Know Your Symptom?

Presentation of the third lesson of the seminar “Speaking Lalongue of the Body” by Éric Laurent

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Eric Laurent takes as a starting point Lacan’s phrase from Seminar 24: “On this basis, what does it mean to know? Knowing your symptom means knowing how to manage with it, knowing how to untangle it, manipulate it.”

In the first instance, it is a question of situating the disjunction between the body and the symptom, following Lacan’s indication: “The know-how that someone has with his image corresponds in some way with this, and permits us to imagine the manner in which he will come to terms with, untangle, his symptom.”

The knowledge of the symptom involves the relation with the unconscious knowledge that arises only from the signifier, from lalongue as equivocation. Language, its symbolic structure, is here second in relation to lalongue, as an elucubration of knowledge about lalongue.

This is what the Lacanian term “l’une-bévue” takes up of the Freudian “Unbewusst” (unconscious) as a trans-linguistic equivocation. Eric Laurent follows here the trail of the French phrase “une-bévue” back to the 16th century, a trompe-l’oeil (which will be followed by the reference to the scopic in the history of art, from Rubens to Matisse), a visual error that supposes a mixture between a signifying equivocation and the One that repeats itself.

The equivocation produces an effect of knowledge après coup; it is the equivocation (une-bévue) that both knows and is love (s’aile à mourre – c’est l’amour) as an experience of knowledge in
transference. The place of knowledge passes here from the register of the symbolic to that of the real. This poses the question of the relationship between knowledge and jouissance that modifies the link between knowledge and love: that of jouissance that insists, consents to being deciphered.

Two logical moments are thus distinguished in Lacan’s teaching with respect to love:

1. Love is that which permits jouissance to condescend to desire. This is the reference to the phallic doctrine. The subject has to come to terms with the operator of castration. The phallus in Lacan’s teaching of the 50s and 60s was the partner that allowed jouissance to be deciphered by way of symbolic castration.

2. Love is that which permits jouissance to condescend to being deciphered. Here it is a question of what can be deciphered of that which does not work, that which does not fit in the jouissance of a woman as a partner-symptom. This turn supposes a “feminization of the doctrine”: for both sexes it is a question of loving a woman in a reference prior to the phallus.

In order to draw the consequences of this turn in Lacan’s teachings, Eric Laurent refers to the doctrine of the Proper Name, founded on the guarantee of the system of nomination, system beyond the Name of the Father, founded in effect on the Proper Name that Lacan situates as a knotting of the three registers: Imaginary, Symbolic and Real.

This would be the point to examine the opposition between Frege and Russell’s conception of the system of nomination and that of Saul Kripke. In Frege and Russell the name remits to a reference by means of a signification, a phallic Bedeutung, while in Kripke there is no mediation possible by means of signification, and the name is rather a “rigid designator” that has no other support but the void, while remaining suspended by the existence of God. Lacan introduces here a new system of nomination, post-Kripke, one that involves a “baptism without God”, an S1 that does not remit to an S2, an S1 all alone.

From this perspective, speaking with the body is “speaking to the symptom”, deciphering it with the means given by the knotting, the stapling (the term used by Jacques-Alain Miller) between the Symbolic and the Real that, by the intermediary of the Imaginary, allows a conversation to be sustained that makes sense and that permits us make use of the system of names, a system that is no longer guaranteed by any reference (Bedeutung) but rather defined by the Proper Name as such.

Translated by Alejandro Betancur Vélez