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The Problem of the SuperEgo in the Treatment of Psychosis

Courtill, institution which proposes to offer the child the possibility to use it as an intermediary prosthesis, has taken the Name-of-the-father as one of its working references. This reference (like it or not, its not a matter of choice) is always implicit in our contacts and exchanges with children by the fact that, charged with this work, we carry it out insofar as dupes of this reference. The resulting discontentment sometimes brings us to bear witness for what we've done or to interrogate the points at which our actions encounter knots, butt up against something.

Courtill works with a reference to the Name-of-the-father which is inevitable but insufficient. In fact, by inscribing the function, aim and program of the institution under the auspices of the Name-of-the-father, we commit the mistake that Freud denounced in his Civilization and its Discontents; the error of believing that the cultural program would be capable of linking the drives in such a way that no mortifying irruption would subvert its ideals.

Even if it refers itself essentially to the powers of the symbolic order and its effectiveness in regulating of human relations, the institution would not be able to situate its sole resort there, except at the price of a denial of jouissance, that residue left behind by Eros¹ which is the underside of the paternal metaphor. In facing this jouissance, the institution has to make a choice: either it becomes fixed in an idealistic adherence to the signifier and then perpetuates the blindness implied in the moment of its constitution, or it takes into account the incomplete character of the Law which renders it apt to receive a jouissance that is outside the norm. This choice seems to me so decisive that the chances of an «infra-analytic» work are entirely dependant upon it. It seems to me that one of the major difficulties of our work with psychotic children resides in the management of this

specific and constraining jouissance of the Super-Ego, and that the absence of a theory and ethic regarding jouissance inevitably brings about a bursting of the framework that one has struggled to put in place, insofar as this place would be that of a signifying elaboration (notably the workshops).

The question of the Super-Ego is introduced with a few remarks on the institution as such, caught in the tension between cultural ideals and the very nature of jouissance. We must then look into the choices that an institution is authorized to make in this ambiguous field where it is constituted. The innovation of Freud's position on the question will guide us.

The incidence of guilt in the subjective economy

One of Freud's most decisive innovations was to show that civilization, human institutions were built in the aftermath of a criminal act: the murder of the father. This statement had led Freud to throw the shadows of guilt on the progress of culture, a guilt that he qualified as «the most important problem in the development of civilization.»² This formula is striking in that it makes apparent the fact that culpability works in a sort of a-temporality; the guilt is still operative in the furrow of an act said to be prehistoric and mythic. How can we conceive of the link between an originary and presubjective event (insofar as it concerns an act and not speech) with what the analytic experience renders so sensitive -- the concrete incidence of guilt in the subjective economy? By what modality is something anhistoric and pre-discursive transmitted so that we find traces of it in a subject's non-localized guilt?

It is at this point that Freud speaks of the death drive and the jouissance presented in the form of pain when the Super-Ego pushes the subject to look for its satisfaction there. What is transmitted there -- working in silence, Freud says, outside signification -- is a left-over, a little bit of jouissance, the negative of the signifying operation, a pulsional residue escaping the originary Law which forbids incest and regulates the distance to *das ding*. With these coordinates in mind -- installation of the law of desire and the remainder of a jouissance outside sexuation -- Freud rethought the position of the institution. What he presents us in *Civilization and its Discontents* has nothing to do with a sort of naive and optimistic Oedipus which would situate the institution as an extension of the family based on a pact between a few younger brothers who would have killed the father and who, incited by the titillation of conscience, would have founded little groups, families, institutions whose virtues of impersonality would guarantee happiness.

