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The Shoes at the Antenna

What could be more banal than shoes? Yet, thanks to Freud and Lacan, we have realized to what point we were blind to these little gestures of daily life that certain children begin over and over again tirelessly. And through the shoes and these manoeuvres tirelessly recommenced, these psychotic children have taught us that they are at work each moment of the day. This article is the fruit of a common reflection made by the team at Antenna 110 for which I am but the mouth piece.

On the side of the psychotics

Youyou arrived at the Antenna and circled from one end to the other of the room, marking the ends of each trajectory with a kick against the wall. Then he marched the length and the width, marking the rhythm of his march by tapping his foot on the floor. Then he marched while keeping only one shoe on, his other foot bare. Afterwards, he would slap his fingers on the shoes of all the people he met.

Didi, a little Moroccan boy, can't keep his shoes on, and he often covers his feet and hands with his clothes, after having taken off his shoes and socks. The moment he arrives at the Antenna, he takes off his shoes and socks to suck his feet. He loves to climb to the shoulders of certain people, tries sometimes to get on top of their heads. One day, when Francis had worn hose, he tried to take them off of her. He put Francis's foot on his penis and tried to masturbate. He is interested in the space

between the foot and the shoe of adults and at first couldn't bear it when the adult took off his shoes. Later he would make the adult take off his shoes.

When Victor, another child, lost the red glass he wore constantly on his head, he made a construction with the shoes: he walked with seven shoes -- one balanced on his head, two under his arms, two on his shoulders and one in each hand. If the shoes stay in place, its OK. As soon as a shoe falls, he punches himself in the face. He also uses the foot of an adult to try to masturbate.

On the side of the neurotics

When she came to us Kristelle was five. She hardly spoke or spoke badly. One of the few words she said was «...oos.» She also said «doll» for «bonnet,» «sweater» for «coat,» and «peepee» for «panties.» She loves to make tracks in the sand with her shoes; she loves it when we trace the outline of her shoes, and in the evening she makes all the bedroom slippers disappear. Sometimes she puts on the shoes of a woman and, showing off for an educator, says «Houda,» the name of another little girl. In this way, starting with her unique preoccupation with shoes, Kristelle came to speak of papa, then peepee, baby and penis.

Chloe, a three-year-old girl, began by dragging a big scarf behind her, a scarf that she brought everywhere. Then she took shoes, watches and bracelets and exhibited herself proudly.

Frank, a ten-year-old boy, put on the directrice's shoes and told us, «I'm the directrice.» This permitted him to install himself in the directrice's office and take up the telephone...

What reading to make

We can see that amongst the neurotics, the question of shoes is situated on the side of the veil and the mask.

Freud already spoke of shoes and more precisely of the foot and the slipper in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in a note about the function of the foot as a fetish object. It is clearly about neurosis, as Freud says:

Another factor that helps towards explaining the fetishistic preference for the foot is to be found among the sexual theories of children: the foot represents a woman's penis, the absence of which is deeply felt. [Added in 1915] In a number of cases of foot-fetishism it has been possible to show that the scopophilic instinct, seeking to reach its object (originally the genitals) from underneath, was brought to a halt in its pathway by prohibition and repression. For that reason it became attached to a fetish in the form of a foot or shoe, the female genitals (in accordance with the expectations of childhood) being imagined as male ones.¹

Kristelle, who constantly speaks of «...oos» actualizes well this question of the veil, for her manner of speaking of shoes and other things shows that in saying one word she speaks about other things (peepee for panties, etc.). The tracks that she makes with her shoes, the traced outlines of shoes that she requests tirelessly, aren't these a way to indicate and pose the question of what's missing? For Kristelle, her shoes take the place of the penis, in the place of what she doesn't have. They index what she lacks. And it took us a long time to understand that the insistent fashion that Kristelle had of showing her shoes, of taking them off, of making them disappear was her way of posing the question of castration. Might one say that Kristelle, in attaching a great deal of importance to having nice clothes, pretty shoes that she might, however, damage or dirty with an evident pleasure, shows that all these accessories are no more than a dressing up of castration and don't serve as falsies?

As to Chloe and Frank, who put on the shoes of others, they identify with the other in taking a trait, a signifier of the Other, a trait which functions as mask and equally underlines a lack. But here, they dress-up in a mask borrowed from the Other. For these subjects, who dispose of phallic signification and the category of lack, shoes occupy the function of the veil which aims to hide the fact that something is missing. Shoes are what the gaze manages to hook on to, what captures, as in the case of the fetishist, the gaze of the Other.

For the psychotics, our reading proves different, for their incessant work seems to us an attempt to make a lack exist, a signifying beat

which inscribes a plus and a minus, the beat of which never gets symbolized other than in the real because they don't have at their disposition the symbolic signification of lack that supports the imaginary.

Shoes, for the psychotic subject, don't have the same function as the veil. For this subject there is nothing to veil because nothing is lacking. It hasn't been inscribed as a lack in the Other of which there only remains the object of jouissance. This is where the work of the psychotic subject is situated: work to introduce a lack that was never inscribed. All these operations (tapping, marching while marking the beat, putting on one shoe and not the other) are remarkable for their binary structure of plus and minus. They are thus structures of language which function as bearing negation on the jouissance of the Other to which these subject are prey.

Youyou treats shoes insofar as pure surface, not as a veil. In default of the phallic organ, in default of use of the signifier whose structure is made up of a plus and a minus, Youyou tries to give himself another structure functioning to fill-in for the missing phallic organ. And all the shoes with which Victor dresses-up might be seen as functioning as a surplus organ in the real. What about the operations that Didi makes with the feet of Francis, or Victor with the feet of another woman? Reading these manoeuvres is more difficult. Might we say that these subject choose an erotomantic position in relation to their Other: «I am loved by the Other?» I won't develop this idea here.

Conclusions

We have witnessed two different types of manoeuvres: one ruled by phallic signification, the other not ruled by it.

In Kristelle we can see from the start that her question about shoes lies along the metaphoric line, underpinned by the question of the phallus. But we had to be less blind and deaf to this question before she could begin to articulate it with other signifiers. It was necessary that the Other propose a silence for her to begin working to interpret this silence and, through its construction, bring her response to the silence of the Other.

For Youyou and Didi, shoes don't hark back to phallic signification, but serve them as material to make a holophrastic chain which is pure imaginary, pure real and pure symbolic. They needed to encounter a

space empty of knowledge, an Other who allies itself with the subject to realize a construction, a chain which gets more complex, but which is not ordered by phallic signification. Where no play between the elements is possible, it becomes a soldered chain which tries to realize a continuity. This whole metaphoric chain is an attempt by the psychotic child to metaphorize the subject.

All these children, whether neurotic or psychotic, use the objects of the Other, detachable objects such as shoes, chains, scarves, earrings, or the corporal objects of the Other, but don't perform the same operations with the material: the neurotics interrogate the desire of the Other, the psychotics perform a treatment of jouissance.

¹ Sigmund Freud. «Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.» SE: VII. Hogarth: London, 1961; pp. 125 - 245.