

Towards Pipol 9, The unconscious and the brain, nothing in common, The argument by Yves Vanderveken : 22nd November 2018

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Towards Pipol 9 : 5th European Congress of Psychoanalysis : July 13th – 14th 2019 : Brussels : The unconscious and the brain, nothing in common

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THE ARGUMENT : The unconscious and the brain, nothing in common, July 2019

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The brain is about to become Toinette's lung 1. There is no longer anything that is not referred to it. After the deciphering of the genome, the technical developments of science promise to unveil – for sure, any moment now! - the ultimate secrets of the functioning of the brain. Neuro-this, neuro-that, the hopes are great, the progress obvious.

What is striking is that what constitutes their object is no longer only the neurological disorders or even the so-called development of intelligence. Every dimension of being and thought are now concerned and targeted. Affects, feelings, neurosis, sexuality, love, hatred and happiness - nothing is left out. "Mental life"² is promised access to the rank of science and "objective" treatment. The unconscious itself sounds like the ultimate bastion of which we will find the neurological key. Hence the false trails on which some go astray, obviously including psychoanalysts, of a possible decompartmentalization of disciplines: the brain presenting itself as the "natural" common denominator of the assumption that the psychical is cerebral.

Make no mistake: this is the best way to get rid of the unconscious of psychoanalysis. The avowed aim is to rectify the error of Freud who, like Christopher Columbus, would have discovered something other than he believed³. Long live the cognitive unconscious, where the unconscious is reduced to what neither Freud nor Lacan wanted it to be: the non-conscious processes. There lies the project of founding cognitivism on the unconscious itself.

The true nuptials are elsewhere. The advance of science in its coupling with technology, in an era when production has become the global master signifier, founds

a discourse of quantification that sweeps everything before it. Cognitivist materialism, and its belief that man is a machine that processes information, has found in the brain its major object 4. It allows cognitivism to better veil or restore luster to its behaviorist origin which, not so long ago, gave rise to shame in its application to the field of the human. Cognitivism seeks to demonstrate the legitimacy of the reductionism inherent to it: that of reducing quality to quantities. Evaluation is its operational arm and its ideology. A little, a lot, passionately is then applied to all fields and "the suffix neuro is the form that the cipher takes when it comes to capture the psychical."5 Cerebral imaging gives to these measurements and correlations, where everything can be compared, a supposedly scientific substrate - of which the most honest sometimes say they do not know what to deduce - but from which they infer mental processes and therapeutic solutions that on most occasions don't take us very far. PIPOL 9 will work on this radiology of the neurosciences.

The individual is seduced by this proposal to identify himself with his organism 6 by means of measurement. He likes to imagine himself as a machine and is not reluctant to see his brain compared in its operation to a computer with incredible potentialities. He thinks he can find, by means of ciphers, an assurance and the existence of his being, which is constantly fleeing and which he never ceases trying to join up with. He also finds there an ideal of equality - all identical and comparable - adequate to the democratic preoccupation. Since politicians have become concerned with taking care of people's health and happiness - which is by no means reassuring for us - they find here an ally in the management and control of the populations. Augmenting and optimizing, by rectifying what is stunted at a cognitive level or what is under-used in terms of potentialities, are merely promises of a better tomorrow. Certainly the promise often falls short - the brain is a complex machinery, you see! But the promise of a cure for the discontents of civilization remains a potent seduction.

If only it were so. It would be for the best... and for the worst. The introjection of the superego of production: Perform! - Enjoy!, as Jacques Lacan will say - did not wait to produce its return-effects: burnout, work related suicide, addiction, depression, violence, exclusion, segregation and hatred of the different. When it does not take this lethal intensity, the new imperative that prescribes making oneself the master of one's self and one's body in a relation of well-being encounters the paradoxes of jouissance that the experience of a psychoanalysis isolates. Namely, the discomfort and the disquiet, not of the individual, but of what we call with Lacan, the divided subject, which is never equal and transparent to itself, which remains non-homogeneous, non-categorizable, incomparable. In short, that of the individual which makes "fail the best-designed algorithms [...] the most massive calculations that claim to explain everything, evaluate everything, predict everything"7, albeit through neural connections and cerebral activities.

