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The Unconscious in the Time of the Virus

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Since two years now – from the year of the coronavirus – the streets of my city remain deserted. What could be more normal? No one ventures out of one's home any more. Face-to-face meetings, hugs, handshakes, public meetings: it's all over. No one would dare to speak directly to his neighbor any longer. Children are made to wear masks from an early age. Who would think of venturing into an in vivo love experience? Everyone has gotten used to living in a virtual world. We work from afar, we fuck from afar, we analyze from afar, we buy from afar. And the worst thing is that we get used to it. As my cat, who is lucky enough not to talk, would say, "The trumans [*les trumains*] have finally understood that they are sick from their interactions."

If he ever said that to me, I would retort that come to think of it, we've known it already for quite a long time.

Since I've been in confinement, I've taken time to reread Freud, you know, the one who said, when he arrived in the United States in 1909, "They don't know that we are bringing them the plague". That plague was nothing other than the unconscious, that ectoplasm that creeps into our exchanges when we don't pay attention to it.

Rereading "The witticism and its relationship with the unconscious", I found it interesting to note that Freud noticed how contagious laughter was. And so he explained the fact that when someone has heard a good story, he feels the almost imperious need to tell it to another person in order to laugh again, whereas the effect of a witticism usually loses its power with repetition. It's as if the joke needs to be spread in a viral way – as we often say since several years now – in order to retain its power.

I thought it would be rather funny to consider that the individuals involved in this transmission are merely vectors at the service of the witty virus. That would be a good joke. And like every joke, it would reveal some truth. The unconscious acts as a virus

that acts as a link between individuals. It is without their knowledge that this link is established, triggering their love, their hatred, their laughter, their tears.

Let us therefore exploit this vein of the unconscious as a virus. The virus has a life of its own and owes its survival solely to the fact that it is transmitted from one individual to another. Once it colonizes a cell, it modifies it, diverts it from its normal course and bends it to its whim.

The unconscious virus exists only in the relationship between two people who talk to each other. Outside this relationship it has no reason to exist.

But as long as it infects you, it dictates its whims, makes you do stupid things, we call these parapraxis, makes you say stupid things, we call these slips of the tongue. It is the unconscious that makes you produce symptoms, it is the unconscious that engages you in a relation of transference, that makes you assume a knowledge in the Other. Which may have led you to commit yourself to a psychoanalysis.

By the way, what is psychoanalysis? Is it a way to learn to adapt to our safe world, to endure the permanent wearing of a mask or a veil, in other words to learn about phobia? Not at all! Lacan, who was very concerned about the transmission of psychoanalysis, said that if it ceased to be transmitted in a viral way (it is I who adds it) in the cures, it would cease to exist. In other words, the virus which, after Freud, preoccupied Lacan, has a name: it is the analyst's desire. Neither of the two thought of eradicating it.

That is why, my friends, in 2022, in spite of the general atmosphere that has done everything to eradicate it, psychoanalysis still exists, I note moreover that it is the only space where one is asked to remove one's mask before entering.

Post scriptum

I hope I haven't shocked anyone with this little science fiction note. May those who have to suffer from this filth that infects our air forgive the levity of my remarks. Isn't the witticism a good remedy to endure the vicissitudes of this deadly and sexually transmitted disease called life?

Bernard Nominé, March 22nd, 2020.

The Trick that Cures

Lacan brought to the attention of analysts the trick, that thing which allows for the analyst, from time to time, to cure a neurosis: "he knows the trick... the way in which to cure a neurosis" [1].

The analyst gets this knowledge from the real of sex.

And how can it be done, dear Dr Lacan?

Admittedly, by the signifier, which Lacan wouldn't let go of all along the time of his teaching. Because it is the only thing we have as a weapon against the symptom which needs to be reached, reduced, and he even says "to really remove the result, that is to say, what we call the symptom", remove the symptom, and elsewhere – in *La Troisième* – he says extinguish the symptom.

How to transmit, you'll see the pertinence, “the virus of this *sinthome* in the form of the signifier?”

The *sinthome*-virus of psychoanalysis!

Not without passing from the symptom to the *sinthome*. Passing, always with the *passe* wherein to account for it, letting go of the symptom that which can “pt” and elevating that which “th”.

One would say Joyce at the end of *Finnegans Wake*: passing from “riverrun” onto “the”. The virus runs in the stream of Liffey and comes to die on the shore of “the”, which is called the... definite article.

This is how “The” Artist proposes his solution.

Let us notice that this shore of the shore supposes the wake, an awakening. Don't we expect from the *passe* that it would indicate this signed awakening?

The virus of the symptom is not that of the *sinthome*, it is insofar as the *jouissance* bails out that the *sinthome* ...cures and gayly laughs [*gai...rit*, homonymy with *guerit* in the French]

That a permanent cartel of the ICG [2] had been be the occasion for reading this conclusive speech of Lacan at the *Conference on Transmission* resulted in finding this viral, this turning point which concerns the practice of psychoanalysts. The task is not small, as in this same intervention he also asserts that in order for psychoanalysis to be able to endure, it has to be reinvented every time.

