

## **NWRPA Newsletter November 2019**

### **Books and Bodies**

**Jo Rostron**

**Friday 6 November 2019**

#### **Summary by Jo Rostron**

This was an exploration by an art therapist of the presence of the body within Lacan's structure of the psyche. The Ancient Greek custom of wearing flayed and abstracted skins, was presented and then linked to the fracture between semblant and reality, and to the objet a. Touching on the history of the manuscript and the book there followed a description of our medieval ancestors' voluptuous and corporeal relationship with them, reflected in their materiality and their anatomical descriptions of books. Reading in those times was accompanied by murmuring and subvocalization, enabling a book to become part of the reader through bodily performance and memory. The practice in monasteries of reading while eating was considered in terms of the food of medieval scholars – their consumption of books, the digestion of knowledge and its rumination. This was juxtaposed with Freud's concepts of nachtraeglichkeit and mnemonic traces, as well as with Lacan's letters or S1s, with the S2s of the Unconscious, and with *lalangue* that links to the symptomatic of the body.

Lacan's concept of the closed and repetitive circuit of the partial drives around their object, from and to the body's erogenous zones, themselves opening out as rims onto the body surface, followed an account of the written or textual amulet that survived during the Middle Ages from the antique roll format. Such amulets would encircle a finger, a limb, or the abdomen to offer medieval people an active role in seeking good fortune and personal protection, particularly during childbirth, through the power of the words used.

On the sixteenth and seventeenth century anatomy tables there was an unfolding of the interiority of bodies, laid out as surfaces for view. Through his beautiful topographical illustrations, Vesalius made direct connections between the geographic cartography of the age and anatomical mapping, to offer new knowledge about the three-dimensional body within the new technology of the codex or two-dimensional turning page. Likewise, through the application of the topology and set theory of our own era, Lacan offers new insight into the effects of the three-dimensional body on the psychical structure. To show how the subject's division occurs as a result of two different spatialities, to include the non-phallic spatiality required by the mnemonic traces or letters, there was an exploration of the table of sexualisation, read as a Moebius strip. An exploration of the Borromean knot revealed the spatial difference between Ego and the Id, the latter being the topological zone, the objet a.

An intuitive approach to topology was offered to those present who were, like the art therapist, not mathematicians. That natural geometric patterns and processes in time have fractional dimensions, known as expanding symmetry, is a topological concept put forward by mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot in the late 1970's. In the tracing out of ciphers, the encrypting procedure is varied. The detailed operation of the algorithm depends on a piece of auxiliary information, called a key (or *cryptovaryable*). For Lacan, it is the identificatory aspect of the unary trait (an S1 or letter) which contains the key essential to the tracing out of ciphers within our individual psychological structures, and gives rise to the symptom, one being the Oedipus complex, the primordial identification with the father.

To clarify how letters create form and structure, the Medieval formula for the four-way 'Sator Arepo Tenet Opera Rotas' palindrome was presented in the context of Lacan's analysis of James Joyce, that Lacan illustrated through what he termed his theory of 'bags and cords'. The subject's division between two different spatialities is but a reflection of an earlier

division, that of the symptom. The symbol can only be a *fractured* part, as has been recognised since time immemorial, of what Lacan calls the pair  $S1>S2$ . However, there is a 'false hole' between the symptom and the symbol that on occasion can be verified as a 'true hole' by the phallus. This enables a link to the imaginary by means of the 'empty bag', the primordial form of the body, which functions as an empty set, where the symbol offloads into the Unconscious, the  $S2$ . This is the budding knot of what Lacan terms the sinthome, which is what there is singularly in each individual. Lacan showed how Joyce incarnated in himself the symptom by reducing himself to a structure which was that of l.o.m. (l'homme) rather than of the Oedipal father. Joyce was thus simultaneously engaged in the writing of his own body of work and the autonomous writing of his Ego. Lacan says 'He didn't know he was fashioning or simulating the sinthome... it is by dint of the fact that he is a pure artificer, a man of savoir faire, likewise known as an artist.'

The presentation concluded with a description of a work entitled 'Entrail Troyen' (2014) by contemporary artist Amanda Couch in which she imagines the folded book, and particularly the leporello or concertina form, as an embodiment of the digestive system. This is a tubular piece of French knitting, articulated loop by loop of threads which are pieced together from a collection of salami skins and sausage casings, originally intestines themselves, which also evolved into a concertina book of the same name. Entrail Troyen is a script: a text, as well as textile, formed from one long line composed of fragments of fibre. The concertina book was created through a life-size scan of the 152cm sculpture. Just as sections of the original sculpture are stitched from casings of charcuterie with diverse colours, transparencies, weights and strengths, so the sections of each scan retain their differences, while the pages are printed on different fibres, tones, and weights of Japanese papers. All of this enables the artist to heighten the bodily, living quality of the work, and to question notions of truth and objectivity in Western science.