Das Ding

What Freud demonstrated was how family, interpersonal and institutional logic are caused by an object that is incompatible with the person, outside the symbolic order, foreign to all negotiation. From the subject itself, he traces the limits of the livable which can only be maintained in subjugating the death drive to Eros, the result of which is sadistic relations with one's entourage.³ Far from singing exclusive elegies to the Other, he sets out from the object that he unmasks behind the over-estimations of culture, and everything is positioned around this: there is the object, there is the imaginary (the cultural program), the symbolic (the pact, and the institution always oscillates between the imaginary and the symbolic) and the real, the death drive as resistance to the cultural program, the introjected figure of which is the Super-Ego. This Super-Ego, that Lacan qualified as a «gap opened in the imaginary by foreclosure,»⁴ is none other than what returns at the very heart of cultural formations, always menaced by wear and tear.⁵ Institutions are not sheltered from this menace. They cannot neglect that the Name-of-the-father on which they lean, as regulator of jouissance, also bears within itself the imperative which paradoxically pushes toward this forbidden jouissance. And it is exactly on this point, where the jouissance surges up as imperative, that we encounter a major difficulty in the daily work with these psychotic subjects. It is so strong that the absence of an ethic concerning the reception of jouissance pushes us to respond with a Super-Ego firmness from a position of mastery. This is inevitably produced in certain forms of therapy with schizophrenics when the analyst has no structural theory of the Super-Ego at his/her disposition.

Wexler and Rosen: identification to the Super-Ego

We can illustrate this proposition by taking the example, first of all, of Wexler.

Desperate because of the Super-Ego manifestations brought about in the progress of an analysis with a schizophrenic, the American analyst, Wexler, decided to identify himself with this Super-Ego. One day, when his patient told him she detested herself, he responded that it is a terrible sin to give oneself over to masturbation. The woman, who had the habit of smoking during her analysis, heard her analyst say (in what he called a fit of moral enthusiasm) that smoking was giving in to a temptation, thus a sin. «Once we've chosen to put ourselves in this position,» he writes, «we quickly crossover to physical interventions to suppress super-ego manifestations.»⁶ Wexler's idea of the end of analysis is identification to the strong ego of the analyst. But we see him now confronted with the

psychotic Super-Ego which is much stronger than his anxiety-stricken Ego. What happens then is strange; the reversal of positions brings Wexler to identify to the strongest Super-Ego. «The attack on the Super-Ego,» he writes, «began with a complete adherence to its most repressive characteristics.» It was through gradual release from its exigencies that the rigidity and archaic repression of this structure were shaken. «The educator,» he continues, «insofar as auxiliary Super-Ego, can, from then on, limit himself to alternate between interpretations with doses of affection and education.»

The techniques described by Rosen's approach with patients in acute catatonic delusion relies on the same premises. «To establish contact with the psychotic system,» he writes, «I deliberately played the roles of characters who seemed to threaten the patient, and I reassured this latter by showing him that far from being threatening, these figures gave him prodigious love and protection.»⁷ Rosen assumed the role of controller in ordering a patient to drop a cigarette she had just lit. He forced her to lie down on the couch and ordered her not to move. Toward the end of the session, he changed attitudes, saying:»I am your mother now [sic] and I will permit you to do whatever you want.»⁸

Thus, Rosen deploys the same idea: facing an internal and strong Super-Ego, he takes over its tasks and then deflates it from the «interior.»

In commenting on the articles of several American analysts who work with schizophrenics, the Kleinian, Rosenfeld, states that their approach no longer belongs to psychoanalysis. I can only agree with his hypothesis. It is in the very nature of the Super-Ego to push these analysts toward methods of control and reassurance.⁹

However, the technique he describes in which the analyst proposes to take all that is «bad» on himself in order to manipulate what had been projected on a «benevolent Super-Ego» reposes on the same confusion between the Super-Ego and moral conscience, between the imperative and the normative, unbreachable by definition. I see there a certain theoretic weakness which effaces the paradoxes of the Super-Ego and reduces it to a normative and introjected speech. This has the effect of bursting the practice under the weight of what returns as shunned, rejected, unrecognized jouissance.

The Paranoization of the Subject

If the theory of the Oedipus and its correlative castration, a theory articulated around a not-all of the signifier is proper to psychoanalysis, then one is brought to the ethical question of how to receive *jouissance* in the clinic. This question deserves to be given its nuances in light of a nosological differentiation. The disentangling of relational registers (a-a', -O)¹⁰ performed by Lacan is certainly an invaluable support which will orient our «you can't do that» not on what the individual is about, but on what the Other's *jouissance* inflicts on the subject. However, the effectiveness of such an intervention will depend on a minimal paranoization.

