

Some Moral Failings Called Depressions

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The psychoanalytic clinic refutes any idea of an entity that could be named "depression."

This refutation has today more than ever an ethical urgency, in view of the degradation of the subject to the consumer of so-called "happiness pills"¹ faced with the obscenity of a psychologizing discourse that covers certain particular sufferings with the non-differentiating cloak of depression, and with the contemporary extension of the term depression which is no more than one of the symptoms of the discontent in civilization resulting from its invasion by the discourse of science and from the precariousness, stressed by Lacan, of our mode of *jouissance*. It is ethically urgent, finally, because it concerns the function of psychoanalysis in regard to certain effects of regression undergone by medicine and psychiatry, resulting from their progress itself toward science: for if pharmacology works - and it is at times indispensable - it only works on somatic processes, and its effectiveness itself occults what is at issue. The psychoanalytic clinique works on the slope of the cause, which is the province of the subject, and thus accounts for every depression.

Two References

The two major references that orient us in this clinic of depressions, for Freud and for Lacan, bring into play the relationship of the subject with *jouissance*. Freud takes up the question in "Mourning and Melancholia."² Depressive affects accompany the work of mourning, which has for its function the symbolization of the loss of the object and the working of a new distribution of the libido. The end of the work of

mourning relieves the subject of the weight of the object, with an effect of elation. But as the subject labors to realize this loss, he experiences some depressive effects. Freud presents this struggle between the ego and the object thusly: either the ego triumphs, through mourning, or the shadow of the object falls over the ego, and there is melancholia. The subject then finds himself identified as trash, as refuse, with an object of a *jouissance* from which he cannot separate himself, and not as an object cause of desire.

Lacan, in *Television*, approaches the question of affect with the series: anxiety, sadness, and *gay savoir*. Sadness, qualified, he says, as depression, "is simply a moral failing, a moral cowardice, which is, ultimately, only situated by thought, that is, by the duty to speak well (*de bien dire*) or to find oneself again in the unconscious, in structure." And he adds: "if this cowardice, as rejection of the unconscious, ends in psychosis, there is the return in the real of what is rejected, of language; there is the manic excitation through which this return becomes fatal.³ In other words, at issue is an escape, a symbolic failing, a renunciation by the subject who gives up on his desire confronted with *jouissance*, who lets go of the symbolic to give in to *jouissance*, which affects him in a depressive mode.

Diversity and Structures

These points of reference orient us in the diversity of depressive manifestations reflected by the diffraction of the signifier "depression"⁴ in the Freudian and Lacanian clinic: mourning, anxiety, inhibition, passage to the act, rejection of the unconscious, melancholia, dereliction, sadness, moral cowardice, self disgust, pain of existence

The psychoanalytic clinic thus has to account for each of these very different forms of depression by elaborating how each subject is inscribed, with his suffering, in an articulable structure. Let us offer

some insights.

Before castration, depression can constitute a form of defence, an attempt at occultation. This, for example, is the choice of the neurotic who, rather than assume his castration, prefers the guilt, the failing, the self-deprecation, as a price for his *denegration* [denial] of the reality of this castration. But when castration does not function for a subject's good, there is, among other possibilities, melancholic depression.

For the hysteric subject, these are the depressive affects which accompany the effect of phallic deflation, when she finds herself, in analysis or outside of analysis, destituted of her position of imaginary identification with the phallus. In a wholly other perspective, she can also wholly utilize depression - as a state over which the signifier is found without hold and without effect - to disempower (*mettre en défaut*) the master, the master-signifier, the hiding place for the poverty, the impotence of the phallic signifier which the hysteric busies herself at demonstrating.

In a differential clinic, depression can also be referred to the Other, in identification as in alienation. The fall of ideal identifications make appear to a subject his tie with the object as they veiled; and he aperceives that what interests the Other is not the ideal but the object itself. The depressive affects this discovery produces are not in anyway to be confused with depression as a trait of identification, when a subject is identified with a beloved object found to be another depressed subject from whom he borrows this trait.

Depressive effects can in a very general way be related to alienation: the subject suffers precisely from his status as mere puppet at the mercy of an omnipresent Other. Depression as a defence against being crushed under the weight of this Other translates as a kind of putting oneself out of the service of the Other: the

Other no longer responds, the subject no longer associates, no knowledge is worth anything to him, interpretation no longer works.

