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"Was Freud Wrong About Women?"

I will try to say something about this very broad and difficult theme, that is, women.

To get a good starting point I will highlight two sentences. I have chosen as title "Was Freud wrong about women?". This was due to Freud having been extremely criticized for his theses or what many believed to be his theses regarding women. You will see why that was, if you don't know it already. I shall put forward a phrase which Freud uttered at the end of his life. After about 40 years of analytic research he said "What does a woman want? We still don't know". In other words he himself made a judgement of what he had elaborated just to say that he didn't resolve the question.

As for Lacan, who provided an answer in 1972 criticizing Freud on the issue of women, he claimed that what had been said up to that moment on women in psychoanalysis, was a "scandal" of the psychoanalytic discourse.

Thus, we have obtained a starting point of what I have to say.

Women as seen by psychoanalysis

I could have taken as title "Women as seen by psychoanalysis". Why? Because one speaks always from a certain point of view and the point of view is not always a visual one. We speak from a position which we take in the world, on the basis of our own experience, our sex, since it is not at all the same experience. Points of view are sexuated and socialized.

In psychoanalysis we speak of women on the basis of a certain practice of psychoanalysis and the facts which make themselves evident in that practice.

The point of view of psychoanalysis is as partial as any point of view. For instance, when Freud asks "What does a women want?", he isn't speaking of women in the world. He isn't speaking of women in civilization, he is speaking of women in terms of sexual desire, which obviously is a limited point of view.

For a brief moment, I will take a broader point of view, I will abandon the psychoanalytic standpoint to take a glance at what happens in civilization.

We live in a time which, at least in the West, is marked by the presence of movements called "women's liberation" movements, movements which derived directly from human rights. This women's liberation movement started, we're still talking about the West, quite long ago, it's marching forward, however unfinished it might be. I'm not discussing its effects here, neither its

geographical distribution since it is not present everywhere. It is for that very reason that I stress out the fact that it is present in the West.

Just a word on what is located outside of the culture of Human Rights. It is an indisputable fact that everywhere in Europe, in ancient Greece, in China, in Egypt, virtually everywhere, women were in a position of being "subjugated". And not only that but also deprived, it's a known fact, of the possibility of accessing any sort of culture, science, arts, political careers, work, salary, voting rights. Even in France voting rights are quite recent dating back to the time after the Second World War. It is an absolutely general fact. On the other hand, in somewhat parallel fashion their bodies - and I'm not talking about subjects here - their bodies were always controlled, one could almost say tethered - think about the feet of Chinese women, about the practice of harems, of genital mutilation which still exists in vast parts of the world, etc. Everywhere where these facts came about they were thought of being part of the order of things, with the general idea that this order was guided by the will of God. This has not yet ended everywhere. However, when we think about these facts as revealing an order of things it makes it possible for these subjects to accept it, i.e. for women themselves to accept it. We now know well the following scenario of a young woman coming from a place where women are subjugated in one way or another. The daughters emigrate, change their culture on the occasion and this provokes confrontations between the daughter and her mother who thinks it's absolutely natural, for example, to have her undergo genital mutilation. We're dealing with situations like these all over Europe.

So the subjugation, if you will, which is a fact, goes hand in hand with the discursive hypothesis on female nature. You know it - women are of feeble constitution, fragile, unable to act, with little capacity for scientific objectivity, not very artistically gifted, in other words, made for reproduction and the maternal role, con ned to family space. And for a long time in civilizations, these that we know, people would ignore the fact that what is taken for granted as the order of things is what we call the order of discourse, that is to say, the order of culture, the order of beliefs, the order of mores. Quite a number of centuries had to pass in order for people to start realizing that discourses change, that they are historically entangled. Basically the moment dates back to 18th century, the century of Enlightenment. So obviously when what previously appeared to be natural turns out to be a historical contingency makes what was bearable - unbearable.

From today's standpoint, a time when psychoanalysis will soon have reached the age of 150, I see three questions:

First of all, what has psychoanalysis, which is a product of culture itself, brought in on the matter of women which would constitute its specific contribution?

