

LA BANDE AVARICE ET SON AVARIE CONTEMPORAINE

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To begin with, I will start with the title of the presentation I gave in June 2023 at the study days of the *Association Lacanienne Internationale* (ALI) on clinical topology, which explicitly deals with the subject I wish to address, in two parts, as indicated: the band of avarice and its contemporary damage, or the Möbius band in obsessive neurosis and its relevance in clinical practice.

As a side note, it was Thatyana Pitavy who contacted me to ask me to speak at these study days. Once I accepted her invitation, she very kindly asked me to suggest a title, but within 24 hours in order to finalize the program. To exaggerate slightly, her request could be summarized as follows: "You have 24 hours to send me your title." So there I was, the recipient of a message that set me to work within the allotted time. This message became the following, that is, my own: "I have twenty-four hours to suggest a title."

Another point to introduce my argument. When I speak, it may seem at first glance that what I say comes from me. In a sense, yes, it is indeed me who speaks, but it is not me who creates my own language. Speech unfolds from a place where signifiers originate (fabric). When I speak, the signifiers I use come to me from the Other, and I appropriate them without realizing it so that I can reproduce them.

This little detour highlights in an extremely simple way that we are spoken beings and that in order for us to realize this, someone had to formulate it. In the *Écrits*, Jacques Lacan says that "in language, our message comes to us from the Other, and in order to

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state it to the end: in an inverted form¹" a phrase familiar to all of us, whose preferred topological object is the Möbius strip.

Taking a strip of paper, we can write "Other" on the front left and "subject" on the back right.

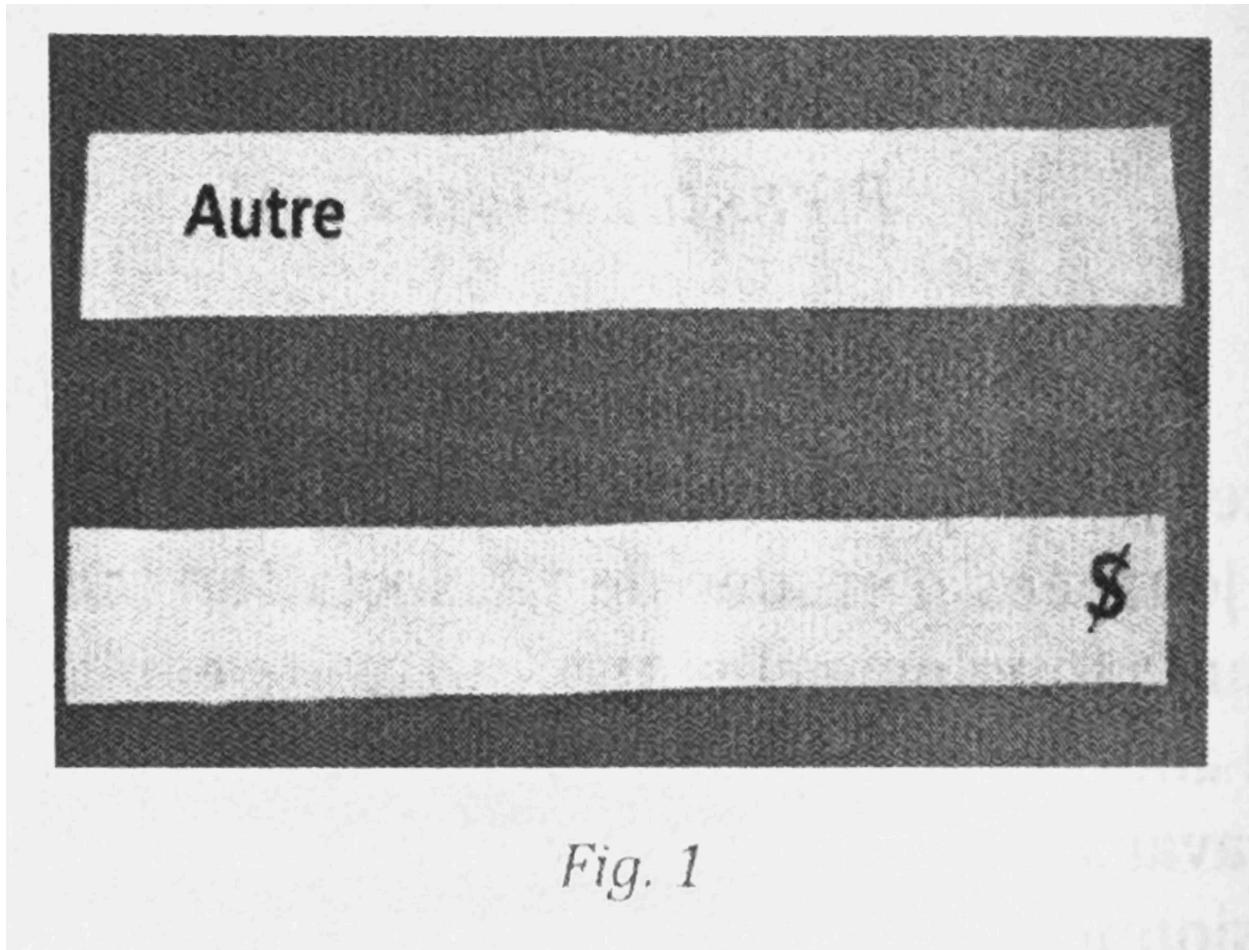


Fig. 1

We have two sides: one representing the big Other, i.e., the place where the message originates, and the other side representing the subject (\$), who is the recipient.

