

HEIMLICH - UNHEIMLICH

We are all indebted to Freud and Lacan for having transmitted to us the Real of our experience in its essential elements. The important task that remains is to continue to fathom how it may still be re-transmitted, because from the analytic perspective the transference is an experience based primarily on each individual's encounter with it.

For my part, I am indebted to Alain Didier-Weill, whose work enabled me to approach in a unique way the question of how the Real functions in the clinical experience of the transference. In the present essay the reader will easily recognize the extent to which I rely on his way of working with and through the basic tenets of Freud and Lacan, while never forgetting the presence of the Real as such.

For example in 1919, when Freud first wrote about the specter of the appearance of angst (*angoisse*) in his article "*Das Unheimlich*," in reality he was relating something to us concerning the domain of the Real at the heart of the "**Heimlich**," our inner most being. His essay went beyond a simple **Heimlich-Unheimlich** opposition in a way that enabled a secret form of "**Heimlich**" to enter into existence, a genuine creation insofar as it was not dependent on being opposed to something "**Unheimlich**." This creation constitutes the horizon of the present work.

Freud and binary dialectic: Heimlich-Unheimlich

I shall retain from this incredibly rich text only those elements necessary for my purposes here. In this respect one of its more remarkable features is the classic manner in which Freud reasons, based on a mode of thinking he habitually clung to that may be traced as far back as his elaboration of the notion of defense, the first station on the trail he followed leading to his discovery of the unconscious itself. In 1892 with Lucy R, and again in 1894 in his article "The Psycho-neuroses of Defense," Freud uses as the basis of his argument the idea of a binary space where the development of thinking activity occurs, and which is delimited by a border whose "good inside" is the place where "pleasing" things are preserved, and whose "bad outside" is the place where things that are "unpleasing" are rejected and repressed.

This is the point of view Freud has in mind when he proposes to use the prefix "un," from the German term "Un-Heimlich," as the mark of repression as such. In this way of depicting things, something "familiar," (one way of translating "Heimlich"), would have been repressed and thus remains hidden. Repression is something that would be directly related to the question of the secret, and thus what is "Unheimlich" has been repressed or "kept" like one. The problem that then arises is the potential for external excitation to give new life to these hidden "repressed infantile complexes." When the specter of the "un-heimlich," formerly secreted away, suddenly appears in the plain light of day, the speaking being is thrust into the situation of realizing that what had previously enabled him to hide certain things, and to be hidden from others, has been in a way stolen from him. How might this absconding of the "Heimlich," which arises from the aforementioned binary mode of thinking, lead to its own re-articulation on the basis of Lacan's reading of Freud?

To start with, Freud's own text provide us with clues in this direction, for example his investigations into the meaning of the Sandman as a maleficent father figure, and when he questions the origins of the *unheimlich* as such.

Interestingly as concerns the Sandman, the first thing Freud points out is that his return spoils the "love-fest," what might be understood today as a radical putting into question of narcissism or, in Lacanian terms, the specular image that results from the knotting of the Symbolic, Imaginary and Real. Taking Freud's comments one step further therefore, it becomes possible to argue that the Sandman's return sought to loosen this knot and perhaps even tear it apart. His act provoked the specter of the appearance of something that fundamentally interrogated this bond formed between the Imaginary, which lent it shape, and the Real, which gave it body, (but only insofar as said body remained enclosed by the parentheses written by the sound of the Symbolic). Each time the Sandman returns the specter of a newly configured Real appears, more than a match for the Symbolic, whose parentheses are stripped away, leaving the full weight of the Real of the body to be suddenly un-forgotten. The specular knot is untied, and angst erupts onto the scene of the "*unheimlich*" itself.

The second clue, as just mentioned, is Freud's investigation into the origins of the "*unheimlich*" itself. His primary discovery was that in certain instances primitive convictions / long-surpassed impressions appear which register a noticeable impact alongside the so-called "repressed infantile complexes." What is Freud in effect saying here, since he himself admits what is at issue is something that goes beyond the traditional boundaries of (secondary) repression and its role of delineating the contours of the "infantile complexes" as such?