Secondly, how can one in light of this contribution understand and interpret the long historical subjugation of women which was so overwhelming? There is an issue here. What was it that had

to be controlled with the subordination of women?

A third point would be to ask what can one say of today's women, women who live in places where women's rights have been adopted, that is, where they have won new freedoms in social and private life and where they have obtained control over their bodies in particular, especially regarding reproduction and sexuality. I believe that this still gives rise to a lot of discussions in the West and particularly in Poland.

I shall begin by shedding the light of psychoanalysis on women.

In the beginning was Freud, Psychoanalysis is a practice which was invented by Freud at the end of 19th century. It is a practice which has but one instrument – speaking. It was invented by Freud on the basis of what at the time used to be called “nervous illnesses”. The first patients, the first female patients of Freud were called “nervously ill”.

We don't speak of “nervous illnesses” any more, rather everywhere in psychoanalysis we speak of “symptoms”. Symptoms are dysfunctions and a dysfunction always refers to a functioning which is deemed normal. Thus, a dysfunction can occur on the level of the body which Freud discovered particularly in hysterical women – paralyses or cases of non-organic blindness which yielded to speech. Or it is a dysfunction which can occur on the level of oriented thinking, in what is called obsessions, self-imposing thoughts, parasitical thoughts with consequences on behavior, forced avoidances. Basically the symptoms are manifestations which pose obstacles in the domain of work and in the domain of sexual relations, the relations of love and desire. Symptoms are everywhere where there is desire. We call a “symptom” an untimely, involuntary manifestation experienced sometimes by the subject, which prevents them from living and which in all cases hampers the accomplishment of one's desires, especially sexual ones but not only. By reminding this I want to underline that on the basis of this Freud couldn't but encounter the question of the difference between men and women as ultimately psychoanalysis looks for the desire which conditions the symptoms with the question of knowing what is the libidinal difference between men and women. That is the perspective adopted by Freud from the very beginning and in this perspective there is no question of posing questions about women's rights - we ask about the intimacy of desire. In the end Freud encountered quite a few surprises at the outset on the basis of what he was hearing in a practice which requires the subject to say their thoughts or rather to say what comes to mind without censorship. Because in life all speaking is censored, be it by friendship, decency or coherence.

One of the surprises of this practice was when one lets the subject say what comes to mind, very quickly they speak of love and sexual couple problems, starting with the parental couple. It is, nevertheless, a surprise.

The second point concerns sexuality proper, when one says “sexual couple” it implies two notions which we distinguish a lot in psychoanalysis; it implies love, which happens between two

subjects. But in the couple there is also a relationship of desire and this relationship of desire happens between bodies. These two relations can be connected, but they are different.

With the speaking of the analysand Freud in his exploration of desire witnesses the appearance in speaking of nothing else but what he called "partial drives", not genitality, however, and this he calls "infantile sexuality". This means that speaking bears witness to the modes of auto-erotic bodily enjoyment derived from one's own body, without a partner and without genitality. In other words, enjoyment is oral, anal, scopical and that which is connected to the invocatory drive of the voice. What a surprise, indeed! People often have the idea that Freud saw sexuality everywhere. Except that in what he called "sexuality" at the outset the body to body relationship is absent.

So a question was raised for Freud of getting to know how the transition from the little polymorphic perverser, the child who derives satisfaction from its own body, how he or she manages to transition from this to adult sexuality where there is a partner, another body, be it homosexual or - which is even more difficult to explain according to Freud - heterosexual. That is the problem which Freud had to face. These are immense questions which I'm only summarizing for you in a somewhat elementary fashion. I cannot do otherwise with the allocated time. I'm summarizing briefly Freud's theses in their popularized form and those were these very theses which outraged feminists who from the very beginning were not very friendly towards Freud. They were friendly towards Lacan a bit later as I tried to show in my book called "What Lacan said about women?".

Freud puts forward an altogether uncompromising thesis - everybody's relation, be they a man or a woman and regardless of their anatomy, in other words every speaking being's relation to sex, to their own sex and that of their sexuated partner, for both sexes, is established through the phallus. And this remains true in all couples regardless of whether they are homosexual or heterosexual.

