

The Centrality of Castration in the Analytic Experience. Remembering, Translating, and Rewriting.

In memory of “Anita”, who thought me the value of the unfinished.

*“There is a crack in everything
that’s how the light gets in”
Leonard Cohen. “Anthem”*

There is a phrase from the Talmud that says *“It is not your duty to complete the task, nor are you free to disengage yourself from it”*. I believe this phrase summarizes what I would like to convey today because it highlights that castration is about working for the task left unfinished by the signifier.

If castration is central to the analytic experience it is because it makes us remember, translate and re-write the foundational fracture that gives birth to the subject. Castration in the analytic experience leads the subject to remember how lack and jouissance have been engraved in the letter of the body. Then, it leads the subject to translate such memory into a *savoir* about the subject’s own heterogeneity. Finally, it leads the subject to re-write such *savoir* into new forms capable of passing on and keeping alive the memory of the lack.

I will organize these three dimensions to castration: remembering, translating and rewriting, in a formula that says that *Castration is permissive of the ethical task of transmission*. Castration in the analytic experience brings back the subject to the very core of his existence, to the rupture created by language that can never completely be put into words. It is by virtue of the work left unfinished by the signifier that the subject is called to occupy the place of transmission. Here, the subject can not withdraw from his responsibility to work for the invaluable dimension of the unfinished task. Castration leads the subject to the ethical task of embracing and enduring the tragic dimension of life: it will not be him who will complete the task, but what he will take away from memory he will give to forgetfulness. What will remain unspoken, nobody will hear; what he will not give will never become.

I will divide the presentation into three parts corresponding to the three dimensions of castration mentioned above. I will call them: a. *“Castration: Time to remember”*, b. *“Translating Jouissance into the inexplicable determination not to die”*, and c. *“Transmission: The ethics of re-Writing”*.

Castration: Time to Remember

One is driven to the analyst office by a symptom. One begs to be cured, to be rid of this “thing” that has taken over one’s life. One arrives into an analyst office unaware that this “thing” imprisoned in a symptom is the thunder and lightning where life opens up. In effect, psychoanalytic treatment is not about eliminating the symptom because that would be equivalent to closing your ears to the voice of the subject who, through the symptoms, seeks desperately not to be trapped by an Other experienced as persecutory. The goal is to unveil the status of this Other, the position the subject occupies with respect to the Other, and the jouissance at stake. For this, it is necessary to go from symptom to fantasy.

A subject who holds to an ethic he still has not identified will surrender to what Lacan has called “the transversal of fantasy”. In particular, the fantasy of the primal scene, where everything begins. Psychoanalysis suggests that from the start, every human is subjected to the Trauma created by, what M. Apollon called the effraction of the voice, in a way also referred by lacanian psychoanalysis as the Trauma of language, that creates an irreversible disorganization. This is how jouissance makes its way into the subject. Also, because the world of signifiers offered to the subject say very little in comparison to what it always remains unsaid (failing of the signifier) there is always a missing piece, a lack, an absence of the Other of language. The fantasy of the primal scene is an interpretation made by the subject as an attempt to try to make sense of what words cannot. Such response postulates that the fracture that turns the subject’s life upside down is the result of being the object of jouissance of the Other who has the power of determining life and death.

The imposition made by the effraction of the voice and the impossibility of language to limit the jouissance created by effraction is experienced as the incursion of a possible death that gives room to the first inscriptions of memory, called by M. Apollon the letter of the body. The letter of the body is the engraving of this Trauma; in particular of the lack that has been introduced and the jouissance that such disorganization creates. The memory that has been written in the archives of the body is what has been buried in the symptom, whose structure is organized by a fantasy still unspoken. There is an identical organization in the structure of the symptom and the fantasy, where the subject and the unbarred Other are in duel, in a position of impossible demand that creates a violent and deadly jouissance. It is therefore through the work of the symptom that fantasy can be unveiled.

As subjects we are born with a “birth mark”, the mark of death registered in the letter of the body. The inscription of the lack is registered as a hole in our existence; its memory is written in our flesh. The analytic experience consists of a process that, supported by the desire of the analyst, opens up paths so that the subject could, dream after dream, signifier after signifier, decode the memory of the lack which is written on the letter of the body. Decoding the memory of the lack, the lack sense that is, the eternal coming back of the real, helps the subject to recall that his existence is ruled by *another* logic that, until then, he could not speak.

Every human being takes part in this radical experience of absence. Every life is a testimony of this foundational unknown. In the analytic experience castration begins

when the subject transverses the primal scene, allowing the emergence of the enigma that had been silenced by the imaginary supremacy of the unbarred Other. This first dimension of castration, remembering, is about questioning the absolutism of the Other.

Remembering the lack frees-up the more fundamental questions of human life. Questions about the origins, our mortality and our destiny. These are primal questions, those that, in Levinas words, “the being breaks apart and humanity emerges”. Humane is the action of the subject whose answer to death is his own life and living. The life of a subject represents a challenge to the absolute. Remembering the lack is the appropriation of an internal demand of such challenge.

Translating jouissance into a determination not to die.

In the analytic experience, remembering the lack yields a process of translation.

Otherness

The weakening of the supremacy of the Other is translated into what I would call “Otherness”, that is, the difference itself, the Other that I am not. The falling of the Other is the falling of the image, but not the Other. What is left after the disintegration of the image is simply “Otherness”, that unreachable space beyond oneself. Before its fall, the Other was a mirage, but one that appeared to be absolute and supreme. After its fall, the Other becomes defined as non-being. After its fall, the Other becomes the foreign, the difference, the limit of the being, that which in negativity can determine one’s existence. The Other is the inaccessible to being, is the inconceivable, in the sense of what has not yet been conceived.