In essence his assertion is that there is an originary encounter between the Real and the Symbolic which permanently eludes the knowledge subjected to secondary repression. Freud wrote this himself the following year, as he sought to explain the repetition compulsion in Chapter V of "Beyond the Pleasure Principle:" "the repressed mnemonic traces of these originary traumatic experiences are not present in him (the patient suffering from repetition compulsion) in a bound state and are in fact, to a certain degree, inaccessible to the secondary processes." Lacan, reading Freud, taught us to see this as the presence of a Real affecting and transforming the Symbolic configuration of certain signifiers specific to each individual. When they appear in this form, material that was previously metonymically enchained becomes unleashed. What then arises is a previously unknown knowledge which Freud called the "**unheimlich**" and that Lacan called "**unconscious knowledge**" on February 15, 1977, noting that it is "the only (knowledge) that may lead to change." Clearly therefore there are hidden or secret stakes underlying the Freudian unconscious, tied to the sudden appearance of angst, which Lacan largely contributed to conceptualizing as something beyond secondary repression.

In order to make an additional contribution here, it may be possible to see where these issues lead in the field of dreams, because it is in them that representations in both forms just discussed are to be found, that is to say as memories subjected to secondary repression, and also something that goes beyond these memories, a "flip-side" that is the source of the sudden appearance of that which is "to come."

Freud relates a dream that had itself been related to him. The dreamer was a father whose son had just died and who, tired from keeping watch over the body,

decided to get some sleep in the adjoining room whilst leaving the door between them open, so he would still not be too far away.

After several hours of sleep, Freud tells us, he dreams that “the child is standing beside his bed, takes him by the arm and murmurs reproachfully: “Father, can’t you see I’m burning?” He then immediately awakes, having perceived a bright light coming from the room where his son is laid out. He rushes in and finds the old man he had charged with watching over the body himself asleep, and a corner of the linens and the child’s arm burned by a candle that had overturned near them. What really woke him? What was this awakening?

This is certainly the right question with which to begin, because it brings together the terrible specter presented to him by representation, and the novelty constituted by the appearance of the resonating voice that made heard the presence of its beyond.

Thus the dream was clearly comprised of both elements: representation, the images of the dream itself woven together into a text, but also its beyond, insofar as the text of the dream had a hole in it, its “navel” or the point where associations about it ceased. That is what Freud referred to as its “*unerkannt*,” which Lacan would later relate to the “*urverdrängt*” or “*originary repression*.”

What awoke him therefore may very well have been the sound of the flames in the other room, the horrible vision represented to the dreamer, the cause of a more than reasonably sufficient degree of unpleasure. But then, why this presence of the voice at all?

Freud reasoned that the dream was a way for the father to prolong the life of his son. Thus the dream is a kind of guardian of sleep within the economy of the pleasure principle, at least until a certain threshold of unpleasure is reached, at which point sleep is ended. But this scenario does not account for the other guide in question, the Beyond of the pleasure principle whose occurrence took place via the encounter with the Real, which blotted out some aspect of Symbolic knowledge, transforming it into unconscious knowledge as such. What kind of secret is thus laid open to being uncovered, and which may only be such insofar as it is revealed even further for having first emanated from the light itself?

This voice that comes from “who knows where” (*d’on ne z’ou*), is aired and resonates for whomever may be ready to pick it up and hear it, but must be carefully distinguished from the superegoic voice pointing its finger. It is witness to the fact that there is such a thing as something visible which is heard, that there is an unacknowledged Real “out there” that is burning for its lack of ties to the Symbolic – such is unconscious knowledge. But the reason why it is forever resonating like this is because it commemorates the moment when the Real suffered the effects of the Signifier, the time when the signifyingness of the “fire” broke the *infans* loose from its “state of nature” once and for all.

What this dream is forever making heard therefore is that there is a beyond of representation and its terrible vision of the “*unheimlich*,” insofar as an originary forgotten sound may abruptly surface from out of a hole in the visible itself, an originary signifyingness at the heart of each human being that cannot be seen because it is covered over by specular visibility.

But the person who is prepared to be a “good listener” (*bon entendeur*) for this invisibility that is only visible to a gaze that hears, may indeed place his trust in its fidelity...

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