After twisting it halfway around, we can bring the two edges together and stick them to form a Möbius strip. There is continuity between the Other and the subject.

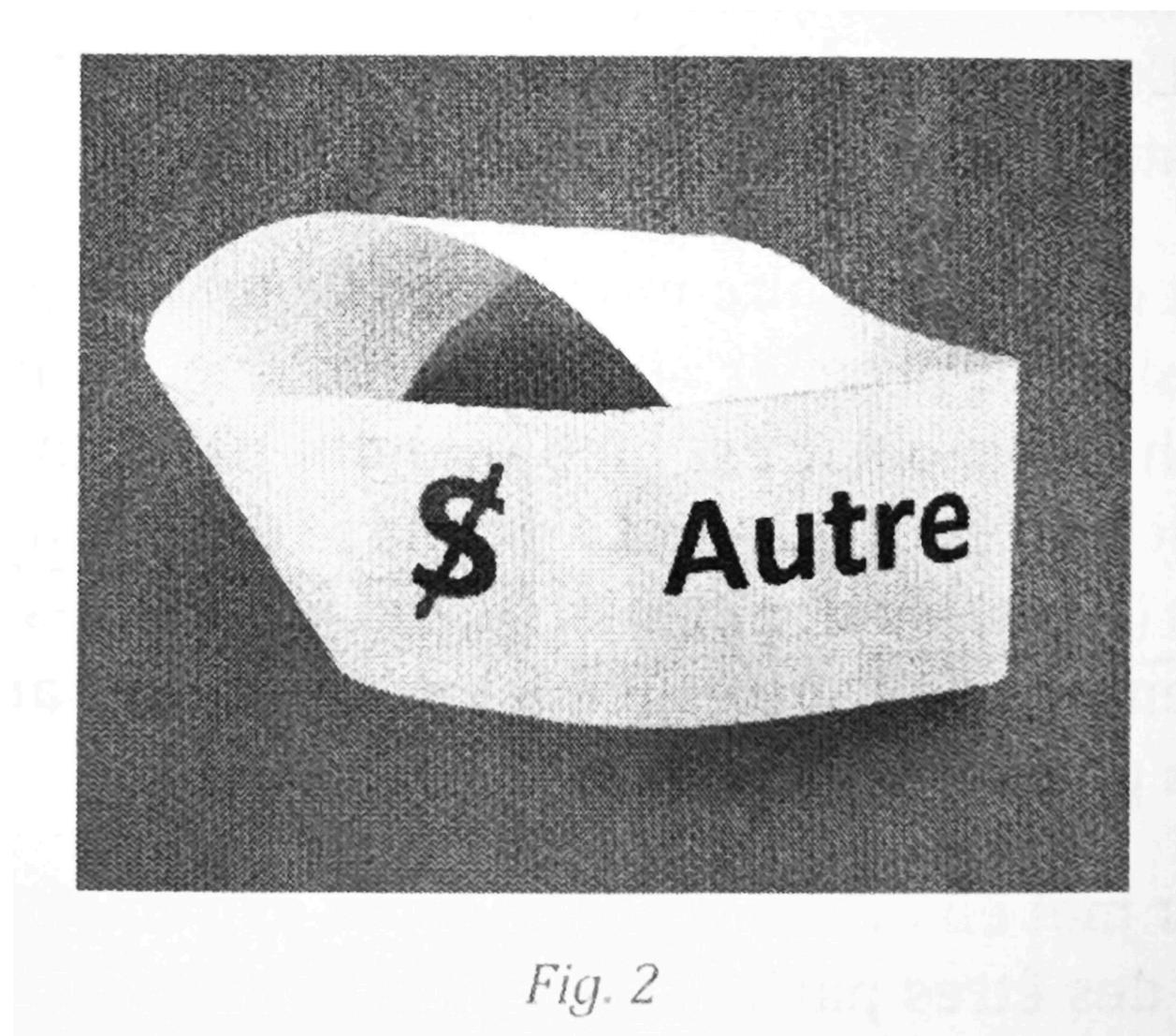


Fig. 2

1. Lacan, J., "Opening of this collection," *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 9.

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It was while reading Charles Melman's seminar *La Névrose obsessionnelle*² with some colleagues in Orleans that I realized the need to use, in a concrete, practical, and clinical way—though perhaps a little naïve for some—the topology of the band, as Lacan does in *RSI*, inviting us to experiment with a real manipulation of the knots.

Let's start with Ernst Lanzer, the "Rat Man"³, when he learns that he has to go to the post office to pay the delivery costs for his monocle; he knows he has to pay a debt of 3.80 kroner. The message he receives from the Other is as follows: "You [Tu] must pay back the money."

I suggest writing this commandment on the left side of the front of the strip and the subject represented by "I" on the right side of the back.

