⁶ There are, however, trained mathematicians and analysts such as Jean-Michel Vappereau who, with the 'generalised Borromean' in hand, have taken up the challenge of eradicating the gap between topology and practice through a mathematical reading and writing of knots. For an example of the results of such work see Vappereau, 2012.

6. Conclusion: A New Imaginary

We will conclude here by examining Lacan's answer to an intriguing question that exemplifies the extent to which his 'topological turn' forces us to think beyond the narrow confines of an unconscious reduced to metaphor's *binding* and metonymy's *glissement*: 'How can we know if the unconscious is real or imaginary?' How can we know if the unconscious is absolutely unknowable (an infinite line that exceeds our finite capacity for comprehension) or something that is knowable (a closable circle)? 'This, indeed, is the question. *It takes part in an equivocal between the two*. But thanks to Freud, we are involved in it, and this on the basis of the *sinthome*. Henceforth, we have to do with the *sinthome* in the sexual relation' (SXXIII: 17/2/76). Certainly, because it participates in the equivocal division *between two* signifiers (S1-S2), the unconscious is aligned with S (or \$), but, because it is involved in an equivocal circularity *between two* (Σ +S) that allows the subject to *jouir* the non-existence of the rapport *between two* sexes (and is thus not reducible to the linguistic 'system of oppositions' between two), *it also structurally 'takes part in' an equivocation between R and I as that which allows for this equivocation* (or 'special suspension'). Referring ourselves back to figure 20, if 'the real... forecloses [the] *sens*' produced by S+I, then '[w]e must break through into *a new imaginary* in relation to *sens*. This is what I'm trying to establish with my language' (SXXIII: 16/3/76). This 'new imaginary', formed on the basis of a singular suppletion of the barred Other, amounts to neither a return of the ego nor a superficially anarchistic revolution, but a nodal consistency that holds Σ +S and R together. In the clinic, what is established with language is a topology.

At Caracas, in the process of establishing 'a new imaginary' – or, more precisely, a new school – Lacan remarked that 'in my knot the real', which 'can only be admitted as not-all', 'features constantly as a straight line stretching to infinity, i.e. the unclosed circle that it presupposes' (2011: 19). Insofar as this line's effect on the knot is topologically equivalent to a closed circle, this is perhaps the most apt support of the 'new imaginary' because this 'line... is quite precisely the *inhibition* that *thought* has in respect to the knot' since thought always 'makes a circle' (SXXII: 13/5/75). In psychoanalytic 'a-thinking', this closure is not enforced but nor is the line straightforwardly infinite because it is this 'not-all' that serves as a structural factor in the knot's consistency. As a 'new imaginary', a *consistence* derived from *ex-sistence*, the line equivocates between R and I, forcing us to shed egoic *inhibition* (the affect

associated with *sens*): ‘there is nothing more difficult than to *imagine the real*... it is the *gap* between the imaginary and the real which constitutes our inhibition’ (SXXV: 9/5/78). Thought tends to obliterate this gap by either jettisoning the real (e.g. philosophy’s noumenal real beyond ideation), incorporating it (e.g. science’s modelling or ‘idea of the real’) or merging R and I (e.g. wrongheaded efforts to get back to nature and rediscover one’s ‘inner animal’). Alternatively, thought suffers from this gap, plagued by the fact that, regardless of the size or surety of the circle it makes, what this circle includes is always ‘not *that*.’ Psychoanalysis, deriving its efficacy from this gap, exploiting the signifiers attached to its navel, allows the subject to create and identify a *sinthomatique* unconscious that ‘takes part in’ this gap by suspending and managing it, enabling him to derive *jouissance from this gap* (JÅ) rather than suffering from it (JΦ) or suturing it (*sens*). Insofar as it *consists réellement* through a strangely *rigorous equivocation*, surpassing both the closed finitude of metaphor’s illusory binding of *sens* and the ‘bad’ infinity of metonymy’s deferral of *sens*, ‘the knot... is entirely based on the equivalence of an infinite line and a circle’ (SXXIII 9/12/75).

