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An Encounter with a Statue

By [Yaron Gilat](#) | October 26th, 2019 | [LRO 186](#)

In his 1919 paper, The “Uncanny,”¹ Freud wrote: “It is only rarely that a psychoanalyst feels impelled to investigate the subject of aesthetics even when aesthetics is understood to mean not merely the theory of beauty, but the theory of the qualities of feeling. He works in other planes of mental life and has little to do with those subdued emotional activities which, inhibited in their aims and dependent upon a multitude of concurrent factors, usually furnish the material for the study of aesthetics”. Five years prior (1914), Freud published “Moses of Michelangelo,”² in which matters of aesthetics were thoroughly discussed but nonetheless, were truly only the beginning of a much detailed, systematic and logical investigation. Freud was at awe with the statue of Moses, it captivated his imagination, he considered it first as “an unsolved riddle to our understanding,”² and he had put a great deal of effort in trying to give it proper meaning. In Freud’s words: “It is possible, therefore, that a work of art of this kind needs interpretation, and that until I have accomplished that interpretation I cannot come to know why I have been so powerfully affected.”² Hence, for Freud it was a matter of deciphering, of cracking an enigma, a matter of unravelling “all that is most essential and valuable for the comprehension of this work of art,”² which lies concealed behind it. An interpretation.

Recently, I too have visited Rome, Freud’s much adored city. Following Freud’s footpaths, I too have “mounted the steep steps from the unlovely Corso Cavour to the lonely piazza”², where the church of S. Pietro in Vincoli stands, in order to observe Michelangelo’s inscrutable and wonderful work of marble, the statue of Moses. Standing in front of it, I have tried to grasp something of that which had such an impact on Freud, making him return to this place time and again and eventually write his “Moses of Michelangelo”. Reading this paper, it seems that for Freud, examining the statue and interpreting it, was an exemplification for the psychoanalytic technique, as he brought forth a method of a certain art critique who insisted “that attention should be diverted from the general impression and main features of a picture, [...] laying stress on the significance of minor details”². In Freud’s words: “It seems to me that his method of inquiry is closely related to the technique of psycho-analysis. It, too, is accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from despised or unnoticed features, from the rubbish-heap, as it were, of our observations.”²

Yet, more than one-hundred years after the publications of “Moses of Michelangelo” and after I have been acquainted with Lacan’s work and especially his later teaching, it occurred

to me that the magnificent statue of Moses may stand as an allegory for the rapport between the Real and the Symbolic. If indeed, as Jacques-Alain Miller asserts, the age of interpretation is behind us,³ what can we make of this glorious piece of Sculpture? While Freud looked at the statue and meticulously tried to conclude what were the movements which preceded the instant in time at which Moses of Michelangelo is presented to the viewers, what actually ran through my mind was a huge formless meaningless piece of marble that fronted Michelangelo before he began his work. Isn't this the Real? Homogeneous, amorphous and unbroken, with no gaps in it, without meaning and impossible to interpret. And then, the strikes of the hammer, the artist's tools as he sculpted and carved his way within this piece of marble, giving it shape and meaning, throwing away the remains, the debris, the objects which stand for a lack. "The symbolic order captures what is not organized and imposes on it an organization,"⁴ Miller wrote, "... this organization is a continuity, a meaning, an intention. What appears as a finality is an intention that makes sense."⁴ Indeed, a sculpture is not only a beautifully shaped sense-making piece of material we gaze at with wonder. It is also the product of what lacks, what was carved out and tossed away. This is the operation of the Symbolic upon the Real, gaping it, perforating it, breaking and slicing it, so that meaning eventually arises. Like a skillful sculptor working his way through marble, the signifiers work their way through the Real. They enter into the Real, an entry from which a subject is born.⁵

1 Freud, S., (1919) The 'Uncanny', The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII, pp. 217-256.

2 Freud, S., (1914). The Moses of Michelangelo, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. XIII, pp. 211-237.

3 Miller, J.-A., Interpretation in Reverse, Psychoanalytical Notebooks, Issue 2, 1999.

4 Miller, J.-A., The Lying Truth, The Lacanian Review, Issue 7, Spring 2019, pp. 149-155.

5 Lacan, J., (1962-1963), The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X, Anxiety, tr. A. R. Price, Polity, Cambridge, 2014, p. 87.

