

Third discussion session on Marc Darmon's book "Essays on Lacanian Topology," focusing on *Schema L*, Chapter II, with Marc Darmon and Charles Melman.

Marc Darmon – So this morning we are going to talk about *Schema L*, which you can see on the board.

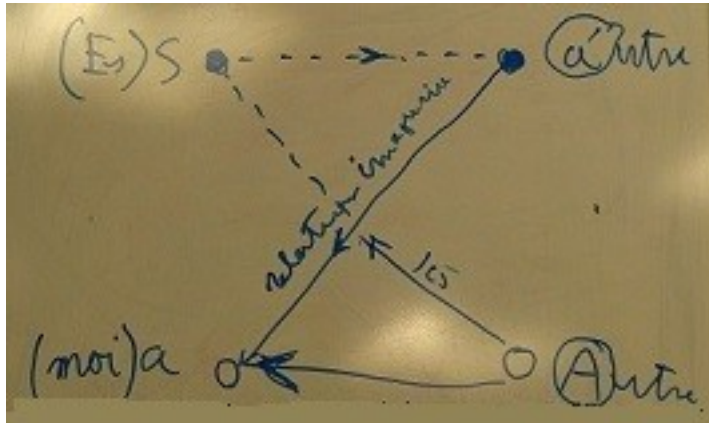


Fig. 1

This is a schema that was developed by Lacan in his early seminars. He returned to it later in 1966 when he published *Écrits* to show that *Schema L* is included in *Schema R*, where it corresponds to the Möbius strip of *Schema R*. But we are going to, on the one hand, put *Schema L* to work, try to understand its origin, its construction, and its various uses, of which Lacan gave us a few examples. We are going to outline a few broad points. The *L schema* describes the circuit, the path of speech. When I discovered this *L schema* a long time ago, I was struck by the fact that in the same schema, in the same circuit, Lacan placed the Other, the big Other, the little other, the ego, the Subject, that is to say, we had brought together very different elements in the same diagram, and the unconscious in particular, which I had a notion of, from reading Freud, as intrapsychic. What is striking about this *L schema* is that the unconscious is located on an arrow, a relationship, a path that originates from the big Other and therefore, in this circuit, the ego was the result of two determinations: an arrow coming from the big Other and an arrow coming from the little other.

So it is a double determination that is both symbolic, since it is the arrow that comes from the big Other, and imaginary, the arrow that comes from the little other. The Subject appears as it passes through the circuit, that is to say, it is traversed from one end to the other by the path of speech, and then there were uses of this *L schema* that concerned both the individual subject and several subjects, that is to say, Lacan uses this *L schema* both to describe what happens in the circuit of speech in different neurotic or psychotic circumstances, and he uses this *L schema* to describe and make a structure with several characters function. This schema therefore broke with an intrapsychic or intersubjective vision, since it deals with both the intrapsychic and the intersubjective. Something that struck me when I discovered this schema was that it went beyond the distinction between psychoanalysis, which is interested in the Subject as an intrapsychic unit, and psychoanalysis, which was attentive to what was happening between subjects, so that the unconscious, for example, this *L diagram* presents a conception of the unconscious that is not to be located within the Subject but which manifests itself on the path between the big Other and the Subject.

Another thing that struck me in this first reading of *schema L* is that Lacan insists that the Subject is the homonym of the German *Es*, that is, what we have translated as the Id. So, in the first figurations of the *L schema*, it is the unstruck S, and we could say that it is the *L schema* itself that constitutes the stroke of this S in question, and we must place at the level of this S the Subject as represented by a signifier for another

signifier, that is, what we actually see in the course of speech in this *L schema*, namely that the Subject is located between two signifiers. It is this Subject that is referred to in this schema. So, let's now talk about the construction of this diagram and the relationship between this diagram and other constructions by Lacan. You can see that there are solid arrows and dotted arrows. Lacan does not give us any explanations about this particular feature of the diagram. We will therefore have to make some assumptions to try to understand how, in constructing this diagram, he came to use solid lines and dotted lines. There are vertices represented by dots: filled dots and empty dots. You have the vertex of the small a, the ego, and the vertex of the big Other, which are two white dots, and the vertices of the Subject and the small other are represented by two black dots. We will therefore have to account for this.

