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Editorial
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Éric Laurent

Who Will Look After the Children?

The following paper was originally published in Lacan Quotidien no. 270. This modified version has been taken from the pamphlet published by the Lacan Institute Du mariage et des analystes, Ed. M. de França and E. Miller-Rose, La Règle du Jeu/Navarin/Le Champ freudien, 2013. Éric Laurent is a former President of the World Association of Psychoanalysis and an Analyst Member of the New Lacanian School.

THE Declaration of the 13 January “against the instrumentalisation of psychoanalysis”, that we have just signed following hostile demonstrations against the proposed law on “marriage for all” and modifications of filial standards to come, mentions that “it is up to each speaking being to find the paths of their desire, which are for each one singular, twisted and marked by contingency and bad encounters.” It takes into account the general twists in what constitutes communication for the speaking animal.

To seek in psychoanalytic experience and in Lacan’s teaching the guarantee of an “anthropological invariant” is particularly twisted however. It is quite simply a misreading, an enslavement of psychoanalysis for conservative ends, erasing Lacan’s whole questioning of the “Names-of-the-Father” in the plural. From the outset, Lacan’s aim was to extend the domain of the Name-of-the-Father in the context of divorced families in the ’30s – such as his own!

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Divorce and the Oedipus Complex

It is absurd to state that he who, as early as 1938, before the restoration of Petain, in his "Family Complexes..." in the plural, critically evaluated the contribution of the Freudian "Oedipus Complex", now finds himself dragged in as guarantor of an immutable order. He who pleaded for the complexity of divorced and reconstructed families, noting that they were "a training for reason", now finds himself enrolled as guarantor of a single form of representation of sexual difference.

Desire and Re-constituted Families

LACAN was "not one of those who aggrieved the supposed loosening of family ties." He rather underlined that this so-called "loosening" was in fact a growing complexity of ties through an incorporation of "the highest cultural progress", including equal rights between man and woman. The further development of his work later made woman into another Name-of-the-Father, affirming equality beyond sexual difference. I will develop this point in other chronicles, but for the moment it is enough to underline this complex equality.

Ultimately, Lacan related the birth of psychoanalysis to the context of the "social decline of the paternal imago". This on no account legitimised a "restorative" perspective, but rather an accounting for the veritable place of the father. According to Freud, re-read in the right way, the "father" was not an anthropological guarantor; he rather incarnated the transgressive character of a singular desire in the face of commonly accepted moral imperatives, which claim to define how to live the drive. The father – through his desire, if it is accepted – separates the mother from her exclusive relation to the child. He incarnates the plurality of jouissances.

In this way, Lacan based on Freudian reasoning the fate of divorced parents who, like pioneers, broke with the moral order. In judicial institutions, divorce had indeed restored the primacy of the couple's choice over family order and that of filiation. This is what appears clearly in English in the opposition between "marriage" and "kinship".

Looking After the Objects (a)!

THIRTY years later, post 1968, in his "Note sur l'enfant", Lacan specifies in the same vein that the father gives a name to an "incarnation of the Law in desire". Those who go on at us about the "anthropological invariant" read this statement in the wrong way. They understand it as a "sublimation of desire in the Law" that,

for good measure, is presumed natural. In other words, they read the function of the father as a normalisation of desire. The mother is the drive, the father the Law. This reading is absurd. The discrepancy, the difference in question here is that the Name-of-the-Father, a function that can be held by a woman, invents a way of looking after the mother's children, her "objects (a)", so as to inscribe them in an immanent common law. What was dated in 1968 should now be brought up to date with the LGBT couples.

Future Debates

OUR Declaration marks a beginning. After the vote on the law on "marriage for all", and up until the examination of family Law, numerous debates will take place throughout French society. The battle over the father will go on. This will be an opportunity to clarify our position. Of what is the father an incarnation? Of a monotone invariant, or the name of an invention of the way in which a given time lives the contingency of the relationship between the sexes?

Translated from the French by Natalie Wülfig

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