An ethics of desire is opposed to this civilization of the cipher and of cerebral imagery. The unconscious, that of psychoanalysis, testifies to this. No, the unconscious is not a memory, albeit buried, forgotten, not conscious. It is also not the trace left by experience, which would testify to neuro-plasticity. If Freud and Lacan were able to explore these paths, it was to arrive, via experience, at the conclusion that the unconscious that we encounter through psychoanalysis bears witness to a real that is peculiar to it. The experience of a psychoanalysis says nothing about the brain. PIPOL 9 will gather the testimonies of this.

What the accumulated experience of psychoanalysis bears witness to is an insurrection of the symptom against the forced categorization to which the subject refuses to let himself be reduced. The unconscious of psychoanalysis testifies, by means of its return effects which always make an effraction, a hole, as commemoration of an encounter, yes, but a missed encounter with a satisfaction that would be appropriate and which, as a result, never happened. The unconscious is the insistence of an inassimilable loss that reiterates, and cannot be represented or imaged. The body is "a surface of inscription of [what with Lacan we call] the jouissance which does not cease to flee"⁸. In this respect, the image of the body veils the real of jouissance. It gives the illusion, by means of a mental image (which Lacan was able to translate the operation of in the mirror stage), of a unity and completeness of the body, whereas the drive which animates it is always somehow incomplete, partial, according to Freud. This image is what neuroscience attempt to grasp through cerebral imaging. The paradox is that it is not of the body [du corps] but of the mind [du mental], of the ego as the ideal image of oneself. It is a misrecognition of the properties of the body of the speaking being. Neurosciences perpetuate this will for misrecognition with an unparalleled technical arsenal. In this respect, we can say that the brain does not know the drive - in the sense that the drive is what makes a hole in cognition.

PIPOL 9 will allow us to sketch out the contours of the real to which the unconscious testifies. It should allow us to tighten this notion of the unconscious with regard to the epoch. We maintain, with Jacques-Alain Miller, that we must sustain it as "ek-sisting outside the norms of scientific discourse, if we want to save psychoanalysis"⁹. This indeed is what is at stake. If, in this clamour of false evidence, the voice of psychoanalysis may seem weak, the power of the force of the real of the symptom promises setbacks to those who would bet on its eradication or control.

To make the ethical hypothesis of the unconscious of psychoanalysis, of another scene where the subject struggles to recognize himself as identical to himself, has consequences in relation to the human. It determines an ethical dimension that then traverses all the practices related to it.

All fields of the human, including art, are now summoned by the neuro-paradigm. The child - the elective object of education - is its first target. But given that childhood today is widely extended, it is the speaking being as a whole that is concerned. Nothing is left here of the outside the field of learning ¹⁰. Projects in this area do not lack extravagant aims, derisory at best, at worst in their ethical dimension attacking some principles of freedom. PIPOL 9 will be able to collect and reveal some of these to enlightened opinion.

Finally, the field of so-called mental health is obviously in the first line of fire. If the neuro-paradigm can present itself as modest and filled with the best intentions, the practitioners of this so-called mental health, in Europe and beyond, are well placed to live in their own flesh the forced rectification of practices at work, operated everywhere by politics and its administration. All these policies openly target the field we call that of transference and of the unconscious. Because, beyond this, it is the entire field of the practices of speech that is put in question.

The ideology of the cipher and the neuro-paradigm found discourses without a beyond, which produce a semantic vacuity. As Lacan points out, "the progress of science makes the function of cause fade away"¹¹, in the sense that what is produced is a: "it means something", there where "the subject's implication in his conduct is broken off."¹² They are congruent in this regard with the loss of meaning, moral values and of practices that are based on the search for a truth. We see their effects unfolding every day. The political discourse is itself traversed by them, not without some concern for the times to come. Without the orientation of psychoanalysis, which is a practice based on the movement of the Enlightenment, the field seems thus open either to all forms of obscurantism and esotericism, or to the new rapid expansion of the religious.