JULIA EVANS' NOTES

- <http://institutfrancais-israel.com/blog/yaron-gilat/>

Yaron Gilat

Dr. Yaron Gilat. Born in Israel, 46 years old, a psychiatrist and director of the adult out patient clinic at the Y.Abarbanel mental health center. Graduate of the advanced study program of the Winnicott Center in Israel, a student in the Lacanian Network and member of the Israeli group of the new Lacanian school (GIEP-NLS). His articles on social, political, psychoanalytic, medical and mental health issues were published in Ha'aretz newspaper and his book "A Red Bouquet of Disintegration" was recently published by Pardes Press.

FOOTNOTES

- From text : **In his 1919 paper, The "Uncanny," [1] Freud wrote: "It is only rarely that a psychoanalyst feels impelled to investigate the subject of aesthetics even when aesthetics is understood to mean not merely the theory of beauty, but the theory of the qualities of feeling. He works in other planes of mental life and has little to do with those subdued emotional activities which, inhibited in their aims and dependent upon a multitude of concurrent factors, usually furnish the material for the study of aesthetics".** Footnote 1 :

This is at the beginning of The Uncanny : p219 of SE XVII : Published by Richard G. Klein at www.Freud2Lacan.com and available [here](#)

https://www.freud2lacan.com/docs/The_Uncanny.pdf

- From text : **If indeed, as Jacques-Alain Miller asserts, the age of interpretation is behind us**, Footnote 3 : See [Interpretation in Reverse : 1996 : Jacques-Alain Miller](#) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12368) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12368> : From p1 of Russell Grigg's translation :

You're not saying anything?

That is what everyone is saying, though they don't know it yet. And this is why these Journées on interpretation need an interpretation.

The age of interpretation is behind us. Lacan knew it, but he did not say it: he hinted at it [il le faisait entendre], and we are just beginning to read it.

- Footnote 4 : 20090211 Jacques-Alain Miller The Lying Truth Lacanian Review 07 Cours 2008-09 L'orientation lacanienne : Quote : **"The symbolic order captures what is not organized and imposes on it an organization,"**4 Miller wrote, **"... this organization is a continuity, a meaning, an intention. What appears as a finality is an intention that makes sense."**4 : The Lying Truth : 11th February 2009 (Paris VII University) : Jacques-Alain Miller, given as part of Choses de finesses en psychanalyse, 2008-2009, L'orientation lacanienne, Available on request to [Julia Evans](#) : From p151-152 of Frederic Baitinger & Robert Raber's translation, published in The Lacanian Review 07, Spring 2019 : It is noticeable that we are led to come back from the splendour of the necessity of the narrative towards the humble contingency. We are bound to listen, which is our position in an analysis when we are analysts.

These reflections make me re-read differently a formula by Lacan, which I have deciphered in the past-how many times?-in his inaugural, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis", on page 256 of the Ecrits. [1-see below] Commenting on the psychoanalytic anamneses, the revival of memories, and especially of childhood memories in analysis, he said: "what is at stake is not reality, but truth"; he was implying in it the full speech (according to his expression at that time), a speech whose effect he defined: "to reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come." [2-see below] Let us give a fuller meaning to this verb to reorder. The prefix re-is not needed. If they are contingencies, they are not ordered. They only acquire an organization through the symbolic order, which is not to be conceived as an immobile structure. The symbolic order captures what is not organized and imposes on it an organization. In particular, this organization is a continuity, a meaning, an intention. What appears as a finality is an intention that makes sense-which wants to say something. There, in this transmutation of contingency into necessity, the lying truth insinuates itself. It is what has always been qualified in psychoanalysis as "rationalization." Lacan, for his part, did not use this term, but what one calls rationalization is to superimpose on the absurd a rational lie, a lie that makes sense.

For Lacan, from the start, as early as this initial formulation, necessity appears to be nothing but a construction.

Footnote 1 & 2 [The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis \(Rome\) : 26th September 1953 : Jacques Lacan](#) or [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=11831) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=11831> or [Discours de Rome et réponses aux interventions \(Rome\) : 26th September 1953 : Jacques Lacan](#) : Information & availability [here](http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12080) <http://www.lacanianworks.net/?p=12080> :p17-18 of Anthony Wilden's translation : The ambiguity of the hysterical revelation of the past does not depend so much on the vacillation of its content between the Imaginary and the Real, for it locates itself in both. Nor is it exactly error or falsehood. The point is that it presents us with the birth of Truth in the Word, and thereby brings us up against the reality of what is neither true nor false. At any rate, that is the most disquieting aspect of the problem.

