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Eyes Wide Shut. Is Psychoanalysis in Touch with the Real? Scientific Ideals, Hermeneutics and the Relation to the Real in Psychoanalytic Practice (1)

Summary

This paper deals mainly with the scientific and philosophical plausibility of psychoanalytic theory and practice. The Author carefully analyzes – and ultimately rejects – the four most common “answers” usually given by theoretical analysts to the question of the “foundations” of psychoanalysis: 1) the Cartesian solution—according to which psychoanalysis is based on the Cartesian subject as the subject of certainty; 2) the historic-narrative solution – according to which psychoanalysis is not a positive science but a method of historic reconstruction; 3) the scientist solution – according to which psychoanalysis is an empirically verifiable and verified science; 4) the hermeneutic solution – according to which psychoanalysis is an hermeneutic activity. He analyzes especially the influence of Wittgenstein’s Private Language Argument, Popper’s and Grünbaum’s criticisms to psychoanalysis, the Lacanian reprisal of Cartesian subjectivity, and the hermeneutic dismissal of analytic interpretations (mainly through two French papers, by Jacques-Alain Miller and Jean Laplanche).

Despite the failure of the aforementioned solutions, the A. shows that psychoanalysis can be persuasive in so far as we recognize its power to “bite on” the real. He shows that psychoanalysis has an ethical specificity – that is, an impact on something real – which distinguishes it both from any scientifically based therapy as well as from any hermeneutic interpretation: analysis makes possible a subjective history by way of opening the subject to the other in the real.

The persuasiveness of psychoanalysis stems from what the A. calls the “affect of truth” which analytical interpretations are able to raise in the subject. This affect is certainly the result of the analyst’s likely historical-hermeneutic re-constructions which reveal the subject’s interpretative defense: but on the horizon, this affect of truth points out to the subject – finally perceiving himself as something other than what he believed himself to be – the possibility of interpreting himself otherwise, thus opening himself to that otherness which dislodges him.

In Italy, these last few years, the question of the scientific plausibility (and not only scientific) of psychoanalytic theory and practice has obsessed analysts. For most of the 20th century psychoanalysis’ great success in the West has been due in part to the fact that many famous scientists – Einstein for one – credited Freud and psychoanalysts with a certain supposed knowledge – a credit which was based essentially on the persuasiveness of their writing style: “anyone capable of writing so seriously can surely be believed; analysis

need not be verified by me personally.” It has only been in these last decades that, following the post-modern prescription of absolute transparency in everything, philosophers and scientists have decided, like in poker, to ask psychoanalysts to show their cards. This post-modern epistemological strip show demands that analysts publicly demonstrate the conclusions which they claimed to have taken from the ministerium in their office – which, being most private, is in fact a misterium. In fact, for one century analysts offered often striking testimony – but no proof – of their misterium, but the credibility of testimony relies entirely on the credibility of the witness. For older analysts, this came as a shock, unaccustomed as they were to any lack of respect for their ministry. It was hard for analysts laden with academic honors to be ultimately confronted with public diffidence and to be asked to humbly account for their knowledge. Many were tempted to take refuge behind a hermeneutic screen, without grasping that the times had changed, while others elaborated other solutions to account for the plausibility of both the analytic theory and practice.

This essay will examine four of the most common solutions proposed, above all in Italy, by analysts:

1. the Cartesian solution (dear above all to Lacanians) – according to which psychoanalysis is based on the Cartesian subject as the subject of certainty;
2. the historic-narrative solution – according to which psychoanalysis is not a positive science but a method of historic reconstruction;
3. the scientific solution – according to which psychoanalysis is an empirically verifiable and verified science (taking into account the challenge of Popper and Grünbaum);
4. the hermeneutic solution – according to which analysis is an hermeneutic activity, in the sense proposed by Gadamer.

I will attempt to show how none of the aforementioned four solutions suffices. But I will also show that we can nonetheless still find a persuasiveness to psychoanalysis, in so far as we recognize its power to in some way “bite on” to something real. Psychoanalysis in fact contains some of the traits of the aforementioned four solutions, but it has an ethical specificity which distinguishes it both from any scientifically based therapy as well as any hermeneutic interpretation: analysis makes possible a subjective history by way of opening the subject to the other in the real.

Contact without Razor

Contact, a 1997 science-fiction film by Robert Zemeckis, which completely escaped the attention of intellectuals, has as its protagonist a tough-faced, -minded astronomer (Jodie Foster) who believes only in what is publicly verifiable by means of scientific protocols, and who dismisses the divine and intimate truths as mere raving. She often evokes Occam’s razor: *entia non multiplicanda praeter necessitatem* – “we should not unnecessarily multiply entities”, or in other words, when considering all possible explanations for a phenomenon, the simplest and most economical one, the one which demands the least number of hypotheses and concepts, is always preferable. One of our atheist’s colleagues, himself a believer, catches her in one of her weak points: Jodie Foster had dearly loved her deceased father, and he says to her, “You say you love your father. Prove it publicly!”

Foster, having detected in space some sign of intelligence, organizes a space mission to encounter it, but the launching, seen from without, appears a complete failure: the missile fails to lift off, and Foster blacks out during the experiment. But this is not a failure for our heroine who, during “lift off”, enters into a state somewhere between stupor, dream and hallucination. And it is in this state that she meets, on a beach bathed in a metaphysical aura, a being who looks completely alike to her adored father, who tells her that the “other” mind has chosen to render him perceptible and tolerable to her for now in this form, and that this

first contact with human minds will be probably followed by others. Then he disappears. Our scientist is convinced that this was no dream, and that a real encounter had taken place, but she has no proof with which to convince the scientific community, which remains incredulous. The film ends with Foster dedicating the rest of her life to searching for proof that her encounter with the Other had been real. She refuses to allow Occam's razor to cut her throat.

The scriptwriter was obviously familiar with the debate going on since the 1950's in Anglo-American analytic philosophy about what they agreed to call the Private Language Argument (PLA), starting with Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. Put briefly: I can express (linguistically or otherwise) my inner world but I cannot know it. A statement like "I feel love for my father" appears grammatically the same as the statement "I have a pimple on my right cheek," but Wittgenstein showed by means of an extraordinary, argumentative tour de force (a brilliant sophism, according to Kripke (2)) that this is mere appearance. While the expression "I feel love for my father" appears to be a description of inner things, in fact, a subtle analysis reveals this expression to be a way of expressing love for one's father. Psychological insight – which allows us to grasp certain aspects of others' souls – has nothing to do with any kind of objective description or scientific explanation. In short, it is not possible to have a scientific psychology of the inner world, but only of outward, that is public, behavior: it so happens that science is only for objects which are stable enough to be ascertained by each of us *de visu*. Which is what brought water to the mill of behaviorism.

