

GUIL CAROZ

The Victory of the Subject

The pioneers who founded the Kibbutz in Israel at the beginning of the century considered themselves to be people already corrupted by the capitalist education they had undergone in their bourgeois families. Through a new educative method they hoped to shape a new man in a new society: a collectivist man who knew neither rivalry nor egotism and who would suffer no neurosis. Toward the 30's, psychoanalysis was introduced into the educational system of the kibbutz as one of the tools which would serve to realize this dream. It was to occupy an important place in this educational method -- called «communal education» -- until the end of the 50's.

The history of «communal education» exemplifies a particular case that Lacan would call «the checkmate of communal utopias»¹ insofar as, through the years, it had been necessary to modify this system in order for it to survive. At the root of this checkmate, one finds the difficulty to articulate a link between, on the one hand, what concerns the universal and collective, and on the other hand, the subject as particular.

The ideological starting point

One of the founding movements of the Kibbutz, the «Shomere Hatzair»² was essentially the mouthpiece for psychoanalysis in «communal education.» Originally a youth movement in Europe, it took its ideals from zionism as well as from socialism and marxism. Certain members of the movement were interested in the then new science emerging in Europe:

psychoanalysis. They considered it a revolutionary science which unveiled the hypocrisy of bourgeois society, above all on the subject of sexuality. One of their references was Siegfried Bernfeld, a psychoanalyst and active and militant socialist. The institute for children that he would create and keep functioning for several months in 1919, as well as his utopian writings concerning education in a socialist society were considered as a possible model for education in the Kibbutz.

The starting point of «communal education» was the marxist critique of the conjugal and patriarchal bourgeois family. According to this critique, paternal authority over the family and the subjugation of woman to man came from the fact that he alone provided for the household necessities and possessed all the goods. In his text, «The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State,» Engels foresaw that when the means of production would pass to common property, the conjugal family would cease to be the economic unit of the society and the oppression of women by men would disappear. In the same manner, so that women would be as free as men to participate in industrial production, he proposed, «Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of children becomes a public matter. Society takes care of all children equally, irrespective of whether they are born in wedlock or not.»³

In this starting point, one encounters the idea of a father jouisseur, who detains all the goods and must be eliminated. Yet, one might state that Engels doesn't content himself with bringing down the father from his place in the family. The abolition of all inequality between men and women is equivalent to the effacement of all symbolization: no more father, no more mother, everyone equal!

Yet, Lacan indicates in his «Two notes on the child» what the conjugal family is, insofar as composed of a father and a mother who have different functions -- thus unequal -- and which support the transmission of «a subjective configuration, implying a relation to desire which would not be anonymous.»⁴

«Communal education» and psychoanalysis

So, in the Kibbutz they tried to apply an education in which the society was responsible and not the parents. To a certain extent, the child was confiscated from the family and offered to society. This went so far as, for example, a stormy debate during a meeting of the assembly of one

Kibbutz, during which the following question was posed: Who would give the newborn a name? The assembly or the parents? In any case, one thing was clear: when the mother came home from the hospital, she delivered her child to the teacher from the baby house. In this way, the child entered into a communal lifestyle with other children who had more or less the same age.

In the maturation process, the group would occupy an important place in the life of the child. In a way, it replaced the family. This latter was not completely abolished, but the child only saw his/her parents for two or three hours a day. Then, he went back to sleep in the group. The teacher was on the look out to assure that the parents didn't intrude too much in the childrens' house outside the agreed upon schedule. The accent was on the development of team spirit amongst the children. At school, for example, children studied without notes, since the system of notes was considered as bourgeois and capitalist and encouraged competition and inequality.

The starting point, as we have seen, was ideological, but psychoanalytic justifications were later added. In a manifesto published by the leaders of the «Shomere Hatzair» in 1937, one finds written:

After a long and obstinate battle, we have overcome -- in the Kibbutz of Shomere Hatzair -- the dangers inherent to a night spent with the parents...These dangers have been discovered by modern psychology (which is to say, psychoanalysis)...Consequently, that children pass the night separate from their parents is one of the guarantees of a sexually suitable education.

Thus, the idea was to protect the child from «destructive libidinal elements in the relation between parents and children.»⁵ In other words, children must be protected from the traumatizing primitive scene of a mother who loves too much, caresses excessively.