It would thus seem that in speaking, in what passes through speaking, sex according to Freud's works is reduced, apart from the partial drives which I spoke of, to the phallus alone, the symbol of the male organ. Obviously that was not something that pleased feminists.

As a result, clinically, this determines two forms of anxiety depending on whether one is a man or a woman, and it is something which from a clinical stance is unquestionable - in a man there is the fear of losing what he has, basically, of emasculation, whereas in the case of a woman there is the envy of what she does not have. Freud has this absolutely wonderful way of putting it where he says, speaking of the penis, "she saw it, she wants it".

There is thus an idea in Freud, who takes up the words of Napoleon, "Anatomy is destiny", not a social destiny, but a destiny on the level of subjectivity. And Freud came up with the idea that these two anxieties are irreducible - the fear of castration in men and penis envy in women, even

with the analytic treatment. So here you have a general summary of the Freudian concept.

Lacan enters psychoanalysis later than Freud and he already has the thesis of the primacy of the penis, constructed by the latter. He advanced at the same time as Freud's continuator and his critic. As his first step as the continuator he rethought the notion of the phallus.

He showed that the organ, which might not be there, as is the case with women, functions as a signifier. The phallus is not an organ but a signified organ. Lacan spent a lot of time developing what a signifier is. The closest word in common speech - not identical but the closest - is the word "symbol". The phallus

in the unconscious operates as a symbol. This completely displaces the question of having or not having the penis - I will not explain it here, I will just simply presuppose it. It is thus a signifier, which is a sort of symbol, since it is characterized by the fact that one can find substitutes for it, which is not the case for the organ.

We can see this on the level of what is called the "phallic having". Man has the penis, but he might not have the phallus. On the level of having this phallus has many substitutes. All the objects which one might appropriate are phallic substitutes. These are the object of having. As a result of this the not having of the penis as is the case in women's anatomy does not prevent from having it in symbolic form, in signifying form. It is how people can speak, not everywhere of course but in the psychoanalytic movement, not necessarily Lacanian, of phallic women or phallic mothers, which obviously doesn't mean that they have a penis.

Substitutes of the phallic having were first discovered by Freud who insisted greatly on the fact that for a woman there is a having which is specific to her, which means that it's not within the reach of men - it is the child. We say - "She has a child". In psychoanalysis there is a whole series of clinical works on the phallus-child for the mother, when a woman becomes a mother. Becoming a mother is situated on the axis of the desire to have and it is not necessarily the same desire as the one of a sexuated woman as such.

The series of phallic possessions is very vast. In the first place there is money. Wealth phallicises. More generally it is also the case with power in different domains, be it the power in the political, professional, creative domain - all these belong to the series of having which we call the "phallic having" and which is unified by a single symbol, the phallus.

We might note in nowadays' society that access to the phallic having thus denied is perfectly within the reach of women when the society allows it. Lacan mentions the natural way in which women can do exactly the same things as men in the field of having, that is, in the field of social competition, cultural artifacts, sublimations of culture to which women have gained legitimate access.

At a certain point in the past and with the continuous passage of time I used to entertain myself by drawing up a catalogue of professions from which women used to be legally banned and as

to which it would be announced that a woman had finally managed to become a representative, thus, opening the way for others - banking, being head of state, construction site manager, police, army. There are women torturers as well. I am not sure, however, whether we have already seen a female army general. It seems to be missing in the collection.

We can clearly see what it was that female subjugation deprived women of - all the phallic enjoyments of having, which were reserved for men, except one, maternity. And in that end they were all reduced to being mothers.

On this point Freud appears as a reactionary in the political sense of the term. I think that it is just an appearance, but it is something which makes itself seen nonetheless since he goes on to say that the desire of women prevents them from being creators of works of civilization. We find this explicitly said in Freud.

Women would not have access to sublimations of cultural production, their specific desire not pushing them there. So obviously on this point we might say that it is a factual mistake. Women have become cultural agents just like men. But what was Freud in fact talking about? He wasn't talking about the desire of women as subjects, but of that part of desire which in everyone, man or woman, is nothing but a part of that desire and which is sexual desire, and it is there that he marked out a difference. He called it a dark continent.