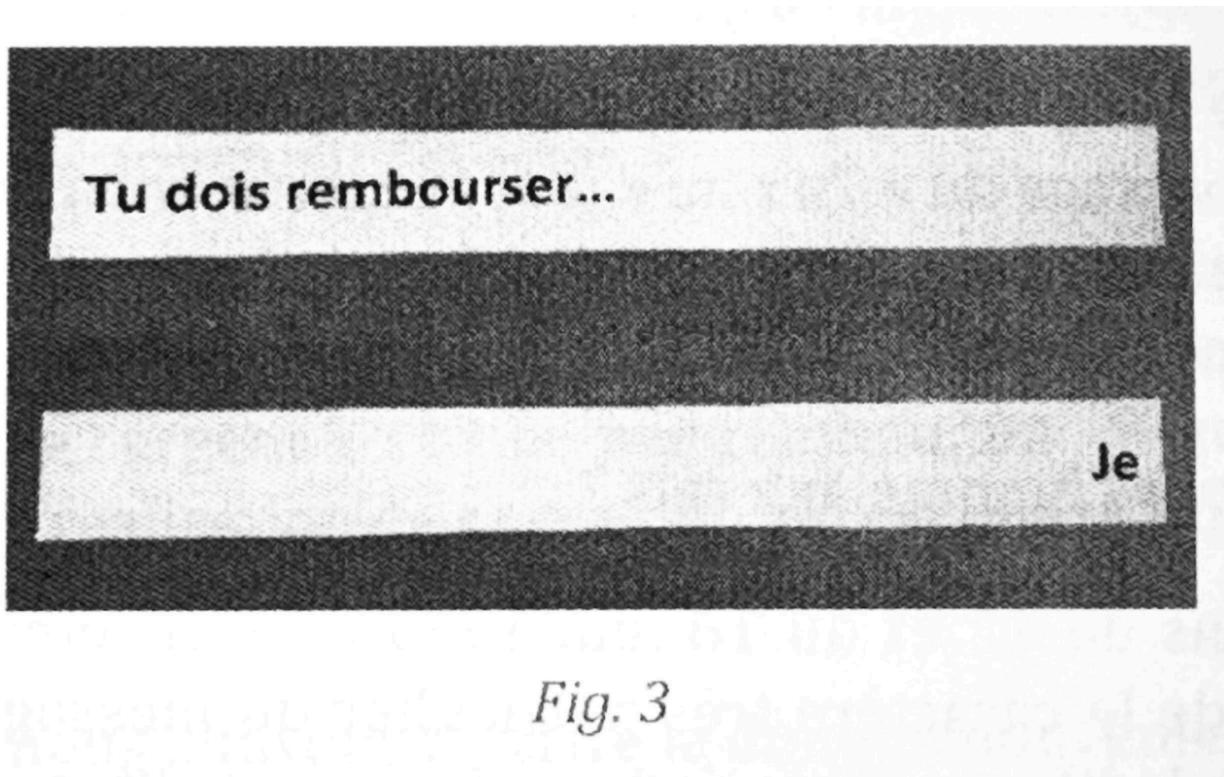


Fig. 3

Once the Möbius twist had been performed and the two edges glued together, the subject received a message from the Other in reverse form, with "I" replacing "You [Tu]."

2. Melman, C., *La Névrose obsessionnelle* (1987-1989), Paris, Editions de l'Association freudienne internationale, 1999.
3. Freud, S., "Remarks on a Case of Obsessive Neurosis," *Five Psycho-Analyses*, Paris, PUF, 1954, pp. 199-261.