PIPOL 9 will give the opportunity to more than one hundred and forty practitioners to demonstrate the effects of public utility of clinical practices that are still based on the ethical hypothesis of the unconscious, pertaining to the field of speech and language. It will carry out an aggiornamento of the symptoms produced by these new coordinates of the discourse of science. Faced with today's symptoms, it will also be an opportunity to reveal the extent of the confusion produced in the field of the "psy" disciplines by the gradual disappearance of the dialectic of clinical points of reference in favor of their statistical and neurobiological classification; points of reference that psychoanalysis of the Lacanian orientation has been able to preserve and update.

That there are interventions on the brain that can change behaviors, modify them, is not to be doubted. This is precisely what does not cease to concern. No one denies the progress allowed by science in the medical field in general, and in the field of the brain in particular. A leap is at work, however, once we enter the field of subjectivity and the mind [mental]. Psychoanalysis will be able to reap its effects, insofar as psychoanalysis is the place of address and interpretation of that which constitutes the absolute fault that inhabits the speaking being.

As psychoanalysts, we have the experience that the encounter with jouissance and the manifestations of desire - even if these may produce dopamine! - is related to an absolute contingency. Jouissance and desire are always singular, they do not respond to any model, they are subjected only to the law of pure encounter. In the field of the relation between the sexes in the speaking being, nothing pertains to an established program - only invention reigns here. This is what Lacan indicated with the aphorism: There is no sexual relation. That is the ground for our compass as psychoanalysts. There is what we call a disturbed jouissance, intrinsically dysfunctional, of the speaking being with his or her own body. It blocks the relation between the sexes and any possibility of hedonistic reconciliation. This fault is opposed to any physical determinism, program or calculable real. It concerns a real that remains at the mercy of absolute contingency.

Psychoanalysis proposes an ethical choice: to promise each one who wants to lend himself to it that he will not be compared or "re-educated", while proposing to him to tighten as much as possible the singular coordinates which found the irreconcilable of the contingency which is his own. So that he can orient himself in life from the logic that determines his always symptomatic mode of being, away from the illusions of identification.

This choice is the one to which PIPOL 9 will open its doors, just as it will look in the face and elucidate the one with which it has nothing in common!

This argument deploys the axes that will organize the blog PIPOL 9

Translated by Florencia F.C. Shanahan

1 [TN] Toinette's lung refers to the work *The Imaginary Invalid* by Molière. Toinette, a maid-servant disguised as a doctor, refers all the ills of the sick Lord to the lung.

2 Dehaene S., *Vers une science de la vie mentale* [Towards a science of mental life], Opening lectures at the Collège de France, Fayard, 2018. See Dehaene, S. (2007). A few steps towards a science of mental life. *Mind, Brain and Education*, 1, 28–47.

3 Naccache L., *Le nouvel inconscient, Freud, le Christophe Colomb des neurosciences* [The new unconscious : Freud, the Christopher Columbus of neurosciences], Odile Jacob Poches, 2009.

4 Miller J.-A., “The Lacanian Orientation, Everyone is mad”, Course delivered at the Department of Psychoanalysis of the University of Paris 8, lesson of 16th January 2008, unpublished.

5 Miller J.-A., “The Lacanian Orientation, Everyone is mad”, Course delivered at the Department of Psychoanalysis of the University of Paris 8, lesson of 23rd January 2008, unpublished.

6 Laurent É., *L’envers de la biopolitique, Une écriture pour la jouissance* [The Other Side of Biopolitics, A Writing for Jouissance], Navarin, Champ freudien, 2016, p. 19.

7 Ibid., p. 10.

8 Ibid., p. 15.

9 Miller J.-A., “The Lacanian Orientation, Everyone is mad”, Course delivered at the Department of Psychoanalysis of the University of Paris 8, lesson of 9th February 2008, unpublished.

10 Lacan J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X, Anxiety*, Ed. J.-A., Miller, Transl., A. Price, Polity Press, London :New York, 2014, p. 291.

11 Ibid., p. 284

12 Ibid., p. 281.

For information see [Seminar X: The Anxiety \(or Dread\): 1962-1963: begins 14th November 1962: Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=212) \\ <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=212>

- All fields of the human, including art, are now summoned by the neuro-paradigm. The child - the elective object of education - is its first target. But given that childhood today is widely extended, it is the speaking being as a whole that is concerned. Nothing is left here of the outside the field of learning Footnote 10.