The habitual educative tasks, to wit the exigencies, the limits, the no-nos, all must be applied by the teacher. In this way one hoped that conflicts between the child and his/her parents would be displaced between the child and the teacher. In the same way, one supposed that a well-thought-out education would raise children in relying on the knowledge of science -- among others, psychoanalytic -- and not, like parents, as a function of their neurotic caprices. The founders of «communal education» expected modifications in the Oedipus Complex, a disappearance or at least an attenuation of the conflicts suffered by the child. The child also expected harmony! Down with the neurotic dynasty!

The patricide that Engels proposed didn't conduct to a better access to jouissance for the sons. The dead father reappeared right away as an ideal. In the name of the child's own good and the prevention of neurosis, in fact, this ideal operated as a prevention of all «destructive libidinal elements,» thus all jouissance.

In this approach, one can see an abyss between psychoanalysis such as Freud had conceived of it, in which the different forms of malaise are inherent, and a utopian conception of the healthy man. If marxism attributed paternal authority, feminine subjugation as well as class differences to economic and historic reasons, taking as his source a modifiable social structure, Freud accentuated in *Civilization and Its Discontents* the fact that the death drive has nothing to do with the economy, and that it existed from the beginning as the source of the discontent and aggressivity of one human toward his/her fellow. He specified that it wasn't in annihilating the family that a solution to the death drive would emerge. This «indestructible feature of human nature» would follow civilization, whatever «new paths the development of civilization could take.»⁶

The subject and the Other

The spirit of the era is easily seen in the following three anecdotes which were given to me by Shlomo Yitshaki, who was very active in the establishment of «communal education.»

As psychoanalysis had discovered that the relations between parents and children were fundamental factors in the child's development, the idea surfaced that it would be useful to follow this closely. For each child born, there would be a dossier established before the birth. It would contain an interview of the parents dated before the birth, and then observations throughout the life of the child of conflicts between parents and child, etc.

One can see in this idea, which was finally never applied, an attempt to position the child in language before his/her birth, to wit, in the desire which created him/her. But the idea of being able to submit this desire to scientific methods indicates the anonymous dimension given to desire. At the end of this preventive cure, desire is supposed to be empty of its capricious particularities. But is it desire?

Two examples of the reactions of children to «communal education» illustrate the subject's obstinacy in maintaining his particularity.

In one childrens' house, it was noted that a child suffered nocturnal anxieties. To broach the problem, it was decided to change the rule. A parent's duty roster was organized. Thus, each day a different parent would «spend the night» in the children's house. The presence of parents in the childrens' house was evidently a compromise with the original idea of «communal education.» But the child in question wanted his own mother. He began counting: «Tomorrow Mommy isn't there, Monday Mommy isn't there, Tuesday Mommy is here!, Wednesday Mommy isn't there, etc.»

Consequently, one might say according to the theory in force, this little boy is a bourgeois -- a petty bourgeois! For him there is no collective mommy but a particular Mommy. It is exactly «by the path of her own lack,» Lacan tells us, that «her care bears the mark of a particularized interest.»⁷ The child introduced a minimal symbolic exactly where one had wanted to erase all difference, to wit, the symbolization produced in the motion of the presence and absence of the mother.

If this example puts forward the desire of the mother without particularity, the following example demonstrates the constitution of the subject as particular by a signifier (S1) which represents him. Shlomo Yitshaki recounts:

We gave to each child in the group the same doll, the same plate, the same wheelbarrow. In this way, we thought to avoid the development of the habit of acquisition and private property. What difference would a private plate make if they were all the same? But the children began to mark the plates. One with a line, another in breaking a little bit off the edge, a third with a little drawing. From then on they demanded, each one, his or her own plate for dinner.»

One can see here to what point the Other is «generous» to the subject. He proposes a place of value where the subject will be counted «like everyone else:» the plate. This indicates to the subject that he isn't worth less than the others. Exactly! But Lacan tells us that the subject «at bottom, he feels himself to be what is most vain in existing, a Want-to-be (un manque a etre) or a Too-much-of-it (en En trop).»⁸ The subject indeed wants to place himself under a signifier deducted from the Other, but on condition that this signifier be outside the signifying chain and that it

represent his «Want-to-be» or his «Too-much,» in other words, his particularity in relation to the signifying network.

