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The Real in the 21st Century

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I WILL not make you wait long to announce the theme of the next Congress. A new series of three themes has begun with *The Symbolic Order in the 21st Century*. It will be a series specifically dedicated to the *aggiornamento*, as one says in Italian, to the bringing up to date of our analytic practice, its context, its conditions, its novel co-ordinates in the 21st Century, with the growth of what Freud called the discontents, and what Lacan deciphered as the dead-ends, of civilization.

It is a question of leaving behind the 20th Century, leaving it behind us in order to renew our practice in a world itself amply restructured by two historical factors, two discourses: the discourse of science and the discourse of capitalism. These are the two prevalent discourses of modernity which, since the beginning, since their appearance, have begun to destroy the traditional structure of human experience. The combined domination of these two discourses, each supporting the other, has grown to such an extent that this domination has managed to destroy this tradition in its deepest foundations. We have seen this in the course of this Congress, with the tremendous change in the symbolic order, whose corner-stone, that is, the Name-of-the-Father, has been fractured. The corner-

stone which is, as Lacan says with extreme precision, the Name-of-the-Father according to tradition. The Name-of-the-Father according to tradition has been touched, has been devalued by the combination of the two discourses of science and of capitalism.

The Name-of-the-Father, this famous key function of Lacan's first teaching, one could say now is a function recognised across the entire analytic field, whether Lacanian or not. The Name-of-the-Father, this key function, Lacan himself discounted, depreciated in the course of his teaching, ending up making of the Name-of-the-Father no more than a *sinthome*, that is, the supplement of a hole. One could say, before this assembly, making a short cut, that this hole filled by the Name-of-the-Father symptom is the non-existence of the sexual proportion in the human species, the species of living beings that speak. And the depreciation of the Name-of-the-Father in the clinic introduces an unprecedented perspective, which Lacan expresses by saying: *Everyone is mad, i.e. delusional*. This is not a witticism, it translates the extension of the category of madness to all speaking beings who suffer from the same lack of knowledge concerning sexuality. This aphorism indicates that which the so-called clinical structures have in common: *neurosis, psychosis and perversion*. And of course it shakes, undermines, the difference between *neurosis and psychosis*, which has until now been the basis of psychoanalytic diagnosis, an inexhaustible theme of the teachings.

For the next Congress I propose entering further into the consequences of this perspective, studying the real in the 21st Century. Lacan makes a use of this word 'real' that is his own, that was not always the same, which we need to clarify. But I believe there is a way of saying it that has a sort of intuitive evidence for anyone who lives in the 21st Century, beyond us Lacanians. There is at least a sort of evidence for those who have been formed in the 20th Century, and who now for a certain time belong to the 21st Century. There is a great disorder in the real. This is the very formula that I propose for the Paris Congress in 2014: *A Great Disorder in the Real, in the 21st Century*.

I wish now to communicate to you the first thoughts that this title, whose formulation I came up with a couple of days ago, has provoked in me. They are thoughts that I am trying out, intended to launch our conversation in the School One, which will last for two years, and not of course to settle that discussion.

The first thing that occurred to me in this respect, which I have taken as it stands, is the following: previously the real was called nature. Nature was the name of the real when there was no disorder in the real. When nature was the name of the real you could say, as Lacan did, that the real always returns to the same place. Only in this epoch, in which the real disguised itself as nature, the real appeared as the most evident, the most elevated, manifestation of the very concept of order. To the return of the real in the same place Lacan opposed, of course, the signifier, in as much as what characterises the signifier is displacement,

Entstellung, as Freud says. The signifier is connected, is substituted in a metaphorical or a metonymic mode, and always returns in unexpected, surprising places. By contrast, the real, in this epoch where it was confused with nature, was characterised by not surprising. One could calmly await its appearance in the same place, on the same date. Lacan's examples to illustrate the return of the real in the same place indicate this. His examples are the annual return of the seasons, the spectacle of the skies and the heavenly bodies. This is what served as a model, for example, throughout antiquity, in the Chinese rituals that used mathematical calculations of the positions of the heavenly bodies, etc.

You could say that in this epoch the real as nature had the function of the Other of the Other, that is, that it was the very guarantee of the symbolic order. The rhetorical agitation of the signifier in human speech was thus framed by a web of signifiers fixed like the heavenly bodies. Nature - this is its very definition - was defined by being ordered, that is, by the conjunction of the symbolic and the real. To such an extent that according to the most ancient tradition, all human order should imitate the natural order. And it is well known, for example, that the family as natural formation served as the model for putting human groupings in order and the Name-of-the-Father was the key to the symbolised real.