This profound diffidence toward the inner world explains, in my opinion, why philosophers dealt only with Freud, Jung and Lacan (3), among psychoanalysts, but never with Klein, Winnicott and Bion (4). This is but one other sign of the cultural crisis facing psychoanalysis: it is precisely those authors, Klein, Winnicott, Bion – who today dominate the thinking of analysts on the international psychoanalytic scene – who never attracted the interest of the theoreticians who were not analysts (5). As regards the analytic philosophers, this is partly explainable by the fact that the Kleinian tradition is based on an alleged description of inner processes and their relationship with the outside world – which clashed immediately with the PLA. English psycho-analysis and analytic philosophy (despite the significant homonymy) went off in completely diverging directions. As to the Euro-Continental philosophers, they recuperated Freud and Lacan through Nietzsche, Heidegger and hermeneutics, but they were uninterested in the Kleinian approach which appeared to them a naive psychological objectivism.

The analyst and her analysands find themselves in a position similar to that of Foster after her experience – both are convinced of having touched something real in their relationship, a real of the heart, but they do not know how to demonstrate it publicly to those outside this "relationship of the hearts." In fact, despite all the well-argued challenges by Popper, Eysenck, Grünbaum and Bouveresse (6) on the scientific reliability of psychoanalysis, the analyst is entrenched behind the ineffability of what she haughtily calls "my clinical experience". When, during an interview with Castoriadis, we spoke about Grünbaum, he told me clearly: "I would like to invoke an authoritative argument against him: I have a practice and daily experience which he does not! If you believe me, fine; and if you don't believe me, then don't believe me." (7) Which is the fideistic argument *par excellence*: you will have access to my knowledge only if you become like me. Just like Pascal who, when asked for proof in order to have faith, said: "Come to church and pray, and you will believe!" It is the rite which founds faith, and not viceversa (8). But, apart from Castoriadis, private practice shows to the analyst something which for him is incontrovertible: that certain interpretations or constructions provoke in nearly every subject a strong feeling of evidence. This feeling usually reveals itself by a sudden quick laugh ("of course, that's exactly it!") or by a certain embarrassment, like being caught red-handed. The whole of this complex and grandiose psychoanalytic knowledge depends, in fact, on this desultory affect of truth: some reconstructions and/or interpretations in analysis carry a surprising and fulminating persuasive force. Yet, the link between these affects of truth and any eventual remission of symptoms (which Grünbaum invokes as crucial) appears uncertain, indirect, debatable – only at times does one ascertain a direct concurrence between this affect of truth and a clinical improvement. More interesting is the appeal to the persuasive force of interpretations or analytic constructions. For the rest, in *Constructions in analysis*, Freud speaks very little of the therapeutic effect of analysis as a criterion for the truth of the constructions;

he rather paragon analysis to a “useless” activity, almost a pure game, like archaeological reconstruction (9).

To objections that this might be mere suggestion, the analyst usually notes that this effect/affect can produce itself in anyone, even in someone very skeptical towards analysis, and in no way disposed to pleasing the analyst. Furthermore, a transference often takes place – and thus all the possible consequent uses and abuses – and often precisely owing to the fact that an analyst succeeded in producing in the subject some “affects of truth”. A subject has the sensation that suddenly a veil parts before him – as when Foster encounters her extraterrestrial father – and it is only thanks to this strong evidence that he is disposed to give any credit to the analyst even on much more disputable reconstructions. Certainly, the analyst is a seducer, but he seduces using the charm of truth as bait.

The Cartesian solution: the need for certainty

The private sensation of having touched on a truth (which *prima facie* presents itself as a subjective truth, although not necessarily so, as we shall see) cannot be taken by scientific discourse in any way as a piece of evidence upon which to build falsifiable theories, precisely because it deals with private evidence. Yet some (usually Lacanians (10)) recall the Cartesian cogito as subject of certainty, to which the psychoanalyst would appeal. With his cogito ergo sum, Descartes finally found an incontrovertible point in which thought and being are mutually implied: my thought may be devoid of any real reference, except when I say “I am thinking of thinking”, at which point, ipso facto, I acknowledge myself with certainty as a thinking being (French psychoanalysts are inclined to assume a variant of this: *Je désire donc je suis* – the very fact of desiring certifies that I am a desiring being; even if I desire to not desire, like the Stoics, I still desire; the human being would be a coincidence of being and desire). Now, on the basis of this coincidence between thought and being, Descartes thought of constructing, piece by piece, the entire building of theological, psychological and physical knowledge: the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the physics of vortices, etc. Every successive idealism looks to Descartes: it is convinced that the initial coincidence between being and thought in the cogito thus authorizes a speculative reconstruction that always implies this coincidence – the history of our thinking coincides ipso facto with the unfolding of the history of events. Luckily enough, our last century saw less and less belief in this. Science today constructs itself without Cartesian suppositions: it starts not from what is certain, but only by degrees of the probability of something publicly controvertible (to state a fact has nothing to do with certainty: it is only a public game, a kind of village fair). Modern science is not Cartesian, it is rather Pascalian, based on probability calculus. The only certainties are perhaps mathematical ones, which however tell nothing of the contingent world in which we live (11). The PLA is an exquisitely anti-Cartesian argument: the certainty which stems from the perception of ourselves as thinking and/or desiring subjects does not constitute any objective knowledge, not even on the aforementioned subjects.

Yet analysts who appeal to Descartes are familiar with paranoiacs, that is, with subjects absolutely certain of their interpretations. The paranoiac is so convinced that his persecutor is defaming him, for example, in the press, that he is incredulous that we do not perceive this evidence (from whence stems his suspicion that we, in turn, are accomplices of his persecutor). Certainty spreads a paranoid odor – only the paranoiac is really certain, we “normal ones” are always uncertain. On the contrary, when we appear too certain of our reason (in other words, as fanatical or dogmatic), a suspicion of paranoia always emerges. Freud often compared the psychoanalytic construction to a delirious one – a sensation which probably derived from his being too certain.