So, I propose that we consider this *L schema* as Lacan's first topology, a topology that will later be extended in the *R schema*, which divides the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, with the cut of the Real, but it is a first topology that, in my opinion, is linked to the birth of topology, that is, to Euler's work, to *Analysis Situs*, that is, an initial topology that concerns the relationship between points without taking into account the path, meaning that the links between these points are plastic, elastic, and can take any form. What is important is the order of succession between the points, connected by loops. This is how Euler solved the Königsberg bridge problem, which involved creating a route. There were a number of bridges between an island and the banks of the river, so the task was to describe a possible route that would cross all the bridges, but only once. This is therefore a graph problem. Euler solved this problem. [Marc Darmon draws on the board]



Fig. 2

Basically, the problem consists of connecting vertices in such a way that only one line can be drawn. A well-known problem is that of drawing an envelope, a problem that all schoolchildren are familiar with: drawing an envelope without lifting the pencil, meaning that you can start wherever you want, but you have to draw the entire path without lifting the pencil. So there you go, I succeeded [laughter] because I started from this point.

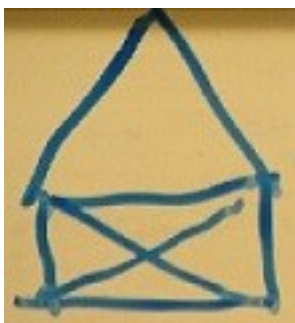


Fig. 3

I'll try to do that starting from the top:



Fig. 4

It didn't work!

So Euler thought about this problem of the schoolchildren's envelope and found a solution, that is, starting from any graph, i.e., points with arrows,



Fig. 5

you can predict whether or not you will be able to complete a route.



Fig. 6

So, here we need to analyze what happened a little.

Here, I started from a point where there are three...

Virginia Hasenbalg – Where there are three possible starting points.

Mr. Darmon – ... where there are three possible departures or arrivals; here, I started from a point where there is an even number of edges, okay? So, if we think about it carefully, the starting point will have an odd number of edges because there is the arrow that starts from this point, that makes 1, and then possibly passages through this point. Are you following me? So, there can be any even number added to this starting edge, but if it is the starting point of the graph, there will always be an odd number of edges connected to this point. On the other hand, points where there is an even number of edges will be passing points.

A point with an even number of edges cannot, under any circumstances, be a starting point or an ending point. So, by examining a graph, even a very complicated one, and counting the number of vertices, which we will call odd and even vertices, we can predict whether there is a solution to the Königsberg bridge problem.

So why the "L" diagram? One might ask. It's *L* for Lacan [laughter], it's *L* for letter...

Henri Cesbron Lavau – "Elle," like a woman!

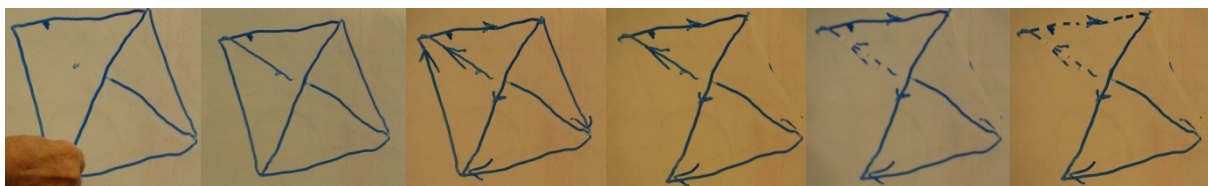
Mr. Darmon – ... and "L" as a woman! We'll see, if we have time or another time, how this *L schema* applies to *The Purloined Letter*.

So, the hypothesis is that the *L schema* was constructed at a time when Lacan was interested in structures, group structures – he talks about this in his seminar on *The Ego* – and group structures are represented by graphs where the points and edges represent operations. We'll talk about symmetries in a moment, and Klein's group, for example, is a group where there are a certain number of operations, plus the neutral operation that doesn't change the configuration. So Klein's group is represented on a tetrahedron. The figure of the tetrahedron was a constant reference for Lacan. The tetrahedron is therefore mentioned in the *L schema*, as we shall see; it is mentioned in the four discourses; it is mentioned in the Borromean knot made of tetrahedra, which we encountered in *The Moment of Conclusion*, I believe. Jean [Brini] did some very fine work on this. So, the tetrahedron is a constant figure. I think that the *L schema* was developed, in part, based on Klein's tetrahedron on the sequence of " α alpha, β beta, γ gamma" from *La Lettre volée* and its distinctive feature, the twist that we see in this diagram, which seems obvious, is that a plane that appears to pass behind—if you like, this first Eulerian topology—is linked to the topology of surfaces.