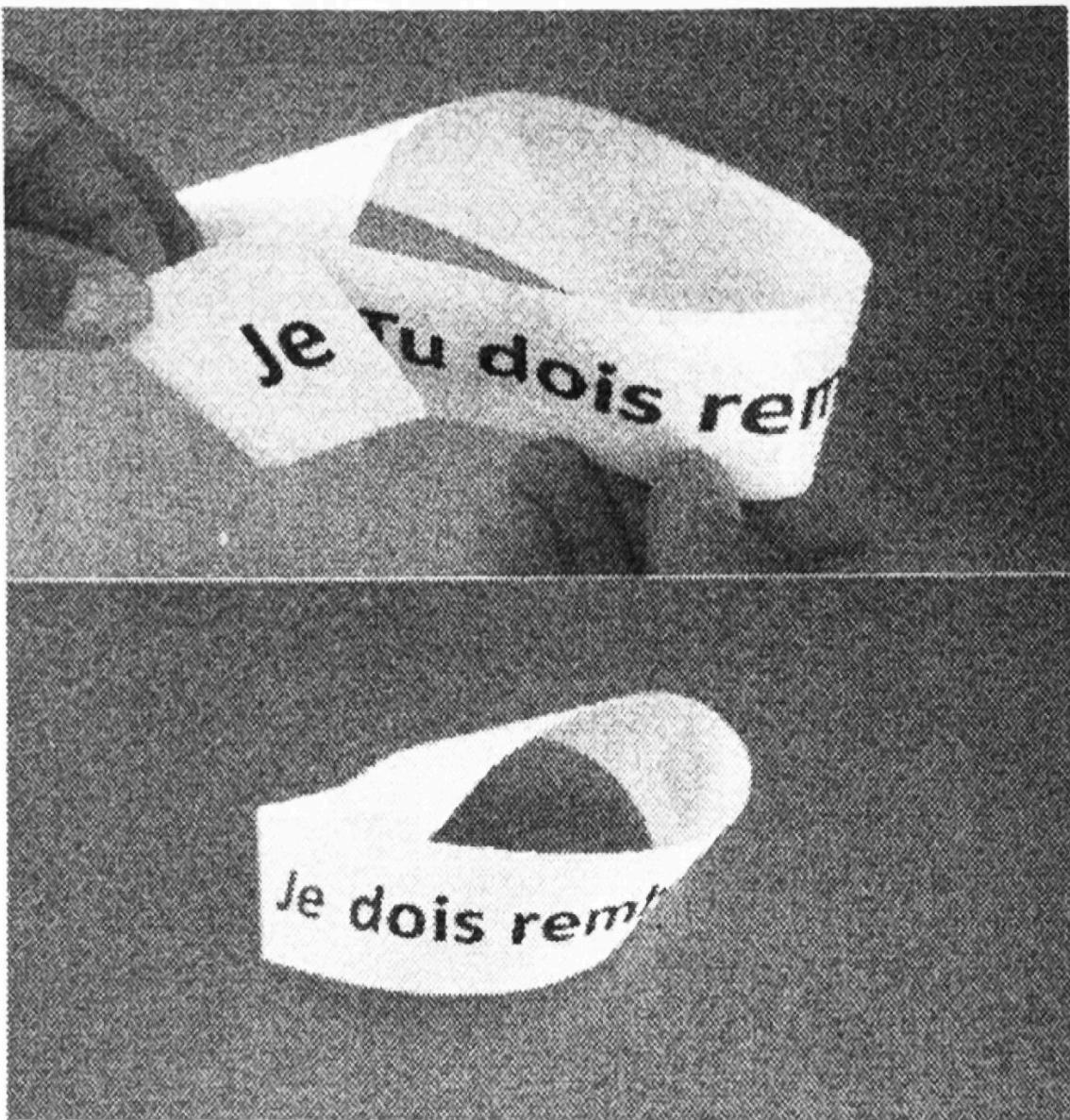


Fig. 4

The reversal occurs at the level of subjective appropriation of the message, in the transition from "you [Tu]" to "I," and also at the temporal level, since the message needs to be repeated from the beginning once it has been received in its entirety.

What about the rat man?

In the lessons of May 11 and 18, 1989, of his seminar, Charles Melman addresses the very particular nature of the message that the obsessive receives from the Other: the obsessive

receives the Other's message in a direct form. The messages received by the obsessive do not come from an internal dialogue, as mentioned previously, but are valid as an imperative that drives them to act, taking the form of "You [Tu] must...", "You [Tu] will...", without even being able to repeat them as "I". According to Charles Melman, the core of this neurosis is characterized by the articulation of two contradictory messages coming from the same place, from the Other: a command immediately followed by a counter-thought. He tells us that "the obsessive does not have the ability to repeat [these messages he receives from the Other] in an inverted form; rather, the only possible inversion is their negative repetition, which is not at all the same thing⁴..."

The obsessive structure is a neurosis and therefore relates to castration. Topologically, the signifying cut around the point of

4. Melman, C., *La Névrose obsessionnelle*, op. cit., lesson of May 18, 1989.

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exception, the offline point where Lacan situates the phallus, divides the cross-cap into two heterogeneous elements: a Möbius strip (the subject) and a disc (the object *a*). But, according to Charles Melman, in obsessive neurosis, the object *a*, and more specifically the anal object, following a reversal operation, will obstruct the phallic point of the cross-cap, thus causing the sphere to lose its Möbius structure. I quote Melman:

"We would then find ourselves faced with a remnant, a bag whose edge would seem to behave as if, and I say as if, its Möbius property had been abolished. [...] [This] would give the edge of the bag a structure that would be that [...] which would retain the memory, if I may say so, of a bilateral surface, as if from that moment on, in this device, what is articulated, what is said from the phallus, was distributed in an irreducible manner according to this double movement, one marked by the injunction to perform the act, and the other marked by the injunction of the prohibition, not to perform this act⁵."

For the rat man, the message he receives from the Other—"You [Tu] must repay"—is immediately followed by the message: "Do not repay the money." However, not repaying the money will result in the realization of his fear, which is that the torment of the rats will befall his father and the woman he loves.

From this point on, we can place the double movement—command and counter-thought—in the same place, on the same side of the tape, and the "I" on the other side.

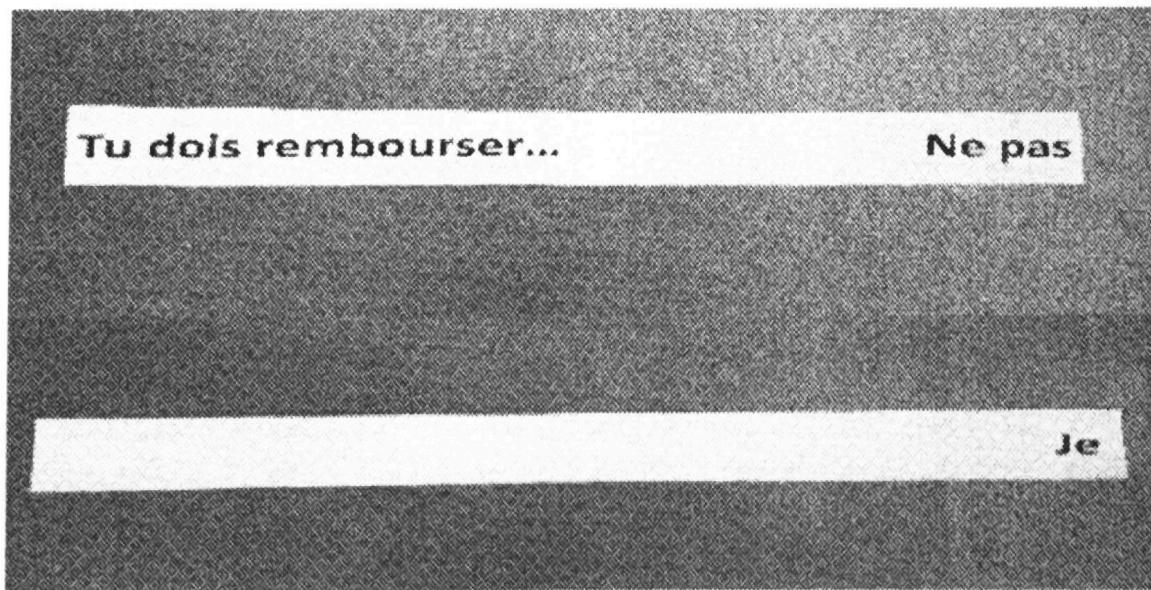


Fig. 5

5. *Ibid.*, lesson of May 18, 1989.

