

## The breakdown of social ties

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"*Progress cannot be stopped*": this is not a slogan, but rather a modest observation. The authors are unanimous on this point. The facts are sufficiently well described, explained, and coordinated in their interpretation that there is no need to add anything further. The task of analysts is not to complain or express regret about modernity and its effects. We must work with it and, if possible, in an informed manner. This is undoubtedly why the authors take such care to explain what is happening in our contemporary society and to show how everyone is coping—rather poorly, of course—in this context.

Nevertheless, analysts differ from observers, commentators, and critics of the contemporary world, regardless of the subtlety and insight of their observations: man is not sick because he lives in a century of misery, he is sick because he is a being of language and it is this primordial relationship to language that puts him at odds with his desires and his fellow human beings. Thus, *Civilization and Its Discontents* describes this twisted relationship between the speaking being and his world. However, this problematic and therefore never satisfactory relationship is not dereliction. It is clear that the analysts' alarm signals the observation of a crossing beyond of the usual symptom: that of the erosion of speech functions and the symbolic law attached to them. This fact has incalculable consequences, the effects of which we have not yet finished measuring. Most of the texts in this book clearly mark the dividing line between what is part of the ordinary difficulties of existence (conflict and neurosis) and something else that can be described as a state of abandonment. The problem encountered by the analyst, as some have pointed out, is that in a situation of disinheritance, the usual lines of force of psychic conflict (linked to repression) no longer exist. It then becomes difficult to identify the crux of the problem and the symptom. This is what I would readily call the subjective and structural consequences of a father without a name.

This term has the advantage of moving away from descriptions of causality linked to the absent father, descriptions that are only fomented by the ideal father that the neurotic has in his head, in his dreams, but whom no one has ever met except at some moment of triggering psychosis. The formula of the nameless father, on the other hand, reflects the dual aspect of the relationship between the establishment of the Name-of-the-Father and speech. It is his function that makes speech possible (as Jean-Pierre Lebrun points out), if only because he makes present the mother's prohibition to the child. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this operation in the social order. So that if this is no longer the case, the father in this function appears only as a derisory domestic tyrant. However, the essential issue in the background of this mechanism (that of prohibition) is that it conditions the establishment of repression and the unconscious Other, which in the opposite case is expelled from the subjective condition. Indeed, a world without the unconscious becomes "a world without limits."

The predicament in which the immigrant's child finds himself illustrates this dimension very well. To be brief, let us say that the traditional discourse that prevails in the family favors the ancestral symbolic order, where speech undoubtedly dictates the rules (for example, those indicated by the places assigned to men, women, and children). However, as soon as they step outside the home, children and young people encounter a libertarian, egalitarian discourse in which the "demands of the old" suddenly appear caricatural, outdated, and unfounded. Of

course, when this young person returns home, it is to challenge the statements of authority and question the legitimacy of their basis. The problem is even more crucial when the father is socially discredited because of his origins or social situation. To complete the picture, let us add that the boy or girl finds an opportunity to form an alliance with the mother, due to the dissatisfaction generated by the symbolic order and its presumed author.

This vignette has the merit of showing that the father's function exists (even a little too much for the child's liking) but that his name, with all that it carries in the symbolic register, can no longer be transmitted. The name is no longer invoked but transmitted as the stigma of a cursed destiny, with the violence usually attached to its course and which is expressed socially without embellishment. Ily would have much more to say on this subject, but let us leave it there and note that the extinction of the function of speech engenders a cascade of changes: elide, disavow, censor, expel one fundamental signifier of human subjectivity, then another, then others. Signifiers come galloping in, multiplying and not necessarily in a manner congruent with the previous one. This situation can be stated as follows: "You did not want a master of flesh and desire, a little wobbly and baroque, but ultimately benevolent towards you, so now you will have a master of iron, a bronze order, that of the object. "This is what the function of the signifier dictates when it is not tempered by the laws of speech (the law of the Other). "Do not murmur against neoliberalism, techno-scientific civilization, the new gadgets that overwhelm you and penetrate your privacy; it is you who murmured against your fathers and made merchandise your fetish."

However, since Marx's observation, it should be emphasized that the object itself has undergone a considerable metamorphosis—and undoubtedly the collapse of the so-called people's democracies is linked to their inability to anticipate this change. For today, it is no longer the object of production that prevails, but the object of consumption that holds sway. The consumption index is the compass that now guides the political action of our leaders because, in their eyes, it is synonymous with the satisfaction index: a new object means a new citizen-consumer. At the same time, the political aim is to make everyone's life easier: we are in the realm of consummate utilitarianism. This metamorphosis has even further-reaching consequences, because the object of production emphasized man's relationship to work, debt, exploitative bosses, etc., that is to say, to an established symbolic structure, admittedly disappointing and unjust, where the symptom served as an essential reference point, whereas the object of consumption emphasizes leisure, playfulness, that is to say, autonomous enjoyment finally liberated. This object is outside the symbolic link to the Other, and it is at this point of emancipation that the question of perversion or collective psychosis arises for the clinician. The object is the new master—as Charles Melman emphatically points out—an object that nonetheless determines a subjective destitution where existence is regulated only by slogans, that is, by empty words. Let us leave it at that, since it sufficiently suggests the consequences of the signifier's mad dash when speech no longer has its stopping point.

Other, more intimate fields will find themselves partially contaminated: let us reread Anne Joos de ter Beerst's fine study on requests for medically assisted reproduction (*MAR*) with this question about the nature of the object claimed (the child) by these infertile couples. Does it not already suggest the object that is missing from the empty shelf of consumption and social representation, an object that reveals its grimacing and distressing face, pregnant with this Schreberian Other? It is this grain of truth that leads the author to question the nature of the

demand and desire of these men and women in distress: a strange object relation that forces analysts to somewhat revise their categories, which they believed were written in the Book of Humanity for eternity. Lacan had warned them, however, as early as the 1960s, of the metamorphoses underway. The question deserves to be asked whether this child-object is still inscribed in the register of debt or whether it is merely a pedicle detached from the symbolic system, and if so, how can such a fictional object be re-inscribed in the laws of speech? Experience shows that mountains of tenderness are not enough (a reference to what Freud had already, in his time, referred to as *wet nurse dreams*).

Analysts, no less than other men, would remain blinded by the light of truth if they did not bend their considerations and relationships and their actions to Freudian principles. When Freud, in *Group Psychology*, describes the preeminence of an object that has become a rallying point and organizer of crowds, it is clear to everyone that the same power of this object can be exercised over an individual considered in isolation. After all, today, what weaves the pseudo-bond of the human community is no longer a common project in and for the city (politics is of no interest), but a common object that brings together like-minded people who enjoy the same object: mountain biking clubs, orchid lovers' clubs, rollerblading clubs, etc. And the Internet provides the means to build networks. Thus, the network compensates for the breakdown of social ties. Why not, in a way? However, this cannot be a remedy for the loss of speech and the ensuing disinheritance.

It is at this crossroads that we find analysis and its function, if not its possible role, because its part and its action remain modest in view of the current widespread collapse of social ties. Beyond the strictly individual reasons that lead a person to undertake a course of analysis, analysis consists less in re-situating the subject's history, epic, and vicissitudes than in marking the milestones as such, caught up in the articulations of language and the implications of speech. This approach allows the subject to gauge their dependence on the demand and desire of the Other—which are facts of language, needless to say—the demand and desire of the Other who are the only real actors in their existence and at the origin of the constitution of their subjectivity. This approach, at the same time, and we would add, reintroduces the essential nature of speech, in other words, leads the subject to reinhabit his speech, and, if he agrees, reintroduces him to a possible social bond.