Jouissance and Depression

The relationship with the object accounts, from another angle for the nature of depressive manifestations. We will develop this approach in what follows, beginning with this question: how are *jouissance* and depression connected, as appears especially manifest in the contemporary world?

If depression is, as it seems, a modern phenomenon, at least in the extension taken by its signifier from the time of the birth of psychoanalysis, depressive affects have nonetheless always existed, and not only in societies touched by the discourse of science.

Would the speaking-being then be structurally disposed to depression, simply because he lacks - in the signifier and in being - or is this solely the province of the modern subject? Is it not rather in the way of dealing with this lack that the question of depression is brought into play? Does not the subject of lack have in fact two ways of situating his relation to *jouissance*: acting with this lack, advancing its creative, structuring function, in other words, assuming castration and making himself a desiring subject - the way of desire; or, on the other hand, filling up this lack, finding for himself a stop-gap (*bouchon*) at the cost of renouncing his desire, of renouncing the pulsional in exchange for an accumulation of *jouissance* - the path of depression?

If Lacan notes that the subject is happy in all the modalities of his encounter with the object, whether under the sign of anxiety, of sadness, or of *gay savoir*, it is because this object presents the *plus-de-jouir* by which the subject is supported, the lost

object it seeks in repetition. Is not the sensitivity of subjects, in our society, to the depressive affect, one of the modalities of the encounter with the object, and thus with the *jouissant* mode, owed to the estrangement and precariousness which characterize, according to Lacan in *Television*, their mode of *jouissance*, which henceforth is only situated by the *plus-de-jouir*"?⁵

Lacan has taught us that for the speaking-being, simply because it speaks, *jouissance* finds itself outfitted by the signifier: the corollary of this is the forced renunciation of a *jouissance* from then on mythic, the sexual *jouissance* that escapes the defiles of the signifier - a Lacanian formulation of castration. But a residual *jouissance* continues to pass through language: the pulsional *jouissance*⁶ that misses the object but bears its mark. This is what Lacan designates the *plus-de-jouir*, a *jouissance* in addition (*en plus*), which fills in the loss and compensates for it.

This *plus-de-jouir* animates the subject; it is necessary for the turning of the mechanism, Lacan notes in *Radiophonie*,⁷ but there must not be too much of it: if there is, the subject finds himself delivered up to the *gourmandise*⁸ of a ferocious superego that requires him to renounce this pulsional satisfaction and thus give up on his desire. This is precisely the source of tile discontent in civilization analyzed by Freud: a "giving up on desire" that does not go without depressive effects. Moreover, the renunciation of the *jouissance* of the drive required by this superego, far from alleviating this requirement, reinforces it: despite the renunciation, Freud says, desire persists and cannot be hidden from the superego--hence the developing sense of failure.⁹

Conjoined with this are the effects of a science, which, in its collusion with capitalist liberalism,

saps the foundations of the master discourse. This indication by Lacan, which figures particularly in his *Note italienne*,¹⁰ has been developed by Jacques-Alain Miller.¹¹ The subversion introduced by the subject coming into the position of the master has as a consequence the collapse of the regulation of *jouissance* by the master discourse. The master conceals the *plus-de jouir* from the subject, thereby creating a barrier to *jouissance*. This function of guard rail (*garde-fou*), when disempowered (*mise en défaut*) by the alliance of science and liberalism, allows the subject to recover the *plus-de-jouir*, a *plus-de-jouir* itself attained to by this science, which makes the fantasy enter into the real, and in the same movement deregulates it.

Hence the precariousness of our mode of *jouissance* from here on only situated by a *plus-de-jouir*, by an unregulated increase. What Lacan indicates, particularly in *Television*, is that contemporary *jouissance*, indexed by the bar over the Other, no longer situates itself by castration: with the fall of ideals, it is no longer by the master signifier, which regulates *jouissance*, that *jouissance* can henceforth be situated; it is no longer situated except by a *plus-de-jouir* reduced to the object of consumption. Nothing more remains for the subject, Miller has noted recently, but his identification as consumer, in the mode: "You have the right to the *plus-de-jouir*, even if it no longer does you any good."