Albert Nguyễn, March 23rd, 2020.

Traduction by Sara Rodowicz-Ślusarczyk

Footnotes:

1 J. Lacan, *Letters of the EFP*, nr 23, vol. 2, 1979

2 ICG Cartel composed of Vicky Estevez (Plus-one), Elisabete Thamer, Rosa Escapa, Dominique Marin, Anna Laura Prates, Albert Nguyễn.

Our Emergency

We are living through an unprecedented time in our contemporary history, which opens onto a point of ignorance that is valid for all, including the experts of the scientific committees supposed to guide the decisions of our governors. No one knows where all of this is going to take us. The non-knowledge concerns the real with which each *parlêtre* is confronted. In actual facts, for about two weeks now, we have been confronted with an entirely new situation known as confinement, making the relevance of what Gilles Deleuze, following Michel Foucault, had called in the 1980s the "society of control" particularly acute – as inaugurating a new form of power, brought on in order to manage and control the living being.

This is a reality that we are all forced to comply with, in order to contain the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. As we know, according to the discourse of the epidemiologists, it is a question of flattening the curve to attenuate the worst. But all the experts also know that it will only stop when around 60% of the population, country by country, continent by continent, has contracted the virus and thus collective immunity will have rendered the virus ineffective. It is all a question of spreading out the time of the process, the urgency being to contain the span of the disaster, linked to the 5% of cases requiring hospitalization in intensive care.

What can psychoanalysts say faced with this real? What is the duty of the saying [*dire*] of the psychoanalyst? We know that Freud, arriving in the United States of America in September 1909, confided to Jung: "They do not know that we are bringing them the plague." Can we still say that today? What is it that we have to transmit? Is the psychoanalyst's mission that of transmitting a virus, that of what Lacan, at the 9th Conference of his School in 1978, called the *sinthome*, in so far as it is what remains of what we call the sexual relationship, clarifying that it would be a question of transmitting it in the form of the signifier?

It goes without saying that neither Freud nor Lacan had the idea of transmitting a lethal agent. On the contrary, it was a question, for Freud as for Lacan, of inoculating in the ambient discourse, in the capitalist discourse, an agent which lessens, reduces the burden of its stench, by injecting into it the revivifying power of the signifier.

The only virus we can inoculate today is the one that could revive the epidemic of psychoanalysis, as Lacan revived it in his time all the way onto Latin America. It would be a question of relaunching the virus of the signifier which rejuvenates language, which revives *lalangue*, a virus which therefore time and again tackles the jargon that contaminates the politics and media of today, as well as scientists, and which we as psychoanalysts also do not escape from. This is *our emergency*.

We have to do nothing other than treat our cases of subjective urgencies. Lacan said it in his "Preface to the English edition of *Seminar XI*" in 1976: how can someone devote himself to satisfying these urgent cases? – and he specified that one can never be sure of satisfying them unless one has weighed up [their demand]. It is even more true in today's particular time. Faced with the demand that the crisis generates, are we capable of assessing its urgency?

Nicole Bousseyroux, March 24th, 2020.

Traduction by Sara Rodowicz-Ślusarczyk

Dear colleagues,

We hope that this issue of Echoes finds you all in good health, that the quarantine into which the world has now been forced is also an opportunity to gather the means at our disposal in order to continue to support psychoanalysis. Our work today certainly constitutes a way of facing the real that is imposed on us.

We hope that the impossibility of physical contact is not an obstacle to get along. International cartels, the organization of online seminars, can be a means of exchange while we await the time - which we hope is near - when we can meet again as before.

The ICG wanted to distribute a new issue of its Bulletin quite quickly, our aim being not only to keep you informed of our activities, but also to maintain the bond of work of our international community.

We would like to thank Bernard Nominé, Albert Nguyễn and Nicole Bousseyrroux, who immediately took up their pens to bring you some echo on this terrible situation that we share.

We send you a warm thought, take care of yourself and your loved ones and see you very soon.

Best regards,

The ICG

ICG meeting

Due to the sanitary preventive measures taken up in many countries, the ICG cancelled its meeting in Paris scheduled between April 3rd-6th. However, we will hold a videoconference on April 4th and 5th, in order to work on various points.

Listening to the passes scheduled for these dates has of course been postponed.

AMS proposals

The AMS proposals transmitted by the local School Devices will be examined by the International Accreditation Committee (IAC), which will also meet by videoconference. We remind you of the composition of this Commission: Albert Nguyễn, Bernard Nominé, Rithée Cevasco, Andrea Hortélio Fernandes, Vicky Estevez, Beatriz Maya and Nicole Bosseyroux.