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When Urgency Comes from the Past

François Ansermet

Urgency implicates time. There is an urgency of the present, exemplified by the trauma that irrupts and freezes time. Then there is that of the future, revealed by the oracle that says what will come to pass. Along with this is the urgency to master it, just as Oedipus had wanted to escape the oracle's prediction – and, as we know, thinking he had fled it, he accomplished it. But there is also an urgency coming from the past: that of genetic prediction, which, contrary to the oracle, says what there was, what was transmitted, and what will come to pass. The past is no longer behind us: it comes up ahead of us, hence the terror – a “panic point” [*point de panique*] [1] – from which, paradoxically, we can escape less and less as biotechnological developments progress. [2]

Faced with the possibilities of genetic prediction, is there an urgency to know or rather not to know? Are those who could be a carrier for Huntington's chorea going to take the test for it? The same question goes for those at risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer or colon cancer for whom there is a determination of family risk.

In a broader sense, now that it is accessible, are we going to sequence our genome to know which past are we carrying within ourselves which threatens our future? Do we really want to know? Or are we going to choose to not know?

We find these same questions with regard to the link – possible today – between procreation and prediction. Are we going to do a genetic assessment before conceiving? A preimplantation diagnosis? A prenatal evaluation, and subsequently face the dilemma of terminating the pregnancy?

Prediction has established itself as a perspective of mastery, revealing at the same time the extent to which one does not control anything. As an eight-year-old child, blind from a recessive genetic disease, told me, “You know, genetics is pure chance.” Why is it upon him that the disease falls? Why were his parents carriers? Since when did these genes manifest in the generations? Why did his parents choose each other without knowing anything about it? Only unanswered questions.

That an individual could be touched by a prediction from the past, does not prejudice anything deductible about the subject. This is especially so since any prediction also reveals the infinity of what cannot be predicted. In any case, as Lacan says, “One is always responsible for one's position as subject.” [3] How can one be made responsible for one's genome? This is the real question, beyond the series of whys. Everything cannot be reduced to its past. What is at stake is that the origin may replay itself in a future to be kept open. This is the wager of psychoanalysis in the face of the urgency that comes from the past; such is the urgency of the analytic act beyond any prediction.

Translated by Arunava Banerjee

[1] Lacan J., *Le Séminaire, Livre VI, Le désir et son interprétation*, 1958-1959, La Martinière/Champ Freudien, Paris 2013, p. 108.

[2] Ansermet F, Giacobino A. “Paniques biotechnologiques”, *La cause du désir*, Navarin, Paris, 2016, pp. 39, 55-62.

[3] Lacan J., “Science and Truth”, in *Écrits*, W.W. Norton, New York/London, 2002, p. 729.

Reference 1) The past is no longer behind us: it comes up ahead of us, hence the terror – a “panic point” [*point de panique*] [1]

Seminar VI : 10th December 1958 : See [Seminar VI: Desire and its interpretation: 1958-1959 : from 12th November 1958 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=842](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=842)

Ch 5, p58 of Cormac Gallagher’s translation : www.LacanianIreland.com :

What completely changes the nature of his relationships to the object, is this crucial point of the nature of his relationships to the object which is precisely called desire. It is in this field that we are trying to articulate the relationships of the subject to the object in the sense that they are relationships of desire, because it is in this field that analytic experience teaches us that there is something to be articulated. The relationship of the subject to the object is not a relationship of need, the relationship of the subject to the object is a complex relationship which I am precisely trying to articulate before you. For the moment let us begin to indicate the following: it is because this relationship of the articulation of the subject to the object is situated there, that the object is found to be this something which is not the correlate and the correspondent of a need of the subject, but this something which supports the subject precisely at the moment at which he has to confront as one might say his own existence, which supports the subject in his existence, in his existence in the most radical sense, namely precisely in this that he exists in language, namely that he consists in something that is outside himself, in something that he can only grasp in its proper nature as language at the precise moment when he, as subject, must efface himself, vanish, disappear behind a signifier, which is precisely what one might call the panic point around which he must attach himself to something, it is precisely to the object *qua* object of desire that he attaches himself. Somewhere, someone whom I will not immediately name today, in order not to confuse matters, someone quite contemporary, who is dead, has written: ‘If one managed to learn what the Miser came to know, what the Miser lost when his money-box was stolen from him, one would learn a great deal.’

[p59] It is exactly what we have to learn, I mean learn it for ourselves and teach it to others.