Jacques-Alain Miller, in his course «That which Makes Insignia,» describes the function of the signifier S1 as a trait of seriality which mediates between the subject and the Other. He says, «As distinguished as it might be, it is, on the contrary, the most common of things, the most ‘like one’ [comme’un].»⁹ The subject borrows a signifier from the Other to represent himself to the other signifiers. This permits the subject to be an element in a series. At the same time, this signifier chosen by the subject, in which he is alienated from himself, becomes through this very choice his/her most intimate signifier distinguishing him/her from the others who are in the series.

In the above example, the child as subject makes his/her little mark on the plate, demonstrating that he/she is like everyone, but his/her plate is not like all the others. In this way the subject makes him/herself counted in the Other while subtracting him/herself from the Other as lacking.

The solution to alienation according to Marx and according to Lacan

The educative attempt of «communal education» and the children’s reactions described above show the opposition between alienation and its solution according to Marx and according to Lacan. In the 1844 manuscripts, Marx wrote about alienation, «The more, therefore, the worker appropriates the external world and hence sensuous nature through his labor, the more he deprives himself of the means of life in two respects: first, in that the external world of the senses more and more ceases to be an object belonging to his labor, a means of life of his work, second, in that it more and more ceases to be a means of life in the direct sense, a means of physical subsistence for the worker.»¹⁰

Evidently, Marx is not speaking about the subject. He speaks rather of the worker insofar as individual. Nonetheless, the idea of lack is there, but it is inside-out. For Lacan, the subject is lacking in its being from the outset, and it is alienated in the Other to establish its existence by means of an identification. On the contrary, Marx posits an individual who has, who possesses from the start, and for whom the lack is an effect produced by alienation -- a process in which he invests all his possessions in the exterior, in the Other.

For Lacan, alienation is on the order of a union. It makes a first period. As solution to alienation, Lacan proposes a second period of separation. It concerns going from a union to an intersection between the subject as lack and the lack in the Other. The object *a* would be the product of this intersection, a product with particularity, but which is not alienated in a signifier, a particularity apart from the ideal as signifier.

The marxist solution to alienation is not on the order of an intersection, but on the contrary is on the order of unification, even if it is only through the appropriation of the totality of the forces of production by a universal union. Thus, it concerns a redoubling of union which reinforces alienation. The appeal to equality is an appeal to an ideal embodied by a unifying and pacifying signifier, an ideal which effaces difference, which defends the subject from manifestations of the death drive.

One notes that from two departure points concerning alienation, one is brought to two different sorts of solutions: marxism which wants to restore to the individual what had been taken away from him by alienation by following a principle of unifying equality; and psychoanalysis which concerns the subject as lack represented by a signifier in alienation, but which proposes, in a second period, a separation from this lack of master signifier borrowed from the Other.

Psychoanalysis in impasse

What Lacan qualified as the checkmate of utopian communities can be formulated in the case of the Kibbutz as a victory for the subject. But for psychoanalysis, this was not a success. With modifications to «communal education» in the 60's, psychoanalysis lost the importance it had held in the field of education in the Kibbutz. Psychoanalysis engaged in serving a master to realize his ideals had stumbled upon an impasse, having accepted to exclude the death drive from its field.

Notes :

- ¹ Jacques Lacan. «Deux notes sur l'enfant,» in *Enfance abandonnée* by Jenny Aubry, Metaille:Paris, 1973; and *Ornicar?* #37; pp. 13-14.
- ² In English these words would mean «the young guardian.»
- ³ Frederick Engels. «The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State.» *The Marx Engels Reader* Ed. R. Tucker, Norton, 1978; p. 746.
- ⁴ Lacan. *Op. cit.*
- ⁵ This manifesto is cited by Shlomo Liber in his article «Psychanalyse au pays des patriarches, possible et impossible,» which appeared in *Hadash-Ote* #5: Kfar-Saba, 1989 (the review of the Freudian movement in Israel).
- ⁶ Sigmund Freud. «Civilization and Its Discontents.» *SE: XXI*. Hogarth: London, 1961; p. 114.
- ⁷ Lacan. *Op. cit.*; p. 14.
- ⁸ Jacques Lacan. «The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious.» *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan, Norton: 1977; p. 323.
- ⁹ Jacques-Alain Miller. «Ce qui fait insigne.» Course given through the Department of psychoanalysis, Univ. of Paris VIII (1986 - 87). Unpublished; lesson of December 11, 1986.
- ¹⁰ Karl Marx. «Alienated Labor.» *The Portable Marx*. Ed. E. Kamenka, Penguin, 1983; p. 135.