

Depression: the ultimate freeze-frame shot!

Jean-Pierre Klotz

Today, depression comes at a premium. It's at the "high end of the market", as Lacan used to say when speaking of psychoanalysis, yesteryear! Has anything changed, since? The market value of depression is on the rise in the context of "mental illnesses", not to say elsewhere. Now more than ever, it's become a standard frame of reference, and this is not without effects. It's been promoted as a generic name, recognised by all. It provides a false sense of unity there where disaggregation reigns. It collectivises alienated subjects by making them shut up. There is no way out, everything is going badly, breakdowns are spreading, we understand nothing, thus it is on the lookout, as a modern epidemic. Such is the response of a certain dominant discourse. Generalised depression constructed on the debris of clinical psychiatry is assumed to provide an answer to everything by erasing all questions, from now on considered irrelevant. By promoting its importance, one aims at imposing a silence on the subject as a valid solution for all. Mouths will always be wide open, but this will be to swallow pills together with their generous promises. Speech will remain absent, and it will have no say in the matter. Incessantly penetrating all declining discourses, depression is moving like a steam roller, erasing all diversity, and with it crushing the subject.

By the very nature of the style of this rather depressively oriented presentation, I am making an attempt to take into account the type of *pathos* which forms a part of the general feeling of malaise of contemporary society. This kind of *no future* that is heard, can, however, be taken as a semblant which leaves an essential point in the shadow, even if psychoanalysis is needed to show this on a case by case basis: in spite of the deficiency it evokes, the absence it displays, the universal that it advocates, depression is a kind of pressure endured by the subject. It manifests itself in the form of an emptying, a "one less", but it is also, more fundamentally, a "one more", a mode of *enjoyment* (un mode-de-jour), even if this only appears with a less global, a more singular approach. Consequently, it is liable to be an enigma, especially when we consent to its role as veiling, that is to say that it's not universal, when we take into account subjects taken one by one. To pursue depression can pass for the pursuit of emptiness by filling a subject with anti-depressants, but, like nature, it also abhors a vacuum when it is that of the subject, and it resolves this by taking the subject's place and filling this place itself. Deficit is not essential to it. It manufactures a chain of culprits, but it itself is not guilty. Being the subject's co-ordinate, perhaps that's why it's guilt-free? Is this not progress, when faced with its compact presentation it makes iconic today?

The subject, as it is approached by the Freudian experience, is a lack-in-being (manque-à-être) or a lack-in-enjoyment (manqué-à-jour), but is happy nonetheless. Lacan let the cat out of the bag on television, not without some scandal. This happiness (bonheur) which Lacan writes as "bon-heur" (good time) is precisely linked to this scandal, outside of the aforesaid compactness. This happiness is precisely linked to a lack, a reduction, an emptiness that is salvational, which befits a subject. The subject does nothing other than flee castration, as that without which he cannot be, and when it is not accessible as in

psychosis, he suffers much more. Would it cease to crush the subject under this universal depression, to lift the pressure, suffice to lift the obstacle that's blocking his access to castration? Perhaps, but how? First, by returning his speech to him through psychoanalysis.

Does psychoanalysis have any purchase on depression? Can it treat it? I would be tempted to put abruptly, in a way that recalls Lacan's maxim on alienation: *either* psychoanalysis, *or* depression—the two are incompatible. It's a matter of choice, as it is for the subject himself. Psychoanalysis has no effect on depression. It is liable, on the other hand, to have an impact on depressive affects, which Lacan, always in *Télévision*, preferred to leave under the name of sadness, linked to the subject. These affects form part of the symptom's entourage, and they should be judged by the relations the subject has with the lack that he is, on the one hand, and with *jouissance* from which he is separated, on the other.

