

NOTES AND INSIGHTS ON THE FUNCTION OF IGNORANCE AND ITS RELATION TO UNCONSCIOUS KNOWLEDGE

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In November 1971, in a talk on The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst, Lacan said “regarding knowledge, I pointed this out a long time ago: the fact that in Buddhism ignorance can be considered as a passion is something we can justify with some meditation. But since meditation is not our strong suit, one must understand it through experience. [...] Ignorance is not a lack; it is something else: ignorance is tied to knowledge,” a fact of the correlation of ignorance. At this point, it is important to propose ignorance as the difference between knowledge and truth, since “it is on the sensitive boundary between knowledge and truth that the analytical discourse is held.” The analytical experience, “is needed to demonstrate that in psychoanalysis knowledge is front and foremost.” In Freud’s article, “A Difficulty of Psychoanalysis,” the very title indicates that the knowledge in question does not come comfortably. There is a very specific difficulty that Freud has in bringing into play a certain function of knowledge because of the very consistency that knowledge has. This means that when one knows something, the least one can say is that one knows that one knows it. This is the core. What is added, namely the mess of the ego (which is constructed around it); is this: knowing that the one who knows that they know is me. This reference to the ego is secondary to the fact that knowledge is known. But “the novelty is what psychoanalysis reveals: it is knowledge not known by itself. [...] If the unconscious is surprising, it is because this knowledge is something else. [...] the unknown knowledge that psychoanalysis deals with is a knowledge that, of course, is articulated, structured like a language.” It is a subversion that occurs in the function, in the structure of knowledge. This knowledge, this new status of knowledge, brings with it a new type of discourse. The language in question is the language in which the code can be differentiated from the message. Without these minimal distinctions, there is no place for speech. When Lacan introduces these terms, he calls them “function and field of speech and language.” That is, the function of speech in the field of language. Speech defines the place of so-called truth as a structure of fiction of knowledge.

In Seminar 1, when Lacan develops the question of speech in transference, he says: “what speaks in man reaches far beyond speech, penetrating into his being, his dreams, and his very organism.” Freudian knowledge leads us to listen to speech in discourse manifested through or despite the subject. This word is not communicated solely

through the verb but through all its other manifestations. With his own body, the subject emits a word that, as such, is a word of truth—a word he doesn't even know he emits as a signifier because he says more than he intends to say; he always says more than he knows he says. For a topological representation of the issue, Lacan draws a diamond, a polyhedron on the board, and says: let's conceive that the middle plane, the plane where the triangle that divides this pyramid into two is situated, represents the surface of the Real, of the Real in its simplicity. Nothing here can bypass it; the places are occupied. But everything has changed on the other level because words, symbols, introduce a hole, a gap, through which all sorts of passages are possible. Things become interchangeable. This hole in the Real is called, depending on how it is approached, being or nothingness. This being and nothingness are essentially linked to the phenomenon of the word. I will return to this point concerning the placement of ignorance between the symbolic and the real registers. In the tripartition of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real, elementary categories without which we can distinguish nothing in our experience, is situated the dimension of being. Only in the dimension of being, and not in the real, can the three fundamental passions—love, hate, ignorance—be inscribed. Now, this last one, which is situated at the junction between the real and the symbolic, constitutes a primary component of transference. “Without this reference, there is no possible entry into analysis: it is never named, it is never thought of, when in reality, it is fundamental” since it is the closest to the subject. When the search for truth is undertaken, it is because it is situated in the dimension of ignorance, as a passion for being. The analyst should not guide the subject toward knowledge but towards the paths of access to that knowledge. He must engage the subject in a dialectical operation, showing him that he speaks poorly, that is, that he speaks without knowing, like an ignorant person. The position of the analyst must be one of learned ignorance, which does not mean wise, but formal, forming the subject according to the way of approaching ignorance as a passion of being through the word, the symbolic register.

I also mentioned the other way of approaching the hole, the nothingness, the drive aspect; the real register. In Seminar 11, when Lacan works on the issue of transference and the drive in the dialectic of the subject and the Other, he creates a schema: he places the subject at the edge of the erogenous zone, as nothingness, in relation to the unconscious as the field of the Other; the subject becoming in relation to the Other. There, the subject as such is in uncertainty because he is divided by the effect of language, by the effect of the word. The subject is realized each time in the field of the Other, thus “the unconscious structured as a language has to do with grammar; it also has a little to do, a lot to do, everything to do, with repetition.” The subject is realized each time through the experience of analysis, which finds its measure in the paths of learned ignorance.

To wrap up, here are some words from a poem by Cesar Vallejo:

