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Towards a Practical Topology: New Perspectives in Knot Theory

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First, I would like to offer my many thanks especially to Tej, who has, today, introduced me in such a way that the narrative conveys something impressive, though I must remark that here, yoked into the imaginary by the permissions of a certain symbolic, the only means by which I might live up to this image would be through the exaltation of death or silence.

Nonetheless, my immense gratitude is to Tej for the opportunity to speak with you all today, to Lacan Toronto generally for sustaining a flame of hope in the anglophone psychoanalytic community, to Dr. Don Kunze for his mythic undertaking that hopes to see Lacan's topology *used* instead of merely discussed, to my first-rate mentors at the *Association Lacanienne Internationale*, especially the late Dr. Charles Melman, Marc Darmon, Jean Brini, and Omar Guerrero, without whom none of this would be possible, and to Jean Michel Vappereau, whose work and teaching captures Lacan's spirit, a spirit that left this earth encumbered by strings, folds, and tapestries. The end then—the end of Lacan, that is—is thus where we ought to begin.

Lacan's death, a kind of legend in and of itself, preceded by long silences, ambiguous disease, and a back turned to his audience is one by which a father joins the stars: perhaps the Lacanian constellation twists and turns, reminding us of his Achillean struggle against the real, a critical moment where his topology—in the sense of 2-dimensional knot theory, not his earlier 3-dimensional topological metaphors—finds its origin. It is at this critical moment, what we might call the end of Lacan, that we find our topical fodder today. I had briefly considered opening this talk with a joke that our session here is covering every Lacanian's favorite topic: knot theory! This, however, tickles my ear in the direction of comedy inasmuch as there is something real at stake: Lacan's knot theory remains, to the anglophone audience especially, particularly dense, veiled, esoteric and mystic—misconceptions which I would like to dispel today, bringing us not up in some rocket ship to this constellation, but, instead, bringing the constellation down here, optimistic to tease out a practical knowledge that we might apply to ourselves, the clinic to which our discipline is indebted, and the social and political causes that manufacture our subjectivity broadly.

At the risk of certain hypocrisy, which is necessary in our discipline of dead-ends, concrete walls, and U-turns, and also in fear of superfluity, I would like to begin our discussion here with a bit of a defense, but not without some initial acknowledgements. A good number of discussions surrounding Lacan's topology either valiantly charge in

the wrong direction, or approach it timidly, uncertainly, and with a distance best suited for the handling of venomous snakes; the majority of publications, in English, from the last forty years apprehend Lacan's topology from everywhere: from the field of mathematics to the cinema screen to leaves of a good work of fiction (barring Joyce), we see topology emerge jaggedly, disconnectedly as Lacan's mystic caesura—in fact, this is something more significant than I think is commonly recognized: had Lacan been openly and consistently developing his knot theory well before the 1970s, we might not associate it with those sacred crossings of straw which bedded his funeral pyre. In other words, sometimes psychoanalysis fails: fails to see its own logic played out in its own discourse—the caesura, a wound and a cauterization, that punctuates our discipline is, in fact, this knot theory. I believe it remains enigmatic, intangible and esoteric, precisely because of where, conceptually, it is temporally situated as we follow the string of metonymic objects that bring us, ladder-rung by ladder-rung to follow Lacan's desire. In a moment, I will decry the historicisation of Lacanian topology, so please keep in mind that I am not immune to it.