Even without ever having been a believer myself, I have known and esteemed some believers. At a certain point, they confide in you their commiseration before non-believers, whom they view as unhappy, but also completely blind. “Is it possible that you non-believers cannot perceive the divine around and within you?” It is almost like speaking of resistance in the psychoanalytic sense to explain the stupefying blindness of the enlightened rationalists. I often point out to my mystic friends that non-believers hold an analogous view in

their regard: smiling amongst themselves at those who believe in the transcendental, as though they were hallucinating. This sense of mirrored superiority resembles an ethnic conflict: the inferior one is always the other. The debate between pro- and anti-Freudians today recalls somewhat those ethnic and religious conflicts.

Thus, this appeal to the sentiment of certainty does not in any way resolve this uncommunicativeness: the fact that everyone appeals to his own inner sense of certainty does not in fact constitute any consensus. Thus the Cartesian certainty is an empty, in fact tautological, knowledge – je pense, donc je suis pensant. Wittgenstein thought that the only certainties were tautological – “a = a” is something certain – thus, that they said nothing about being (12). But it is nonetheless true that psychoanalytic practice and theory can only appeal to a sense of certainty which has touched on a deeper truth of the heart. The point is not to conclude that “those who have faith in God or in psychoanalytic interpretations are deluding themselves”, but rather to ask “how can those who have faith in God or in psychoanalytic interpretations manage to convince those who don’t believe? And is it enough to witness it?” Science tends to create a universal consensus precisely because it does not appeal to inner certainties – and for this reason it appears to many as, ultimately, superficial and irrelevant. “What difference does it make to me if light is composed of waves or photons, with respect to the evidence of my sorrow?” Even for Wittgenstein, in his *Tractatus*, the scientific discourse – the only one meaningful for him – was of little significance; what counted for him was the difference between the world of the happy and that of the unhappy (13).

Analysis can thus be compared less to scientific knowledge than to a knowledge which is intuitive, almost perceptive (hence Freud’s recourse – which today appears naive – to scenes, to visual traumas like *Urszene*). When, by chance, we perceive ourselves in a photograph or film, we suddenly “see ourselves” – given that the mirrors in which we actually recognize ourselves, to paraphrase Cioran, reflect too much before reflecting us. Sometimes we see ourselves (with horror) as others see us – but this is neither science nor paranoia. At other times, we suddenly “see” a mathematical theorem or a very complex logical inference which had heretofore escaped us: the intellectual grasp (*Begriff* as “seizing”) of an argumentation is an inner evidence, not a simple automatic derivation. To others my grasp might appear to be inaccessible (how many persons are able to perceive Gödel’s theorem?). Another example: often, when we are convinced to have written something exceptional, our showing it to trusted readers reveals it to be otherwise. Sometimes it happens that the other succeeds in showing us – thanks to a streak of argumentative grace – that we have really written badly (be it a question of content, style or both). And in re-reading ourselves... we see. We say to ourselves, “but how could I have thought, up to now, that I was writing something worthwhile?”

In short, those moments when we have the sensation that a cataract has suddenly disappeared from our intellectual eyes, and that finally we can see correctly, are crucial. But what is the “correct way”? It lies in our seeing ourselves not so much as “objects” of science, but as other than what we had thought of ourselves. We see ourselves as an other sees things in us which escape us, because he is situated in the right place. Psychoanalysis puts practically all its credibility on this experience, which is neither certainty (because it does not give a ground to anything) nor scientifically provable: an experience which Wittgenstein would call seeing in a perspicuous way (14). Psychoanalysis sometimes offers a happier point of view on things which were previously viewed in a different and unhappy perspective. Psychoanalysis’ strength lies in this difficult-to-define “perspicuous representation” (*übersichtliche Darstellung*).

The historicist solution: indifference towards the event

Others deny that metapsychology – meaning the construction of explicative theories, the statement of universal laws, like in physics – counts in psychoanalysis, it being rather an historical science. The psychoanalytic explanatory theory would be at most a fiction, simply to avoid losing oneself in the practice.

They strongly point to the Freudian essay *Constructions in analysis*, where analysis is compared above all to an historic, archaeological reconstruction. In effect, the idea has become diffused amongst epistemologists that two types of distinct, objective knowledge exist: on the one hand, a knowledge aimed at the formulation of natural laws, and on the other, a knowledge aimed at a truthful narration of events (15) Another historic equivalent (often used by filmmakers in depicting psychoanalysts) is the criminal investigation: it is necessary to reconstruct a crime in order to tell the most likely possible story.

Yet the analogy between psychoanalysis and historical sciences is partial, and the source of continuous

misunderstandings. Take Freud's historic hypothesis according to which the Wolf Man's neurosis derives from having witnessed, at an early age, his parents' coitus, with his mother being taken from behind – an hypothesis which today even the most ironclad Freudian no longer believes. How would a real historian behave faced with an hypothesis of this sort? He would seek documentation which would either increase, or diminish, its likelihood (16): he would interview the survivors of that period, he would study the layout of the house to see if an "incident" of the sort were possible, etc. The Wolf Man's inner certainty of having witnessed an act of coitus (17) is not in fact enough for the true historian. On the contrary, for the analyst it is at most irrelevant whether the scene really took place or was only imagined. If he then looks to the Lacanian thesis of *après coup*, even the fact of whether this fantasy was really germinated in infancy or projected retroactively by the fantasizing adult, truly does become irrelevant. The romantic theory of *après coup* thus offers to the analyst a sovereign (despotic?) interpretive liberty. "There are no facts, only my interpretations."

This Olympian indifference of analysts towards historic truth understood as factual truth – which shocks every true historian – dramatically reproduced itself in the case of the debate which followed Jeffrey Masson's book. Analysts reacted to Masson's thesis exhibiting a sovereign indifference with regard to objective truth: "after all, what do we care about anything which dealt with real seductions! The problem raised by Masson is irrelevant for us." More hermeneutic analysts state that analysis is a reconstruction not of real events, but of subjective interpretations – psychoanalysis would thus in short attempt an historiography of the interpreting subject, it would not construct objective biographies. These are "Crocian" analysts: for them, as for the idealist Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce, history comes down to historiography. The analyst would in short be an absolutely *sui generis* historian: he would not reconstruct events in time by interpreting them, but rather construct subjective interpretations through the evocation of events which he supposes to be imaginary.

