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OF THE TIES THAT B(L)IND

*"But love is blind, and lovers cannot see the pretty follies that themselves commit."*

(Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*)

*"One has to admit that if there is one domain in which...deception has some chance of success, it is certainly love that provides its model."*

(Lacan, 1964-1965, p. 133)

We have come together here to discuss two very specific topics, which have everything to do with what concerns us psychoanalysts in the clinic: *the social link*, and *reclaiming the unconscious* in our time. In putting it this way, I am emphasizing that I consider both topics to have clinical significance, and it is from this perspective that I wish to continue.

I would like to begin by stating that the psychoanalytic discourse creates a *social link* that is otherwise impossible. To say discourse, according to Lacan (1969-1970/2007), is always already to say *social bond* according to the definition he provided in *Seminar XVII: The Other, or Reverse Side of Psychoanalysis* (depending upon translation). *Social bonds* are made up of *social links*. But, the psychoanalytic one is unique, what is possible in it is reserved for it alone, and its affects on the subject are without comparison. In fact, "this discourse," Lacan noted in *Television* (1973), "implies a promise: to promote a novelty" (p. 28). How is this discourse unique? I would like to argue that everything hinges on the meaning, and place of the object within it.

To make this claim, I will begin with an initial discovery made by Freud. Though in the beginning he did not want to see it, eventually Freud did not quibble on this clinical fact: Psychoanalysis requires the transference. Transference provides the link necessary for psychoanalysis to proceed. What had yet to be fully articulated, however, was that with this Freud was also contributing to the conceptualization of love itself. In one of the technical papers entitled, *Observations on Transference-Love*, Freud (1914) noted that as psychoanalysts – given what we are met with in the clinic – "*we have no right to dispute that the state of being in love which makes its appearance in the course of analytic treatment has the character of a 'genuine' love*" (p. 168). The clinic forced Freud to dissolve the naïve assumption that transference is mere illusion when compared to the unquestionable veracity of love, and he emphasized that though transference occurs through a false connection, the love present in it cannot be considered merely false. Love and transference become equally illusory, and equally genuine. In fact, the very assumed dichotomy between what is true, and what is false ceases to be meaningful in this case. The structure becomes that of an Möbius band, a single surface with no real distinction between different sides.

To speak of transference is to speak of love; to speak of love is to speak of transference. They are inseparable, and only

distinguishable by the situations in which they occur, as well as their intensity. With no distinction possible between true and false, it also becomes clear that both are predicated on a certain degree of blindness, and it is this blindness that binds them. What is unique about the psychoanalytic discourse is that it creates the possibility for a treatment that – like Freud (1906) said of analysis in one of his infamous letters – “is effected by love” (p. 10), through the very blindness by which love serves to bind. Yet, love *as such* is now thrown into question, and to what exactly it is bound must be articulated.

It is by answering this question that we are able to shed light on the true novelty of psychoanalysis, and to separate the practice (as well as the discourse itself) from other approaches, which profess love to be a form of prophylactic. By attempting to define the transference, Lacan expounded upon what could be found in Freud’s writing specifically related to the object’s involvement within it. This is at least explicitly the case beginning with *Seminar VIII: Transference* (1960-1961/2015), where Lacan uses the *Symposium* of Plato to highlight that “the lover appears...as the desiring subject, with all the weight that the term ‘desire’ has for us, and the beloved as the only one in the couple who has something” (p. 34). Through this seminar, Lacan addressed what he termed the structural positions necessary for the “signification of love” (p. 40). He outlined the fact that the positions of lover and beloved are obviously required, but the signifier of love – love being “a metaphor, assuming that we have come to understand metaphor as substitution,” (p. 40) in Lacan’s words – requires that the lover be substituted for the beloved. Lover must become beloved, and beloved must become lover. It is through this substitution that love occurs.

According to Lacan (1960-1961), it is “insofar as the function of...the person who loves, as a lacking subject, comes to take the place of, or is substituted for, the function of...the loved object, that the signification of love is produced” (p. 40). Though Freud (1905) was always clear that in the transference, “new editions or facsimiles” (p. 116) of the analysand’s history are involved, a revival of the past in “new impressions or reprints” (p. 116) – due to the dissatisfactions in love, which are the fate of all *speakingbeings* – it was Lacan’s genius to push this even further. Through the elaboration of *Seminar VIII*, Lacan (1960-1961/2015) confirmed that the transference has something to do with history, with specific relationships, and those people with whom they were formed in the past. It continues to involve the repetition that it involves. However, transference has less to do with the people concerned, and more to do with some-*thing* these people seemed to possess. This is, in itself, a return to Freud in the sense that it centralizes the equivocation present in the very concept of the object.

It is essential to note that for Freud, the object was examined in a few different, but not entirely separate ways. First, the object is a partial object, and according to Freud (1915) it is the object “in regard to which or through which the [drive] is able to achieve its aim” (p. 112). Along with this, the object is also an object to which the subject is attracted, and one that is loved. Though in *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, Freud (1915) attempted to draw a distinction between the two senses of the object, and it is the habit of some psychoanalysts to propose that under the genital organization of sexuality a subject has come to subsume all partial objects in love directed to a total object (i.e., the other person in their totality), this is not necessarily a Freudian reading.