It is thus justifiable to say that psychoanalysis can do nothing against depression, defined as such: as universal and grammatically singular, or even as referred to the singularity of each person. Unless there is a symptom whose depressive affects have a place among the subject's co-ordinates. The accent shifts when the symptom appears. Perhaps there are new symptoms today in which sadness is more present than in previous times. This remains to be shown. And it may well be, in so far as symptoms, in their presentation, can follow, particularly in hysteria, the avatars of the malaise in civilisation. Are we still speaking of hysteria in this context when we place ourselves under the banner of depression? In the way it was introduced above, it is not a symptom, it is a-structural, has no reference to the subject and to speech, which it is cut off from. We should not be surprised, if we think how it took shape against any consideration for the subject, reintroduced by psychoanalysis and especially by Lacan when referring to the consequences of the discourse of science, in which it is foreclosed. From this point of view, depression is nothing other than the daughter of Science, and it should be noted that its rise to the zenith of modern psychiatry is concomitant with the latter's scientific ambitions, founded on medical biology.

The subject of psychoanalysis and depression are thus both children of Science, in their occurrence if not in their being. But they were not conceived in the same bed. If one considers them from the side of the subject – there is no median point of view, no third party position – their incompatibility does not prevent the subject from having something that is “structurally depressive”, as Serge Cottet puts it in *La lettre mensuelle* n°149. This is not to say that he is suffering from depression, but that he is dispossessed qua subject. All subjects are depressed, if they are subjects, if we take each one, one by one—where it can be verified that the subject is a lack, or a discontinuity in a *jouissance* that is his as separated, henceforth included in the symptom, which makes it localisable. Here lies the mark of a division, and it is only on this basis that the subject is articulable with depression. The division is a division in so far as it is a lack and in so far as it is initially “less”, then “more”, *jouissance*. Consequently, there is no longer depression as such, but instead miscellaneous presentations, at times misleadingly characterised as depressive as affects are, according to Lacan--except for anxiety, the only affect which does not deceive.

Besides, let us recall the subject is happy. How can he be at once both depressed and happy? Is this happiness in evil? Is the subject of psychoanalysis Sadian? How can we find our bearings?

If the subject is happy, then why does he complain? Since this is the form in which the subject presents its demand to the analyst, which is based on a certain discomfort or dissatisfaction that is nothing but a representation of generalised happiness. From this point of view, we could easily admit that every subject is depressed, if we privileged this suffering. But this would not be enough to enter analysis, for this suffering must also be caught up in a symptom, just as this symptom is a question, and that the demand is not only a demand for relief, but must also point to an enigma, have a meaning, in the dimension of knowledge. In the demand to know lies something other than a pure complaint, and the crude and sticky depression that the complaint conceals. It's the divided subject, and not the individual, a division between suffering and what we shall attempt to refer to as desire that bears witness to pain that is not raw pain, but in the first instance is pain that is spoken about. Depression evokes continuity in proportion as the subject evokes discontinuity, it is only on this basis that one can speak about the subject's happiness.

Lacan draws a distinction here: the subject is certainly happy, the "happy hour" is his lot, to him all hurt is good, but the bliss to which he aspires escapes him, he feels exiled. Happiness is not bliss.

Happiness is momentary, fleeting and repetitive, appearing and disappearing, elusive and aggressive, distinct from the subject of which it is characteristic, however. This isn't the tranquil happiness of a fixed and replete pleasure, but rather joy that is unceasingly lost and refound. In brief, this is happiness whose *jouissance* is unremittingly characterised by lack.

The latter leaves you openmouthed, is associated with a gap that correlates with a suspension of the flow of time, evokes an interruption only when it leads to eternity, without any speech that can perturb it, or at least when speech has come to an end. There is also a kind of incompatibility between this captivation leading to infinity, and the subject's "life", which includes "death" in so far as it is the subject of castration.

The subject's happiness is thus episodic and repeated, and thus a product of the encounter with the real, that is, of the always new that founds this encounter newness, which further deepens on its return the lack as the founding encounter with the subject of castration, whereas bliss appears more imaginary, with a dazzling effect rather than constitutive. And yet the subject's happiness is the individual's misfortune more often than it is his turn. At least he believes it to be, and belief is inherent to the individual as long as he thinks he is himself. He confuses belief with what is. He is unhappy, quick to complain, because he is feeling the lack-to-enjoy, hoping for the happiness identified with the hypothetical total *jouissance*, that of all the others. He is mistaken, of course, if only by basing this feeling of lack on the negation of lack which he is as a subject. He makes castration something contingent, he imaginizes it, whereas it conditions his access to desire, as an effect of language on *jouissance*. Hence the result of this thesis that is, in appearance, somewhat less

paradoxical: there is only happiness where there is *desir*. But wouldn't it be interesting to see in what respect he could also not be mistaken?