So I'll explain quickly.

[Marc Darmon draws on the board] Here is the tetrahedron.

Figures 7 to 12:



So here I've put arrows to answer the question: on the tetrahedron... is there a direction such that there is the possibility of a path where, as in the bridges of Königsberg, you can only take a path between two vertices once?

Virginia Hasenbalg – But the tetrahedron allows you to add two edges.

Mr. Darmon – So there are two edges, yes. So I suppose Lacan started with an oriented tetrahedron. And he removed two edges. So there you have it, we get roughly *Schema L*. All that remains is to explain the dotted lines. So if we start with the tetrahedron, we can say that the dotted lines represent an edge that would pass under one of the planes of the tetrahedron.



Fig. 13

We can also draw on the interplay between solid lines and dotted lines that Lacan uses

in "*Desire and its Interpretation*" when he talks about the graph. There are certain parts of the graph that are dotted and others that are solid lines. And this is very interesting because Lacan distinguishes these parts of the graph with solid lines and dotted lines, for example in the intersection on the ^{first} level of the graph. Now, [for] the intersection of the line of Demand with the treasure of signifiers... the arrow that comes out of it is dotted.

And Lacan says that what is in solid lines concerns the synchrony of signifiers, and what comes out is in dotted lines because it concerns the signifiers themselves placed in discourse, that is, with the cuts that make them discrete elements. So there is a game like this between solid lines and dotted lines that I think we find in *Schema L*. That is to say, the unconscious in its synchrony—the fact of ignoring time—is in solid lines, and when it crosses the barrier of the imaginary relationship, it enters into a discourse in which the subject is caught up, and we are dealing with discrete elements.

I will perhaps stop there for discussion, and we will talk about the use of Lacan's *Schema L* at another time.

Charles Melman – I am delighted every time we are able to push our friend Marc Darmon to surpass himself, which he is perfectly capable of doing for the benefit of us all. And that's why I came to ask him in the way we see. And each time, I thank him, both for what he tells us and at the same time for what he doesn't tell us. Because, as we know, what is not said can sometimes be the most important thing.

It is obvious that what you are missing is the context in which Lacan's elaboration took place. That is to say, the intellectual quagmire in which post-Freudian psychoanalysis had become mired, in other words... Obviously, you no longer read these texts, and you are right not to, but take a look at them and you will see that those who claim to follow Freud can say absolutely anything and everything; and in such a way that this possibility—that is, the fact that ultimately something like "to each his own psychoanalysis," not just to each his own unconscious, which would be quite legitimate, but ultimately to each what comes as it were to play with a set of Legos to build in his own way according to his own aesthetic. And then it gives rise to... everyone can have their own charisma, and then it gives rise to local crazes, schools of this and that, arguments... Pointless.

This diagram by Lacan is fundamental. Why? In the never-resolved question of the topography of the unconscious, its location, its home, with Freud obviously placing it beneath the surface.

"Beneath the surface" is a dimension where it is buried. It is a projection of the imaginary with consequences elsewhere in the practice of therapy. We must always dig deeper, we will arrive at the treasure that... because we are never sure we have reached the bottom.

He contrasts this with an incredible story because this *Schema L*, if I may say so, is incredible. Why? Because it gives the unconscious a physical disposition because, and this is what Marc did not tell us, this *Schema L* is inscribed very directly on the fold of the Möbius strip.