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If the obsessive seeks to defend himself against castration by treating his Möbius structure as a bilateral structure, we can glue the edges of the strip together to obtain a double-sided strip. Depending on where the strip is glued together, the command can cover the counter-thought and vice versa.

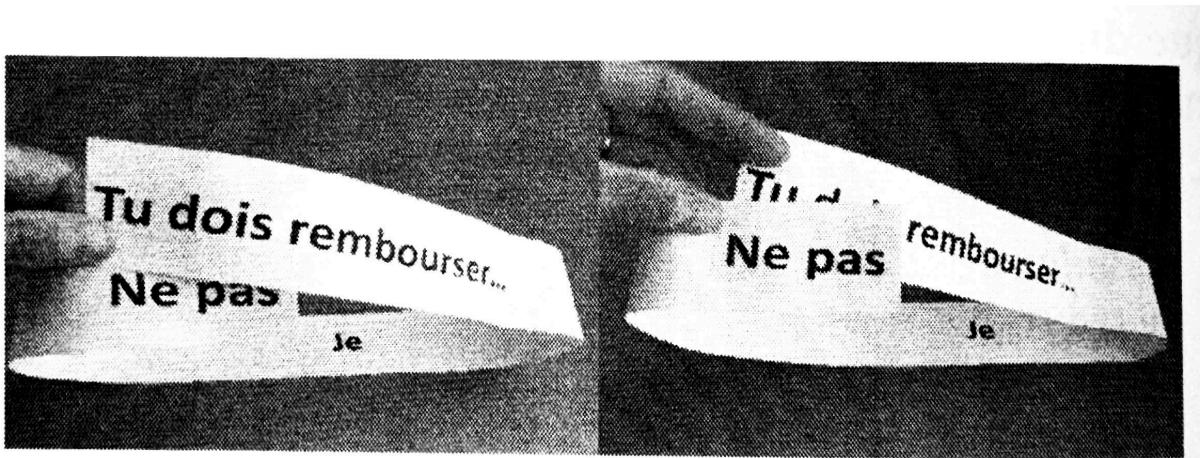


Fig. 6

It is precisely the alternating presence of these two contradictory messages that plunges the obsessive individual into doubt, hesitation, perplexity, and rumination, which characterize him.

Note also the change in the texture of the message, which shifts from a moral imperative to an impersonal infinitive. We do not know who the counter-thought is addressed to, and on the tape, the subject disappears on the other side, thus relieving him of his place of enunciation. This negative repetition is not an opposition or a conflict with the big Other, but rather a response in the form of statements, a logified response, that is, a written response to a spoken statement; the obsessive person speaks as he writes.

So how can the obsessive move from a Möbius strip to a strip that is, to use Charles Melman's term, bilateral?

We have just seen that the obsessive person skillfully strives to undo castration. In other words, he seeks to limit the effects of the cut that imposes a loss on him. It is as if the signifying cut lost its effectiveness. If we allow ourselves to use the Möbius strip as a cross-cap, since the Möbius strip is an open cross-cap, I propose to represent this cut, which cuts everything while canceling its effect, by a simple single cut in the middle of the Möbius strip. We then obtain a bilateral surface from which no object detaches.

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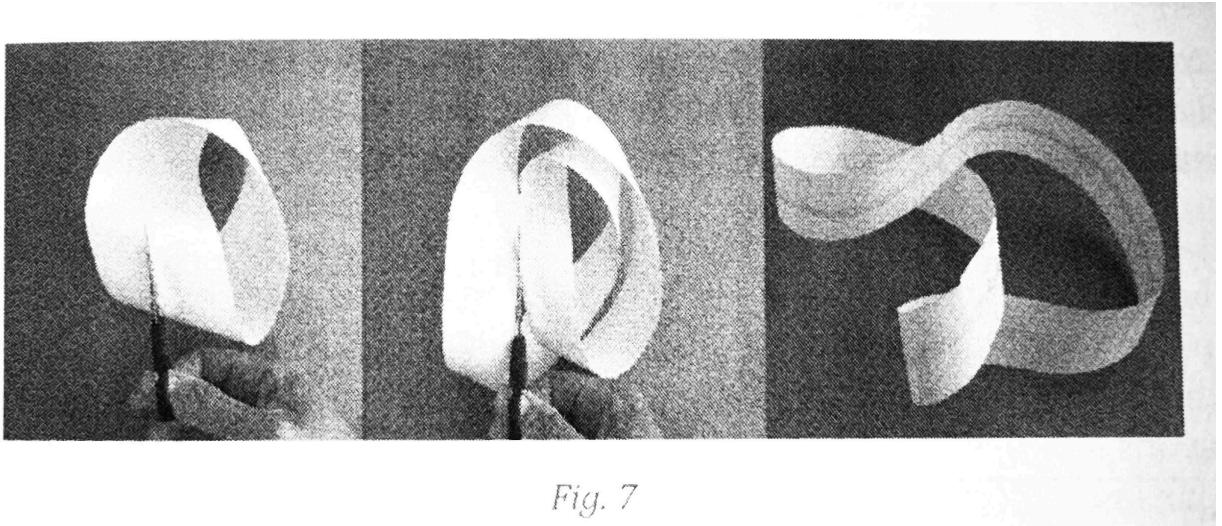