Certainly, the subject can refuse this *plus-de-jouir* by making the ethical choice to abstain from despair, as Collette Soler has noted in evoking "those depressed... the anorexics of the year two thousand - those nauseated with the *ready made plus-de jouir* of their time ." Genevieve Morel reminds us of the term coined by Lacan in *L'Envers de la psychanalyse* - the word *lathouse*, to name those objects produced by modern

science and the universal power of its formulas: those universal *ready made* objects - the same for everyone - lodge themselves at the place of the object *a* for the subject; they constitute a contemporary category, that of the object "ready-to-enjoy" (*pret-a-jouir*), but have nothing to do with the particularity of each subject's fantasy and of the desire this fantasy supports. These universal objects, bad *Ersatz*, can only make the void of the drive echo, and create sadness and *ennui* (all the same, a *jouissance*). Thus they go hand-in-hand with depression.

Therefore, if the subject chooses to recover this modern *plus-de-jouir* thus separated from the drive, if he makes this choice at the cost of desire, depressive affects, again, will be the index.

Extracting Oneself from the Universal Stereotype

Here, the superego unveils itself. at the same time requiring the renunciation of *jouissance* insofar as it is pulsional *jouissance*, and pushing us into *jouissance* as soon as it can be separated from the drive, no more than a *jouissance* of a covering over of castration; the commandment of a *jouissance* of the superego, "*Jouis* the renunciation of *jouissance*!" is its paradigm: the renunciation of pulsional *jouissance* is in fact, in itself, a universal ready-to-enjoy; religion did not wait for science to discover this.

"I have the impression of being in a very deep abyss, I can no longer do anything, places become sad, it pulls me back": this is how a young woman describes the moments of depression and inhibition she never fails to be plunged into by her encounters with a mother who rules her life. A series of dreams show how phases when she is "the life of the party," when she sees herself in a kind of enthusiastic erection, are succeeded by periods of disappointment and depression where, in the

depreciated and naive form of inverted masculine genitalia, the feminine organ is figured. She immediately defends herself against the anxiety that lays hold of her at the opening of the abyss by plugging it up with objects of consumption available in profusion, incapable of restraining herself: bags of cookies, channel-zapped T.V. images, rosewater romances from the Harlequin series, stereotyped, industrialized objects, with which she stuffs herself, and which make her guilty and sad as she gives in to an insipid and lonely *jouissance* that freezes her in inhibition.

Contemporary society thus becomes the nest of depression, willingly furnishing the subject with an antiseptic *plus-de-jouir*, a pure stop-gap for the void of the drive. Renouncing this ready-to-enjoy is the price for any possible access to the risk of desire, and it is what permits the work of analysis.

Notes

1. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1915), SE. XIV- 243-258."
2. Jacques Lacan, *Television* (1973) (Paris: *Editions du Seuil*, 1973) p. 39. Translator's note: for the sake of greater precision, I have diverged slightly from the generally excellent translation by Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson in "Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment", ed. Joan Copjec (New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1990), p. 22.

3. *Television*, p. 54.

4. Translator's note: *pulsional*, or *pulsionelle*, is the adjectival form of *pulsion*, the standard French translation of *Trieb*, or drive. In this text, Scriabine refers both to this *jouissance pulsionelle* and a *jouissance de la pulsion*. I have translated the latter expression, where it occurs, as "jouissance of the drive."

5. Jacques Lacan, *Radiophonie, Silicet 2/3* (Paris: *Edilions du Seuil*, 1970), p. 86.

6. *Television*, p. 48.

7. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*.

8. Jacques Lacan, *Note aux Italiens* (1974), *Ornicar?*, 25 (Paris: *Navarin editeur*, 1982), p.8.

9. Jacques-Alain Miller, *Le banquet des analystes* (1989-90), lesson of 4/4/90, unpublished course transcript.

10. Eric Laurent and Jacques-Alain Miller, *L'Autre qui n'existe pas et ses comites de ethique* (1996-97),

lesson of December 4, 1996, unpublished except for the meeting of November 20, 1996, in *La Cause freudienne*, 35 (Paris: Navarin/Seuil, 1997), pp. 3-20.

11. In English in the original.

<http://www.lacan.com/depressionf.htm>