The end to the scandal?

What do we notice on Lacan's side? I am starting off again from the phallus-symbol, the signifier. I have illustrated the function of this signifier on the level of the aspiration to have, which is brought to extremes by capitalism. But there is another dimension of the phallus, which according to Lacan is more primary and which concerns being.

In order for there to be any aspiration, any desire whatsoever, there has to be a lack. One desires only on the basis of lack and not on the basis of completeness. One can have satisfaction, sleep, but one cannot desire based on completeness. To desire there has to be something lacking and that very thing pushes you forward. It is what Lacan ended up calling the "cause of desire". Essentially the very aspiration to have is a sign of there lacking something. Accordingly, Lacan emphasized that the phallus is primarily the signifier of what is lacking owing to the fact that the speaking subject knows lack and that this lack grounds desire, all desires. All desires aim for a complementary element, complementary and compensating this lack. If there were no lack, there would be no desire. It is thus how Lacan insisted a lot on the difference between organic needs and desires. A common trait between the two is that both are headed towards an object. But organic needs, having been satisfied, are appeased, whereas the desire is more of a phoenix, even if satisfied it is not extinguished, precisely because it is grounded in lack. I will not develop it further here.

What Lacan calls the barred subject, with an S which is written with a bar, \bar{S} , is a first approximation of this, the being which is defined by its lack. Let us add that this lack according to Lacan results from an effect of language, but that's another issue. Hence its quest for compensating objects. It is what in psychoanalysis, long before Lacan, was called "object relations" or what desire aims for.

If the phallus is a signifier of lack in the speaking subject, one can immediately understand that anatomy in this respect is not destiny, that all subjects, regardless of their anatomy, be they a man or a woman, as subjects have a relationship with the phallic lack and, consequently, with desire. And since it is so, they can compensate their lack through having. On this point women and men are equal, except for the baby. So if we were now to bring the question solely to the level of the sexuated relationship, we would have to ask - What does desire aim for in the relation with the other sex? Lacan, having rethought the phallus as a signifier, completely displaces Freud's formulas. He agrees with Freud in saying that on the level of sexuality both sexes refer to a single signifier, the phallus - this is Freud, only reformulated. But he doesn't refer to it in the same way and this constitutes a critique of Freud or this is simply Lacan, if you will.

According to Lacan there is a disparity of desires in relation to the phallus. How could we formulate this difference? Well, through a difference between having and being. A man wants to have it, it's a desire for sexual potency, whereas the woman wants to be it. There have been over the years a great number of elaborations by Lacan on this topic closely tied to the analytical clinic. And essentially it is true that in its relation to the woman the male desire is a desire for sexual potency in the sense of having it as an organ of enjoyment which engages the major masculine fear, of which Lacan provides a very simple formula in the seminar on Anxiety of which we will be speaking tomorrow - the formula of basic anxiety in men is that of not being able to [perform], sexually but not only.

As for the woman in her relationship with a man, I mean, in her relationship with a man and not in herself, well, she wants to be it. What does this mean, if not desire of a man and the fact of being desired, which for a woman makes her equivalent of what is lacking in a man. The desire of a man phallicizes her and thus establishes her as what is lacking, as the cause of his desire. In this sense being desired phallicizes, there is no doubt about it. For example, when we listen to a woman who is in a situation where she is not desired, where she is not desired any more, what does she very often say? She says that she feels annihilated, she feels like she isn't anything any more. One can notice even on the surface of the terms themselves this register of the phallic having. With this Lacan introduces a whole different perspective on women. Sexually it is not the envy that characterizes them in their relationship with a man, but something altogether different - it is rather the aspiration to receive what I may call the investiture of being singled out by a desire. So it is an aspiration to receive what is lacking.

Similarly for a man to have the organ, and thus the enjoyment proper to the organ which he is

the only one to have, does not amount to saying that he has the phallus since, on the contrary, as a subject he falls under the sway of a lack called the castration lack. The lack grounds desire and essentially the woman-as-phallus comes in to fill up this lack for him to the point where sometimes it fetishizes her a little.