And yet, the question of psychoanalysis' plausibility – more than scientificity – should not be put in dichotomic terms of all-or-nothing, that is, "scientific" versus "non-scientific", or "proven" versus "unproven". The important question is rather that put to historic reconstructions: to what degree is this reconstruction likely or not? The point is that the level of likelihood of historical reconstructions depends on individual standards of rigor. It is difficult to establish at what point an historic reconstruction becomes convincing for somebody.

Psychoanalysis reminds me of Inspector Quinlan, Orson Welles' hero in the film "Touch of Evil" (interpreted by Welles himself), who, in the course of the film, appears very evil because he systematically falsifies the evidence against the accused, so that they appear guilty. And when he is unmasked by the good guy, he admits, "it's true, I manipulate evidence – but only because I AM CONVINCED of the accused's guilt". Only in the end do we realize that he was right: the accused, even though caught through planted evidence, confesses his guilt. Yet Quinlan remains something evil. This appears to be the destiny of psychoanalysis today: the analyst's instinct tells him that things are precisely as he sees them, and yet rarely is he able to come up with the proof. The analyst may in the end have understood better than the others but, like Quinlan, he risks dying in the meantime.

An historical reconstruction – like a criminal investigation – never reaches a certainty, and science neither does. Except that in science, trust is placed for a while in the dominant paradigm (Kuhn’s normal science) because it seems the most likely one to the scientific community. Instead, in criminology there are no paradigms which hold: every case is distinct, for which there is always the doubt of having convicted an innocent person. A criminal investigation seeks only to make all the evidence converge towards the most likely possible construction. But detective literature and crime history are full of cases where a mass of evidence converged against a defendant who was subsequently convicted, with the prosecutor’s castle destroyed later by the emergence of some small detail, or the confession of the true perpetrator of the crime. The “castle” metaphor is very perspicuous: a reconstruction (even Freudian) is like a castle... in the sky.

This is why psychoanalysts have not yet produced any decisive proof of the truth of Freudian theories; and yet... psychoanalysis has its own undoubtful likelihood. There is no certainty, yet a good analyst, if he also knows how to write well, can succeed in increasing the level of likelihood of analytic constructions. One might say: but the sensation of likeliness is very subjective. When I was young and a convinced Marxist, I found all, even intelligent, arguments of bourgeois liberals completely shallow and not very truthful, because for me the Marxist paradigm was the only true one. When later, and after long reflection, I switched to liberalism, my feelings reversed: when the Marxists spoke, I felt their reconstructions to be shallow and not very likely. Thus, one is dealing with subjective tropisms. Is it possible to de-subjectivize likelihood?

It is not. It is, however, possible to increase the likelihood of a reconstruction so as to render it ever more plausible even for the most skeptical and demanding minds.

The Objectivist Solution: The Illusion of the Reversal

The most well-known objectivist refutations of psychoanalysis come from Popper and Grünbaum. For Popper, psychoanalysis is not a science because it is not refutable; for Grünbaum, instead, it has the explanatory structure of a science, but this is not proven. For Popper psychoanalysis is a false science, for Grünbaum it is a false science. Some analysts accept Grünbaum’s challenge (but non Popper’s, in so far as they start from the supposition that on this point Grünbaum had definitively refuted Popper) and attempt to show that, in some way, psychoanalytic theories are fundamentally verified. Because for Grünbaum the only possible proof of psychoanalysis is its therapeutic impact – the Freudian hypotheses would be proved only by successfully showing that they are capable of curing the psychoneurotic symptoms – analysts seek to show that the therapeutic effects of analysis are due not to suggestion but to the value of truth of analytic interpretations-explanations. In other words, psychoanalysis would be an objective science like any other, but with one very odd particular: that enunciating the truth in itself constitutes an efficacious act (18). It would be the only science in the world to coincide with its own technological application.

The attempts – albeit rare – to demonstrate the objective truth of analytic hypotheses in accordance with standard scientific protocols have not been very persuasive. Generally they take for granted that the Freudian explanations are the only ones capable of inducing a long-lasting remission of the symptoms – automatically, the therapeutic effects provoked by psychotherapies founded on other theoretical suppositions are thrown together in a conceptual cauldron called suggestion. But this pretense remains a pure petition of principle: a Freudian ought not only to demonstrate that his interpretations were certainly the curing agent, but also, and moreover, that all the curative effects of other psychotherapies are due not to truthful interpretations but to suggestive factors. If psychoanalysis really followed scientific methods, then Freudians ought to experiment with Jungian analysis, Jungians with systemic-relational therapies, systemic-relational analysts with Freudian analysis, etc. A Freudian, because he does not deny that patients cured with other systems improve, usually says, “certainly, when two persons meet each other, for months or years, and one of the two listens to the other, something happens”. But this is not enough. It would be necessary to show that this “something that happens” is within the realm of something completely different from what happens in an authentic Freudian analysis. Which is certainly very difficult to prove: at most, one can take account of

one's own practice, but not at all of others'. As to published transcriptions (for the most part incomplete) of analyses carried out, there is always the suspicion that they have in some way been manipulated in some biased way. Thus, it does not seem to me that up until now any fan of psychoanalysis – when he has accepted Grünbaum's challenge – has convincingly responded to him.

There is however a much more subtle objectivist option, widespread amongst analysts, that does not confront itself with the rationalist and positivist epistemology. This trend aims rather at distinguishing itself from every hermeneutic reinterpretation of analysis. That is, it does not aim to directly demonstrate the objective truth of analytic theories, but contrasts itself with the hermeneutic interpretation of analytic interpretations.

Post-Heideggerian thought has noted that, short of turning to brute force or hypnosis, every human act (including the analytic one) can be efficient only within a web of beliefs, institutions, laws, customs – in short, by means of a web of interpretations. In other words, it is impossible not to interpret – man is an interpreting animal. Even if the analyst were not to interpret explicitly, the patient certainly would: as less naive analysts admit, patients read the mind of the analyst, and behave accordingly. In the end, there is nothing which is really objective (19).