The astonishment that these figures and drawings provoke are not unaffected by the conditions under which they were born. As such, we must understand this specific topology to be born of Lacan, and not of mathematics—because this topology is *not* mathematical topology. Mathematical topology, where knots are distorted in a space to the effect that they convey algebraic or geometric insight, has, like Lacan's mathemes, logic, and algebra, undergone a tailoring: Lacan's topology *is* Lacan's topology. It is made for the reading of the subject, the subject of psychoanalysis, the writing of his structure, and the forecast of its potential for change. Therefore, we are consigned, if we are to be careful, to read it as such. It is here, perhaps, that we might come to a definition—not yet a thesis, but a definition—which conceives of Lacan's topology in two dimensions: the first, that this topology is, indeed, an intelligent, logical system by which we might sidestep the signifying associations of *any* language, whether mathematical or otherwise enunciable, in order to convey the real of the subject. We will see how this first dimension is fraught by what Melman describes as *bullshit*, connerie, as it is traditionally misconceived as a “fixed-point” in psychoanalytic thinking. The second dimension, however, is marked by internal validity: that the *writing* of the knot is constitutive of an *act*, which Jean Bruni conceives of as fundamentally linked to the operation of transference. This function of the act, yoked to the analytic scene by its transferential value, is absolutely essential: this means that the supports for knot writing are not consigned to the *content* of the session, which would imply a Borromean translation of our observations. Thus, what we must avoid in the conception of knot writing as an act is that which makes it an *imaginarization* of structure.

To the same effect, it is an act inasmuch as it *is* a writing, where, because meaning only offers itself up to interpretation at the end of a sentence, the same logic applies when

we construct a figure. Here, we can be sure to recognize also the *programmatic* value of the knot: once more, not unlike the complex interweaving of difference, syntax, temporality, and all other elements constitutive of the enunciation of a sentence, the knot reserves its seat on the witness stand, that is to say, it is written with the deployment of a kind of knowledge, and then it is offered to us for interpretation, judgment, for its value as something both static and mobile—the knot *is* an expression of a structure that we can judge. We judge this knot on the basis of its value, which is where we decide its utility: not unlike speech in the analytic session, we find ourselves sometimes transfixed by the knot, scratching our head a little or on the end of our chair—even when its elements are indiscreet and thoughtfully articulated—in such a way cues us in to a kind of necessary anticipation, the same at stake in the predictive movement constitutive of listening, listening for meaning in patient's enunciation.

To talk about the very possibility of knot surgery, we must do so on the side of the signifier, which is where we consider the functional value of the knot, at least inasmuch as it directs our attention to signifier itself, and the cut and the suture—our only weapons in the analytic session—we must expose as our methods of interfacing with a given knot. Indeed, by cut and suture we hack and saw at links, create twists and turns, envelopes, barriers, and entanglements. Though this information is far from revolutionary, I rarely see it explained, this lineage between knot and signifier. I was a bit unsure where to situate this content in today's presentation, especially since, in a moment, we will resurrect our discourse on the theory of Lacanian topology itself, but I would like you to take what follows—which offers a practical yoke between signifier and knot—and put it especially in your back pocket for later, when we talk actual knot surgery in the form of Reidemeister moves. This, then, is a short diversion into what I would like to call the genuine value of my talk here today, which is not simply a revisionist approach to theory in philosophical language that regurgitates what we have all read and heard, but something living to take away and apply in our practice, whether on the couch or in the world.

Marc Darmon explains that the knot reconditions our approach to the signifier itself, especially as it modifies how we assess the structural *value* of a given signifier. I find this to be of essential significance. The knot indicates that the signifier is not fixed, not definitively located, as Darmon argues. In other words, although psychology has discarded the notion decades ago, we too must follow suit—there is *no engram*, no map that organizes the signifying system. This also helps us to make light of Lacan's formula, that the unconscious knows no contradiction. It is not like a file system on a computer, and it does not preserve elements in fixed places. We do not go “deeper” or “shallower” in the signifying pool the longer we know a patient or the more we come to understand him. The unconscious is not a bag from which we draw signifiers in an unwavering temporal chain.

What I mean to say is, that the temporality to which we are accustomed, the one in which we see elements emerge chronologically, is not the logic of the knot. Because the logic of the knot, which we will certainly elaborate much further, employs complications as a means to simplify, in the sense that you will recognize if you have ever untangled Christmas lights, that sometimes you must make loops, crossings, and turns in advance of attaining your untangled string, we can acknowledge a temporality all its own: in essence, that the logic of the knot is physical, that crossings and loops dictate its temporality, that movement by movement, we uncover its constitution, and, most importantly, I must stress, that it is *impossible* to define this temporality in advance. Thus, the signifier, caught up in this logic by its very formation, is mobile: a certain signifier—take *famillionaire* as an example—will come to occupy a particular crossing, a particular junction in the knot at a particular time. It does not become arrested there, just as, in our Christmas light strand, particular points unravel easily with a few turns before getting stuck again, needing special attention to proceed further. This point where things get stuck, where the knot finds itself impinged, where there is a sticking, is the point where the signifier emerges and takes on a certain value.

This is of profound significance, particularly as we think about elements of the analytic scene like scansion, the duration of the session, and even the duration of the cure: to a skilled knot surgeon, and, in an ideal, fantastical sense of course, we could find the right signifier and make a twist or a cut over and over again, discovering and manufacturing new crossings in such a way that the cure might be possible in, I don't know, a year? Six months? I can't tell you for certain, but topology changes this dimension of temporality profoundly, and in an almost entirely unexplored way.

Topology, then, has a *real* and incredibly significant place in psychoanalysis, as it threatens to completely rewrite our understanding of *time* in the analytic scene. As such, we butt up against another of Lacan's famous riddles: that topology IS time. We can stage the notion of the cure as such without losing any intellectual value: however long it takes you to unravel the knot **is** the duration of analysis. Full stop.

As I promised earlier, I will wax hypocritical for a moment as I tear down what has heretofore been built: I must do as much to recognize how this recapitulation, this attempt to codify parameters in an amorphous discourse, the desire, simply, for a neat box constructed of all my careful definitions and built of the logic of this talk in particular represents the usual mode by which Lacan's topology is approached, and rendered into the same useless *connerie* (bullshit) that populates the body of works already available in English on the subject. This is by no want for highly intelligent authors treating this topic: the content by itself, a so-called "writing of the real" bears great responsibility for the mishandling of Lacan's knot theory. To be pedantic, as we are supposed to be, in order to pay our dues to the abstract theory which makes full our clinical toolkit, topology exemplifies this *connerie*, this bullshit—not in the quotidian sense of that

suggesting dupery, snake-oil and sleights of hand, but in the sense that it is often taken as a *metasystem*. Therefore, if we are to use the knot in the clinic, outside of publication and lecture, outside especially of private obsession and all the public convincing necessary to fill in its obvious aporias, we must not resist the lasso by which it might, itself, be tangled, wrestled to the ground, and made tame to our brand of the signifier. I hope you can see here what is beginning to emerge in terms of a paradox, which is as implicit in Lacan's articulation as it is when we take a step back to look at the function of the knot definitionally: this is the impossibility, the bullshit of "writing"—a systematization of the signifier—of the real. Writing. The real.

Historically speaking, we have mishandled Lacan's topology, as I have already made evident, from the fundamental misrecognition framed by its appearance as a perfect conclusion, or, perhaps even a mystical reincarnation of a beginning, in his discourse. We have taken topology to be our discourse's "way a lone a last a loved a long the riverrun, past eve and Adam's"—to quote Joyce—our discourse's interior-eight, that marks it not as castrated, as unfinished, but, instead, as having perfectly closed-in on itself, as having perfectly satisfied the fantasy of Lacan himself—a man whose symptom, it has been often said, was the real: finally, he catches it here at the end, and even has time to suture it to the start in the space between two deaths. It remains so, and persists as such, in the fantasy we adopt as psychoanalysts broadly, where it appears to us as it did to Lacan, as an enigma, something whose value has yet to be apprehended, something that has come to signify, by dint of structural impossibility, the real itself. This, I insist, is where we grow weary, that which Melman calls the fixed point—the fixed point which says "c'est ça" ("that's it!"), and which, by the very property of the real that topology claims to make legible, destroys itself, inasmuch as we know that it is sustained only by that same signifying logic, that same "c'est pas ça" ("that's not it"), the logic of difference constitutive of the signifier, to which it submits, where it is intrinsically moored. I repeat, perhaps more clearly, that at the heart of this supposed-real is another man behind the curtain, another illusion of the real, and, in fact, another signifier. It is thus at the heart of many works dealing with Lacan's knot theory, not just in English but in all languages, that we see the fundamental, structural issue that contaminates our desire to explain it. To make it practical is not to upend it. To make it practical is not to confine it to math, the clinic, the written or spoken word, but, instead, *relativize it* in the context of other fixed points, not to proselytize it in the philosopher's tongue or university's discourse, but to relativize it, where it stands, by making it accessible as a tool.