Fig. 7

In the same seminar by Charles Melman and in *Douze leçons de topologie à Montpellier*, Bernard Vandermersch tells us that, in obsessive neurosis, the founding split of the subject is based on the paternal metaphor while avoiding the choice imposed by castration. We are dealing with a split that divides but does not sever. Bernard Vandermersch proposes that obsessional neurosis be referred to as a failure to close the double loop, i.e., a cut that does not close on the second turn and extends indefinitely.

By making this cut on a Möbius strip, we obtain two objects of different but not separate natures: a Möbius strip and a double-sided strip.

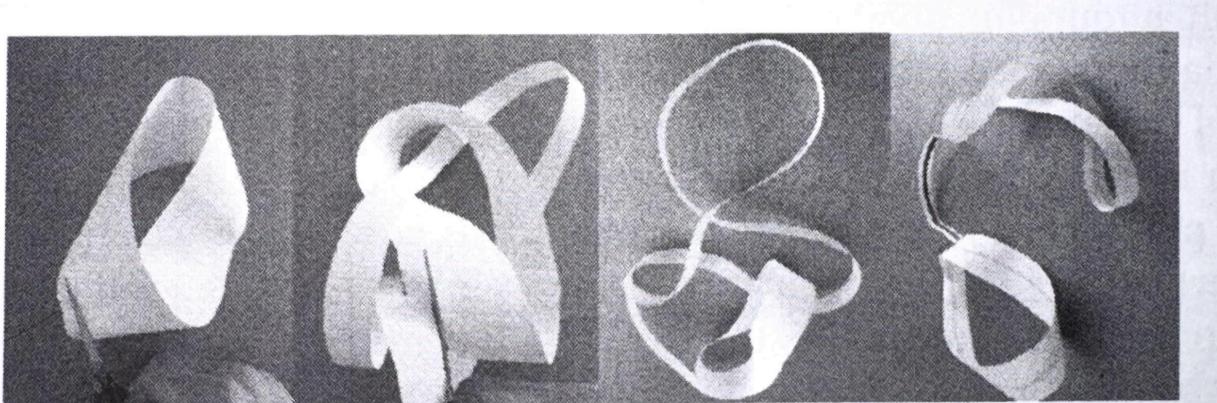


Fig. 8

Castration is inscribed and yet ineffective. Obsessive neurosis is characterized by this paradox, which consists in not completely giving up the object, in maintaining oneself fantastically as the one who causes the desire of the Other and at the same time in protecting oneself against the

6. *Ibid.*, lecture of October 20, 1988.

7. Vandermersch, B., *Douze leçons de topologie à Montpellier*, Paris, *Editions de l'Association lacanienne internationale*, "Les cahiers de topologie," 2014.

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contamination and infiltration of the object. I propose that this link to the object be materialized by the band with the black line (right image in Fig. 8) connecting the disc to the Möbius strip.

The Möbius strip, the disc, the cross-cap, and the double-loop cut are topological tools that can be used to approach a traditional clinical treatment of neuroses that responds to the logic and effects of the signifier. Today, the contemporary clinical practice we are dealing with is a clinical practice of jouissance, which is often approached through the topology of knots. Following my work on obsessional neurosis and after the recent work of the *Association Lacanienne Internationale* on Charles Melman's book *L'Homme sans gravité*⁸, here are some questions I would like to develop: how can we characterize the contemporary subject? What about the subject and the big Other? Is this Möbius-like conception of the articulation between the subject and the big Other still relevant today? Does the contemporary subject still receive its message in an inverted form? What message is it receiving? Indeed, the societal and cultural changes we have been witnessing since the end of the 20th century have led to a crisis of reference points, giving rise to an economy no longer organized by repression, but by the exhibition of jouissance. Until now, the subject has maintained its existence on the condition that its desire remains unsatisfied. This dissatisfaction was organized around an originally lost object that introduced a limit to jouissance. However, it is this limit, this restriction of jouissance, that sustains the subject's desire and vitality. This organization around the loss of the object has given way to an organization based on the presence and jouissance of the object in reality. Permanent satisfaction is available to the contemporary subject. They must enjoy themselves and show it without guilt. Charles Melman speaks of a "new psychic economy" (NEP), which he

believes is the result of the collective liquidation of transference, in the sense that we have realized that the sky is empty. The phallic authority as a place of sacredness and authority has been delegitimized and is no longer a point of gravity around which the subject can anchor themselves. The desiring subject weighed down by lack disappears in favor of a new subject.