With this in mind you can clarify a whole series of small phenomena, a series of behaviors which one might take note of outside of psychoanalysis. These are all the behaviors where we see that a man displays his woman. In a nutshell, the first major stage of Lacan's elaborations is that the phallic mediation lies at the heart of the sexual couple and precisely of that which desire regulates.

But I shall introduce later the word "jouissance", enjoyment, inevitable when one speaks of sexuality. Love is not the same thing as desire and desire is not the same thing as enjoyment. When one speaks of sexuality one cannot but speak of enjoyment. Emphasis put on desire, its irreducibility, its foundation in lack, is but one aspect of the difference between sexes. The big question, from before psychoanalysis, is that of the respective enjoyment of the two sexes. I've said from before psychoanalysis because you might be acquainted with the myth of Tiresias which Lacan brings up also in the seminar on "Anxiety". In Greek mythology Tiresias was transformed into a woman for a certain amount of time to later become a man again. When asked whose is the bigger enjoyment - that of a man or that of a woman, Tiresias responds that a woman's enjoyment is by far the greater one! Here we are at the level of the living body, precisely on the level of what is called the orgasm in the sexual act with the question of whether at this level there is a difference which would not stem from culture, from discourse.

It has to be said that Freud elaborated only a little bit on this difference. He was essentially interested in sexual failures, in symptoms of failures - basically impotence on the one hand with its different forms and frigidity on the other. But Freud questioned little the enjoyment of the sexual act as if it was something obvious.

Lacan came to the question of there being different types of enjoyment or not in the 1970s. There exists a famous and easy formula, even if you have never heard of psychoanalysis, and which proclaims that the success of the act, not the failure, not the symptom but the success of the act, brings about the failure of the "sexual relationship".

I will condense to the shortest possible form this formula for you that he was developing for a long time to say that in the end there are two types of enjoyment which are heterogeneous and which don't meet, that is, what he called "phallic enjoyment"; this is not the phallus as the signifier of desire, its prototype, it is the male enjoyment; and the "other enjoyment" which is not the phallic enjoyment and which would be specific to what is called a woman. You might be asking yourselves how psychoanalysis can bear witness to it since as a practice, as I like to say, it doesn't hold the candle at the feet of the bed and everything that psychoanalysts are able to say comes from what they hear from their patients. Psychoanalysis cannot attest to anything which

doesn't pass through what is said in a psychoanalysis, sometimes on what happens in bed. One cannot say that analysands are excessively talkative on this subject.

Essentially, in psychoanalysis since Freud we decipher the unconscious. To decipher means to proceed word by word and what we discover is that the unconscious does not say all. The unconscious says the desire and the phallic enjoyment which led Freud to assert that there is only one libido for both sexes, what seems to be somewhat odd as there are two sexes. On the level of enjoyment there are words for solely the phallic enjoyment, the one illustrated by the penis and the for the one connected with the drives. What we know of it is its briefness, its fall announced in the act with, for instance, the anxiety of the *coitus interruptus* which Freud spoke of. The other enjoyment, the non-phallic one, is the one which the unconscious structured like a language does not speak of. And it's at this level that Lacan situates the difference specific to women. A woman has a relation to the phallus, Freud was right, but she is not fully all in the relation to the phallus, she has a different enjoyment, non-phallic, which she doesn't speak of, even if, as Lacan says, she were begged on the knees. Thus you can see how the construction presents itself. A sole signifier of desire - the phallus as the signifier of lack. A sole signifier of jouissance - the Phallus written with a capital letter. But two enjoyments, a supplementary one with regard to the phallic enjoyment on the side of the woman. It is what Tiresias seemed to know. Well, as you know these theses of Lacan from the 1970s have bedazzled the feminists. On the basis of these texts Lacan was spread at American universities in the cultural studies departments. It also enjoyed success in France.

The Women's Liberation Movement became in some way a lacanian movement. I would like to point out that the feminist movement, the feminist movements as they are many, have been divided on a particular point of these matters.

