

Título: Anxiety, repression and foreclosure: some remarks to the clinic

Autor: Sonia Leite<sup>1</sup>

Dispositivo: Mesas Simultáneas de Trabajos Libres

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In 1924a, Freud went back to the *case of Elisabeth*, a young hysterical woman who was in love with her brother-in-law. *Standing beside her sister's death-bed, she was horrified at having the thought: "Now he is free and can marry me"*. The scene was instantly forgotten and thus the hysterical symptoms were set in motion. Neurotic symptom is the answer to the anxiety that comes from the encounter with the real of the sister's death. Freud points out that if it was a psychotic reaction, the outcome would be a disavowal of the fact of her sister's death, that is to say, there would be no dialectic between this real and any other signifier and its covering would not be possible.

The relation between anxiety and foreclosure was already considered when I inquired into the nature of the experience that led Rosana – a psychotic patient – to an unending repetition of what could be named “traumatic encounter”.

*“I saw the horrible thing!”*. She expresses the unapproachable that is present in her life every day. She goes on: *“When he (...) sets my ears in motion, I have the impression that I will die. The rumble in my ear is dangerous... it comes through the electricity wires... they are rumbling screams in my ears”*.

The signifier “rumble” points out the presence of an excess – pure sound – detached from word and meaning. It is a violent encounter that is repeated many times in a week. Something similar recalls the psychotic subject. As Rosana comes across what she called “the horrible thing”, she is – literally – out of her senses.

Foreclosure is the essential condition of psychosis, which requires a chance cause to be unleashed. This chance cause - which for Rosana was the moment when she had to work as a teacher for the first time in her life – has the primordial character of producing an appeal to the Name-of-the-Father – fundamental signifier – whose effect is the clinical beginning of psychosis.

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<sup>1</sup> Psychoanalyst, member of Corpo Freudiano Escola de Psicanálise – Rio de Janeiro.

These remarks raised the following question: *If we assume that, concerning neurosis, what produces repression is anxiety, are we allowed to assume that in psychosis it is also anxiety what produces foreclosure?*

## II

The Freudian enquiry into the question of anxiety is initially bound up with the discussion concerning anxiety neurosis (FREUD, 1895 [1894]). The prospect of a direct libidinal conversion, his first theory of anxiety, indicates the fact that something exceeds the psychic apparatus. Freud's writings unmistakably point out already the strong connection between absence of desire and emergence of anxiety – what is later indicated by Lacan (LACAN, 1962-63). The clinic of psychoneurosis, i.e., the discovery of Oedipus complex and thereby the theme of guilt make possible a fresh theoretical elaboration, which is presented in 1926, in the paper *Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety*. The theme articulates with the notion of helplessness, anxiety being considered as an affect with a noticeable character of unpleasure that is discharged whether *automatically*, in traumatic experience, or as a signal that makes possible a preparation to the I that sets the pleasure-unpleasure principle in motion, whose role is avoiding the repetition of the traumatic situation.

Freud goes back here to the discussion about the economic standpoint (FREUD, 1920; 1924b), remarking the relation between the quantity of excitation in mind and sensations of pleasure and unpleasure. These qualitative variations show the psychic apparatus' capacity to bear a certain quote of stimulus and indicate the conditions of the experience of anxiety, justifying the use of specific mechanisms of defence, not anyone.

In the paper of 1926, Freud reformulates some old conceptions regarding the constitution of neuroses. One of the most important points is the conclusion that it is *anxiety that produces repression* and not the contrary – *repression producing anxiety* – as he thought up until then. Therefore anxiety is not newly created in repression; it is

reproduced as an affective state *in accordance with an already existing mnemic image*. This mark indicates the presence of *primaeval* traumatic experiences. These experiences are bound up with the earliest outbreaks of anxiety, which are of a very intense kind and occur before the super-ego has become differentiated. *It is highly probable that the immediate precipitating causes of primal repressions are quantitative factors such as an excessive degree of excitation and the breaking through of the protective shield against stimuli* (FREUD, 1926 [1925]: 95).<sup>2</sup>

In his last work dedicated to the theme (FREUD, 1933 [1932]), Freud reasserts some points which were added in 1926 and sheds light over a double origin for this affect: one being a direct consequence of traumatic moment (automatic or realistic anxiety) and another one being the signal that prepares the *ego* for a menace of repetition of such a moment (signal of anxiety). What is shown is the fact that the *ego* is the site of anxiety and the signal of anxiety makes possible a time, from which the pleasure-unpleasure principle can be set in motion.

The remarked points indicate the importance of primal repression as a dividing line between the structures – neurotic and psychotic – and also as *sine qua non* for signal of anxiety.

### III

In Seminar 10, Lacan intends to delineate the median function of anxiety between *jouissance* and *desire*, pointing out that anxiety is always *signal of real* and for that he goes back to the optical scheme (LACAN, 1962-63), trying to shed light on the moment of the outbreak of anxiety. The cathexis of the specular image is an essential time of the imaginary relation, for it has a limit and what is left over does not have a possible specular image and inscribes itself as *lack* (-  $\phi$ ). It means that the *phallus*, since

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to observe that, in this passage, Freud attributes the possibility of the establishment of primal repression to a breaking through of the protective shield (mother), i.e., to a fault of it, what enables us to make an articulation with what Lacan (1957-58) calls function of paternal metaphor, that is to say, what establishes the fault/lack in *Other*.

it cannot be represented , is *cut* from the specular image. Such a cutting constitutes castration, what at the same time involves the fall of the *object a* and the signifier division of the subject.

The outbreak of anxiety takes place when something appears in the place of (- $\phi$ ), when the lack lacks. Moment of imaginary dissolution. The access to the symbolic makes possible the imaginary reconstruction and the covering of lethal real. In the scheme of the signifier division of the subject, the outbreak of anxiety – signal of real – indicates the necessary renewal of a *crossing* in order to accede to desire (LEITE, 2009).

However, if anxiety is always *signal* of real for Lacan, where we could find *automatic* or *realistic* anxiety, named by Freud?

I suppose that since Lacan settles the experience of anxiety between *jouissance* and *desire* on the levels of the signifier division of the subject, he replaces the Freudian notion of automatic anxiety by the very experience of the encounter with real. In other words, what Freud calls automatic anxiety appears to be *jouissance*, in Lacanian terms, situated on the first level of the signifier division of the subject.

Such perspective makes possible to reassume that what leads to foreclosure *per se*, in psychoses, is the presence of a primal foreclosure, experience of an excess that cannot be represented and that is traumatic due to the absence of primal repression. Foreclosure of the signifier of Name-of-the-Father, moment of imaginary dissolution, is well expressed in Rosana's sentence: "I saw the horrible thing!". There is no possible mirror. Moment that indicates a reencounter, without outline, with traumatic real. Reencounter that will be able, at a second logical time, to be partially covered by delusional metaphor.

Perhaps such perspective explains why after a long lecture about anxiety, in conference XXXII, Freud goes back to the discussion about instinctual life. On the one hand, the fact that *signal of anxiety* is guided by pleasure principle points out the tendency of psychic apparatus towards something that cannot be represented and, on

the other, *automatic anxiety* – encounter with real – maybe another name for death instinct.

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