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About the «Introduction of the Psychotic Dimension in the Education of the Mentally Retarded»

The tyranny of the university discourse

Today, it isn't abusive to state, as did Lacan, that we live under the yoke of a new tyranny which is not that of a monarch with divine rights nor of a mustachioed dictator, but that of knowledge. Moreover, one may remark that the habitual dictators and the ideological discourses that sustain them, being the galaxy of the master signifier, go over like lead balloons. What succeeds them isn't simply democracy. That would be too good. Nor is it even capitalism. That would be too simple. What succeeds them is the discourse of science insofar as it commands both. Lacan situated the discourse of science in the university discourse, and he wrote it like this:

$$\begin{array}{cc} S_2 & a \\ \text{---} & \text{---} \rightarrow \text{---} \\ S^1 & \mathfrak{S} \end{array}$$

Note, also, that in the university discourse the Other is not Subject. It only becomes one in a second period. At the start, the Other is only the object (a) that can be identified to the student posed as ignorant, whom Lacan also named the exploited of the university discourse. It is only after having undergone the trial of a certain learning of knowledge that he can, by this discourse, become subject, subject of the university discourse

of which the best example is the teacher. This is why the university doesn't produce as many philosophers as it does professors of philosophy, which is also valid for psychoanalysis when it is lodged in the ivory towers. In other words, in our day and age, «Your papers, please» doesn't really refer to your passport so much as your diplomas. And this is so much in the air, that one often hears the proposition that a certain intellectual level is necessary to undergo an analysis. Well! Arming yourself with knowledge doesn't always protect you from making an ass of yourself!

Education isn't structure

The question I'd like to pose today is: what becomes of those who haven't joined the movement? First of all, one looks for them, or tracks them down, evaluates them and calls them mentally retarded, so they can finally be put into special education. This canvas, that might be qualified as a social treatment of retardation or handicap, already reveals that, for the retarded, the circuit is interrupted. Thus he remains in the position of object a, without subjective status. What's more, the retardation remains bound to the intelligence quotient, considered only as a deficiency to make up for as much as is possible. In brief, as subject, the mentally retarded is in the margins of discourse and thus presents not so much symptoms as a negative factor.

In this framework, the destiny of the retarded can encounter still other avatars which Lacan characterized precisely as this: the retarded child can find himself reduced to only being the support of the desire of his mother in an obscure term. In referring to this, Lacan adds:

the psychotic dimension is introduced into the education of the retarded. It is precisely what our colleague [in this era, 1964], Maud Mannoni, in a book that has just come out [l'enfant arriere et sa mere] and which I recommend you to read, tries to indicate to those who, in one way or another, may be entrusted with the task of releasing its hold.¹

Lacan emphasizes many important things here. The retarded child, because he is retarded, is more easily than anyone else annexed, confiscated by maternal desire. And if the signifier to which she is identified is an obscure term that Lacan qualifies as holophrase, it is because it doesn't hark back to anything other than itself, it doesn't hark back to the Name-of-the-father. Nonetheless, this pushing aside of the father, with the psychotic dimension that it implies, is effectuated uniquely in the education, Lacan specifies, by means of which (and this is important) it is reversible and only constitutes a heavy mortgage weighing on the destiny of the subject. In

effect, education is not structure, being the discourse of the Other in which the subject is constituted. More precisely, this is only a part of the handicap -- the part which depends on the master signifier commanding imaginary identifications -- which Lacan situated on the lower level of the graph of desire.² To change what happens at this level, it suffices to exit the short-circuit, taking recourse to the symbolic armature which frames it. This can be done, not by just any old psychotherapeutic reeducation of the mother/child couple, but in putting into play the other signifiers of the structure.³ In brief, here again, rather than getting obsessed with the «development,» the «progress» of the debilitated child, it would be better to remember that he is also a subject of the unconscious -- something that parents, preoccupied with educating him (which is to say indicating how to grow up like everyone else), misrecognize in a more or less resolute fashion.

As to Mannoni's book, without considering it a classic, it remains all the same recommendable, much more for its analysis of the parental 'word' than for that of the discourse of the children in question. As to the former, she begins by stating, rightly, that the debilitated child is rarely received into a truly triangular situation, the father or whoever is supposed to handle the paternal function will be disinterested in it.⁴ She remarks as well that «the retard whose place is assigned as such in the family always encounters more difficulty than the one who, in spite of his handicap, is an ordinary person accorded paternal sanctions.»⁵ This implies that where one only sees diverse failures, there is also a symptom in response to the desire of the Other, that Mannoni indicates as always being maternal. Any rehabilitation whatsoever will be understandably ineffective on this symptom.⁶

Nevertheless, one can no longer follow her when she tends to amalgamate psychosis and retardation in positing that «every study of the retarded child remains incomplete so long as the meaning of the handicap is not first of all looked for in the mother.»⁷ In effect, this would be to scorn the subject's response which, on occasion, is astonishing enough. It would take Lacan to make evident this response, a few years later, in stating that what is proper to retardation is not being outside discourse like psychosis, but to float between two discourses.⁸ This floating is correlative to the impasse in which the speaking being finds himself confined when he only receives from the Other a status with strongly imaginary resonances as with the handicapped, but who, in compensation, occults the signifiers capable of representing him as subject.