Here, we can appreciate what was held, by Lacan himself, to be one of the primary benefits derivable from studying his topological turn. Can the painful ‘a-thinking’ – a thought that does not flatten by imagining consistency –, for which the knot is a support, occur outside the clinic? Whilst writing and reading this topology is unlikely to resolve one’s psychosis or hysteria, and may even encourage observers to declare one mad (or, as Hogan put it, in need of ‘reconstrual’) when they might not have before, the break with the common *sens* of binary logic and egoic intuition that topology requires has the *practical effect* of loosening the obsessional approach that morosely stitches up the gap opened by the psychoanalytic discovery and inhibits ‘a-thinking’: ‘I consider breaking oneself in to the *practice* of knots as breaking inhibition... [T]he imaginary would be formed by mental inhibition’ (1975c: 6). The reception of Lacan has been characterised by, among other things, an inhibition regarding his topological turn. Does this inhibition not bear some relation to the wariness that greeted the psychoanalytic discovery itself?

We have seen in Part Two how topology allowed Lacan to present and demonstrate the structural paradoxes that define the psychoanalytic subject as distinct from the subject of conscious self-apprehension and how temporal topologies such as the Möbius strip wrench us away from fallacious intuitions with a compelling force that is unmatched by language. In Part Three we have scrutinised topology’s function in Lacan’s reading of Freud as not just another interdisciplinary reference but by looking

at how the ‘return’ itself functions *as a topology*, a re-turn. If Lacan’s ‘symptomatic response’ to the Freudian *legacy* was to ‘invent’ the real and *gift* a topological writing that supports it to his readers, it was in order to renew psychoanalysis in the face of the ego psychologist’s coherence without rigour and formalise the basis upon which psychoanalytic *effectiveness* could be judged (as topological cuts and re-writing), thereby rebutting the assertion that psychoanalysis’s rejection of the empirical coherence promised by dosage data makes it an entirely unrigorous practice. In reference to the topological distinction Lacan makes between two modes of intervention in ‘*L’étourdit*’ (i.e. the single turn or return that produces a coherent circle and the double-looped cut or re-turn that *is* the subject’s division), Part Four and the latter sections of Part Three examined the effects of actions performed by analysts and artists in topological structure – actions that are, to recall Soury’s formulation ‘not easily repeatable, conscious, transmissible, or verifiable.’

We have concluded with a reconstruction of ‘Lacan’s analysis of knots’ (the absent crux of the case presentation witnessed by Hogan) in an effort to monstrate the final result of Lacan’s *déblayage*, his ‘solution’ to the great *casse-tête*. It is an indication of the extent to which Lacan believed he had written ‘a bit of real’ that he felt able to add his own twist to Pascal’s famous formulation: ‘nature has a horror of the knot’ (SXXII 14/1/75). Nature, as the merging of R and I, is, for man, split by being knotted to S (figure 29). If psychoanalysis is to survive the 21st century – a century in which the battle lines are being drawn with a heretofore unseen starkness between non-dupes and martyrs, between the inflexible atheism of a reductive biologisation or pharmaceuticalisation of mental health and the spiritual security of caliphates and healing crystals –, it will be because it supports, *by means of a rigor without egoic coherence*, an approach to this knotted gap that is neither that of the obsessional doubter nor the disciple, but that of the ‘good dupe.’ Taking Lacan’s topological turn seriously is, I contend, an *effective* route to becoming just such a dupe. It has been the purpose of this study to weaken the entirely understandable conviction that this is, to recall Mrs Grose’s description of the governess’s apparent madness, some ‘dreadful turn’ – a ludicrous, unnecessary and even harmful preoccupation – and argue that it is instead relevant, important and helpful, even if the results of this turn are every bit as difficult to consciously grasp and know as James’s ghosts.

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