8. Melman, C. *L'Homme sans gravité - Jouir à tout prix*, Folio Essais, Paris, 2005.

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Based on *L'Homme sans gravité* and *La Nouvelle Économie psychique*⁹, I will attempt to revisit the various characteristics proposed by Charles Melman to address the contemporary subject. According to him, this new subject is no longer divided, a raw subject that is unable to question its own existence. It is a subject that has lost its specific place and has become a whole, compact subject, a common, average, ordinary subject, relieved of its subjectivity. The subject of the new psychic economy no longer has a shelter, a place where it can stand. It is a flexible subject, perfectly capable of changing, moving, and lending itself to a whole series of domiciles that can lead it to take contrary and heterogeneous positions. Not being guaranteed by a fixed and stable reference, this subject is subject to the vagaries of the inconstancy of the egoic support in a very great dependence on the object. The current jouissance of the object produces a subjective eclipse, a subject who is irresponsible for its existence and whose only purpose is to participate in this generalized perversion, a generalized perversion that stands as a challenge to what has hitherto been considered the norm and social consensus. Where it was necessary to experience lack, dissatisfaction, and the discomfort of desire, the subject of the new psychic economy shows us how to enjoy, when he wants, where he wants, with whom he wants, and with what he wants, freed from any debt to the big Other: I owe nothing to the big Other; on the contrary, let me enjoy freely. Charles Melman sees this widespread perversion as the last bastion against social psychosis. Due to the foreclosure of the paternal authority, the dimension of otherness is abolished and the subject finds himself completely engulfed and enveloped by social discourse. He no longer has a real space that would allow him to question his existence. Faced with this constitutional atopia of the subject, the object, which can be grasped and manipulated in reality, offers a final compass. In the absence of a *heim* ("home"), objectal jouissance proves to be a fixed point, a reference point despite the risks and dangers that this entails for subjectivity.

Whether this new way of enjoying and thinking today is a matter of rejection, denial, defiance, or foreclosure, the contemporary subject is the object of an injunction that pushes toward jouissance, an injunction that can be formalized by the following imperative: "Enjoy!" This imperative no longer comes from the big Other but from opinion, as it is suggested to us by

9. Melman, C., *La nouvelle économie psychique*, Toulouse, Erès, 2012.

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Charles Melman. Opinion, through information, the Internet, the media, and advertising, dictates this jouissance while providing the object that guarantees it. I propose to put it this way: the subject of the new psychic economy receives its message directly from opinion. We "Enjoy!" in place of the big Other, and on the other side a subject, noted S to indicate its non-division, with the objects of satisfaction within reach.

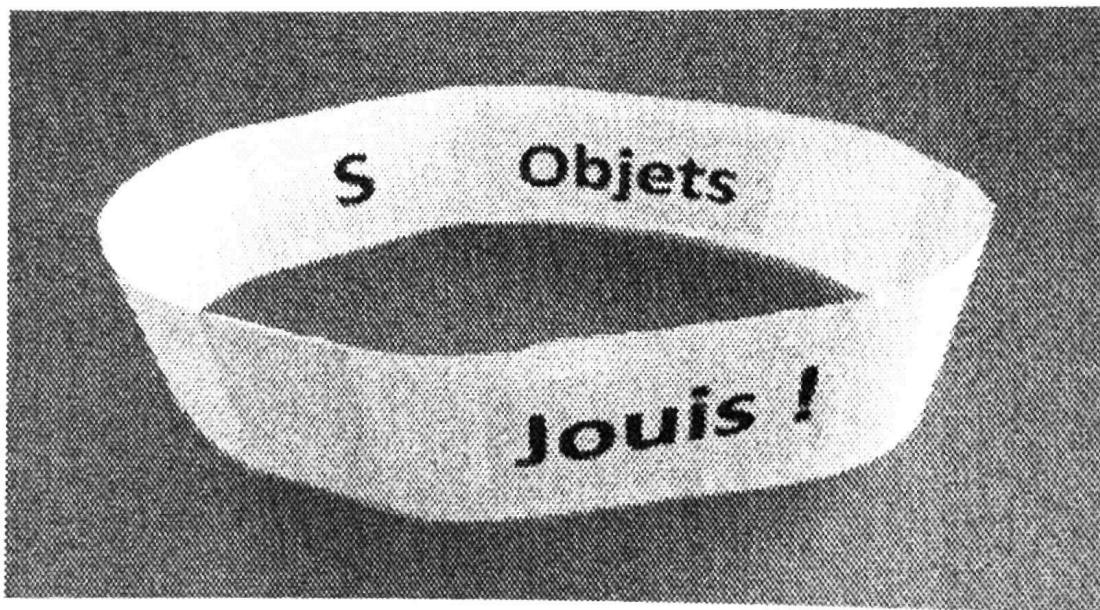


Fig. 9

We move from a defense in the obsessive, a kind of bilateral defense, to a bilateral bond that is very real this time among the bearers of the new psychic economy, and which may also bring to mind the psychotic's relationship with the big Other.

The subject therefore no longer has the possibility of being divided in relation to the message, since the message is a simple and totalitarian one, excluding the dimension of reality. The subject finds itself trapped in its link to the object in a form of infinite addiction, excluding it from social ties.

Charles Melman speaks of a "whole and compact" subject. These terms reminded me of Cotard's syndrome, where, due to the subject's total identification with the object, the Cotardian subject lives in a state of excess and complains precisely about the compactness of his body. Topologically, Cotard's syndrome is characterized by "the imaginary sphericity of primordial man¹⁰," to use Marcel Czermak's expression. Thus, with regard to the new psychic economy, could we envisage the isolation of the subject in his bath of jouissance through the closure of

10. Czermak, M., "Psychoanalytic Significance of Cotard's Syndrome," *Passions de l'objet*, Paris, Joseph Clim's, 1986, p. 221.