As Lacan was always quick to point out, it is a mistake to read Freud’s ideas of object-love, which relate to post-pubertal sexuality

as somehow representative of a final, completed genital form. Both senses of the object must be retained: the partial object of the drive, and the object loved. Again, it is an Möbius surface. The object-relationship must be defined by retaining both senses simultaneously. Lacan (1960-1961/2015) reiterated this in *Seminar VIII*, but placed a unique importance on the fact that the object proper to transference is less who, and more what; less the beloved, and more the beloved object they are supposed to contain. The object loved becomes the *silenus*, and the partial object its hidden treasure. Lacan also added something to this Freudian conceptualization by stating that this object – in its equivocal sense – is closely related to knowledge, a certain knowledge that the lover presumes to be located in the beloved. The object, then, must also be seen to have a certain epistemic value.

Lacan (1964-1965/1977) revisited this in *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, where he provided the aphoristic definition of transference being, “the enactment of the reality of the unconscious” (p. 146). This is a continuation of Lacan’s point, because since Freud it has been clear that this reality is inescapably sexual. Transference puts the sexual reality of the unconscious into action within the treatment. In fact, it is this enactment that permits of a certain *reclaiming* of the unconscious: both a recovering, and cultivation. Through this enactment, the unconscious is open to be *re-claimed*, because it displays a closure of the unconscious – the staging of a closure – upon a satisfaction of *jouissance* in relation to the object. The object that Lacan (1960-1961/2015) was able to focus upon in *Seminar VIII*, is now the object targeted in the enactment of the sexual reality of the unconscious.

In the same seminar, Lacan (1964-1965/1977) was able to delineate another of the object’s unique attributes, while at the same time reiterating the problem Freud (1914) stumbled upon when trying to distinguish between transference and love. “Both in sexual union and in the struggle to death,” Lacan (1964-1965/1977) stated, “the being breaks up...between its being and its semblance, between itself and that paper tiger it shows to the other” (p. 107). Being is distinguished from semblance – though a relation between the two persists – and semblance comes to be identified with what is broken away from being. Again, how are we to distinguish between truth and appearance? Semblance is not merely false, and for Lacan the semblant signifies similitude, being similar to something else, representing something else. It does not have a negative connotation, because it is not opposed to what is true, but is, in fact, linked to truth. A connection is made between semblance, and the object – the Freudian lost object that is broken away through the castration of language – and it is the object in its semblance that is directly implicated in love. Love is love of a semblant.

How, then, does this influence the *social bond* of the analytic discourse? In his *Seminar XVII* (1969-1970/2007), Lacan outlined the fact that the *social bond* that is discourse is a “*necessary structure that goes well beyond speech*” (p. 12). It is established according to a structural logic that determines everything possible within it. In his elaboration of the psychoanalytic discourse specifically, Lacan located the object – now specified even further as the *object a*, which represents all of the significations of the object simultaneously – in the position of the agent of the discourse, and the cause of the divided subject that is at stake in the treatment. With this, Lacan clarified that the object of transference is the cause of psychoanalysis: Because of its position in the discourse, and because of the transference that ensues therewith, the object is truly causal. Further, Lacan stated clearly that this is the object that the psychoanalyst is required to embody. They are to become the

beloved in which the beloved object is supposed to reside. By agreeing to embody this semblance, the analyst causes the subject in its division, and the epistemic role of the object leads to what can be *reclaimed* of desire.

Finally, in *Seminar XX: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (1972-1973/1998) Lacan brought together all that had been elaborated upon in relation to the object and its place in love and transference. He did this by reiterating again the link between love and knowledge that he had outlined in *Seminar VIII* (1960-1961/2015), and by continuing his Freudian reading of the equivocation of the object as one of the drive, and one that is loved. In *Seminar XX*, however, Lacan highlighted that if the object is to be defined as such – as *object a*, in its semblance – it must also be shown to emerge against the backdrop of the impossibility of the sexual relationship. More precisely, love is what makes up for this very impossibility. The link formed between the subject and this object bridges the irreparable fissure that exists between the sexes due to the real of sexuality *as such*. Yet, it is the semblance that by its appearance makes the subject blind to the real in relation to which the object is situated.

In conclusion, within the structure of the psychoanalytic discourse – a *social link* unlike any other – the possibility is created for the object to have its causal function, and to lead the subject in transference to a *reclaiming* of the unconscious that is its support. The epistemic function of psychoanalysis would be impossible if the analyst did not embody the object in its semblance, and allow for the subject to relate to the object in such a way as to create something new. It also shows that what is loved, and what is causal in the transference present in psychoanalysis remains a mirage, a genuine illusion in the Freudian sense, and that the divided subject that is animated by it is blind to the fact that this is what binds it. To return, again, to the beginning, as Lacan (1973) noted the psychoanalytic discourse serves “to promote a novelty. And that, awesomely enough, into the field from which the unconscious is produced, since its finesses [*impasses*]...come into play in the game of love” (p. 28).

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