

FREUD, THE ARTIST OF THE *THREE ESSAYS ON THE THEORY OF SEXUALITY**

At the same time as Freud was writing the manuscript that was to become the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* he was also composing, on a separate work table, *Wit and its Relations to the Unconscious*.

Surely he went back and forth from the one to the other. However this fact might come as a surprise to most readers, since there is nothing to indicate an obvious connection between the two works.

On this the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the publication of the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, which we are privileged to celebrate here in Mexico City thanks to the invitation of *La Red Analitica Lacaniana*, I shall attempt to argue Freud was animated by one and the same question in these two different works – a question that brings *Wit In Its Relations to the Unconscious* and the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* into symbolic continuity in an unexpected way.

In the theoretical section of Part Three on the “Transformations of Puberty,” Freud returns to the question of the importance of the appearance of “infantile anxiety” in the “the finding of an object.”

According to his explanation when a loved one is absent, libidinal investment cannot find satisfaction, and this is why “children in whom the libidinal drive is precocious or has been excessive and demanding” behave as if they were already adults: their “libido is transformed into anxiety when it is unable to reach satisfaction.”

My argument will be built on the basis of this evidentiary clue, insofar as in a footnote¹ Freud further indicates that “in order to relieve his anxieties through the transformation of libido, he (the child) will seek recourse to the most puerile of measures.”

What therefore does the child have to teach the adult that he has forgotten since he was a child?

As a way of paying homage to Freud’s genius as the inventor of psychoanalysis, and to what he transmitted through it that goes beyond what he said in print, let us tarry awhile on his comments concerning a three-year-old boy alone in the dark, who called out to his aunt to speak to him as a way of dealing with the anxiety he felt:²

“Tante, sprich mit mir, ich fürchte mich, weil es so dunkel ist.”
“Auntie, speak to me! I’m frightened because it’s so dark.”

To which the aunt answers:

“Was hast-du denn davon? Du siehst mich ja nicht.”
“What good would that do? You can’t see me.”

“Das macht nichts,” antwortete das Kind, wenn jemand spricht, wird es hell.”
“That doesn’t matter,” replied the child, “if anyone speaks, it gets light.”

The aunt does not get how the mere fact of speaking could relieve anxiety because the disappearance of the visible, the apparent cause of the anxiety itself, would still be present.

Thus a misunderstanding (*malentendu*) arose between these two interlocutors. What was it about this story that “touched”³ Freud so deeply he felt compelled to relate it to his readers via this footnote? Is this afterthought that came to him in the aftermath (*après-coup*) a

¹ Freud, *Gesammelte Werke V*, p. 126.

² Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, S.E. VII, p. 224.

³ Not in terms of thinking, but as an internal perception we may indeed call “unconscious.”

footprint leading to the other table where *Wit and Its Relations to the Unconscious* was also at work?

It might be supposed Freud heard a tension in this three-year-old child's heartfelt cry that went beyond what it specifically said, and that the anxiety affecting him "touched" him in a way that made this heard to Freud, who was the "right listener" for it.

Like a newborn to come hearing the tension it will forever be marked by in its mother's voice, caused by the conflict between sense and sound (of music), we are accompanying Freud to the opera, and can hear along with him in the voice of this child both unlimited signifyingness (*signifiance*) and the limits of meaning (*signification*).

Let us leave the aunt therefore to her Enlightenment luminaries and follow the unheard cry conveyed by the voice of this speaking being. Let us get closer, beyond the said of the German language itself, to the saying that is being made heard and that Freud transmitted to us as its unknowing conveyor. Even though it is impossible to say it in words, I shall risk the following rendition:

"Auntie dearest, I do not lack the knowledge needed to understand that when light is darkened what then ensues is the disappearance of the visible and audible world in which I had been locating the well-known spatio-temporal footholds I first discovered in the mirror stage, leading to the appearance of an unknown part of myself that terrifies me. This is why I am pleading with you to talk to me."

The aunt, mired in her certitudes, displayed her own egoic and superegoic deafness to anything that is not crystal clear:

"What's this all about! You can't fool me that way. When you cannot see, neither your words nor mine have any significance. Don't you know what is seen and heard go together, and the absence of what is seen blunts the impact of what is heard? In case you were unaware of this, I will teach it to you. Take it to heart as enough said."

And yet the child did not become fixated on this commandment. He insisted, driven by the impulse of a drive he had put his faith in:

"Yes auntie, there's nothing there to see or hear and even less to understand, because in the end it's like magic: in the same moment as a person starts to speak, a spark of their spirit (esprit) begins to live in me."

The enlightenment of the witticism (*mot d'esprit*)⁴ thus passed from one work table to the other. The drive circuit produced the signifier "wird es hell" as pure signifying itself.

It is pretty unbelievable...An other world was revealed, a world without limits that Lacan dubbed "the human Thing," in reference to what Freud encountered through the lens of "*das Ding*." A new temporality was created, the time of the sudden surfacing of a pure signifyingness, as the effect of a division heard in the human voice by Freud, who unknowingly became its "good (attentive) listener" (*bon entendeur*).

The wit or spirit of the witticism had rung loud and clear. A door was flung open that leads to the *never before seen* and *never before heard* that artists are forever transmitting, be they musicians, dancers, painters, sculptors and everything else in between. It was also transmitted in the "part-saying" (*mi-dire*) of Lacan on June 24, 1964, the last session of his seminar on the *Four Fundamental Concepts*, when he envisioned the end of analysis as leading beyond the fantasm to "experiencing the drive" (*vivre la pulsion*).

⁴ TR: Obviously this point depends on the fact that in French the word for "spirit" and "wit" are the same, *esprit*.

This is also the direction we are taking in the work we are doing in the *Mouvement Insistance*, based on the invocatory drive Lacan qualified in March 1964 as the “closest experience to the unconscious.”

This drive is founded on the fact that the transference is a locus of insistence where the Real that is freed from its knotting with the Symbolic and Imaginary is able to define a meaning that gives birth to this unintelligible, incomprehensible and enigmatic moment of the stunning of thought.

Then and only then, in the aftermath of this moment when thought was in mourning, is the Real of the call of the Other, unheard because it does not make itself heard to our ears, able to be received by a presence that is suddenly invoked.

Clearly, analytic discourse is a discourse of “exception” because it is, as the experience of discourse itself, the only one that presupposes the passage of this receiver, invoked by the call of the Other, into an emitter of the invocatory words of Alterity: “*es wird hell.*”

“Wo es war, soll ich werden.”

Where id was, where light was dark, there a flash of light as pure signifier shall enter into existence.

Jean Charmoille, Paris February 23, 2005.

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