Does this mean that we are impotent against the *jouissance* that courses through the body of the schizophrenic? Or worse yet, that we accept to be subtly piloted in a technique that puts the paranoization of the subject on the horizon of its action, supporting itself on a Jungian work ethic? That the fruits of such action appear all the more sinister, the ethical support frankly scandalous, reinforces our rejection which, moreover, is already supported by the refusal to hide the rocky reefs with the horizon.

The paranoization of the subject is neither the objective, nor the goal, nor the ideal; it is a structural consequence of a particular listening which doesn't rely on an impediment to «free» construction. The offer to listen unfolds the field of the Other. As little as the subject chooses to bivouac his suffering there, we note that the schizophrenic part is paranoized in and by its enunciation. From there a work can be undertaken that crystallizes a consistency in the Other. This approach has nothing to do with any work ethic required in relation to an autistic retreat and due to a norm. It is situated rather at the level of Freud's *Durcharbeitung*, and coming from the structure of the discourse he inaugurated, it is something else altogether than the task of the proletariat.

Fixity and incompleteness of the frame

Insofar as it is the psychotic process of repairing, to sustain the delusional construction is thus a first response to the question of *jouissance*. This doesn't resolve the whole problem. Our aim at Courtil is to provide a framework for the *jouissance* either by a push to construction or by more real structures such as workshops. But what I have tried to show is that this *jouissance* is sometimes stronger than the framework. What position can we take then? It seems to me that, when that happens, we can only be stronger than the Super-Ego of the psychotic; nothing in this formula distinguishes me from the authors already cited. But it is inserted

in an entirely different logic which is articulated to the castration that these authors disavow in the totalitarianism with which they oppose the Super-Ego's rigor, a position motivated by their anxiety that would certainly be pardonable if their theories didn't stem from a denial. To be stronger than the Super-Ego of a psychotic is to hold his place in the framework which positions him. This framework is then defined by two essential characteristics: its fixity (it always comes back to the same place) and its incompleteness (to the same place and not another). The child will find there the presence of a lack around which he can construct. The fixity protects him from the claims of the Other who finds its own incompleteness there, particularly pregnant when there is a crisis, an explosion of the framework or the failure of a symptom.¹¹¹²

¹ Sigmund Freud. «Civilization and its Discontents (1929).» SE XXI. Hogarth: London, 1961; p. 121.

² Ibid.; p. 134.

³ Ibid.; p. 119.

⁴ Jacques Lacan. «Variantes de la cure type.» *Ecrits*. Seuil: Paris, 1966; p. 360.

⁵ For example, the return, at the heart of democracy, of the extremism it rejects.

⁶ M. Wexler. «The Structural Problem in Schizophrenia: Therapeutic Implications.» *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* #32, 1957; p. 157.

⁷ J. Rosen. «A method of Resolving Acute Catatonic Excitement.» *Psychiatric Quarterly* #20, 1946; p. 2.

⁸ _____. «The Survival Function of Schizophrenia.» *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* #4, 1950; p. 3.

⁹ H. Rosenfeld. «Notes on the Psychoanalysis of the Superego Conflict of an Acute Schizophrenic Patient.» *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* #33, 1952; p. 113.

¹⁰ See the schema L in Jacques Lacan's «On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis» in *Ecrits: A Selection*. trans. A. Sheridan, Norton, 1977; p. 193.

¹¹ See Philippe Bouillot, «Quelques remarques sur l'expérience psychanalytique des psychoses en institution», *Les feuillets du Courtil* #1, 1989; p. 47.

¹² For example, the schizophrenic child who, invited to explain himself after some little infraction, responds in pointing to another, «It's not me. It's him.» What's happening here? Corporal disintegration, doubling, metonymy (*pars pro toto*)? The «It's him» is a little paranoid, while the objectivization with the hand reveals the basic schizophrenia. It isn't question here of a fully constituted paranoia in the sense that the *jouissance* would be localized in the Other, but a simple paranoid idiom, in which the passage of the Other that any speech act implies is taken into account. Note that such an idiomatic reversal is produced by the insertion of the Other in the experience of the subject, here, in the invitation to explain himself.