Jacques-Alain Miller, who proposes himself as Lacan's heir, writes: “the era of interpretation is over” (20) ; that is, “interpretation will never be what it has been. The era of interpretation, in which Freud shook up the universal discourse through interpretation, is over” (21). What can be done? Miller, obviously, proposes Lacanian analysis. Because Miller interprets interpretation according to Lacan, in the sense that “interpretation is nothing other than the unconscious itself”; the Lacanian paradox would be “the unconscious desire is its interpretation”; “interpretation is above all that of the unconscious, in the sense of the subjective genitive: it is the unconscious that interprets” (22). These ideas are not limited to Miller: to go towards the end of interpretation tempts many analysts today, and not just Lacanians (23).

Miller might not admit it, but his conclusion is along the lines of the hermeneutic approach to psychoanalytic interpretation. If we assimilate the unconscious to a textual weft (as Lacan essentially does when he says that the unconscious is structured like language), it is a pillar of the hermeneutic approach to interpret every textual weft as an interpreting activity itself. If one were not to interpret, one would fall back on objectivism, for which the text is a language-object demanding a meta-language that adequately interprets it.

In short, as Miller hermeneutically notes, if to interpret means to decipher, it is also true that “to decipher is to cipher once again”. The traditional analyst – who tells the patient who has left his umbrella that “you wanted to leave me your penis” – believes he is deciphering, but in fact he ciphers precisely as does the unconscious, creating, even himself, a hermeneutic myth. People with good common sense often say that “psychoanalysts rave”, and Miller appears to agree with them: “it is the path of every interpretation: interpretation with a structure of delusion” (24). Miller evidently takes up the classic objection of philosophers to psychoanalysis, which goes: “Freud claims a true interpretation of myths and dreams, but in fact, he created new myths and new dreams”. But then, if the analyst can no longer interpret in his usual way, what could he possibly do with the unconscious interpretations of the patient? Say nothing? But this excessive silence would mean that he has nothing more to say to his subjects, and in general to our era. How can one escape the grasp – or hermeneutic circle – whereby the analyst, deciphering the unconscious, re-ciphers it, thereby creating other fantasies and other symptoms, in an unending cycle.

At this point, Miller appears to grasp on to a slippery surface when he eyes the possibility of an “interpretation” that is not delirious, and does not feed the myth by interpreting it: it would be the reverse of interpretation. Thus “if we are dealing with a deciphering, it is a deciphering that makes no sense”. It resembles a mutant, like in certain science fiction films: it contains traces of the good old interpretation in which traditional analysts believe, but on the other hand it is actually the contrary (25).

The objectivist solution: the deconstructive illusion

Another French analyst of orthodox leaning, Jean Laplanche, ends up making somewhat analogous comments to those of Miller. Of course Laplanche's vocabulary is different, but the core is the same. Even for Laplanche the hermeneutist is not the analyst, but the ego (moi) of the human being: who, in his infancy, is faced with the enigmatic messages of adults, and is forced to translate them (26). The adult messages are traumas for the child who, in order to master them, is forced to interpret them, that is, to "translate them". The human being is in short agitated by a "drive to translate", from the *Trieb zur Übersetzung* of the Romantics – the equivalent of the Lacanizing affirmation "desire is interpretation". But every translation is in the end inadequate and incomplete, for which it comes to constitute an Id, that is, the crucible of the meaningless, of what rebelled against being translated, and which threatens the cohesive bind with the moi.

So one might expect at this point that analysis aims to translate the not-translated, that unbound of which the Id consists. But this is not so: Laplanche states instead that psychoanalysis is anti-hermeneutic – the hermeneutist, he who gives meaning (even if always inadequately), is rather the individual. The analyst does not translate but "detranslates" (I would say that he deconstructs, rather than constructs, a meaning). Here, the influence of Derrida's philosophy is obvious. But then in what does the therapeutic process consist? Laplanche is forced to admit that, in analysis, there are two processes: on one hand, the detranslating and thus "unbinding" process of the analyst by means of "free association", and on the other the re-translating and "binding" process of the Ego (moi).

This work of progressive detranslation, by successive layers, is constantly matched by an inverse movement. Because, as Freud stated, the Ego itself is moved by a compulsion to synthesize, precisely because of the danger of unbinding re-actualized by analysis. The force of synthesis constitutes the reparative tendency specific to the psychotherapeutic process.

Thus, both for Miller and Laplanche, it is essential to reject the idea that analysis is a hermeneutic process in so far as it gives, or finds, a meaning to the meaningless. Very often, when I ask even noted analysts in what does the changing force of analysis consist, they respond: "analysis helps the subject to give a meaning to his suffering". But was this not always the task of religions and political and philosophical ideologies? Can analysis simply be the modernist heredity of this classic consolatory function? On the contrary, Miller and Laplanche – and French analysts in general – deny that psychoanalysis is a way to give meaning to pain, or to give meaning in general. Psychoanalysis would rather run along the rough road of science, which certainly gives no meaning to the world and our pain. For these analysts, giving meaning or translating are instead the source of the symptoms and the neurosis, the penalty to pay for "making sense" or "translating". The analyst would act in a contrary sense – Miller speaks of "the other side of interpretation", Laplanche of the "anti-hermeneutic". He subtracts meaning even though, for other reasons, the human being, hungry for meaning, always ends up spontaneously re-constituting some new equilibrium, that is, new systems of meaning – and new neuroses.

But how should the Millerian call to turn interpretation upside down, and the Laplanchean call to de-translate, be interpreted? Both reveal an Enlightenment ideal which, rejecting every human self-interpretation as either myth or delirium, aims for the objectivity of something elementary, for a primary cause which, in so far as cause, has no meaning, and is to be sought somewhere beyond all of our interpretative myths and superstitions. Certainly neither Miller nor Laplanche considers psychoanalysis an applied science, but nevertheless they remain faithful to the scientific and objectivist ideal. It is not by chance that both herald from structuralism, for which an objective reconstruction of subjects not as things (as positivism wished), but as systems of signs (or signifiers), was necessary. Thus did structuralism dream a cheap, Saussurian and definitive way out of the hermeneutic circle.