There is no shortage of examples in the history of ideas of this role of nature. They are so abundant and we have so little time that I will not expand on this today. These are points to elaborate. They need to be researched by way of the history of the idea of nature as order, as real. For example, the world in Aristotelian physics was ordered in two invariable dimensions: the world above separated from the sublunary world, as one says, each being seeking there its proper place. It is in this way that this physics functions, it is a topography, that is to say, a set of well fixed places.

With the entrance of the God of creation - let us say the Christian God - this order remains valid, in as much as the nature created by God answers to his will. The divine order persists, even when the separation of the two Aristotelian worlds no longer exists; the divine order which is like a law promulgated by God and incarnated in nature. It is on this basis that the concept of natural law arises. One has to view things from the side of Saint Thomas Aquinas, his definition of natural law which gives place to a sort of imperative. A *noli tangere*, to say it in Latin, a "don't touch nature". Because there was the impression that you could mess with nature, that there were human acts that went against natural law, acts of bestiality in particular, against which the imperative "don't touch nature" was posed.

And I have to say, even though it is not perhaps the view of the majority here, that I consider it admirable how even today the Catholic Church fights to protect the real, the natural order of the real, in matters of reproduction, sexuality, the family, etc. Of course they are anachronistic elements but they testify to the duration, the solidity, of this ancient discourse. You could say that it is admirable as a lost cause, because everyone feels that the real has broken free from nature.

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From the beginning the Church perceived that the discourse of science was going to mess with the real that it was protecting as nature. But it was not enough to imprison Galileo to halt the irresistible scientific dynamic. Just as it was not enough to halt the dynamic of capitalism by qualifying as *turpitude* the thirst for profit, for gain. It is Saint Thomas who uses the Latin word *turpitude* for profit.

Lost cause? Lacan also said that the cause of the Church perhaps announces a triumph. And why? Because the real emancipated from nature is so much worse that it becomes more and more unbearable. There is something like a nostalgia for the lost order which, even though it cannot be recuperated, remains in force as illusion. Before the actual appearance of the discourse of science, the emergence of a desire to touch the real was apparent under the form of acting on nature, making it obey, mobilising and utilising its power. How? Before science, a century before the appearance of the scientific discourse, this desire was manifested in what was called magic. Magic is something different from the conjuring tricks that we use to entertain children.

Lacan considered it so important that in the last text of his *Écrits*, "Science and Truth"¹, he inscribes magic as one of the four fundamental conditions of the truth: magic, religion, science, and psychoanalysis. Four terms that anticipate something of the famous four discourses. He defines magic as the direct summons of the signifier that is in nature on the basis of the signifier of incantation. The magician speaks in order to make nature speak, in order to disturb it, and this already infringes on the divine order of the real in such a way that magicians were persecuted to the extent that magic was a form of witchcraft. But this magic, the craze for magic, was already the expression of a longing for the scientific discourse. This was the thesis of the erudite Francis Yates², who considers that hermeticism prepared the way for the scientific discourse. And it is a historical fact that Newton himself was a distinguished alchemist. Yates, taking up the work of the economist John Maynard Keynes on Newton, indicated that Newton devoted more years to alchemy than he did to the laws of gravitation. I mention this as subjects for research, this branch of the history of science.

But we would do better to follow Alexandre Koyre³, who insisted on this difference: magic makes nature speak while science makes it shut up. Magic is incantation, occultation, rhetoric. With science one passes from speech to writing, in conformity with Galileo's pronouncement: "Nature is written in the language of mathematics"⁴. We have to remember that at the end of his teaching Lacan was not afraid to ask – when he no longer had the ambition to make psychoanalysis scientific – whether it was not a sort of magic. He only said it once, but it is an echo to consider. Of course with this begins a mutation of nature,

1 Lacan, J., "Science and Truth", in *Écrits, The First Complete Edition in English*, transl. by B. Fink, Norton & Co., New York/London, 2006, pp. 726-45.

2 Cf. Yates, F., *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, Routledge, London, 1979.

3 Cf. Koyre, A., *Études d'histoire de la pensée scientifique*, Gallimard, Paris, 1966.

4 Galileo, G., *The Assayer* in *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, Anchor Books, Doubleday, New York, 1990.

which we could express with the aphorism of Lacan: "There is knowledge in the real"⁵. This is the novelty, something is written in nature.

