

Truth, Otherness and Social Bond

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Something of the social pact has mutated. A breakdown in institutional authority linked to novel communication technologies user-generated content, media editing and promotional culture puts into question the locus and function of what Lacan called “the Other of good faith”, which struggles to constitute itself as a symbolic place, one of mediation and trust.

Byung-Chul Han calls *infocracy* the new form of rule characteristic of contemporary information capitalism. He argues that, contrary to the 70s, when Hannah Arendt wrote about de-factualization,¹ today “it is the very distinction between truth and falsehood that is undermined. Anyone who knowingly lies and resists the truth, paradoxically recognizes it. Lying is possible only where the distinction between truth and falsehood is intact. [...] *Fake news* are not lies: they attack facticity itself. [...] When Donald Trump offhandedly says whatever suits him, he is not a classic liar knowingly distorting reality, as - to do that - one would need to know it.”²

For psychoanalysis, since Freud, the unconscious implies a not wanting to know: about desire, aggression, jouissance. But the truth psychoanalysis is concerned with does not pertain to factuality, its home is discourse, Lacan’s way of naming a social bond. So we cannot oppose lie and truth, both are a consequence of language as such. The lie is the inclusion of the symbolic in the real, a late formulation of Lacan’s, which Jacques-Alain Miller elucidates in its link with the inclusion of the real in the symbolic, namely anxiety³, that which does not deceive. Is it surprising that the current state of civilisation – with the lying truth is exposed like an open sky but separated from the place of the Other – has as its correlate an exponential rise in anxiety?

As Freud asked in posing the problem of “what determines the truth”: “Is it the truth if we describe things as they are without troubling to consider how our hearer will understand what we say...? [...] does not genuine truth consist in *taking the hearer into account*...”⁴ This is

¹ Arendt, H., “Lying in Politics”, in *Crisis of the Republic*, Harvest & Co, 1972.

² Han, Byung-Chul, “The Crisis of Truth”, in *Infocracy: Digitization and the Crisis of Democracy*, Polity, 2021.

³ Miller, J.-A., “The experience of the real in psychoanalysis”, teaching delivered at the Department of Psychoanalysis, University of Paris 8, course of 21st December 1998. Unpublished.

⁴ Freud, S., “Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious”(1905), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. VIII*, Vintage Classics, 2001, p. 115 [my italics]

what is in question in our times. Lying implies the recognition of the Other; there is no lie without the Other, who introduces the subject to speech, constituted as lacking.

I recall the effect it had, while working in a psychiatric hospital, to introduce something of this to a team who insisted in punishing a young girl, admitted for anorexia, who lied about hiding food in her room. For her, being able to deceive the other was already a way to inscribe a lack somewhere, to constitute a veil over an unbearable real.

The push for transparency and surveillance threatens the possibility of this veil. Fiction is part of the place of the Other, where to articulate the impossible with a dialectic of trust. The alternative is the *distrust* and *refusal of belief* posed by Freud referring to paranoia.⁵

When we speak of psychoanalysis as a new social bond, we try to convey that in times of so-called post-truth, authoritarian therapies, markets of the fake that sweep away any reference or value of truth, but also sweep away lives,⁶ Lacan gave us his School as a base of operations and as a refuge to treat the malaise without ignoring the real at stake, without misrecognising its place: yes, truth can only lie about the real, however, that is no reason for exiting the conversation. Our effort is to continue to speak in order to say what is false about the true.⁷ The paradox is that we can only do so by respecting that which is most singular in each, which is not founded in any Other, namely, otherness itself.

⁵ Freud, S., “Draft K. The Neuroses of Defence from Extracts from the Flies Papers”, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. I*, Vintage Classics, 2001, p. 26.

⁶ Lebovitz-Quenehen, A., “D’un discours qui contre le fake”, in *L’Hebdo-Blog*, 24th January 2021.

⁷ Laurent, E., “Parler, et dire le faux sur le vrai”, delivered at the ECF Question d’École “Le Fake”, in *L’Hebdo-Blog*, 31st January 2021.