It is as though Miller said: "other analysts fall into superstition, and are no less delirious than the unconscious, while those who follow me will be capable of true interpretations, which are no longer really interpretations, because they will reconstruct what is truly active in the subject." But in this way, believing himself free from any hermeneutic temptation by reducing it to a decipherment of meanings, he falls victim to the hermeneutic (and PLA) criticism of any pretense at making objective science of the subjects: the

illusion that we can finally free ourselves from the interpretive drive, that we can emancipate ourselves from interpretations; even if by entering, like Alice, into a mirror, “reversed”, world.

Analogously, Laplanche speaks of de-translation, but every de-translation is in other ways a translation. It is not by chance that in his text he oscillates in a symptomatic way, and at a certain point speaks not of de-translation but of a “translation of a translation”, which appears more of a super-translation than a de-translation – nevertheless, it is always a translation with which we are dealing. To demystify the interpretations, I must in my turn interpret, and thus risk mystifying. This is also the Derridean ambiguity: his deconstruction of texts turns into a sort of re-construction of them, that is, ultimately, a reinterpretation of them. It is not by chance that deconstructionists are usually accused of over-interpreting texts, of not respecting their literalness. In fact, Derridism, even when psychoanalytic, often turns into an over-construction rather than a true deconstruction.

Neither Miller nor Laplanche has the courage to take the plunge into hermeneutic nihilism – which consists in stating that every interpretation always interprets another interpretation, without ever reaching any originary and elementary datum. They warn rather that, as it is the unconscious to interpret, the analyst must not imitate it. Both Miller and Laplanche believe in the existence of a human activity which is neither interpretive nor translating, but that is instead the reverse of one or the other: the analyst’s. Thus Miller resorts to structuralist meta-linguistic illusion: it is a question of “objectively” isolating signifiers. While Laplanche re-proposes the traditional utopia of the neutral and indifferent analyst, pure dispassionate and unconnected listening. But isolating meaningless signifiers is always an interpretative act, proof of which is that many dissent from doing it – and this possibility of dissent is what distinguishes interpretation from everything else which has to do with perceiving data or of understanding a logical demonstration.

But does admitting that there is no way out of the hermeneutic circle not imply the skeptical conclusion by which interpretations are arbitrary? This is apparently the accusation of the anti-hermeneutists: “one interpretation is as good as another – I will tell you how to really escape from interpretation, that is, from the unconscious.” Hence the insistence on elementary signifiers. This love for the term “elementary” is always the indicator of a reductionist attitude: the objectivist runs from the complex (the *olon*), and seeks peace or a safe haven in the elementary. Hermeneutic nihilism affirms instead that our discourse never succeeds in saying something originary; elementary propositions or signifiers (or fantasies, drives or relationships) cannot be articulated. The atomistic dream of psychoanalysis reveals its scientific Bovaryism (what Habermas (27) called scientific self-misunderstanding on the part of Freud) (28).

The hermeneutic solution: Grace versus Method

But then, if psychoanalysis is in fact a hermeneutic activity – interpretation of interpretation and not causal explanation – then should not the analyst state this with pride, and re-describe (as many have done) his work as a hermeneutic practice? Hermeneutics certainly aims to persuade, but not on the basis of objectivity’s criteria – that is, not on the basis of a public statement of factual data. For hermeneutics, psychoanalytic propositions are not *Bilder* (images) of “psychic things”, of inner objects – as today’s dominant Kleinism naively claims – but are part of a subjective *Bildung* (formation). The analyst does not in fact follow the specific methodologies of scientific likelihood (he abandons the idea of truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*), and trusts in what I would call grace: the capacity – described as *tempestivity*, being in the right place at the right time – to enunciate an exquisitely historical and temporal truth (in the case of psychoanalysis, a truth of subjective history). Truth would be “historical” in the sense of *Geschichte*, not of *Historie*. This grace is not to be confused with talent – in effect, talent is necessary for any activity, even for chemistry or mathematics – but is rather a gift deserved by a correct formation. This formation (*Bildung*) of analysts and then of analysts then becomes the essential thing: it need not initiate them to a method (in order to produce

adequate Bilder of a subject) but render them receptive to this grace.

The price to pay for enjoying this grace is the uncommunicability between psychoanalysts: every analytic school is convinced of its own grace, for which every one finds a tradition ever more different from the others. While prestigious scientific journals are open to contributions of any leaning (as long as they are in accordance with certain methodological standards accepted by all), the psychoanalytic journals are rigorously separated into schools, each with its own Bildung. The perpetual dissent, the chronic lack of consensus, constitutes at once the vitality and the limit of psychoanalysis. Analysts, unlike scientists of a given discipline, do not in fact constitute a community – the schools are the very negation of a community. Not by chance, they do not communicate in English, the only language used today by the scientific community – analysts usually communicate either in their own language, or in the language of their chosen master.

So that many analysts feel at ease only with certain post-Heideggerian and hermeneutic philosophies, whose banners read “facts don’t exist, only interpretations do” in the wake of Nietzsche (29) – everything is subjective history, nothing is verifiable, the constructive grace of the analyst is not bound by the reference to some real. As Lacan once said, psychoanalysis is a savoir inventé. Thus psychoanalysis has little to do with what 99% of historians do (not to speak of detectives), seeking documentation that can however render more likely their reconstructions.

In my opinion, the resignation of analysis to an hermeneutic game – i.e. to elaborate interpretations that only History will be able to judge – is a sign of its crisis. If analysis is the fruit of hermeneutic grace, what then distinguishes it from any other form of ideological, philosophical, religious, artistic or moral interpretation? Not that these interpretations are contemptible, but many – myself included – had hoped that psychoanalysis might glean a different real than that perceived by art, political ethics or even eventually by religion. If the analyst recognizes himself only as a hermeneutist, this does not make him a charlatan, but he certainly does lose that neutrality which constituted the ethical attraction of the Freudian game: it does mean then that he becomes a charismatic leader who tends to convert his analysand to his reconstruction. Those who discredit psychoanalysis think in fact that it deals only with interpretations, and never really with something real – that the analyst is not a witness to some thing (das Ding) that the subject discovers, but a manipulator of the subject’s beliefs. An hermeneutic psychoanalysis in fact refuses to confront itself with the real.