The psychotic dimension as mortgage weighing on the destiny of the subject

Hanna's case is revealing enough of the conjunction which conjugates the more or less radical paternal erasure and the mother/daughter *tete-a-tete*, as intense as it is infernal. All of this is underpinned by the degenerative brain disease which she has suffered since her birth sixteen years ago and which gives her a rather reduced access to language. This said, she is often mute, hides her head in her hands as soon as one speaks to her, addresses a few aggressive signs to an enigmatic presence behind her, but is generally rather effaced. Since the beginning of this year, the mother reckoned that she wasn't doing very well and concluded that, plainly, she was angry at her for committing her as in-patient. It is true that Hanna throws the most fearsome tantrums for her mother, refuses to sleep, violently insults her world, urinates in her bed so much and so well that her father, overwhelmed, couldn't find anything better to do than to hit her. At the institution, the picture isn't the same and if she also sometimes flies off the handle, she is rather amorphous.

Things got clearer when the mother informed us that Hanna was terribly ill and risked dying young, which isn't exactly false, and nothing is too good for her daughter. From then on, she alone took care of Hanna, cajoled her, slept with her, etc. It quickly became apparent that Hanna's fury was directly proportional to the intensity of her mother's passion for her. Far from asking for more, she did what she could to defend herself. It even seemed that this was the only thing that the mother understood. She had come to recognize, in effect, that only the tantrums of her daughter kept her from considering Hanna as still being her little baby. As to the father, he gave up, which got him more of the same from Hanna. He nonetheless reacted in his style, finding no better response than to make her shut up by smacking her around.

The psychotic dimension here seems manifest. The mother testifies to making Hanna a phantasmatic object along the lines of an eternal baby, the requests of whom she would interpret infallibly, she thought, the father remaining outside of the whole affair. If manifest, the psychotic dimension is only so in the Other or, more precisely, in the way Hanna is treated, in her education. In effect, Hanna's choice is indeed different. Far from installing herself in the place prepared for her, and to pay the price in diverse symptoms or in the elementary phenomena of psychosis, Hanna challenges this and defends herself. And it will be to support her in this enterprise that things will be able to change.

Going in this direction, supporting her is about not doing what her father does. This implies existing by making her voice heard, by not consenting when her mother wants to take her home, to meet with her as often as possible and not to hesitate at her «What to do?» by indicating that it wouldn't be a bad idea to set the father straight, etc. Above all, it

concerns taking care of Hanna -- not her person since she isn't lacking that, but her discourse, that being what she is as subject.

Discourse might seem to be a big word here since if she comes to see me with great impatience, it's often to say no more to me than hello and leave again radiant. The rare and consequently precious signifiers turn around men and her father. The first would be represented by a boy in her pavillion who interests her, but ignores her so much that she insults him, aggresses him, in short, reproduces in this simulacrum what is at cause with her father, a repetition that is not too difficult to interrupt by not occupying the same place as the father, by responding differently. A repetition that also indicates how it is no longer the jouissance of the Other at stake at the expense of the subject, but her desire which she provokes and lights up as she can, which is not easy for her. In effect, our man isn't comfortable except in the company of men, and thus is little interested in women, doesn't know what to do with his daughter when he isn't simply ashamed of her.

The psychotic dimension in this case is thus a rather heavy mortgage weighing on the destiny of the subject. As Lacan indicates, we are entrusted to releasing its hold, not to ratifying it. Admittedly, what is missing must be introduced into the circuit in order to do this. Logically, in the transference this equals not playing the father and leaving her to her fate, which would only reproduce the same problems and add to the deficit. One must do otherwise, occasionally even doing what he doesn't do. One must make a discourse exist in which she can lodge herself. A discourse in which to lodge is the necessary condition to prevent the mortgage in question from ending up a bankruptcy, this being the «or worse.»

- ¹ Jacques Lacan. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*. trans. A. Sheridan. Norton, 1977; p. 238. [I have not followed Mr. Sheridan's translation to the letter. The french text states: «...que s'introduit dans l'éducation du débile la dimension psychotique...» (Jacques Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, Seuil: 1973; p. 215) trans. note.]
- ² Cf. Jacques Lacan. «The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious.» *Ecrits: A Selection*, Op. cit.; pp. 292 - 324. [trans. note].
- ³ Jacques-Alain Miller. «Psychanalyse et psychothérapie.» *La Cause freudienne*: 22, October, 1992; p. 7 - 12.
- ⁴ Maud Mannoni. *The Retarded Child and the Mother*. trans. A. Sheridan, London: Tavistock, 1973; p.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*; p.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*; p.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*; p.
- ⁸ Jacques Lacan. «...ou pire» Seminar of 1971 - 72. Unpublished; Seminar of march 15, 1972.