

Psychoanalysis

Postcolonialism

- “Freud emphasized that language concealed, revealed or modified hidden desires, anxieties and fears. His point was that desire does not express itself easily because culture does not allow or facilitate it, and we need to pay attention to language and other forms of symbolic expression—gestures, sounds, facial expression, writing—to discover it. In this, Freud was exploring a link between language and the unconscious—a move that was to become the core of both the psychoanalytic practice (described as the ‘talking cure’) and criticism.”
- “Psychoanalytic criticism, therefore, explores the language of the unconscious, of the repressed and the hidden as embodied in literary or cultural texts such as art or fiction, with particular attention to the repression of sexuality and its desires.”
- “Freud proposed, in some of his more controversial essays, that the artist is a kind of neurotic, where art is a means of fulfilling otherwise ungratified desires.”
- “For Freud—and this is the link to psychoanalytic criticism—dreams are a language, the language of the unconscious and of repressed desires. This language is broadly termed ‘dream-work’ in Freud, and is the mechanism of dreams. The dream work has two central dimensions: latent dream content and manifest dream content.
- Latent dream content is the actual content of the unconscious that seeks expression. The expression of the content in the form of images or events in “of images or events in one's dream is the manifest dream content.”
- “Lacan's psychoanalysis combined Freudian theory with the linguistics of Saussure and Émile Benveniste to produce some extraordinarily complex theories of the psyche. Lacan's work in *Écrits* (1977) and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1977) proved highly influential for feminists and poststructuralists”
- “Lacan constructs a model of identity-formation that takes a three-stage process or ‘orders’, as Lacan calls them.”
- “The Imaginary. Here the child makes its first identification—with the reflection in the mirror. It now associates coordinated limbs and movements in the mirror with itself and thus forms a sense of the self. In the ‘mirror stage’, as Lacan terms it, the child's sense of the self is similar to its conception of the relationship between himself and the mother. Just as the child does not see a distinction between himself and the mother (what Lacan calls ‘desire-of-the-mother’), looking into the mirror, he does not see any distinction between himself and the reflection. In the Imaginary the child seeks to erase all difference and otherness by imagining himself as the person in the mirror and seeing himself and his mother as the same. In Lacan's terms the mirror stage is a ‘homologue for the Mother/Child symbolic relation’. Lacan then describes the child as the signifier and the mirror image/reflection as the signified: The child looks into the mirror and says: ‘that's me’, thereby giving himself some meaning. He thinks he can substitute himself with the mirror image. The child works with a misrecognition—that the smooth, coordinated and whole image in the mirror is himself. This stage is therefore metaphoric

- This is the stage when the child acquires language, and is perhaps the most important formulation in Lacan. It is the moment in which the child enters society and social relations.
- In language, for example, the child discovers that society has different names for 'father', 'mother' and 'child'.
She is 'Mother' in language, and is different from 'I'.

The child discovers here an endless chain of signifiers: 'I', 'mother', 'father' and thereby discovers social relations. He moves along a chain of signifiers in a metonymic displacement from one to the other. It is the first sign of difference.

The child discovers that he is different from others, and that he cannot desire the mother. He discovers the Symbolic Order that is external to himself, what Lacan terms the 'Other'. Thus, the 'desire of the mother' is now prohibited by the order or Name-of-the-father.

There is a name (of the father) even when the father is not necessarily present. That is, the child may be threatened with a statement like: 'I will tell your father'. Here the absent father acquires a threatening presence because of the name.

- In the Symbolic, therefore, the absence of the Mother (absence because the child cannot have her, he is not her, she is different, and will always be desired because of her absence) is linked to the absence of the father, who is present only as a name.
- There are thus two absences: in the case of the mother, the desire of the absent mother, and in the case of the father the threat of the father in the very name 'father'.
- Lacan here is working with the language of the Symbolic order where 'Mother' stands for the desire of the absent mother and 'Father' stands for the threat of the absent. Both language and absence go together here.
What is important to note here is that Lacan sees language as constituting a social bond in the Symbolic—an idea that would influence poststructuralist thinking later. Desire is based on a series of signifiers where the lost object of desire generates a chain of names acting as substitutes for the lost object. And desire, for Lacan, is primary."
- The Real. This is the order that both the Imaginary and the Symbolic try to control. This is where the child's illusions (of being one with his reflection or being one with the mother) from the Imaginary is at odds with the sense of otherness from the Symbolic.
- Lacan identifies three stages in the making of the psyche:
the Imaginary is the pre-linguistic (i.e., before language) where the child sees himself reflected in the mirror and considers himself whole and complete and one with the mother;
the Symbolic is when the child acquires language and begins to understand difference, social relations, that he is not one with the mother or the primary desire of the mother and that the law of the father is supreme;
the Real is the stage where the Imaginary and Symbolic both seek power and the psyche is caught between the 'lack' (i.e., the desire for the absent mother discovered during the Symbolic stage and eventually pushed into the unconscious) and the need to fulfil this lack.

- Lacan suggests that all desire is linked to a lack: In fact, the lack is desire. Here he turns to linguistics and suggests that all signifiers merely gesture at the lack.

When we pursue the signifier's meaning (i.e., the signified) to fill the lack what we find are more signifiers. We thus proceed on the chain of signifiers without ever reaching an end-signified.

- Desire thus remains as a lack, and constitutes our unconscious/repressed.
- What is crucial here is that the loss of the object of desire (Mother) is what gives the child language. Language, therefore, is always connected with the loss of the object and the desire.
- Language itself is about lack, since signifiers do not lead to a final meaning but more signifiers.
- The unconscious thus develops a language of/for desire: 'Mother'.
- This language comes from the outside (as we have seen in the section on the Symbolic Order) and is, therefore, the language of the Other. Between the signifier and the signified mediates the language of the Other (the name of the father that pushes the desire for the mother into the unconscious). And, therefore, the unconscious with its desire is the discourse of the Other.
- There is desire.
- There is an object of desire (the Mother).
- The child discovers that there is a name for the Mother.
- This name is from the language, which comes from outside the child, from the social order, i.e., from the Other.
- There is only a name, the Mother cannot be attained.
- The missing object of desire is replaced by a name.
- The name or speech of/from the Other drives desire inside by replacing the object of desire with the name.
- Desire is thus repressed and enters the unconscious.
- Desire is always, therefore, about lack/absence of the object of desire, which has been replaced by a name.
- In the unconscious desire is always linked to names, where the names lead to more names but never to the object of desire.
- The unconscious is about a perpetual lack/desire.
- "The unconscious is also based on a structure of difference (between names that become codes for relations: 'mother', 'father', 'child', and the chain of signifiers), just as language is based on a structure of difference and endless chains of signification (As we have seen, the child proceeds along a chain of names seeking a signified that he will never reach, just as in Saussure's notion of language, we move along a chain of signifiers and every signifier leads us to more signifiers rather than a signified.).
- The unconscious is produced as the repository of desire, through the effect of speech/ names from the outside/Other, which drives desire inwards, substituting the signifier of Mother instead for the object-Mother.
- Therefore, the unconscious is constituted by desire and the effect of language of the Other."

Sources

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