Negation: Lacan between Freud and Hyppolite

Date: Wednesday 25 October
Time: 6-8pm
Location: Tutorial Room No.3, NIDA, 215 Anzac Parade

In his short essay *Die Verneinung*, "Negation," Freud suggests that one way to get to the repressed unconscious material is to take what is repudiated and negated in an analysand's speech as true. Such negation is always at issue in obsessive neurosis. For instance, as Freud wrote, the part denied in negation in the speech is, in fact, affirmation of the intention: "Now you'll think I mean to say something insulting, but really, I have no such intention,". In order to get into the core of the issue, we must disregard negation in this statement. The negation is a way of understanding what is repressed by the ego, which is the way of its unacceptance as well. This is a process through which the intellectual part (the understanding of the repressed) detaches itself from the unconscious content that remains as affect. This is the content that refuses to enter into the consciousness. Thus, repression still remains in its place in the unconscious. For Freud, the unconscious never says no, but perception of the unconscious in the ego appears in terms of negation. The negation is related to the destructive instinct, whereas the affirmation is related to the Eros. Consider the following joke:

> X: You have a nice hat.
> Y: Thanks
> X: Um, but of course I don't mean your hat is funny

The X knows everything but makes up a repudiation as a way of telling about his true intention. What is repressed is not just that. The discovery of what is repressed might not be related to X's statement, but to his obsessive behaviour, for he might say similar things about others' noses, jackets, bicycles, etc. The persistence of this statement that the X is using to everyone is at stake which, in fact, remains unrepressed. Because, the repetition of the statement itself says so. The persistence indicates the affective component of the negation, which is also a symptomatic defiance, as Freud writes, "the repressive process itself is not removed." There are two components in the above joke if we look at it from Freudian view, which was also reiterated by Jean Hyppolite in his comment. The first is, the judgment of negation or the intellectual part of the negation; and the second part is the attitude of negation. Both components are summarised by Hyppolite in a single Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung*, "It is Hegel's dialectical word, which means simultaneously deny, to suppress and to conserve, and fundamentally to raise up." Here Hyppolite appears to say that the repression isn't accepted, for its repetition testifies this unacceptance.

To put it simply, one major implication of the structuring of the elusive identification is *negation*, as a procedure that the subject contrives in order to persists on a repressed wish or thought by way of its denial and disavowal. This always happens during the practice of treatment and analysis as a resistance on the part of the analysand, which in the meantime is a way of the perception of the repression as well. For example, the subject will say 'no' while he means 'yes' as Freud argues in his short essay "Negation". The 'no' here is meant for the ideational representation of the unconscious wish, and 'yes' to the primordial unconscious source of that wish or feeling.

In October Seminar, we will first discuss Freud's brief essay, "Negation," and then examine its philosophical interpretation provided by Hyppolite. Then we will consider Lacan's response to both Hyppolite and Freud. In the end, we will have selective readings from the three texts.

Dr Ehsan Azari Stanizai

Reading:

1. Freud: "Negatiom," *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, Penguin Books
2. Hyppolite: "A Spoken Commentary of Freud's *Verneinung*," *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's paper on Technique*.
3. Lacan: "Introduction and Reply to Jean Hyppolite's Presentation of Freud's *Verneinung* [Negation]," *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's paper on Technique*. W W Northon & Company