

Anxiety, Signal of the Real

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Many thanks to ICLO for the invitation to reflect together on this beautiful theme, *The Names of the Real in the 21st Century*, that is part of the research movement on our way towards the next Congress.

It was proposed by Jacques-Alain Miller that we take interest in what he calls “a great disorder in the real.” This will clarify from a different angle our previous research on *The Symbolic Order of the 21st Century*, which was the theme of the congress in Buenos Aires last April.

Today I propose that we pause for a moment on the idea of “disorder.” I will then approach the topic of anxiety that I also choose to explore from this perspective, since anxiety, like the symptom and inhibition, is a response to a disorder. Anxiety erects a rampart around the disorder encountered by the subject, whether this disorder is exterior to him, as is the desire of the Other, or interior, intimate to him, as is the disorder provoked by the drive.

The Disorder in the Real

Let's note first of all that the notion of *disorder in the real* is not in the same register as that of disorder in the symbolic – for example, the one that Dora, Freud's famous patient, complained about – where Lacan emphasised that it was up to the analyst to point out the part the patient plays in this disorder of the world. This type of disorder in the symbolic has Hegelian resonances. It is dialectical. It can be analysed and gone beyond; it concerns that which Lacan termed, with Hegel, “the claim made by the ‘beautiful soul’ who rises up against the world in the name of the law of the heart.”¹

Neither is disorder in the real easily comparable to that which Lacan attributes to psychosis, when, in “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” in *Écrits*, he mentions with regard to the psychotic subject “a [disorder] that occurred at the inmost juncture of the subject's sense of life”², and that is found at the junction of the symbolic and the real.

The disorder that psychoanalysis is dealing with today is *political*. In his introduction to the next congress, Jacques-Alain Miller indicated that it results from the profound upheaval of the symbolic order caused by the emergence – and their “combined domination” – of two discourses prevalent in modern times: the discourses of science and capitalism. They “have managed to destroy, and perhaps even break the traditional structure of the human experience in its deepest foundations”³, he said.

This destruction of the traditional structure of human experience is of a different nature than that of the debasement of the function of the Name-of-the-Father, a symbolic function reduced by Lacan to being nothing but a *sinthome* – that is to say, a suppletion for

¹ Lacan, J., “Presentation on Transference”, *Écrits*, translated by Bruce Fink, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, p. 179.

² Lacan, J., “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis”, *Écrits, op. cit.*, p. 468.

³ Miller, J.-A., “Le réel au XXI^{ème} siècle”, *La Cause du désir*, n° 82, p. 88.

the hole of the non-sexual relation⁴ and for the hole in language that Lacan named with a neologism: *troumatisme*, (which in French, combines “hole” (*trou*) with “trauma”).

Our contemporary disorder in the real has nothing to do any more with the guarantee that had been given by the symbolic order and the laws of nature. This is attributable to the recent advances of the scientific discourse, for which, according to Lacan, « there is knowledge in the real ». It is also due to the demoniacal combination of this discourse with capitalism, which advocates individual enrichment to the detriment of any humane law.

However, the real that psychoanalysis deals with is of another order. It is a real qualified by Lacan as “lawless”⁵, which is intimate to the *speaking being*, and which makes of *knowledge* “an elucubration about the real, stripped of all supposed knowledge”⁶, a fantasmatic elucubration of knowledge.

The analytic discourse bases its standpoint on *jouissance*, and on the impossible reduction of discontentment in civilization linked to this *jouissance*. The modern master would like to “submit subjects to his order and his disorders.” But the analytic discourse, as Jacques-Alain Miller states, “flatly refutes this mass subjective rectification, for it gets its power – precisely – from being *demassifying*.” In this regard, Jacques-Alain Miller argues that “psychoanalysis accompanies the subject in his protests against the discontents of civilisation.”⁷

Psychoanalysis indeed accompanies the subject to the farthest reaches of his solitude, to his own exile where there is only One-all-alone, to this opaque *jouissance* that is outside any meaning – where the unconscious and the symptom are relieved of the weight of meaning. In other words, where the unconscious and the symptom have been reduced to chance, alleviated from *it all makes sense*, in favour of what Lacan called the *not-all*, a specifically feminine logic that escapes the phallic logic of the *all*. Psychoanalysis accompanies the subject all the way to Lacan’s novel solution that he called *the pass*.

“It is not a question of provoking disorder in the world, it’s about reading the not-all that is there”⁸, said Lacan at the end of his teaching. There is thus no harmony in the world of humans, for we are *speaking beings*. The speaking being is the name of the Lacanian subject who is affected by language, involving an irreducible lack, affected by the contingent encounter with words and with bodies that constitutes our *lawless real*.

