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Freud – So To Speak

I

Because of the times we are living in, we have been asked to consider again what are the issues behind the Freudian invention. We know more or less clearly that it was not conceived so that it could mingle with pre-established knowledge, nor add a complete new chapter of ideas to it [*un nouveau continent*]. Freud did not invent a mere a body of knowledge –be it understood as a theoretical discipline or as a practical know-how. As it happens, the very idea that the practice of psychoanalysis (the “clinic”, as we say in analyst circles) never ceases to strengthen the foundations of the theory, shows in fact – although it might confuse matters further at a pragmatic level – that thought here proceeds by opening itself up to a surge [*une poussée*] emanating from depths that are always more enigmatic and concealed in the “analysis” itself, whatever meaning we give to that word. As a layman, I would say that it is because the role of the “clinic” consists of nothing else than to facilitate, each time in a unique way, access to what is inaccessible, to what is primordial or cannot be unveiled. It is in this sense that the Freudian invention is the most clearly and resolutely unreligious of modern inventions. It is also for this reason that it cannot even believe in itself. As an institution (including not only its “schools” but also the analysts’ practices, and even the institutional name of “psychoanalysis”) it cannot avoid it, but as a system of thought its guiding principle can only be to defer its own identity.

What we call “Freudian psychoanalysis” is the fact that the analysis—and particularly the analysis of the “cure”—is only ever an *interminable* analysis, even when we can say it is *terminated*. It never stops interpreting itself or inviting us to interpret it, all the while getting further away from what it is supposed to be: a body of “knowledge” and a “know-how”. Beyond all analysis, it never ceases to invite us to what Derrida (1996, p. 49) calls a “lysis [*lyse*] without measure and *from which you can never return*”.

In the final analysis—if I am permitted to express myself in such a way—Freud does not want to develop a body of knowledge. The evolution of his thought demonstrates it thus: he never ceased moving towards hypotheses or conjectures always more expressly adventurous (“metapsychological”, that is to say metaphysical or speculative), towards models that could be less well modelled or constructed (“second topology”, rather a-topological), towards what Freud himself called “speculation”, “representation”, or “myth” (“murder of the father”, “death drive”), and towards objects that were always less clinical—and in fact always less “objects” at all—such as religion, art, civilisation, war.

This is well known, but it nonetheless still deserves to be considered. What we have to do now is to assess more precisely the gap between, on the one hand, the positivism found in scientific and instrument-based models (for which the “cure” provides its vector), and on the other hand the narrative and imaginative drive which creates worlds. For this is exactly what Freud tried to do: to tell a story, to retrace the awakening of the human being, and the action of the forces involved.

That is not to say that we must try to measure this gap in a more precise way than we have done up to now (Lacan, himself, knew how to measure it by inventing his own fictions in relation to knowledge, although

they were subordinated to the instrumental constraints of the institution, and to its function or to the profession itself).

II

What is at stake here cannot be measured easily. Without any doubt, the distance of which we speak grew during Freud's lifetime and with the evolution of his thought, without managing to reach its full potential. But his essential motif or guiding thread runs *through* the entire length of his Oeuvre: the "unconscious" does not designate a folding of the soul: it is the soul itself, or if you prefer, it is man. Freud did not discover that man had an unconscious as Descartes discovered, he believed, a pineal gland in man, one which we still have yet to find. It is man in his entirety that Freud puts into question. Man now has a new narrative.

It is the most resolutely unreligious narrative – in other words it is the narrative least likely to rely on any form of belief whatsoever, even on a belief in science. For Freud, science is a shield against the illusion of religion. But he cannot rely on it as if he was constructing a solid object. Science is, at best, a measure of solidity. Let us not fall into the traps which endeavour to transfigure us. All in all, Freud knows too well that the desire to know generally derives from the desire for power and mastery. It is impossible to find a "scholar" or a "scientist", who is not only more modest than him, but, moreover, more sincere when it comes to acknowledging what is uncertain and incomplete, and to admitting the limitations of one's thought.

His Oeuvre is strewn with the confession that it is insufficient, obscure, or unsatisfactory. Whether it is dealing with "identification", "sublimation", "art", or "civilisation", among many other themes, Freud asks that we accept to be disappointed by his results, and asks us to wait for a later date or to look for a different source of knowledge. What he said about femininity, upon concluding his conference on this theme, can be applied to his work as a whole. After having admitted that his presentation remained incomplete and fragmentary, he declared to his audience: "if you would like to know more about it, reflect on your own experiences, turn to the poets, or indeed wait for science to bring you more deep and coherent knowledge". It is clear that the last idea leads to a very uncertain future, if indeed it is not to be taken ironically, while the first two ideas—which must be linked together—clearly indicate, and this is often repeated in Freud's Oeuvre, that it is less about knowing objects than giving a new expression to our existence as subjects.

III

Once this point is understood, one can say that there is no Freudian discovery and that the unconscious is not an organ. But Freud did make an invention: he invented man's narrative. Before, it was a Creator or Nature that had created Man, before, man was promised a celestial afterlife or the survival of his species, but instead, Freud gives man another origin and another destination. Man comes from a momentum [*élan*] or a surge [*poussée*] which surpasses him, which surpasses in any case much of what Freud designates as the "self" [*moi*].

He calls this momentum or surge the *Trieb*. In English this is translated as *drive*. In French, which is the language which I have written in, we use the word *pulsion*. What is at stake in the translation is of paramount importance, all the more so because I write this paper to accompany the Japanese translation of the works of Freud! *Drive* and *pulsion* both imply a mechanical and strained surge, each in a different manner. It is a traction which is experienced more than it is an attraction which is searched for. In French the term *compulsion* stresses the passive and nearly automatic movement experienced, as if it is ordered from outside. Yet Freud calls this compulsion *Zwang*, which comes from another family of words and which implies coercion, the impossibility to resist (particularly in the context of obsession and repetition). Both registers are quite distinct even though they converge at certain points.