For the Truth of this revelation lies in the present Word which testifies to it in contemporary reality and which grounds it in the name of that reality. Yet in that reality, it is only the Word which bears witness to that portion of the powers of the past which has been thrust aside at each crossroads where the event has made its choice.

This is the reason why the yardstick of continuity in anamnesis, by which Freud measures the completeness of the cure, has nothing to do with the Bergsonian myth of a restoration of duration in which the authenticity of each instant would be destroyed if it did not sum up the modulation of all preceding ones. The point is that for Freud it is not a question of biological memory, nor of its intuitionist mystification, nor of the paramnesia of the symptom, but a question of remembrance, that is, of history – balancing the scales in which conjectures about the past cause a fluctuation of the promises of the future upon a single fulcrum : that of chronological certitude. I might as well be categorical in psychoanalytical anamnesis, it is not a question of reality, but of Truth, because the effect of a full Word is to reorder the past contingent events by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, just as they are constituted by the little liberty through which the subject makes them present. :

p47-48 of Alan Sheridan's translation : The ambiguity of the hysterical revelation of the past is due not so much to the vacillation of its content between the imaginary and the real, but it is situated in both. Nor is it because it is made up of lies. The reason is that it presents us with the birth of truth in speech, and thereby brings us up against the reality of what is neither true nor false. At any rate, that is the most disquieting aspect of the problem.

For it is present speech that bears witness to that portion of the powers of the past that has been thrust aside at each crossroads where the event has made its choice.

This is why the condition of continuity in anamnesis, by which Freud measures the completeness of the cure, has nothing to do with the Bergsonian myth of a restoration of duration in which the authenticity of each instant would be destroyed if it did not sum up the modulation of all the preceding ones. The point is that for Freud it is not a question of biological memory, nor of its intuitionist mystification, nor of the paramnesia of the symptom, but a question of recollection, that is, of history, balancing the scales, in which conjectures about the past are balanced against promises of the future, upon the single knife-edge or fulcrum of chronological certainties. I might as well be categorical: in psychoanalytic anamnesis, it is not a question of reality, but of truth, because the effect of full speech is to reorder past contingences by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the little freedom through which the subject makes them present.

- From text : **This is the operation of the Symbolic upon the Real, gaping it, perforating it, breaking and slicing it, so that meaning eventually arises. Like a skillful sculptor working his way through marble, the signifiers work their way through the Real. They enter into the Real, an entry from which a subject is born.** Footnote 5 : Seminar X : 9th January 1963, pVII 57-58 of Cormac Gallagher's translation : 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> : To this must be added, that if it is firstly and primarily unconscious, it is because in the constitution of the subject, we must firstly and primarily hold to be prior to this constitution, a certain incidence which is that of the signifier. The problem is that of the entry of the signifier into the real and to see how from this the subject is born. Does it mean that, if we find ourselves as it were before a sort of descent of the spirit, the apparition of winged signifiers would begin to make their holes in this real all by themselves, in the midst of which there would appear one of these holes which would be the subject. I think that, in the introduction of the real-imaginary-symbolic division, no one imputes such a plan to me. It is a matter today of knowing what is there at first, what it is precisely that allows this signifier to be incarnated. What allows it is of course what we have there to presentify ourselves to one another, our body. Only this body is not to be taken

either, for its part, in the pure and simple categories of the transcendental aesthetics. This body is not in a word, constitutable in the way that Descartes establishes in the field of extension. It is a matter of our seeing that the body in question is not given to us in a pure and simple fashion in our mirror, that even in this experience of the mirror, there can occur a moment where this image, this specular image that we think we have in our grasp, is modified: what we have face to face with us, our stature, our face, our pair of eyes, allows there to emerge the dimension of our own look and the value of the image then begins to change especially if there is a moment at which this look which appears in the mirror begins to look no longer at ourselves, *initium*, aura, the dawning of a feeling of strangeness which opens the door to anxiety.

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