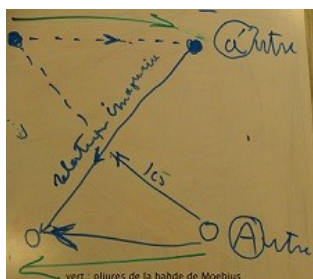


Fig. 1 4

In other words, what is dotted is obviously what cannot be seen in the Euclidean plane; it is on the other side. And so he takes a physical property of the Möbius strip—the fact that it has this fold—and he turns it into... Just think how daring that is! You don't have to follow it. But if you do, it has extremely serious consequences, since it effectively makes the discipline to which the Möbius strip belongs, i.e., topology—no longer topography—topology becomes the scientific domain. This is a scientific attempt to account for what has until now been a quagmire. So the Möbius strip, not as a model but as a support at the level of its fold for what encounters..., accounts for the process of the unconscious. There are things that pass to the other side, which is the same, as you can already see, with a consequence that is absolutely... which we do not take into account and which is that the unconscious is not only the slip of the tongue, the witticism, the *slip of the pen*, the Freudian slip, etc. It is that the unconscious, being on the same side as the conscious, is in your daily life. Of course it is in your daily life; you don't need these extra manifestations for it to be in your daily life. Daily life is dominated and marked by the unconscious. What I am telling you, what Marc is telling you, is it about science or is it about the unconscious? It is about each of us, about what is unconscious in each of us, including in the way we read and the way we hear or do not hear. So, with this *Schema L* business, there is already a kind of... it's a thunderclap that has never been heard, in reality. That's probably why it continues to rumble, because this thunderclap is not heard. It's a ^{first}principle that will... if we follow it, it will obviously determine everything else.

So what you have before you, as we can see, is a topological representation of the unconscious. That's how it works, says Lacan. And he calls it *Schema L*; he doesn't tell you that it's the universal schema. It's Lacan's schema. He, Lacan, tells you that's how it is. We will soon have these days on *The Ego*, but you can immediately see how much of a radical break there is with Freud's second Topical. The *Id*, the *Ego*, the *Superego*, that's a reprise with precisely the *Id*, that's why he calls it (*Es*) *S*. It's a reprise of Freud's second Topical, but it's fundamental.

The second thing I'm not sure about, but I talked about it a little bit with Marc and I'm glad he didn't hear me. The second thing is that there is no break with the unconscious. It's obvious that with the signifier, we are inevitably led to think of the Other as separated by a break. There is no break with the Other. And in a field—ours—where the question of the break is decisive. The ^{first}break is the one that organized your fantasy and was decisive, and then, of course, the breaks of interpretation, possibly. There is no break between the Other and then what? We are not going to say the field of representations. It is not the stranger, it is not beyond a border. I have already equivocated at length on this point: the problem of the border is a major problem in our archaic system of thinking. Because the other side of the border is always the stranger. And therefore the enemy, inevitably. It's the *self* that is not like me, and that's unbearable. What an offense! He has a *self* that is different from mine. Oh no, let's not exaggerate! You see, we're immediately into the problems of daily and collective life. Right away. And all of this is based on this ridiculous little diagram, except, I should say, if we accept that it is constructed on what is the fold of the Möbius strip. Well, there are all the consequences proposed to the potential reader.

Because Lacan doesn't force your hand. If you want to read, read. He's not dogmatic in this respect; he leaves you free to read or not to read what, if he had been more explicit, could obviously have given his teaching a character

academic. How can academics illustrate proposals such as these: no divisions, but an upside-down world. There is an upside and there is a downside. It is therefore the upside-down world that varies from one moment to the next. It is therefore the upside-down world that makes the difference, that creates otherness. Otherness is not defined by a cut, but by the above-below. There is what is above, there is what is below, while remaining the same above-below and being Other in relation to each other, the same and the other. Otherness as the same. This is also something extraordinary, and we will of course find this above and below in what will be the geometry of the knot where everything is organized, where I would say: the physical structure of the knot depends on the above and below. And then, of course, the braid, which is nothing more than a play on the above and below. Phew! I don't know, it takes my breath away. And then what contributes to this "dispeic" effect for me in this *L diagram* is what it tells us about the two possible cuts in the Möbius strip and how they support the interpretation—these cuts; that an interpretation, because if we are not believers in magic, in pure magic, we are forced to ask ourselves why an interpretation can work, or why it can also fail completely. Perhaps most of the time it doesn't work. We say to ourselves: not only does it do nothing, but it strengthens the defenses! And yet we say to ourselves: but that's just what I said, it's true, it's valid. So this incredible thing, that in a geometry that is therefore not metric, we will nevertheless have two cuts, one that follows the edge and the other that is median. I must tell you sincerely that this causes me problems, but that's what it leads to, and with two completely different consequences, completely different topological consequences, and you wonder: but what's the point, what's it all about? Why is there a cut, the one that follows, which is close to the edge and therefore results in two intertwined circles, one of which is double-sided and the other Möbius-like? And why, what is the difference in effect, since we are talking about interpretation, with the median cut, which makes a single turn and results in a single double-sided strip? You see, it's you I'm asking, Marc, and it's you I'm hoping for, because how... Would you like me to let you speak for a moment, because I've seen you throughout, taking it all in, not without reflection. Would you like to speak now?