The determination not to die

The installation of Otherness liberates jouissance from any imaginary cause and its violent force becomes unjustifiable. From Otherness a force emerges, a subjective and inexplicable will emerges and takes precedence. There is a translation of the deadly jouissance of the primal scene into a will, that I call “a determination not to die”.

The translation of an unbarred Other into Otherness opens up to a thirst for “something else”. The determination not to die is the desire that The Other shall persist, in its new dimension of Otherness. It is not about a need for the being to survive, but rather a desire for the continuity of Otherness. It is the emergence of desire, which is desire of The (with capital T) Other, a desire for the Transcending. The determination not to die is a force ultimately dedicated to prevent the annihilation of The Other. The subject, now a legitimate carrier of the unfathomable absence, has no other recourse but to throw himself into this foolish determination not to die, to live in battle against his inevitable destiny.

The process of translation into Otherness creates a fracture that puts the energy of jouissance in movement towards the non-being, the Other that I am not. Such detachment of energy transforms the death anxiety of the primal scene into a vital jouissance of being what one is not. The Other no longer represents a death threat for the

absolutism of the same, but is rather welcomed as what leads the subject to the truth of his own heterogeneity, to the unfixability of his own disharmony, to the desire to be as close as possible to that which is unattainable.

We are born out of the fertility of this unattainable, bearing the weight of the lack. We are born as bearers of heterogeneity, to be spokespersons of the echo that *jouissance* has been transporting for millions of years. We are born being carriers of what Legendre calls the “invaluable object of transmission”. Invaluable, because it is non-negotiable, unrelenting. Invaluable because it bears within it the stamp of death and its own rebelliousness. Invaluable also because the determination not to die is inexplicable, as well as unavoidable. The life of a man is an eternal slope into something beyond himself.

Transmission: The ethics of a new Writing

Remembering and translating are, however, not enough. The body had been the stone where the original fracture had been engraved, and the process of analysis leads the subject to translate this into words. However, *Savoir* that stems from the analytic experience forges its full value only if it is re-written in new forms that are transmissible.

What does it mean to transmit? A quote written by a native American Chief can illuminate this question: “*Earth is not something inherited from the ancestors; it is something borrowed from the children*”.

The power of this phrase resides in the change of position of the subject of the enunciation with regard to the object of transmission. The subject no longer occupies the place of the object of demand that is always in debt with the demand of the unbarred Other, nor is he in the position of expecting anything from the Other. Instead, the subject becomes absent. There is no subject in this sentence. The subject in this sentence is the non-being, the one who passes on the object of transmission. It is no longer about the *demand of the Other* but about the *desire of The Other*, with capital T, the desire of what it is always about to be. It is not about the *inheritance* but about what we have *borrowed* from the future. The debt is with the continuity of life itself, with the unfinished task to pass on to the ones to come. It is in the sense of the unfinished task that for the subject, due to the position of absence he occupies in the structure of the enunciation, there is no other choice than being the corridor where the object of transmission passes through.

Why is transmission an ethical task? Every human being is born alienated to a symbolic universe that recaptures in the body the *jouissance* introduced by effraction, *jouissance* that can never be entirely said. The symbolic order recaptures the impossibility to represent *jouissance*. This is how the symbolic order recaptures *jouissance*; through the remains left to be said by words, by a language that could pass on to others what it cannot say. The symbolic order is about the failure of the signifier and its role is the transmission of the unfinished task. Transmission is an ethical task because transmitting means working for the unfinished task of the signifier. What I call the *ethics of re-writing* is the offering of a space to the unfinished through words that express what the signifier can not

signify. The ethics of transmission is the offering of what remains to be said. There is not transmission but by means of re-writings, like a highwire artist, always walking with one foot in death and the other looking for future.

The *savoir* offered by castration in the analytic experience, a *savoir* about the precariousness of which a subject consists, compels the subject to take an ethical position. To consist in the unfinished means that the action of the subject is always to start again, to re-write what *jouissance* has written in his body, to work for the unfulfilled promise of the word, because ethics resides in the failure of the word to keep its promise.

That *castration is permissive of the ethical task of transmission* means that for the subject there is no other choice than to make room for the invaluable dimension of the unfinished. Transmitting is not to pass on the torch of great victories, but to leave the blood stains of the struggle and the sweat of the effort. Transmitting is to continue re-writing the unfinished even knowing that one will not be able to finish the task.

The tragic dimension

Castration is the keystone of the analytical experience because it drives the subject to recall, translate and re-write a *savoir* that goes far beyond his own life, a *savoir* that is uniquely human, a *savoir* of the incompleteness that we incarnate. Castration inevitably results in a change of position of the subject regarding the Other and *jouissance*. The remembrance of the foundational fracture and the translation of the unbarred Other into Otherness and deadly *jouissance* into determination not to die leads the subject to occupy the space of the lack, to be absence, so to find himself with no other choice but to man his station to become space of transmission. Here, the subject can no longer avoid the tragic destiny of working for the impossible, the unfinished task. Only by transcending beyond himself can he extract out of *jouissance* the most exquisite nourishment he can offer to life. Only his efforts can transmit the live echo of memory. The ethical demand of transmission to which castration leads becomes therefore an unavoidable responsibility with life itself.

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