: Seminar X : p291 of Adrian Price's translation :

OR Seminar X : 12th June 1963 : pXXII 202-203 of Cormac Gallagher's translation :
We will return to this language of the child. I pointed out to you that the new evidence of original works, which one can only be astonished were not performed up to now, allows us now to grasp *in statu nascendi* the first operation of the signifier in these hypnopompic monologues of the very small child, almost two years old, and to grasp in them - I will read you these texts at the proper time - in the fascinating form of the Oedipus complex itself here and now; already articulated, giving here the experimental proof of the idea that I always put forward to you that the unconscious is essentially the effect of the signifier.

I will finish in this connection with the position of the psychologists, for the work that I am speaking to you about is prefaced by a psychologist who is very attractive at first sight in the sense that he admits that it has never happened that a psychologist has interested himself in these functions starting from, he tells us - a psychologist's own admission - from the supposition that nothing interesting is notable about the coming into play of language in the subject, except at the level of education: in effect it is something that is learned. But what makes language, outside the field of learning? It required the suggestion of a linguist for an interest to begin to be taken in it, and we believe that here the psychologist lays down his arms. For it is certainly with some humour that he highlights this deficit in psychological research up to now.

Well that is not at all the case. At the end of his preface, he makes two remarks which show the point to which the habit of the psychologist is really inveterate. The first is that, since this constitutes a volume of about three hundred pages and is a considerable weight since these monologues were collected for a month and a complete chronological list of them was made, at this rate of going think of all the research that we are going to have to do! This is the first remark.

And the second one is even better. It is extremely interesting to note all that; but it seems to me for my part, says this psychologist who is called George Miller, that the only thing that would be interesting, is to know: "How much of that does he know?" What does the child know about what is telling you? Now it is precisely there that the question lies. It is precisely, if he does not know what he is saying, that it is very important to note that he says all the same, what he will know or will not know later on, namely the elements of the Oedipus complex.

- The ideology of the cipher and the neuro-paradigm found discourses without a beyond, which produce a semantic vacuity. As Lacan points out, "the progress of science makes the function of cause fade away"

Footnote 11, : Seminar X p284 of Adrian Price's translation :

Seminar X : 12th June 1963 : pXXII 199 of Cormac Gallagher's translation : Desire taken in this perspective is situated in effect essentially as a lack of effect. The cause is thus constituted as supposing the effects of the fact that primordially the effect is lacking there. And this is rediscovered, you will rediscover it, in every phenomenology. The *gap* between cause and effect, in the measure that it is filled - this indeed is what is called in a certain perspective the progress of science - makes

the function of the cause vanish, I mean there where it is filled. Moreover the explanation of anything whatsoever culminates in the measure that it is completed, in leaving only signifying connections, in volatilising what animated it at its origin, what was pushing to be explained, namely what one does not understand, namely the effective gap. And there is no cause which is constituted in the mind as such, which does not imply this gap. All of this may seem to you quite superfluous. Nevertheless this is what allows there to be grasped what I would call the naivety of some of the research done by psychologists and specifically that of Piaget.

- in the sense that what is produced is a: "it means something", there where "the subject's implication in his conduct is broken off."

Footnote 12 [Seminar X p281 of Adrian Price's translation : Seminar X : 12th June 1963] They are congruent in this regard with the loss of meaning, moral values and of practices that are based on the search for a truth. We see their effects unfolding every day.

: Seminar X : 12th June 1963 : pXXII 196 of Cormac Gallagher's translation : In order for the symptom to emerge from the state of an as yet unformulated enigma, the step is not that it should be formulated, it is that in the subject something should be outlined whose character is that it is suggested to him that there is a cause for that. This is the original dimension taken on here in the form of the phenomenon, and I will show you besides where one can rediscover it. This dimension - that there is a cause for that - in which simply the implication of the subject in his behaviour is broken, this rupture is the necessary complement for the symptom to be approachable by us. What I intend to say to you and to show you, is that this sign does not constitute a step in what I could call the understanding of the situation, that it is something more, that there is a reason why this step is essential in the treatment of the obsessional.

Further texts by Yves Vanderveken [here http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=653](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?cat=653)

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