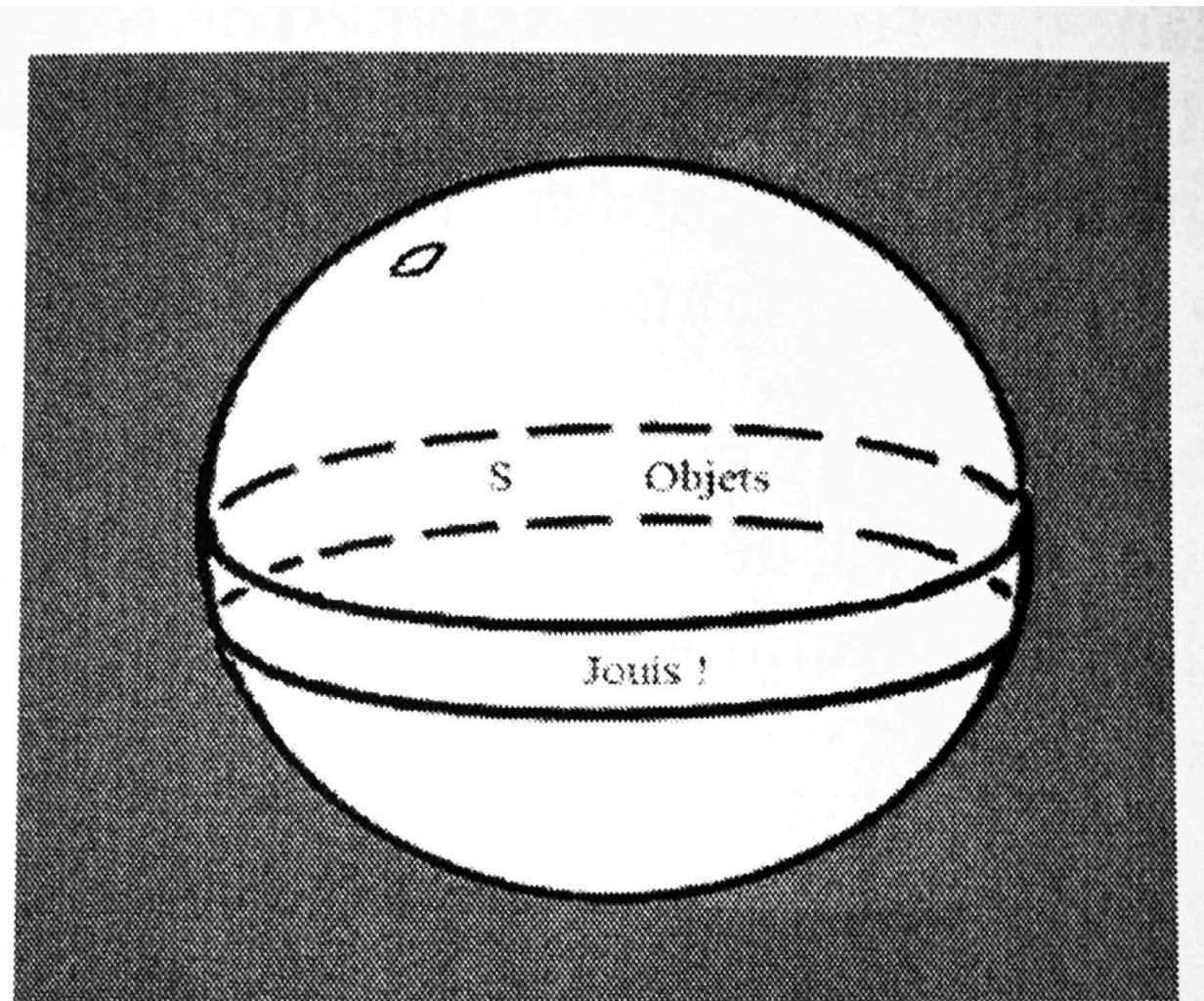


Fig. 10

The contemporary subject would be likened to a sphere, the *s'faire jouir*, whose envelope would be the medium for the message of opinion, like a billboard; a sphere within which the subject enjoys the objects at his disposal. But, unlike the Cotardian, the contemporary subject nevertheless creates an impossible, but a non-subjectivized impossible, which does not take on the value of a complaint or a classic demand. Can we then consider this non-subjectivized impossibility as a hole in the sphere, a hole that is present but inoperative, and whose manipulation and possible transformations would modify its structure, if we want to remain a little optimistic? What would allow the person stuck in this sphere to get out and thus take a certain distance from his *jouissance*?

The spherical conception of the subject of the new psychic economy also seems to point towards an ethic of aesthetics. The denial of the third function of language gives prevalence to

the imaginary register: we are dealing with an ego that seeks to preserve its unity, its value in its relationship with its counterpart, in a dual relationship, because the other may be the holder of the object that arouses envy and also a counterpart with whom to share the same object of jouissance.

What I wanted to articulate is the transition from a band of the subject of desire to a band of enjoyment. In this regard, Jean-Pierre Lebrun had already made this connection between obsessive neurosis and the new psychic economy in chapter 1 of *L'Homme sans gravité*,

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questioning Charles Melman about a possible massive obsession in society. Charles Melman did not subscribe to this possibility, pointing out that the obsessive always seeks to conceal desire by canceling out the sexual, whereas in the new psychic economy, the aim is to bring jouissance into the public arena and turn it into a commodity like any other.

Through my remarks, I hope I have been able to convey my use of topology in an attempt to clinically account for the fact that we no longer get hard like we used to.