Jacques-Alain Miller has thus proposed a task for the analysts of the 21st century: to replace the disorder caused by the crazy laws of modernity with another disorder, a subversive one, which consists of *disturbing the defence against the lawless real*. This is in order to reach the point of uniqueness of each subject, his or her absolute difference⁹.

Overcoming Anxiety

Disturbing the defence against the real is just what the analyst does when he responds to the subject’s anxiety with his act. Lacan has said that the analyst’s mission is to “counter the real”. This means to bring the analysand’s elucubration to the point where meaning falls away, to get to what is outside meaning, to chance, to that which does not have an effect of meaning and is called *jouissance*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Lacan, J., *Le Séminaire, livre XXIII, Le sinthome*, Seuil, Paris, 2004, p. 137.

⁶ Miller, J.-A., “Le réel au XXIème siècle”, *La Cause du désir*, n° 82, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁷ Miller, J.-A., “Parler avec son corp”, *Mental*, n° 27-28, p. 129-131.

⁸ Lacan, J., *Le Séminaire, livre XXI, « Les non dupes errent »*, lesson of 23 April, 1974, unpublished.

⁹ Miller, J.-A., “Le réel au XXIème siècle”, *La Cause du désir*, n° 82, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

Public authorities seek to thwart this mission by supporting, to the detriment of psychoanalysis, educational and behavioural methods whose only effect is to extend the field of anxiety. For, as Hebe Tizio wrote in her article on the real¹⁰, as opposed to psychoanalysis that does not balk at treating the real and which promotes the void where each One may place their uniqueness, the civilisation of science, of classification and figures does not believe in anxiety or in the symptom, and seeks to reduce the real, or even to erase it. This civilisation of ours presupposes an individualist subject who would not be responsible for his or her position, and whose actions would be devoid of cause. A subject who is therefore mute, alone, lost.

Instead, psychoanalysis maintains that suffering certainly has something to do with *an impossible to say*, which is a real, but that this *impossible* has a cause which is nevertheless *said* through diverse conjunctures that are terrible and ravaging, that bear witness to various disasters.

According to Lacan, anxiety is the affect that does not deceive. It is the affect of the real *par excellence*. It touches the body, and thus has a truth value in our epoch of malaise [*mal-vivre*]. It is one of the responses to that which causes the subject. Lacan has defined it as *not being without an object*. This expression means that the cause of anxiety is, precisely, an object. This implies that once the danger has been isolated, once the object that causes the displeasure of anxiety has been grasped, once this anxiety is faced and not avoided, there is an awakening that allows it to be possible to cross the barrier of anxiety. In an analysis, the subject will be able to unload this anxiety by defining the danger by *saying* it, and thus symptomising it. This is the good way of believing in the symptom.

The anxiety that can be surpassed, or symptomised, is what Lacan called “productive anxiety”. This was my case, for example, at the moment of my pass: making *her voice* heard. One of the consequences of this productive conclusion was, for me, to let go of a fantasy of *disappearance*, in order to join an ethics of action. At the moment of the pass the object drops. It is left, like a leftover, to the analyst. At the same time, it is put into action. Alleviated of pathos and rid of the fascination for this pathos, it becomes operative. The now active object subverts the subject, inspires him, pushes him to act and create. A certain enthusiasm may even be the result of an anxiety that has been overcome.

We experienced this in France when we responded, with our forums, to the attempts of public authorities to support laws favourable to cognitive-behavioural therapies but hostile to clinical psychoanalysis – to the point of wanting to eliminate it. Jacques-Alain Miller gave impetus to our decision not to put up with it and to take action – to climb onto the stage of enunciation rather than disappear, as can happen during a passage to the act, where, Lacan tells us in his *Seminar on Anxiety*, what is at stake is a sort of exit from the stage. On the contrary, as the momentum given by the pass shows us, the only way for me to overcome the obstacle of anxiety was to leave the private darkness and to pass into the exposure of the public light!

Anxiety and the Real

Of which signal of the real is anxiety an indication?

In the case that I just mentioned, which drove psychoanalysts to organise forums with Jacques-Alain Miller, the real danger was the ill will of public powers and their desire to discredit, even eliminate psychoanalysis in favour of CBT. This danger still exists today, so psychoanalysts are still vigilant and active. The WAP has engaged in a political action,

¹⁰ Tizio, H., “Le réel”, *Scilicet, L'ordre symbolique au XXIème siècle*, collection Rue Huysmans, December 2011, p. 297.

orienting psychoanalysis in such a way that it has become, in Jacques-Alain Miller's words, "a political and material force". Psychoanalysts have become active citizens who organise meetings and events with local and national political significance. One example of this is the UFORCA event that took place in Paris in June, entitled "Psychoanalysis and Autism". The point was to demonstrate the relevance of psychoanalysis action with subjects called autistic. It was a success.