Thus, on the road to a practical and transmissible knot theory, we cannot fail to remember Lacan's prescription: that topology is a thinking best done with one's hands. To the effect of this prescription—another promise I have made, that today that we might all come out of this with something to use, a goodie-bag of sorts that remembers

the party—I would now like to offer a new kind of topological transmission: while I can't insist that everyone picks up their favorite ball of twine, or that we all pillage our pockets for the lint-ball tangled by various threads, I can try to make this physical-thought more real—in the sense of the symbolic, of course, of reality and not of the real—insofar as we can convey the operations of the knot through movements which we can immediately acknowledge as a kind of alphabet.

These movements—known as *Reidemeister moves* in mathematical topology—are the product of the work being done at the ALI to standardize an alphabet for the burgeoning psychoanalytic field of knot surgery. While it is significant to note, for those of us especially who already employ knot theory as a clinical device, that these Reidemeister moves do not inherently constitute a panacea for any and every complex entanglement, thus we must recall that the logic of entanglement itself defies the linear temporal logic of something like algebra. The temporality of the knot is based on the incidence of the crossing and of the tangle. Again, to read Lacan is to read Lacan, and to use his topology is, of course, hallmarked by this same relativity.

As Darmon contends, what is so unique about the knot is, of course, the fact that it often must become more complex in order to be simplified. In other words, entanglement is not always about traditional reductions—as we develop a parallax indicative of the utility that these Reidemeister moves retain, we have to understand that their function is not self-explanatory: otherwise said, these movements, constitutive of a topological alphabet, are intended to build our knowledge of entanglement more than they offer readymade solutions for it. With our warning signs well posted and our approach tempered by an excess of caution, today, we will cover three moves, Omega 1, 2, and 3. These constitute three different basic arrangements that we call crossings, in the hopes that we can, following Lacan, think with our hands a bit as we pull together a practical logic by which we might uncover some clinical treasures.

As such, we must regard each of these moves with Lacan's advice in mind—to think with our hands. Although I was quick to acknowledge the ridiculousness of asking for each of us to come out with a string and attempt to follow along, if you want to pull out a few strings later for your own edification, I would not be so opposed: topology, at least, in the practical sense, *is* a physical science. What we are specifically after here in these three moves are not unlike elementary chords, which the skilled musician weaves into the polyphony of song, or primary colors by which we might tease out shades, brightnesses, and hues. In this moment, what we are concerned with are our building blocks, though I do promise to make evident the ways in which we might see these fundamental grammatical mathematics—if I may be so bold as to address them as such—produce sense in the clinical scene animated by the signifier. With this additional small preface in mind, and not without a few contradictions, the three moves, pictured [here](#), are as follows:

Our **first** move is Omega 1, otherwise known as the *loop*, takes place on only one round. As you can see, an Omega 1 move does not retain the capacity to become a real knot, as there is only one string upon which it can fold. It is a single-movement twist that complicates an otherwise straightforward round by the introduction of one crossing. While the Omega 1 is, in principle and by a mathematicians estimation, the simplest transformation we can envision relative to its effect, I will urge you to think of it as our most complex: inasmuch as this Omega 1 is the motion which can take our simple round and make of it an interior-eight, we cannot forget its value on the side of the signifier, where it generates a recursion. On the level of meaning, I find it imperative to supplement our sterile, mathematical definition of “one crossing” with some associations: it is this kind of fold that adds dimensionality to a single loop, enclosing another on itself. It is duplicative, in the sense that it makes 2 rounds out of one. It also is inversive, since the fold inverts the pathway clock or counterclockwise, depending on which way it is twisted. In this way, I see this simple motion as absolutely fertile: at the level of the topological surface, it is this Omega 1 which produces a 2 dimensional reminder of the Moebius band. It is also this Omega 1 which is essential to understanding the constitution of the trefoil knot, which retains crossings but no distinct rounds. We will take a better look at this trefoil knot in a moment.

Our second move is pronounced between two distinct loops, or two threads. **This** is Omega 2. Omega 2 is a movement where a double-crossing is formed. This movement is not unlike a kind of eclipsing, where suddenly, a direction is made manifest: here, we can see how one string ends up on top, generating a directionality. Especially in a Borromean context, to which we will soon apply this reading, we can immediately observe the way in which this movement is integral to forming a right-facing Borromean **knot** (which we refer to as *dextrogyric*, where the real overrides the imaginary) or a left-facing Borromean knot (which is *levrogyric*, where the imaginary overrides the symbolic). The good thing about topology is that it can be drawn, even poorly, and retain its essential characteristics!

This directional distinction is one we cannot simply blow past, so I hope you will excuse the brief diversion. Hang on to Omega 2 for just a minute. A product of the work conducted by Pierre Soury and Michel Thomé during the *RSI* seminar of 1975, the notion of direction in the Borromean configuration plagued Lacan early on. Although a few papers at the time, especially Whitten's in 1969, had posited that dextrogyric and levrogyric Borromean knots were, indeed, two separate, distinct entities, our psychoanalytic thinking gives us a privileged vantage on this conundrum; instead of seeing two unique knots, where an inversion of one and the other is logically impossible, let us consider the value of the specular image: with respect to a plane, the transformation between the levrogyric orientation and the dextrogyric orientation is one

that exemplifies a mirror symmetry. Otherwise said, the mirror shows us that these configurations have the same identity.

On the terrain, however, of Lacan's thought itself, from where we can mark out the bumper-rails of his teaching, Pierre Ségaud aptly identifies this quandary between two knots as one of Lacan's misapprehensions of topological theory: in order to prove that these two knots are the same, we have to reconcile them in a 2-dimensional space. We can do this by flattening the **knot**, and, using one of the rounds as a pivot like a door hinge, show the possibility of a levogyric orientation becoming dextrogyric, and vice-versa. But this minor sin, while seemingly an issue with few and technical consequences, is historically severe: Lacan's error, at least in the RSI seminar and those preceding it, considers knot theory in three-dimensional space. In doing so, he conflates two logics that he will eventually come around to silently rectify, with no announcement or fanfare, no revision or formal issue of corrections, by the time we get to Joyce. As such, he is Road Runner and we, trailing him fast, are Wile E Coyote, about to slam into a brick wall painted in the likeness of a tunnel. These kinds of errors, which are lost in the context of the situation and detrimental to the reader of Lacan who has a background in anything other than mathematics, are those that I blame for that enigmatization of Lacan's topology that I mentioned earlier. Without question, psychoanalytic thought is sometimes intentionally contradictory, and we are not psychoanalysts in order to preach from the pulpit of the master. But where a tool is employed incorrectly, like the Borromean knot for several seminars, it seems to me that analysts and analytic theorists are duped into justifying these aporias on the basis of Lacan-as-master ("but there *is* a tunnel, there it is, I see it with my own eyes") rather than correcting them ("what about the bruises all over me from trying to pass through it?") With this diversion-turned-derailment exhausted, let's return to the **Omega 2** movement.

