

# The Psychoanalyst and Modernity\*

## **The Art of Responding to the Foreclosure of the Real of Sex.**

More and more these days, the modernity in which we live offers us media-ting windows, televised plateaus. The thinkers in us believe they will always have everything under control as concerns this knowledge held over them, because they believe it will enable them to accept into themselves what is good, and reject what is bad. Things, however, are not so simple when we begin to take the meaning of the symptom into account.

Indeed it may transpire that during one of our many moments of watching and listening in this way, a symptom of some sort will suddenly lay hold of our being. What was it we in fact stumbled upon, insofar as the symptom is its response?

## **Plugging a hole (*bouche-trou*) with the object of the fantasm**

What the experience of the transference may reveal in this respect, is that even though we consciously think what we are doing is looking, hearing and understanding, what has in fact occurred is we have been plunged into an otherworldly place where it is *we* who are radically and unconsciously<sup>1</sup> watched and listened to.

This is a harsh reminder of something we had in fact forgotten, we have always been watched and listened to this way – players in a worldwide spectacle. This is the discovery that leads to the object of the fantasm.

Freud first witnessed this wholesale reversal in the dream of the Wolf Man. The object of the fantasm that was present in his dream, in the form of the gaze of the wolves, had a clearly defined function. It was intended as a stopgap (*bouche-trou*), a plug barring access to the hole of the Real of sex.

Manifestly speaking therefore, the dream signified that this gaze had fixated the young Sergei Pankejeff into the position of someone who was being watched. At the same time however, it showed that its dreamer had become transfixed by gazing in turn. Through this reversal the dreamer may thus find there is a beyond to the fixation he experiences as an object of the fantasm.

## **The Real of sex: Beyond the fantasm,**

Because the dream is a formation of the unconscious, it is an art of responding to the Real of sex(uality), the experience of which left the speaking being unable to respond in the day or days preceding the dream itself. The fantasm stems from the activity of what Lacan, in particular, envisioned as the transference.

---

\* Preparatory text for my presentation at the working-group sessions for a conference celebrating “The One Hundred Years Since the Publication of the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” (Mexico, February 18-20, 2005), organized by the Lacanian Analytic Network of Mexico (REAL), with the help of the Freudian School of Buenos Aires and the Psychoanalytic Institute of Buenos Aires, all of which are members of *Convergencia*.

<sup>1</sup> Meaning we are not yet able to think it but a so-called unconscious perception of it may arise in its aftermath.

The secret of the fantasm latent in the dream, insofar as both have become caught up in the dialectic of the transference, is that it is both the impasse the subject finds himself in, manifestly immobilized as something gazed at-gazing, as well as the locus of “the pass” to the beyond of this position, a place where the Real of the drive<sup>2</sup> may trigger a new drive impulse fueling the Subject of the Unconscious.

The stakes involved in the fantasm lie herein: there is a presupposition that it is not impossible to go back to a place beyond it, something that is, per Lacan’s claim on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1964, “beyond analysis that has never been discussed.”

### **To Maternal Privation**

For Lacan, the conveyor (*passer*) of Freud, the Wolf Man’s dream opened a door that revealed, even as it left veiled, the unseen and unheard field of the Real of sex as a realm of maternal privation. The real hole she was (reduced to) in the field of the gaze was replaced by the Symbolic hole *to come*<sup>3</sup> out of which, beyond what is seen by the eyes and heard by the ears, the passage to a Subject who does not know,  $\$$ , heretic of modernity, must enter into existence.

Freud’s discovery was thus highly subversive, insofar as it cannot be reduced to the sight of the mother’s imaginary castration. Beyond the hole *of* the mother, it appeals to the idea of a hole *in* the mother, a representative of the lack in the knowledge of the Other as such. What is crucial is not so much something that is absent for her as something that is absent *in* her, because this lack signifies the possibility of both presence in absence, and absence in presence.

### **Foreclosed by Our (version of) Modernity**

This hole at the heart of sexuality, which the psychoanalysis of the transference assumes as its key burden, is foreclosed by our present version of modernity, focused as it is on sexuality as the abrupt surfacing of uncontrollable forces, which it has labeled “drives” in an effort to evaluate and educate them, in response to a need to see them suppressed.