We would not still be talking about psychoanalysis, even among hermeneutists, if Freud had not convinced many of the fact that the analytic practice, albeit by means of interpretations, puts us in contact with a real – with mental events or experiences that have a causal force. It would not be so if the analytic interpretation were the same type of interpretation that Heidegger made of Aristotle’s or Duns Scot’s texts, or that Jan Kott made of Shakespeare as “our contemporary”. We may be convinced that Heidegger’s or Kott’s interpretations are clever, but this does not mean that we think that they uncover a causal power in their texts. To reduce an analyst’s reconstruction of a symptom, for example, to the convincing interpretation that a philosopher or critic makes of a text cuts away the causal realism.

A limping hysteric comes to us, and after a bit of conversation we tell her (or she tells herself), “you are convinced that you made a false move”. Let’s assume that following this “revelation” the hysteric stops limping, and let’s ask ourselves if it was simply a question of an hermeneutic interpretation of the symptom as metaphor. Only up to a certain point. Even if the hysteric “were to decide” to continue to limp, the interpretation’s ace up the sleeve consists of the fact that the subject sees with perspicuity the causal force of a conviction of this sort. The (for Freud unconscious) metaphors exercise a real force, or in any case are the trace of real forces – something the ordinary hermeneutist puts aside. Besides, analysands amongst themselves use anything but an hermeneutic language. For example, the wife of a man in analysis tells me, “one month ago my husband’s analyst finally gave him a blow to the face... and he hasn’t yet recovered”. She was referring to interpretations which had really shook him up. The hybrid (from hybrid) metaphor of violence more adequately describes analysis than the respectable academic metaphors of hermeneutists like Gadamer, Ricoeur or Vattimo.

The fact remains that analysts, after one century, have not been able to convince anyone who has not undergone analysis (nor those many who have but who did not get much out of it) that this act of force in which analysis consists – betting on the fact that certain interpretations have a causal power on real life – bases itself on some truths in the realist sense, and does not come down to simply a socio-existential move, pedagogical persuasion or spiritual *Bildung*. Here lies the crisis of psychoanalysis: it succeeds in convincing ever fewer cultured élites that they have touched on a real, just as Jodie Foster does not succeed in convincing her colleagues that she experienced a truth, and not an illusion.

However, even though the persuasiveness of interpretations or analytic reconstructions has diminished over the last decades, it has not altogether disappeared. There exist individual differences between cultured and rational persons as to the standards of persuasiveness. The evidence presented to date by analysts – and thus the impact of the “affects of truth”, the likelihood of the reconstructions invoked – is sufficient enough to convince some rational persons (for example, philosophers like Davidson or Rorty), yet insufficient for others perhaps more demanding or less malleable. Analysts today should finally have the humility not to speak or write just to believers or accomplices, but to seek to increase the likelihood of that which they elaborate in their ministerium; in short, they should try to be more convincing.

The analytic conversion

But then, if the four proposed solutions – objectivist, historical, Cartesian and hermeneutic – are insufficient, what then does psychoanalysis really do? And above all, does it still have any persuasiveness? I believe so, as long as it decides to reclaim its tropism towards the real.

The crucial question is: does there exist a possibility of contact with the real that does not a priori exclude scientific proof, but affirms itself independently from it? The point is not to say dogmatically, “psychoanalysis will never be the object of scientific proof”; today, one makes a science out of anything, even our states of consciousness, so why should one not try to make a science even of psychoanalysis? The point is rather if psychoanalysis, independently from scientific protocols, can convince (analysts above all) that in some way it makes us touch something real.

This question becomes fundamental once a hermeneutic conception of the Truth is abandoned. An hermeneutic approach in fact flows into an historicist nihilism: every conception which affirms itself historically is true.

Psychoanalysis is valid to the degree that it has historic success, period. Once it no longer convinces an era, it ceases to be true. Hermeneutic truth turns into an Hegelian-justified, historicist conformism. Personally, I seek to overcome the hermeneutic opportunism not by returning to the objectivism of scientific methodologies, but by seeking a realism beyond objectivity. Is it possible to have some touch with a real which science (for now) has not captured. To me, it appears that psychoanalysis’ destiny hangs on this question.

Take the book by the philologist Sebastiano Timpanaro (30) which aims to dismantle the Freudian theory of slips of tongue. As Wittgenstein did before him (31), Timpanaro just as convincingly shows that when Freud runs up against the young Jew who forgets the term *aliquis* in his quotation of Virgil (32), his interpretation of this amnesia in fact does not explain the cause of the slip. In other words, Freud carries out a pure hermeneutic operation: he gives meaning (or attributes signifiers, if you prefer) to this forgetfulness – connecting it to the subject’s present worries – but he does not at all demonstrate that this meaning is also its cause, that the meaning had also a causal force. The question here is what one could call “the ontological proof” of the unconscious’ existence by Freud. With Freud one is not dealing, like in Saint Anselm of Canterbury, with demonstrating the existence of God starting from a perfect thought of perfection, but with demonstrating that the meaning of a text coincides with its cause. Like Anselm, even Freud incurs a

“Kantian”-style criticism – which Wittgenstein and Timpanaro did not hesitate to articulate.

In effect, it is not at all certain that unfolding a meaning convincingly (the coherence of the construction) captures the real cause, that is, something of the real. But the Freudian construction nevertheless conserves a likelihood. The uncertainty of any historic reconstruction, always provisory and contestable, cannot be eliminated. Between the 0 of the impossible and the 1 of certainty, analytic constructions have a fractional likelihood, whose degree depends on an individual’s level of tolerance in the face of uncertainty. The analyst is above all a daredevil (can there be a timid analyst?): he forces himself to consider his constructions true, because he is aware that this is the only way to force the inertia of the neurotic construction.

But let us reflect on another point. Freud nonetheless succeeds in making his young interlocutor reveal something: that he fears that his Italian girlfriend is pregnant by him. We are not at all sure that this thought is the cause of his amnesia, but Freud nevertheless, through the subject’s “free dis-associations”, showed something real: that is, that the subject is tormented by a discordance. On the one hand, with his public and politically correct face, he invokes like Dido some descendants to vindicate him – on the other hand he then admits in fact to fearing having descendants. Here, a crucial point of all Freudian theory reappears: that every neurosis (just like every dream and every parapraxis) is connected – even if we can no longer say with sureness that it is its etiology – to a subjective discordance, to something ego-dystonic. This conflicting gap was interpreted by the psychoanalytic tradition, after Freud, in ever more subjectivist terms: it is essentially an intra-psychic conflict, in short, seeing how the subject is conditioned, dominated, by old childhood interpretations which must be dismantled (as Miller and Laplanche, and somewhat all analysts, repeat). The young Jew’s slip of tongue is due to his being the theater of an exquisitely subjective conflict between contradictory desires. But this way of seeing things completely removes something which is situated in the real, and precisely for this appears so revealing: that our young man’s lover is really pregnant. It is after all with this irruption of the real – in so far as unexpected – with which the subject must deal by interpreting it. Such as, in his sleep, a subject must deal with real drives which tend to awaken him – whence the dream’s compromise.