All of them underscored the cultural determinations of the feminine. You might know perhaps the quote of Simone de Beauvoir "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". This means that what is called femininity - one says for example: "She is very feminine" or "not feminine at all" - is an "artifact" of the discourse. On this point all feminist movements agree. But on this basis they become divided. There is a current which demands what I call the "unisex beyond the clothing". The word "unisex" was introduced for jeans when they came from the United States to Europe and in advertising it was the first piece of clothing to be called "unisex". So a part of the feminist currents which shout out that men and women are the same demand what I call the "unisex beyond the clothing".

And then there is another part of the feminist movements which postulate a beyond of the cultural determinant, there being a limit to the unisex; where would it stop if not at the feet of the bed, at least on the level of the drives. The process of cultururation would have a limit in nature. But here, attention! Nothing more alien to psychoanalysis than the idea of nature. And Lacan does not say "The woman", which would mean all the women according to anatomy, but

"a woman". A woman has a different enjoyment. Which means that what the discourse calls "woman" is defined with regard to the sexual relationship with a man. Lacan uses this expression: she "who offers herself to be called woman". In other words, when he says that there is another enjoyment and that women are not-all, this doesn't prevent certain women from being all in the phallic enjoyment. And at the end Lacan says that the subjects have a choice of placing themselves on the side of the phallic all or on the side of the not-all phallic, regardless of their anatomy. Lacan is led to the idea of a sexual option, antithetical to anatomical destiny. It is a very complex issue, in any case there is an alternative between the phallic and the not-all phallic to which he adds that it's an unconscious choice.

The new galleys

I will say a word on the women of today. What have they gained all in all?

First of all, new anxieties. They have not only the feminine anxieties, but moreover the same anxieties as men. The anxiety of failing, of not being able to achieve professionally, in case of success, of not being able to seduce a man, of not being able to be the select object of a desire. So there are new anxieties. They also have access to new symptoms - the debasement of love life described by Freud for men functions also with women, that is to say, the disjunction between the loved partner and the desired partner, as this is the debasement that Freud discovered in men, but with the liberalization of mores we notice that it also functions in women. What's more, there are all the new dramas on the level of maternity. The dramas of maternity have always existed. These are the dramas of infertile couples. Currently the new dramas are the conflicts between professional achievement and the success in emotional life as they say. As we are in a time where everyone believes in "managing" their life as one "manages" a company, or at least believes to be able to manage it, we see more and more profiles of women who make a plan for their life. First of all, studies, a job, a salary, the phallicism of having, then a family. A father for the children has to be found; not just a man, but a father for the children. And the new dramas are expressed in terms of the "biological clock". We see that there are more and more cases of women like this - at the age of 35 they have made their lives, they have had a career, all is well, every- thing's in order, there is a house, there's money and now they're moving on to the next point on the agenda. Only it's more difficult to find a father for their children, a man who could be a father, who would be suitable for the role, who'd like to be one and all this with a tight deadline since the biological clock rings the alarm around the age of 40. Of course there are pregnancies after the age of 40, but statistics tell us that it is less and less frequent and that artificial insemination is not reimbursed after the age of 40, at least not in France. You can see that it's very interesting to see the new satisfactions, without a doubt, new freedoms, but also new galleys. The hellish life that some women force themselves to live is striking. Similarly I was surprised by Simone de Beauvoir who at the end of her life said: "I was tricked", that is to say, I have missed that which was worth the effort.

She who chose an intellectual life without family or children when she says "I was tricked", she means nobody else but herself, it was her choice.

So what was Lacan's view? There was no question of him objecting to women's rights, they're untouchable, he supported women's rights to access whatever is possible. He always did a lot, there are testimonies to this, to support what the female analysands wanted regarding work, the life of the couple and maternity. He had nothing against it, but he did have, I think, a tendency to think that a woman has a lot to lose, that women have a lot to lose, if they enter phallic competition. There are several remarks on this subject. It was his opinion, I believe, but we are not obliged to share it, we have a choice. That would be all.

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