

## **Simmel, Lacan and Freud. Monetary economy, economy of jouissance**

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The reading of the Seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* presents a calm rhythm, as if the War in Vietnam, which had begun four years earlier, had shown that there was no need to hurry, that there was still plenty of time ahead of us. A very different rhythm is presented in the Seminar *from an Other to the other*, in which the events of the French May did not give a break and where Lacan clarifies on more than one occasion, during those lectures, that he had no time to stop.

In both seminars, Lacan goes through signifiers that gave names to different epochs. Utilitarianism, Enlightenment, Aristotle, and Romanticism, to name a few. Today I would like to dwell on the two references to George Simmel and his theory of values.

George Simmel, considered along with Durkheim the founder of sociology, is introduced by Pierre Kaufmann in the class of March 2, 1960, in relation precisely to this field of study. This lecture is centered on a critique of the article "Comments on Sublimation" by Siegfried Bernfeld. In this text, the author states that Sigmund Freud presents and elaborates the notion of "sublimation" as an autonomous concept, intrinsic to psychoanalysis, independent of other fields of study. Pierre Kaufmann takes up this article, not to establish an agreement with its author, but to defend Freud's statement in which he comments that the notion of "sublimation" is precisely borrowed from sociology. Intrigued by the sociologists who might have influenced Freud's elaborations, Kaufmann pays special attention to George Simmel, in whom he finds developments around sublimation and its relation to aesthetic value in the work of art. Traces of Simmel's reading can be found in the particularly poetic story *On Transience* (1915) where Freud emphasizes that the perishable of life makes beauty, youth, and time, precious objects of high value. In the *Philosophy of Money*, Simmel elaborates on his theory of value and for this, he starts from an earlier and inaccessible time, a scene of Paradise in which subject and object, desire and satisfaction are not separated. Different factors, among them culture, the scarcity of the object, and the

need for renunciation produce a distancing, a distancing that establishes a subject, and an object: desire will remain on the side of the subject, and value on the side of the object. This theory of value, to which Lacan alludes in the two seminars cited above, maintains that the existence of value is a primordial phenomenon about the object and concerns the first datum of subjectivity. The author emphasizes: "If there is value, there is subject". Value is not attached to objects but is an attribution given by the subject, and the intensity of value will be given by the distance between the object and the subject's possibility of obtaining it. I quote Simmel: "Things are not difficult to acquire because they are valuable, but they are valuable because of their distance. [...] The value of an object lies in its desirability." I believe this statement corresponds to one of the comments when Lacan presents his program of the seminar on ethics, namely: "To tell the truth, we can hope that Freudian analysis will establish a little order in what it finally led to, these last years, namely, the famous, too famous, theory of values, which allows one of its supporters to say that the value of a thing is its desirability".

If Freudian analysis brought some order to value and took it out of scale, it is because it established another economy. If the value of money is at the base of the monetary economy, the value of jouissance is at the beginning of the economy of the unconscious. For this reason, Lacan returns to Simmel in March 1969. This time, he makes a bit of fun of his audience, which repeats the ideas that the author proposes regarding the value of woman. Let us see what it is about: the German thinker proposes an evolution, required by the advance of culture. To this end, he proposes a path that begins in an era governed by the "principle of the capture of women by force", comparable to cattle rustling. This period is surpassed by the exchange of women between tribes, being the exchange of sisters one of the most common forms. Later and always due to economic changes that produce changes in exchange relations, women become a valuable object and therefore have a purchase price. However, the increase of the monetary economy generalizes, finally, the dowry system that, although it is conserved in many regions, was transformed into the valuable trousseau that the bride's family is assembling for the moment of the marriage.

These changes in the value of women throughout history, according to the author, are directly related to changes in the mode of production and its relationship with the means of production. In other words, Simmel traces the value of women, which goes from use value to exchange value in social exchange. This seems to be a path of progress, evolution, and at a distance from repetition. This is why Lacan places Simmel within idealism, making him a supporter of the idealization of values.

The Freudian economy elaborates an apparatus governed by the principle of pleasure, which in the search for an experience of satisfaction without remainder, one might say absolute, inscribes differences between the pleasure sought and that achieved. This apparatus has the possibility of hallucinating, putting something over nothing. And it is from there that we can affirm that there is a world and this world is suspended from our dream of the world. The dream, as condensation and displacement, is already an interpretation, wild, vulgar, as Freud said, which will be replaced by psychoanalytic interpretation. It is in these terms that I think Lacan's interventions on some historical facts and names that seem outside the psychoanalytic field and our practice. His references, varied in time and space, have no trace of a sociological intention, none of them seeks to explain the phenomenon, neither to Aristotle, nor to the crusades, nor to space travel. It is an exceptional style with which Lacan aims at the clinic and which exceeds the case. Faced with Bergler's theory that the neurotic is a collector of injustice, creating the desire to be rejected, Lacan turns to the Vietnam War. He takes it already as an interpretation and asks about the perplexity of people dreaming of being rejected in order not to be devoured. He returns to Simmel, at the moment that he receives the adhesion of a majority of his audience. He does not explain, he does not develop Simmel's philosophy.

He warns against overestimating the value of ideals at the expense of excluding the jouissance value that sustains the symptom.

Our disappointments also have the color of our ideals and it is in the name of them that each epoch, including ours, speculates its apocalypse.

The actuality that concerns us is not that of fashion, always passing, but that of the re-actualization of the trauma that returns each time. And that repetition, each time is each time the failure of selfhood. Otherwise, selfhood becomes the dream of a world that cannot change and leaves us absorbed or inhibited, nostalgic or scandalized in the face of transience.