Mr. Darmon – Yes, I... You go straight to the Real of this construction, that is, to read in the *L diagram*, effectively the Möbius strip, even the knots, that's true. That's true, but my approach was to take it step by step, because it is remarkable that in Lacan's first topological construction, the Möbius strip and the knot are already present.

So we might ask ourselves: was he aware of this? Did he already have all this in his head? I don't think he was aware of it, but from the point of view of Reality, it was there.

In other words, we can actually find this twist you're talking about in the Möbius strip in the *L schema*; it's obvious. It's obvious to us because we know what comes next, that is, we know that Lacan placed his *L schema* in his *R schema* and that he read the *R schema* as a *cross-cap* and that this *cross-cap* contains a Möbius strip and that the Möbius strip is an upside-down, since the edge of even the simplest Möbius strip, but this is even more true when it is triple, is a knot. So you ask the question about the double cut or the single cut. When Lacan talks about it in *L'Étourdit*, it is to identify them. That is to say, as if in the single cut there were no remainder of what falls in the middle in the double cut, and what allows him to identify the Möbius strip is the cut itself.

Then, strangely enough, he takes up this question again in *Topology and Time*, since in the first lesson of *Topology and Time* he makes a double cut and a single cut in the three-times twisted Möbius strip. And the three-times twisted Möbius strip is a

A knot that is intertwined with a Möbius strip twisted three times if you make a cut along the edge, and it is a simple knot if you make a cut in the middle, a trefoil knot.

So what, in practice, would differentiate a double cut from a single cut in the interpretation? Well, the double cut leaves the structure in place, since we are still dealing with a Möbius strip in the middle, which calls for new cuts. And there would be something definitive about the single cut, since there is nothing left to cut from there, there is no remainder.

Ch. Melman – Yeah, what you... I'd like to ask you about a remark I made: that the double-sided strip is the strip of psychosis. I probably talk about it easily because I started my career on it; it was called "the dividing wall."

When you have a relationship with space organized by the dividing wall, that is to say: "The fact that, well, it's on the other side of this wall that everything happens... there, right! They're there behind it, and it's them behind it who are in charge of everything! I can hear them, too. At the same time, I can hear them. They're there." A mechanism that responds to collective psychosis. It's the border. They're there behind the threat... The double-sided gang is the gang of psychosis. And so, should we see in the double cut that Lacan proposes, one I don't know why it would be the one that... perhaps because of the topological consequences, the opposition between an interpretation by equivocation and an interpretation by meaning? Should we see in what he proposes to us here the support of the two different effects of interpretation, depending on whether it is done through equivocation or through meaning? Is an interpretation through meaning equivalent to the establishment of a double-sided band? That is to say, a phallic interpretation through the meaning of what is on the other side; interpretation through meaning is necessarily a phallic interpretation, that is what it means. So an interpretation of the phallicism of what is on the other side, and if there are two, there is necessarily one that is superfluous [V. **Hasenbalg** – Who is? Sorry] there is necessarily one that is superfluous. You may get the impression, we're not going to do workshops on reading post-Freudian texts, I assure you that you wouldn't have much fun, but if you look at them, it can have a strange effect on you from a clinical point of view! A strange effect, the impression of dealing with a bunch of lunatics, I'm not talking about their acquaintances, I'm talking about their texts. I submit this hypothesis, as I have always wanted to, and now that the opportunity arises, I submit it to your consideration so that you can decide for yourselves whether it seems interesting, whether it seems tenable. I would say: what does it mean to interpret through meaning? What comes from over there, what comes from below, is in reality another side. So you will say yes, but it is homogeneous since it is the same meaning, but to say that on the other side there is meaning, that in the Other there is meaning, is already to phallicize it. And to say that its organization is as phallic as what is on the other side.