As you can **see** this transformation has a value of two crossings, where two points of intersection occur on the same line. To evaluate associatively, this movement is generally a crossing and a crossing-back. It is displacing, and, as we will come to see in a clinical reading, demonstrates a deformation as well as a return. In the Borromean context, this movement can invite elements from one register into the next, open up a space or impart a stopper, solicit the logic of a register into a dimension where it does not belong, and, most significantly, yoke together two rings under the edifice of a third. The Omega 2 crossing is integral to the logic of the Borromean knot itself, whether three or four rounds.

The Omega 3 movement, **pictured** here, is not possible without first having an Omega 2 configuration. It is the most difficult movement to conceive of on its own, since it is directly inversive, and depends on an existing crossing as a structural reference point. It involves moving a round beyond a crossing, inverting the orientation of the repositioned

round relative to this crossing. This example best helps us to understand the way that, sometimes, topology is necessarily complication for the sake of simplification—if you see this movement as a repositioning more than a tangle, since it does not generally change the direction of crossings, you are correct. It is just the passing over of a crossing, which changes its orientation. I think of it like hop-scotch: the player jumping rope is a crossing.

So, as a method of demonstration with an optimistically practical slant, we will observe these movements as they produce clinical changes in a Borromean configuration. I know we have moved quickly, but I feel there is much to impart. Therefore, as Jean Brini notes, it is important to recall that each of these movements, though there are only three elementary, basic manipulations, have additive effects as they stack. That said, it is also significant to convey that the possible number of movements, even when complicated, are finite, somewhere around fifty in number, give or take. In this way, we might also verify an earlier conclusion that showcases the subtle enslavement of the knot to the signifier—this is a logic that we can tame. If there are no objections, I would like to now demonstrate how we see these knots used in the clinic, in the context, I remind you, of the transference, where they are the structure of the subject, not models of this structure. Although this part assumes, at least, your loose familiarity with Lacan's Borromean knot, the Reidemeister moves Omega 1, Omega 2, and Omega 3 will be coupled with a few insights about its constitution fundamentally, and might help to bring it into the realm of utility generally.

Let us examine the Omega 1 movement first. We can do so by establishing our Borromean configuration, a three-round variant in the levogyric orientation, which is the one most commonly used by Lacan, marked and pictured below. We must first articulate some basic parameters, with my many thanks to Jean Brini for his guidance and examples, that remind us of a few critical aspects. The first, that we can perform the Omega 1 movement on any of the rounds, real, symbolic, or imaginary. The second, that the Omega 1 can be applied to either inside or outside of the round. Finally, that the Omega 1 can be applied to any of the four segments of the round. Because this movement can be applied with either a left-hand turn or a right-hand turn, we can posit that there are 24 possible applications in this three-round Borromean configuration.

As such, here is what the knot looks like when transformed in four different sectors of the symbolic. In this demonstrably pure example, which is intended to illustrate an effect in every possible realm of the symbolic, essentially produces little colonizations of the symbolic order in the junction points connecting it with other registers, and also independently, in the round itself. These colonies, which are marked on our figure 1-4, have different effects at different levels of the signifier. We can read this knot at each of these junctions not only as distortions in an ideal configuration, from which they would

be absent, but also as indicative of what the properties of the symbolic are relative to the signifier generally.

The loop marked **1**, external to the knot but internal to the symbolic, illustrates what we call a “simple” conjunction of signifiers. This loop is not immediately consequential for the subject, since it is a byproduct of language itself: this is the interference of the homophone. “Deer,” d-e-e-r, and “dear” d-e-a-r, which differ by a letter, for instance, “aloud” a-l-o-u-d and “allowed” a-l-l-o-w-e-d, which do not differ to the ear but share only three letters. Although these homophonic conjunctions are inconsequential by themselves, I hope the knot shows how they might become problematic: in tandem with other moves, for instance, or other distortions in this round, we might find ourselves at one of those sticking points in entanglement, where our Christmas lights seem quite knotted together.

