

NOTES ON STYLE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS¹

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Poetry is the language of languages, since it is in and through poetry that an unexpected way of saying of things is expressed. It is always something novel and disconcerting. The unpredictable word of the poem cannot be domesticated by poetics... far from being entertainment or self-help, poetry does not strive to appeal to all tastes. On the contrary, it disrupts discourse, enables difference, refuses to appease, causes disquietude.

Mario Chamie. Interview in Estado de São Paulo newspaper.

Lacan urges us to think about what a style might be, and, in his peculiarly provocative manner, tells us to do what he does, but not to imitate him. A style is the unique manner of each individual; it emerges; it “simply” appears with no premeditation. But how does it come about? What place does it have in the life of the subject?

I begin with a brief definition of style provided by Iris Apfel: being stylish is different from being fashionable, style is in the DNA, it requires courage and originality. We are not interested here in fashion, but we notice it in various spheres—fashion, art, literature and others—when someone has a powerful, striking style. Turning to the practice of psychoanalysis, I suggest here that we think about style in terms of concepts such as

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singularity, invention, the *sinthome* and ‘knowing-how-to-deal with’ (*savoir-y-faire avec*)³, as outlined in Lacan’s final period of teaching, especially Seminars 22, 23, and 24.

When he says, “do what I do but don’t imitate me”, Lacan invites us to invent but not reproduce. Lacan thus provides a demonstration of his unique style. Transmission passes through a style, Lacan says. Doing what Lacan does would therefore involve something like each psychoanalyst being encouraged to invent his or her own style and psychoanalysis being transmitted like this.

We can see then that, from the point of view of psychoanalysis, style and transmission are not disconnected concepts; they go together. In our *poietic praxis*, it is with style that each psychoanalyst sustains the singularity of his or her act.

But how is it that we invent a style? Each psychoanalyst must travel a singular path as part of his or her own pathematic experience, in their own personal analysis, until such a time as the way has been paved for their own unique style to emerge. We are well aware that transmission occurs in the analysis of each individual, in the experience of the subject in analysis. It is there, on the couch, that the one-on-one takes on its maximum proportions.

In relation to the pathematic experience, I will take up again briefly here a reference to Agamben that I have used on another occasion (Lied, 2007). In *Infancy and History*, Agamben discusses the singularity of experience as referred to Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* through the notion of *πάθει μάθος* [learning through suffering] and argues that this involves learning only from and after tribulation—a form of suffering that excludes any possibility of foresight, of certain knowledge. Experience must contain an element of uncertainty and thus provides an opening for that which is novel and unforeseen: something that has never previously featured in the analysand’s repertoire.

It is in his RSI Seminar that Lacan introduces the notion of the *patheme* – *πάθει μάθος* – when he says that “the passion of the body” as “an effect of language is *pathéin* [suffering]”.

³ [Translator’s Note: following Cormac Gallagher’s translation of Lacan’s ‘*savoir-y-faire avec*’ in Lacan’s 24th Seminar: *L’insu que sait...*]

A psychoanalyst is formed by his or her experience as an analysand, a unique, pathematic, untransferable experience, in which each individual goes through the theory by suffering it, in his or her own analysis. This is the field of 'loose talk' that takes place on the couch.

We could, therefore, conceive of the experience of psychoanalysis as generating a *poiesis* (Franco, 2010). Considering *poiesis* as a transformation, *ποιεῖν* in the sense of creating a work of art, an act of creation that does violence to language, in a manner exactly like that of poets. But it should be recalled here that it is not a matter of transforming the analysand into an artist or a poet, but rather of creating the conditions whereby he or she can detach themselves from the language of the symptom to do something else, to invent their own *sinthome*.

Let me cite the essayist, critic, and writer Otávio Paz, in *The Bow and the Lyre*, as a way of saying something about this way of being of poets:

"Poetic creation begins with violence to language. The first act in this operation is the uprooting words. The poet wrests them from their habitual connections and occupations: separated from the formless world of speech, words become unique, as if they had just been born" (Paz, 1982. p. 47)⁴. Paz is saying something here very close to what Lacan means by the invention of new signifiers.

***Sinthome* and 'knowing-how-to-deal with' (*savoir-y-faire avec*)**

Lacan recasts the termination of analysis using the *Sinthome* and dedicates *Seminar 23* in its entirety to the development of this idea. It is the work of James Joyce and the way it operates in the life of the writer that caused him to delve into this concept of the *sinthome*, creating an artifice using topology and art. An artifice is something that is done with art. The *sinthome* is invented out of and with that which generated the symptom, and, as the end of analysis, a

⁴ [Translator's Note: English translation taken from [Paz, O. (1973) *The Bow and the Lyre*. Translated by Ruth L. C. Simms. University of Texas Press]

declension of knowing is installed, now transformed into ‘knowing-how-to deal’ with, *savoir-faire* in relation to one’s destiny. *Savoir-faire* in relation to the sexual non-relation, sustaining the pain of existence.

Becoming responsible for one’s own ‘knowing-how-to-deal with’ – that is how we can identify with our *sinthome*.

In *Intraducción del Psicoanálisis* [The Untranslation of Psychoanalysis], Roberto Harari (2004) proposes that the “knowing-how-to-deal with” brings together the three main characteristics of the *sinthome*: solitude, singularity and artifice.

1. Solitude, because there is no place for the Other;
2. Singularity, because of the invention of a new differential signifier;
3. Artifice because, whatever it may be, it is “made by art”.

Returning now to the question of style, I think that style also involves these three characteristics. Is it through style that the *sinthome* is created? Or does the creation of the *sinthome* give rise to style? Although we can see that there are many similarities and connections between style and the *sinthome*, I do not believe that the two terms should be considered synonymous. Would the one be possible, though, without the other?

Style as a singular way of organizing the marks left by the Other.

In relation to solitude, we could see it, as Winnicott does, as the capacity to be alone. But it could also be a “cozy solitude,” because it does not leave us helpless, but provides us with a small portion of freedom, in which the subject recognizes him- or herself, sustaining his or her own mark, ‘patented’, as it were. There are no limits to what it can be!

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