But what exactly does "anxiety, signal of the real" mean?

In the chapter entitled "The Mouth and the Eye" in *The Seminar, Book X, Anxiety*, Lacan justifies the choice that led him to treat anxiety, saying that not only is it the path that revivifies all the dialectic of desire, but it is also the only path that allows us to introduce a new clarity about the function of the object in relation to desire¹¹. When it comes to the question of the real, this new clarity interests us above all. In fact, there is an elective relationship between anxiety and the real. This is why Lacan takes anxiety – the "signal of the real"¹² – that we encounter in our experience as his guiding principle.

Anxiety is then one of the names of the Real

Lacan relates the phenomenon of anxiety to the desire of the Other. He shows that we are anguished essentially by the desire of the Other. Hence the question that Lacan places in the foreground of the psychoanalytic experience: "What does the Other want from me?"

An example? In this extraordinary *Seminar* on anxiety, Lacan states that that which makes a woman anxious is the desire of the Other. But at the same time, he shows that when it comes to desire, the woman is freer than the man. Why? Because, contrary to what Freud said about *Penisneid*, penis envy, namely the envy of what she lacks, Lacan considers that the very fact that she lacks nothing makes woman both freer and closer to the real – this real that, says Lacan, "lacks nothing"¹³.

In contrast, then, what about men?

Regarding the relation of man to *Éros*, the anxiety that is felt at the time of the sexual act comes from his experiencing the detumescence as *a loss*. Lacan even says that what occurs at that moment for the man is a "putting out of the game" [*mise hors-jeu*] that can make him intensely anxious¹⁴. The encounter with a woman can thus become a moment of truth. Such an "out of the game" explains why some men prefer to deprive themselves of the sexual act, for in this way they avoid the encounter with anxiety – in this case, castration anxiety, felt at the moment of "the fall of the most real of the subject"¹⁵.

Lacan brings up striking testimonies given to him by male patients on this subject. It happened that an adolescent boy, at the moment when the papers were being collected during an exam, a moment which he experienced as his object being torn away from him, and which corresponded to the peak of anxiety he felt with regard to what was expected of him, ejaculated. The danger, according to Lacan, is in fact linked to the deciduous character of the object, to its possible fall, "to the character of *cession* of the constitutive moment of the object *a*." This is why, in analysis, it takes time to consent to this *cession*, to this fall of the most real of the object *a* cause of desire. Words must come to dress the thing. And it takes time to reach a new desire that is no longer subjected only to the object *a*, and that is therefore freer.

Here Lacan introduces us to the difference between the object behind desire, and the object in front of desire. In this way he contrasts fear with anxiety: the object cause of anxiety is in front, and it is productive. Using as an example Chekov's short story, "Panic Fears",

¹¹ Lacan, J., *Le Séminaire, livre X, L'angoisse*, Seuil, Paris, 2004, p. 265.

¹² *Ibid*, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

¹³ *Ibid*, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

Lacan shows that that which scares us is not the same as that which provokes anxiety. In this regard he uses the term *disorder*, saying what scares us is “that which puts (the subject) in the disorder of a true panic.”¹⁶ Fear “is not a menace, a characteristic of anxiety”, says Lacan, and he adds, “in this sense, the subject is neither gripped nor concerned nor interested in the most intimate aspect of himself.” Lacan therefore refers the difference between fear and anxiety to the opposition between an intimate real and an exterior real.

But in both fear and anxiety, the subject is aware of a danger. He defends himself with what is for him a danger “signal,” a “signal” of the real that Lacan qualifies as *opaque*¹⁷, since it is not signifiable [*signifiantisable*] and thus in contrast to the symbolic function of the signifier, whose vocation is to clarify. This is why the strange, the opaque, before which anxiety operates as “signal,” is about the “irreducible of the real”, says Lacan. And this is why he can affirm his guiding principle of his *Seminar*: that of all the signals, anxiety is the one that “does not deceive.” Beyond the entire signifying operation hitherto promoted by Lacan, anxiety, which escapes the signifier, thus indicates a certainty with regard to the desire of the Other and the response of the subject, and with regard to the irreducible of the real. It is therefore a compass to indicate the real. It is our compass, our orientation in clinical psychoanalysis, since it was, at the moment he uttered it, Lacan’s own reinvention.

Translated by Florencia F. C. Shanahan and Pamela King

¹⁶ *Ibid, op. cit.*, p. 187.

¹⁷ *Ibid, op. cit.*, p. 188.