From the repressed unconscious to the constellated sky

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“To analyze the speaking being (parlêtre) is no longer exactly the same as analyzing the unconscious in the Freudian sense, not even the unconscious structured as a language... We should bet on the idea that analyzing the speaking being is what we already do, however we must know how to say it.”

[MILLER, J.-A. The unconscious and the speaking body].

In trying to elucidate Jacques-Alain Miller’s proposition, which states that analyzing the speaking being is different from analyzing the unconscious of Lacan’s first teachings, it seems interesting to me to evoke cases from our practice, in which speech, constellated, does not seem to be organized by a unary trait, but by a swarm of signifiers that are much more a source of jouissance, than a source of meaning.

We are thus far from the Freudian unconscious, that Lacan returned to in his first teachings, such as “the chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a lie: it is the censored chapter.”[1] What we teach the subject to recognize as his unconscious is, in fact, his history, says Lacan, assuming that the truth can be rediscovered, for it has already been written somewhere. It is the unconscious defined by the establishment of a law that puts order in language, like a Roman road, in order to enable the signifier to connect to a meaning.
If the Name-of-the-Father is no longer the Roman road to the unconscious, we can assume that the contemporary subject is primarily submerged in a constellation of signifiers, amongst which the subject must find those that marked his body in a privileged manner. If Freud’s unconscious was like Rome, with its ruins and excavations, for Lacan, the unconscious would be like Baltimore at dawn, with its blinking lights. In the place of the unary trait, we have multiple luminous clusters[2].

Could there be an approximation between the unconscious evoked by Lacan in 1966 and the status of the Japanese subject, of whom Lacan, in the 1970’s, suggested that he was unanalyzable?[3] The Japanese takes his bearings from a constellated sky, Lacan says, and not only from a unary trait to identify with. That is why the Japanese subject places such importance on the codes and relations of courtesy, where semblants prevail. No-one communicates less of himself than such a subject, who hides nothing and composes and decomposes himself in ceremonials[4].

Where is the jouissance of this subject, who leans too much on forms without content? Jacques-Alain Miller considers that in this language, affected by writing and closed to the effects of the unconscious, satisfaction is divided between speech and writing[5].

In order to understand the Japanese of the subject, we could examine the opposition between Japanese and Occidental theatre. In Bunraku - highlighted by Lacan, which is no longer very widespread in Japan, and specific only to certain regions - a marionette is manipulated by actors who, covered or uncovered, are present and visible behind the marionette. The latter only represents the action, while the words are uttered by narrators who interpret their lines standing beside the action, with all the affective nuances. Thus we find ourselves far from Occidental theatre where the actor must embody and subjectivise the character’s discourse as best they can.

In this language, crossed by writing, we have a specialized writing, in which the Japanese characters, imported from China, can be read in two different ways: in on-yomi, where the characters are pronounced as such, and in kun-yomi, the way in which the meaning is produced[6].

If we, as Occidentals, produce meaning through the articulation of signifiers that are empty of meaning, this is only possible through a belief in a fundamental meaning, incarnated by the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father. In Japan, according to Lacan, each one by his speech act, would have to, through a literal system of diffused signification, produce meaning from the articulation with signifiers that in themselves have no signification[7].

Our hypothesis is that this possibility of a discursive regime that is not founded upon the signification of the Name-of-the-Father, enables analysts in the contemporary clinic to
broach situations where difficulties are present with instituting a subject supposed to know, which would otherwise be integral to the concept of repression.

The pluralization of the Name-of-the-Father, used by Lacan from the 1960’s, moves towards this pulverized identification of the Japanese subject, for whom the Other is no longer knotted to the Name-of-the-Father as a universal hypothesis. This is why Lacan’s indications on Japan are valuable to us. The so-called new symptoms may be considered as a product of a game of semblances that give enjoyment, and not as enigmatic signifying traits, that would require to be deciphered. In our “Japanized” world we are called upon to know how to make do with semblants, a mix of the imaginary and the symbolic, so that in each speaking being one of them can detach and function as a symptom, a privileged and singular mode of jouissance.

Each patient, with their constellated speech, can in this way create a bricolage by giving consistency to their body, and existence to their symptoms, in relation to which he must keep a necessary distance, to leave half open a gap of the sexual relation that does not exist. From this gap he will be able to invent a singular, sinthomatic way of existing, and perhaps a new link with the Other.

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