The second loop, marked **2**, represents an effect of meaning, *sens*. This colony is an infiltration of the imaginary by the symbolic, in which is demonstrated by the effects of witticism, “famillionaire,” for example. While we might think in terms of size and configuration here, we must remember that this representation, being topological, can be drawn at any size, and in any configuration that preserves it. I remind you of this in order to convey that this is as much a distortion of the imaginary as it is a distortion of the symbolic: both registers are affected.

The third loop, marked at **3** is our lapsus, a colony of the symbolic which captures a little piece of desire. Brini helps us clarify—we don’t want to think of this as a *mot d’esprit* (Moe despre), a witticism, but instead as that which catches us by surprise.

The final Omega 1 loop is here at **4**, where it carves out a little colony of phallic jouissance. This kind of distortion is responsible for that which, in a particular signifier, produces a bit of jubilation, as in Jarry’s “merdre”—shit, in French, with an additional “r”—that opens *Ubu roi*.

In the interest of the material, although I know we could likely spend a good deal of time on just the omega 1 movement, or even just on the Borromean knot, let us now turn our attention to the **second** Reidemeister move, Omega 2. In this knot, to which we will apply the Omega 2 movement to restore it to a simple levogyric Borromean configuration, we see how a distortion in the imaginary produces two additional points of crossing in the symbolic. The significant structural crossing, where the dimension of meaning, *sens*, is given berth, is this **third** point here, which we can immediately acknowledge as inaccessible: quite truncated, and also split. The two additional points above, 1 and 2, showcase two points of fixed signification, where the sliding of the signified beneath the signifier is arrested. By applying the Omega **2** movement, we can pull the imaginary back into place, restoring the dimension of meaning with only one, structurally significant crossing.

In a clinical context, we could imagine that a patient has regularly confused her husband's first name with her brother's, without any conscious acknowledgement of the slip. This is the point **here** where the symbolic invades the imaginary, at the peak of this deformation between points 2 and 3. As a self-professed "daddy's girl," during the course of our patient's reflections on her close relationships with men, she formulates that her relationship with both her brother and her husband engage the privileged position she occupied with her father. The Omega 2 movement is fulfilled by this realization, and the treatment moves forward. Our patient might now contemplate and reconsider her position in her father's desire, relative to the question of her mother's place in this Oedipal triad.

Our final **movement**, Omega 3, will be used to showcase the effects of an arrangement that, I contend, is quite pervasive and topical in our social and political miasma. A structure germane to the conditions of our very reality in the West itself. This knot is special to me, since I believe it speaks: it enunciates not only of a particular condition, but, perhaps, of a new psychic economy in general. As such, I thought I'd leave off here today giving you all my favorite thing: because this configuration has a great deal of open-ended value, inasmuch as it provokes more questions than answers, especially at the dimension of our ethics, what our duty is as psychoanalysts, I would like to conclude our talk today at the very threshold of this waterfall. If Lacan is Road Runner and we are still damned to be Wile E Coyote, here, I will paint over the imaginary tunnel on the brick wall, so that we know it is a wall, and invite us to run freely into it.

This knot, which begins as a simple, levogyric Borromean formation, which by now we are used to and probably bored of, is transformed first by an Omega 2 movement, the necessary precondition for the Omega 3, where the latter exemplifies some curious effects. Most simply, this configuration demonstrates the structure of addiction, of addiction to the real.

One last, quick diversion before we dig into the "what" of our figure represented here. Those of us who play with knots necessarily confront the enigmas left to us by the kindness of our cruel master, especially those concerning whether or not the knot ought to be three or four rounds. "To do without the Nom-Du-Père," Lacan tells us, "is to know how to use it." While I refuse to promise the impossible, that is to say, a key that untethers these formulae from their structural obscurity, I can offer something that at least bisects a certain field, making legible a difference that tells me—and, I hope, you—a little bit about what is going on here. Because Dr. Melman tells us that there is "no real symptom in addiction," we are consigned to representing such a phenomena as a three-round knot.