Mr. Darmon – Regarding your first remark about the "party wall" and the double-sided strip as being that of psychosis [**Ch. Melman** – Yeah], then I was thinking, in relation to *the L diagram*, I was thinking about what Lacan says in the story of *the sow* [– Yes, absolutely], the hallucination of the word *sow*. He applies the *L schema*...

Ch. Melman – I've just come from the butcher's, and what comes to him in a hallucinatory echo: *sow*.

M. Darmon – *Sow* [– Yeah] he tells us that if we apply the *L schema*, it's an *L schema* where the dimension of the big Other is excluded. [– Well, there you go] what happens is between two Selves, in fact, between two Selves that are puppets speaking in the Real, meaning that there is no other dimension [– Yes] and indeed we find ourselves in a non-Moebian space, where the Self speaks.

Ch. Melman – Yes.

M. Darmon – We are dealing with an ego that speaks.

Ch. Melman – Absolutely, it is from the ego that it speaks.

Mr. Darmon – That's what's crazy.

Ch. Melman – Yeah. Very good.

Do you see, Virginia?

V. Hasenbalg – It was in relation to the other interpretation through ambiguity, which would reveal the very structure of the Möbius strip, which is that of a cut...

Ch. Melman – Yeah... Well, which would reveal that on the other side there is not the One, there is the letter, that's the whole difference: is there the One on the other side or is there the letter?

V. Hasenbalg – Okay.

Ch. Melman – Psychosis is when there is the One. Ah yes.

Pierre Coërchon – Yes, but there is this peculiarity...

Ch. Melman – Pierre, sorry, speak up, I can't hear you...

P. Coërchon – There is this peculiarity linked to the fact that a double-sided strip resulting from the central split of a Möbius strip can be reconstituted [– Yeah] also, there is a possible return, there is a possible reverse path.

Ch. Melman – Absolutely, it can be reconstituted, the Möbius strip can be reconstituted after the cut, of course. But there is, well, perhaps for another second, another... when, and you rightly point this out, when he says that ultimately the materiality of the Möbius strip is the cut, we enter, it seems to me, into a domain, since I say that it is physics, we enter into a domain, he had no idea about the knot at the time, the knot happened to him, as we know, by accident with Valéry Marchand, who...

Mr. Darmon – Yes, but he is in the Real, at the level of the Real.

Ch. Melman – Yes, in terms of reality, yes... What did I want to say?

M. Darmon – The break is the subject... materiality... the break is the Möbius strip. **Ch. Melman** – Yes, it inaugurates what will be another coup de force, whereas I continue to find unprecedented that the materiality of the instances that organize psychic life, if you rely on the knots, this materiality is holes. Has anyone ever thought of such a thing? Their difference lies essentially in the nature of the circles that delimit these holes and their reciprocal relationships.

Julien Maucade – Gustave Eiffel had thought of that.

Ch. Melman – Okay.

Martine Bercovici – I would also like to say something. This *L diagram* comes from a very strong partnership with Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss had already introduced Klein's group and the inner eight, so this is Lacan's contribution to a research movement known as structuralism, which is extremely powerful. He also drew on the work of many mathematicians of the time.

Ch. Melman – My dear friend, I have never found the slightest trace of a Möbius strip in Lévi-Strauss.

Mr. Bercovici – No, but Klein's group from the point of view of structure [– Yes] and the fact that structure is something, which comes from Poincaré, by the way, that structure is something that greatly influences human existence. We see this in linguistics, in topology [– Okay] and Lacan is very much part of this movement [– Yeah] and the fact that he moves from the schema... that represents a group. A group is a structure, the fact that he moves from this schema to topology, etc., all of that is paths that were laid out by the mathematicians of the time [– But of course! It didn't just come out of his brain on its own.] We could draw on the whole environment of the time.

Ch. Melman – Of course.

J. Maucade – One last question, if I may, regarding phallic interpretation, um, in clinical practice, I use it a lot with adolescents to be able to move on to ambiguity, and adolescents, it seems to me, do not have access to interpretation through ambiguity right away. That is to say, if we don't go through this... it's a transition, that's all.

Ch. Melman – But you should add, Julien, that your teenagers are a bit special [– Yes], and that if you don't speak to them in phallic language, they don't understand anything [– Yes]. Okay, we agree.

Well, thank you very much.

The audience – Thank you, thank you very much.

Henri Cesbron Lavau – Next Matinees, February 20.

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