One went on speaking of God and of nature, but God is no more than a subject supposed to know, a subject supposed of knowledge in the real. The metaphysics of the 17th Century describes a God of knowledge who calculates, according to Leibniz, or rather who is mistaken for this calculus, according to Spinoza. In any case it was a question of a mathematised God. I would say that it was the reference to this God, veiling the old illusion of God, that permitted the passage from the finite cosmos to the infinite universe. With the infinite universe of mathematical physics, nature disappears; it becomes, with the philosophers of the 18th Century, solely a moral instance. With the infinite universe nature disappears and the real begins to be unveiled.

I have been asking myself about the formula "there is knowledge in the real". It would be a temptation to say that the unconscious is at this level. On the contrary, the supposition of a knowledge in the real appears to me the ultimate veil that needs to be lifted. If there is a knowledge in the real there is a regularity that scientific knowledge allows us to predict. Scientific knowledge prides itself in prediction, in so far as this demonstrates the existence of laws. And it does not require a divine utterance of these laws for them to remain valid. It is by way of this idea of laws that the old idea of nature has been preserved in the very expression "the laws of nature".

Einstein, as Lacan remarked, referred himself to an honest god who rejected all chance. It was his way of opposing the consequences of Max Planck's quantum physics; it was, for Einstein, an attempt to restrain the discourse of science and the revelation of the real. Physics has progressively had to make room for probabilistic uncertainty coming from the economy; that is to say, for a set of notions that threaten the supposed subject of knowledge. Nor has it been able to make the real and the material equivalent. With subatomic physics the levels of matter have multiplied and, let us say, the "the" of matter, like the "the" of the woman, disappears.

Perhaps I can hazard a short cut here. With respect to the importance of the laws of nature one grasps the tremendous echo that Lacan's aphorism "the real is without law"⁶ ought to have. This is the formula that testifies to a complete rupture between nature and real. It is a formula that decidedly severs the connection between them. It targets the inclusion of knowledge in the real that maintains the subordination of the subject supposed to know.

In psychoanalysis there is no knowledge in the real. Knowledge is an elucubration about a real stripped of all supposed knowledge. At least this is what Lacan invented with his notion of the real, to the point of asking himself if

5 Lacan J., "Session of 15 February 1977" from *Le Séminaire, livre XIV, L'insu que sait de l'Une-dévue*

6 Lacan J., *Le Séminaire, livre XIII, The Sinthome*, Seuil, Paris, 2005, pp. 137-8.

this was not his symptom, if this was not the cornerstone that allowed him to maintain the coherence of his teaching. The real without law appears unthinkable. It is a limit idea that in the first instance implies that the real is without natural law. Everything, for example, that had belonged to the immutable order of reproduction is in motion, in transformation. Whether at the level of sexuality or of the constitution of the living human being with all the perspectives that are appearing now, in the 21st Century, to improve the biology of the species.

The 21st Century announces itself as the great century of bioengineering⁷, which will give rise to all the temptations of eugenics. And the best description of what we are experiencing clearly now, remains the one that Karl Marx gave in his *Communist Manifesto* of the revolutionary effects of the discourse of capitalism on civilization. I would like to read some phrases of Marx that assist a reflection on the real:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without the condition of constant revolution of the instruments of production, and thereby of the relations of production, and with them all social relations. [...] There is an incessant disturbance of all social conditions, constant uncertainty and agitation. [...] All fixed and ossified social relations, with their train of beliefs and ideas venerated for centuries, are swept away.

And the clearest expression of the break with tradition: "All that is solid vanishes into the air, everything sacred is profaned."⁸

I would say that capitalism and science have combined to make nature disappear. And what is left by the vanishing of nature is what we call the real, that is, a remainder, by structure, disordered. The real is touched on all sides by the advances of the binary capitalism-science, in a disordered way, randomly, without being able to recuperate any idea of harmony.

There was a time in which Lacan taught the unconscious as a knowledge in the real, when he said structured like a language. In that epoch he sought laws, the laws of speech, the laws of the signifier, the relation of cause and effect between signifier and signified, between metaphor and metonymy, starting off from of the structure of recognition in Hegel; recognise in order to be recognised. He also presented and ordered this knowledge in graphs, under the pre-eminence of the Name of the Father in the clinic and the phallic ordering of the libido.

But afterwards he opened up another dimension with *lalangue*, in as much as there are laws of language but there are no laws of the dispersion and diversity of languages. Each language is formed by contingency, by chance. In this dimension, the traditional unconscious – for us, the Freudian unconscious – appears to us as an elaboration of knowledge about a real. Let us say a transferenceal elaboration

of knowledge, when one superimposes on this real the function of the subject supposed to know, which another living being consents to incarnate. This is the unconscious that can be put in order, as discourse, but only in the analytic experience. I would say that the transferenceal elaboration consists in giving meaning to the libido, which is the condition for the unconscious to be interpretable. This supposes a previous interpretation, that is to say, that the unconscious itself interprets. What is it that the unconscious interprets⁹ in order to be able to give an answer to this question one has to introduce a term, a word. This word is the real.