Is it totally wrong to consider that *jouissance* is also a correlate of happiness? This corresponds to the common idea, which is well within the claim of the neurotic. I was speaking more about the clash with *jouissance* having for answer the lack-of-being, consequently happy to be in lack. The aim is to take into consideration the side of the subject, there where he is apprehensive where there is no obscurity, before which more or less was, at the level of the signifier that metaphorises it: the paternal metaphor, since it is in this context, where it exerts its effect in making *jouissance* impossible. It's the spot where the individual is suffering from, and where his is happy to be a lack-to-be – without knowing it, without any wish to know.

All things considered, the question is as follows: what can be done so that he wants to know something? It's here that metonymy, spoken first by Lacan of desire, then later of *jouissance*, of a *jouissance* that is not negated by the father, that is favourable to the side of the lack-to-be of the subject, where the drive can reside in the structure in a distinct form of the reference that erases, it is here where it is worth to be taken into account. The question of the subject's happiness, is also that of the relationship between the subject and *jouissance*, on the side of antagonism that links them at the level of the metaphor.

The problem of the subject, happy by definition if one believes Lacan, is also to consent to this happiness. The crucial question is that of the relations at the level of the subject's signifier and at the level of the drive of *jouissance*. There is cause to move from the hypothetical revelation of meaning which would release the subject from his shackles, identified with the therapeutic solution, with the consent of the subject with what conditions him, and for which he is an effect. If he is the effect of the signifier, this effect is produced only because of its effect on *jouissance*, which this one, which is not all, is thus not totally negated. This belongs to the consequences that for which the subject then finds the ways to consent to *jouissance*, which is the limit where he can be found. This limit would it not be that which is where he can find his happiness; and the happiness of the Other, as an antagonist of depression, after all that is what it's seeking? And once found, it would finally be possible for him to be occupied with things other than himself.

For the subject, consenting in being happy, is consenting in being nothing other than lack, and to no longer be under the illusion that this lack is to have, distinct to its being. Subjective destitution, a possible designation for this discovery, would be thus the condition for consenting in being a happy subject.

There is nothing special or spectacular about this rather naive form of happiness, since it is bound to the assumption on the encounter with what is impossible to say. The subject will attain happiness upon accepting his incurability.

To return now to depression, it correlates with the subject wanting to know nothing of his happiness, or with which he associates it with bliss, which results in feelings of alienation. It is the subject of despair, at once deprived of speech and also rejected as subject. What he is seeking actual treatment for, is to eradicate subjectivity itself. To oppose its contentment,

there is refusal of being a subject. It's the refusal of his very being which results in depression, which returns to him from the Other as another itself eternally depressed, with a deficient appearance, but drawing its consistency from this deficiency. The subject has depression as his imaginary partner, indefinitely. Therefore, we have either a happy subject, responsive to destitution, found in the symptom, or the depressed subject, that appears only by way of an imagined duplication in relation with its refusal in considering itself as a subject. One could say that if the subject saw itself as a subject, it is depression itself that he would see.

This image, so readily offered as an a-subjective model, is what made me propose the title "Depression: the ultimate free-frame shot". It has this unreal and timeless fixation, outside all articulation. Depression as an entity is another path than that of the subject. If we return to Lacan's categories of logical time, it's a time to be understood as perpetual that prohibits any conclusive moment, without resolution. Similar to the subject's enigma, which returns only to remain in a pure contemplative state of silence. Only through Psychoanalysis can the film start rolling again, reintroducing the evanescence of each image and allowing their articulation by reinstating the lack at the centre of this mortal so it can come face-to-face with it. A freeze-frame is opposed to subjective destitution, completely incompatible with it. The problem of depression, if one neglects the subject, is the fact that it is without end.

Translated by Keith Al-Hasani. Thanks to Russell Grigg for his feedback.