In doing so, we can differentiate between psychosis, which, represented **here** in a pure way by the trefoil knot—not a knot at all—does not preserve the structural integrity of

the three registers, and the knot of the addict, [back](#) on this page, in contrast, exemplifies a decompletion of the *order* of the three consistencies—a dissociation, but not an unraveling. As such, for the addict, what erupts from the symbolic into the real is entirely missing here: the symptom is structurally unnecessary inasmuch as the field of Autre *jouissance* now covers over the field of the imaginary, except, of course, in the remnants of the field of meaning, *sens*.

So, what's happened here, topologically speaking? And how does this knot irrevocably speak to the existence of the new psychic economy? Take a look at the triskel. For those of us unfamiliar with the Borromean knot, the triskel is that intersecting quaternary of overlaps in the middle. This is a complex arrangement, but, I promise you, if you keep your eyes on the triskel, it will make more sense. So, the first thing to note is that the triskel has been altered substantially—in fact, it cannot be called a triskel any more, mathematically speaking. The point where phallic *jouissance* ought to be has been deformed more than superficially, but structurally, by an Omega 2 movement. The round of the real was turned from left to right, encircling the imaginary, and untethering this phallic *jouissance* from its usual structural occupation. This structural point at $J(\phi)$ is now sufficiently impossible—it cannot be “clamped,” as it was in the triskel, and is reduced to an interlock between imaginary and real. As such, the Autre *jouissance* circulates freely throughout the imaginary. In clinical terms, Jean-Luc Ciacalli explains that this kind of distortion “strips the imaginary of the body of its symbolic dimension in an attempt to be entirely non-phallic.” The phallic function, a limit of the imaginary, is refused. We can read this effect by the disappearance of the clamp of phallic *jouissance* in what should be the triskel, and also in the untethered sliding of the symbolic on the imaginary round.

The limit imposed on us by the phallic vector is entirely lifted: with the symbolic no longer pinned down on the side of phallic *jouissance*, the impossibility constitutive of the limit is refused. For the subject of addiction, this is chasing the dragon. The limit is gone. The real, in the form of death or some kind of paralysis, is all that remains for the subject to pursue. This is the drug addict, the anorexic—but this is also all of *us*. Today's world is an imperative to enjoy.

While kids 40 years ago were raised and socialized by cassette tapes and television screens, they are, today, enveloped in the waters of an unrelenting imaginary, a ceaseless *jouissance* without finitude, of infinite content and, now, generative content that certifies this infiniteness. We are encouraged to work, purchase, and enjoy without relent. The “no” that was an arbitrary, patriarchal prohibition—what caused the desire of the subject of the 20th century—has been foreclosed, as *jouissance* takes to its all-Autre dimension. The discourse of science promises cures for death itself, demands the ablation of the subject from its utopian impossibility of “the objective,” while capitalism, which commands us to enjoy from the seat of the Master, fights communism,

the same beast in a different trench coat, which commands us to enjoy the *jouissance* of the *Autre*. Ideology, philosophy, and science now fight on the terrain of a subject without limits—a subject who, socialized in a world that offers no boundaries, is an individual among individuals, instead of a part of a collective. We see adolescence stretch itself well into the late-20s, as kids remain kids, never crossing a threshold of necessary renunciation. Without moralizing, our thanks are due to discursive movements of absolute equality, transparency, and general liberation who have demanded that we do away with anything that might remind us that we cannot seize our own enjoyment. That we cannot do or be as we please. Thus, we have every option, at the cost of the overwhelming paralysis of the real, the terror of choice.

This knot here, emblematic of our new psychic economy, shows us, not as a model, but as *such*, what I propose gives us a parallax on Lacan's riddle: the social has, indeed, done away with the Nom-du-Pere. Not because it knew how to use it, but by an accident of *jouissance*.

Are there any questions?