Transfixed in, and by, development and technology, our modernity is content to observe, and humans become anonymous beings in its service. *Exeunt* the effects engendered by the entry into language and the object of the fantasm. *Exeunt* the Real of sex that it covers over, the discovery of which, beyond the fantasm itself, is the first indispensable step toward the realm of speech. *Exeunt*, in short, the speaking being *tout court*.

What is instead seen, looked for, is “The Man Without Qualities.”<sup>4</sup>

This symptomatic outcome, which Robert Musil foresaw at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is just as relevant today for explaining the development of numerous symptoms, including anorexia, bulimia, impotence, asthenia, depression and others. Is it in

---

<sup>2</sup> More specifically the invocatory drive, “the closest experience to the unconscious.” (J. Lacan. *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis). Seuil. p. 96).

<sup>3</sup> This is the duty that issues from Freud’s “Wo es war, soll ich werden.”

<sup>4</sup> The title of a novel by Robert Musil written near the end of the 1920s, the same period when Freud was embarking on his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

fact an unconscious compromise formation struck in order to deceive the “evidence”<sup>5</sup> (of the eyes) of this (disembodied) subjectless knowledge, and thereby appeal to what is beyond it?

### **Building an Average Configured Man**

Indeed, the thing whose gaze over us continues to grow is in fact a kind of accounting transparency (*le comptable*), as if these symptoms were constructing a semblance of quantitative reductivity and growth. The techniques of psychotherapy<sup>6</sup> seem designed to expand things further in this direction.

The knowledge of modernity configures the human being into a series of predictable responses to questionnaires, statistical averages and rules for smooth functioning. Our time, the time of the average man, is indeed a prolonging of the time of the “Man Without Qualities.”

In 1997, the philosopher Alain Badiou produced a remarkably precise wording of this process of involution: “The word ‘culture’ works to obliterate that of ‘art.’ The word ‘technique’ obliterates the word ‘science.’ The word ‘management’ obliterates the word ‘politics.’ The word ‘sexuality’ obliterates the word ‘love.’”<sup>7</sup>

What answer might the psychoanalyst furnish to this from his position in the transference?

### **The Art of the Responding**

By discovering the importance of unconscious sexuality, Freud established a discourse of exception: Repression is not the repression of a thing, but repression of a truth. What is lost therein however is not the truth as such, but the key to unlocking the meaning of the new language of symptoms through which it continues to speak – a repressed truth continues to be signified elsewhere, in an other language, the language of neurotics.

The subject is no longer “conducting” things, discourse continues to be articulated but outside of him. He is no longer his own center, an other subject has arisen, the Subject of the Unconscious.

This is too much for the “soul engineers” of today, as it was for those of yesteryear. They are not unwilling to tolerate the existence of unexpectedly invasive sexual forces coming, without warning, from beyond all conscious logic. But to them this (analytic) presupposition of a sexuality promoted to the locus of speech, the neurotic idea of a saying beyond the said, is inconceivable.

### **By Opening Up *L’Étourdit***<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Insofar as the word “evidence” derives from *videre*, the Latin verb “to see.”

<sup>6</sup> Characterized by the fact that they do not take the creative activities of the transference into account.

<sup>7</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul. La fondation de l’universalisme* (Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism). P.U.F 1997.

<sup>8</sup> TR: “l’*étourdit*” is a neologistic title. An ‘*étourdi*,’ without the ‘t,’ is a ‘dumb-dumb’ or a ‘fool.’ Spelled with the ‘t’ as Lacan does here adds the word “dit,” “speaks” or “said.” The new meaning might thus be rendered as the “dumb-dumb-speaks,” or “what the fool said.” Of course both spellings are indistinguishable when they are “said” aloud.

Freud's discovery clearly revealed a discourse of exception because it does not seek to reveal the truth via a knowledge that has already been discovered by an anonymous observer, but rather a truth that is revealed even as it remains veiled.

Therein we begin to hear resonance of the opening line (*ouverture*) of *l'Étourdit*, first sounded on July 14, 1972, in Beloeil:

“That we are saying remains forgotten behind what is said (*dit*), in what is heard.”<sup>9</sup>

Paris, November 13.      Jean Charmoille, Member of *Insistance*

---

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Lacan. *L'Étourdit*. Scilicet 4 p. 5.