In German *Trieb* designates a surge considered as action: the growth of a plant or the nurturing of an animal. It is about momentum and desire. It moves forward, it is active. In the semantics of the verb *treiben* there is a considerable and polymorphic activity. Freud did not choose this defining word by chance. He wants to put

in this word both something more than an “instinct” already programmed, and something less than a programming “intention” or “aim”. In truth he means a surge which one sustains—if you see it viewed from the little “self” [*moi*], which is conscious and deliberate—but which at the same time originates from the birth and the growth of this singular “one” which we call the “subject”—a term to which Freud does not attach too much importance—and which far exceeds what is represented by our models of the “person” or the “individual”.

The notion of *Trieb*—or of the *Triebe* complexes—signifies a movement that has come from elsewhere, from the non-individuated, from what is the hidden archaic state of our origins, proliferating and confused—and that is: nature; the world; the whole of humanity behind us, and behind it what makes it possible; the emergence of the sign and the gesture; the call of all of us to the elements, to forces, to the possible and the impossible; the sense of infinity lying ahead of us, lying behind and amongst us; the desire to answer to this call, and to expose oneself to it. We originate from this movement, from this momentum, from this surge. In the final analysis, it is within this movement and as such a movement that we can *grow*—as we say in French when talking about plants: it is thanks to this movement that we rise, and become what we are capable of being.

This surge comes from elsewhere than us. It makes of us a grown individual, a being which has not been “produced” by a set of causes, but led, launched, projected, or even “thrown” (to reuse a word of Heidegger’s). This “elsewhere” is not a “beyond”, it is neither a theological transcendence, nor a simple immanence as some atheistic negative theologies have understood it to be. This “elsewhere” is inside us: it forms within us the most creative and the most powerful engine driving this momentum, which is what we are. This is because it is nothing less than our being, or it is being in itself once it has detached itself from its ontological moorings. It is “being” considered in the meaning of the verb “to be”: it is a motion, a movement, an emotion, the shock and rise of desire and fear, waiting and attempting, trying, accessing, even crisis and exaltation, exasperation or exhaustion, the forming of forms, the invention of signs, the incoercible tension moving to an unbearable point where it fragments or lays itself down.

IV

What I call here Freud’s “narrative” is this attempt to retrace man, considered as the origin and the renewed coming of such a surge: the growth of nothing else than a sign traced on the obscure and infinitely opened background of a being which could not be explained neither by any God, nor by any Nature, nor by any History. It is the most powerful attempt to define man since the end of metaphysics. It has not fallen in the double trap: the trap of the auto-production of man, from which Marx cannot escape, and the trap of a resurrection of some sort of divinity, which is the case for Heidegger.

The strength [*grandeur*] of this attempt keeps it suspended between its two fragile edges: on one hand we have the positivism of a supposed science or of a technique (and it is out of the question to refute the fact it can work, although it is always more visibly limited by the deep mutation of civilization and with it of the “psyche”), and on the other hand we have the belief in all sorts of depths or fantasmatical powers, the whole imaginary of “primitivism”, which psychoanalysis attempts precisely to refute.

But what is refuted, either as a supposed object or as an invented origin, has nonetheless its own consistency: it acts as a support for what we are calling here the Freudian *narrative*. This narrative tells of and explains how men tell themselves where they come from and where they are going, in relation to an infinite surpassing of themselves, in relation to an excessive surge which precedes and follows them, which gives birth to them and makes them die, all the while demanding that in this world they give form to this force which is out of this world.

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* Freud put on stage the first narrator, the first mythologist, who tells his horde that he has killed the father: it is an impossible narrative since the father only exists because of his murder, and consequently the murderer will only have killed the pre-paternal animal.

According to Freud, myth is the means by which individuals detach themselves from group psychology. In other words, it is through myth that we have the structure needed for the “ego” [*moi*] to detach itself from the “id” [*ça*] – and this detachment is brought about by the mythical creation of a “hero”, in other words an “ego” [*moi*]. Everything that Freud invented starts here: the subject tells his own story, he comes into existence through his narrative. It is not a tale because it is not the “speaking subject” who operates here, it is rather the one to whom speech gives birth—speech, or rather signification, the opening up of the possibility of meaning [*sens*].

Freud knew that we must not ask for the meaning (of life); according to him, this question is already pathological. But he knew that signification forces us to ask this question. To be obliged by meaning to do so, means that we are carried away by what we are supposed to carry. This is the answer given by speech when considered as myth: it does not tell tales, it does not write fictions, it tries to allow that which precedes speech to speak—signification in its nascent stage. The *Trieb*—surge, momentum, pulsation, enthusiasm, anger—is the name found by Freud (particularly to oppose to “instinct”) to express this effort, even this forcing of meaning that occurs before and after any signification: the force of desire which carries man beyond himself.

Freud has been able to reopen mythical speech at the precise point where science stops and where religion is of no avail. He gave a name, albeit as provisional as any mythical name (and perhaps as any name), to what surges in our being. Did he not write (Freud, p. 101): “The doctrine of drives is, so to speak, our mythology. Drives are mythical beings, spectacular in their indetermination”?

So to speak (“*sozusagen*”): but we always say “so”, approximately, nearly, as close as possible and always infinitely far away from what drove us to speak.

Translated from the French by

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