In the transference one introduces the subject supposed to know in order to interpret the real. On this basis one constitutes a knowledge not in the real but about the real. Here we locate the aphorism: "The real has no meaning"¹⁰. Not having meaning is a criterion of the real, in as much as it is when one has arrived at the outside meaning that one can think that one has emerged from the fictions produced by a want to say¹¹. The real has no meaning is equivalent to the real does not answer to any wanting to say. Meaning escapes. One gives it meaning, there is a donation of meaning by way of the fantasmatic elaboration.

The testimonies of the Pass, these jewels of our Congresses, are accounts of one's fantasmatic elaboration, of how it is expressed and dissolved in the analytic experience in order to be reduced to a nucleus, to an impoverished real which is sketched as the pure encounter with *lalangue* and its effects of jouissance in the body. It is sketched as a pure shock of the drive. The real, understood in this way, is neither a cosmos nor a world; nor is it an order. It is a piece, an a-systematic fragment, separated from the fictional knowledge that was produced from this encounter. And this encounter of *lalangue* and the body does not respond to any prior law; it is contingent and always perverse. It is this encounter and its consequences – because this encounter is translated by a deviation of jouissance with respect to what jouissance ought to be – that remains in force as a dream.

The real invented by Lacan is not the real of science. It is a contingent real, random, in as much as the natural law of the relation between the sexes is lacking. It is a hole in the knowledge included in the real. Lacan made use of the language of mathematics, which is the best support for science. In the formulas of sexuation, for example, he tried to grasp the dead-ends of sexually in a web of mathematical logic. This was a heroic attempt to make psychoanalysis into a science of the real in the way that logic is. But that can't be done without imprisoning jouissance in the phallic function, in a symbol. This implies a symbolisation of the real, it implies referring to the binary man-woman as if living beings could be partitioned so neatly, when we already see in the real of the 21st Century a growing disorder of sexuation. This is a secondary construction that intervenes after the initial impact of the body and *lalangue*, which constitutes a real without law without logical rule. Logic is only introduced

7 [TN, in English in the original.]

8 [TN, Translated from the Spanish.]

9 Lacan J. *Le Seminaire, livre XXXI (à Sotomayo)*, op. cit., pp. 137-8.

10 [TN, *Querer decir "no mean"* and also "to want to say".]

afterwards, with the elucubration, the fantasy, the subject supposed to know, and with psychoanalysis.

Until now, under the inspiration of the 20th Century, our clinical cases as we recount them have been logical constructions, clinics under transference. But the cause-effect relation is a scientific prejudice supported by the subject supposed to know. The cause-effect relation is not valid at the level of the real without law, it is not valid except as a rupture between cause and effect. Lacan said as a joke that if one understands how an interpretation works, it is not an analytic interpretation. In psychoanalysis as Lacan invites us to practice it, we experience the rupture of the cause-effect link, the opacity of the link, and this is why we speak of the unconscious. I am going to say it in another way: psychoanalysis takes place at the level of the repressed and of the interpretation of the repressed thanks to the subject supposed to know.

But in the 21st Century it is a question of psychoanalysis exploring another dimension, that of the defence against the real without law and without meaning. Lacan indicates this direction with his notion of the real, as Freud does with his mythical concept of the drive. The Lacanian unconscious, that of the latest Lacan, is at the level of the real, let us say for convenience, "below" the Freudian unconscious. In order to enter into the 21st Century, our clinic will therefore have to be centred on dismantling the defence, disordering the defence against the real. The transferential unconscious in an analysis is a defence against the real. Because in the transferential unconscious there is still an intention, a *wanting to say*, a *wanting you to tell me something*. Whereas the real unconscious is not intentional, but is rather encountered under the modality of "that's it", which you could say is like our "Amen".

Various questions will be opened up for us at the next Congress: the redefinition of the desire of the analyst, which is not a pure desire, as Lacan says, not a pure infinity of metonymy but appears to us as the desire to reach the real, to reduce the Other to its real, and to liberate it of meaning. I would add that Lacan tried to represent the real with the Borromean knot. We will ask ourselves how valid this representation is, of what use it is to us now. Lacan made use of this knot, the passion for the Borromean knot, to arrive at this irremediable zone of existence; the same zone as Oedipus at Colonus, where one encounters the absolute absence of charity, of fraternity, of any human sentiment. This is where the search for the real stripped of meaning leads us.

Thank you.

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