In effect, Freud quite justly stated that every Ego has to do with two “other” non-psychological needs: the pressures of the external world and the pressures of corporeal drives, the Id. Freud often oscillates when he uses the term Ich: one often asks if he is speaking of the *das Ich* of the second topology, or of the Ich that English-speaking analysts call Self, that is of subjectivity. He oscillates because not just for psychoanalysis, but for every human being, it is problematic to distinguish what is authentically a part of me and what is not, what is “really myself” and what is “other than me”. (Here, psychoanalytic theory does no less than any of us – it reformulates, without resolving, the perplexity of every subject.) But in the end neurosis shows precisely the efficiency of an other need on us, of something deriving either from the biological source of our desires or from the world of things surrounding and pressing in on us (33). Instead, analytic theory has for some time now taken an intimistic and anti-biological line: it has devalued ever more the traumatic dimension, and concentrated on a pure description of (usually fantastic) subjective processes. The conflict and discordance within the subject were seen only as the subjects’ doing: an ever more extensive and narcissistic search for truths of his heart, but not of the other’s impact on him.

In the film *Contact*, a mind radically other and very distant in space takes the form of what for the astronomer seems ever nearer and intimate: the beloved father. Here, the phantom’s child-like intimacy is the mask of an unimaginable otherness. Instead, the theory and practice of psychoanalysis has ended up taking literally the mask of intimacy; both lack the terrible, extraneous otherness hidden nostalgically in long-ago memories.

It is true that every neurosis goes back to an interpretative system – that can go back to infancy – which needs to be deconstructed by re-constructing it, or dis-interpreted by interpreting it. But one must also ask: why does this interpretative system to which the suffering subject is fixed in fact no longer work? There are some infantilisms which do not lead to neurotic discordance because the subject finds some comfort in them. Freud also speaks of “defense mechanisms”, the psychological equivalent of the immune system. Here a

crucial difference between a classic medical treatment and an analytic cure emerges. Medicine cures by aiming to *restitutio ad integrum*, restoring the whole, that is, by directly or indirectly reinforcing the immune system and its defenses – the virus or lesion produced from without are eliminated. Instead, Freud from the start opted for a different ethic: it is not a question of reinforcing the Ego – that is its defenses, repression – in order to more efficiently expel the otherness, but on the contrary, of opening the Ego to the other, of integrating the other to oneself, of permitting the Ego to dis-integrate from what it was. The analyst pushes the Ego to become permeable to otherness (biological drive, trauma, demands and interpretations from without) – something which is possible thanks to a subjective re-conversion, to a restructuring of one's own interpretative habitat. Thanks to this welcoming of what for the Ego is real, the subject can escape from repetition to finally have a history. The analyst usually does not directly suggest this re-conversion, but renders it possible by situating the subject before its "inevitability". But how?

Let us take one of Freud's cases, that of Dora. What really constitutes Dora's illness? Certainly not her "petite hystérie" symptoms which were not enough to alarm her family. Dora's true symptom consists rather in upsetting her father's strategies – she is more her father's symptom than the bearer of her own symptoms. But in playing her father's symptom, she remains tied and impassioned by the family rondo which includes the Ks, and into which even Freud enters. In her deconstructive fever, she never manages to break out of the game of family swapping. Freud is convinced that Dora sexually loves the other protagonists of the roundabout – her father, Mrs. K., Mr. K, and then even Freud – but Dora loves most of all that erotic-domestic situation. Freud – who enters into the roundabout – does not succeed in pulling Dora out of this *oikos*, he fails to make her become a woman. And yet it is a recurring theme even in her dreams: Dora runs away from home... even from Freud's. Even today, she escapes us. The hysteric is a female who remains a child, who stays too long at home even while playing at innumerable escapes. The hysteric is not yet capable of centering her own life, with or without a man, on different patterns from those of incestuous family games. In this way, the key to Dora's subjective discordance or conflict is something which transcends pure subjectivity, an ethical tension in the widest sense: on the one hand the biological and social necessity of acceding to a femininity which is acceptable to herself (to finally give herself to someone really extraneous), and on the other, the fact that she remain stuck in a domestic economy of swaps and complicity with the same.

Take the example of the limping hysteric, like Elizabeth von R. A good part of analytic theory remained hypnotized by the metaphoric character of the symptom – hence the avalanche of linguistic, symbolist and hermeneutic re-interpretations of standard theory. But in so doing the cause of the drama expressed in the symptomatic metaphor is lost: that the limping signals the subject's difficulty in proceeding into the world where laws prevail, such as those prohibiting incest and which instruct children "to abandon your father and mother". The interpretation of the metaphors – the linguistic aspect – is only one, perhaps not even essential, part of what the analyst ethically does: in this specific case of the hysterics, for example, to permit them, albeit limping, to throw themselves into the real. Every analysis succeeds when this *Geworfenheit* succeeds, this pro-jection outside of oneself and of the *oikos*. The deconstruction of subjective interpretations produces effects when the subject finally confronts herself with that real that her neurotic interpretations sought to tame or to dodge. The real, for Dora, is running away from home, of which, at night, she limits herself to dreaming.

Contrary to the doctor who strengthens the organism, returning it to its original equilibrium, the analyst is the guide to unbalance and to re-conversion towards the future (in the sense that we say that a rural area is being converted into an industrial zone): "you mustn't resist the real, but instead, accept it and make it yours". We could say that the precept of every true analyst is what Kafka set for himself: "In the implacable conflict between you and the world, side for the world".

From whence stems the persuasiveness of that affect of truth from which psychoanalysis draws, basically and despite all uncertainties, its whole credibility. This affect is certainly the result of the analyst's likely historical-hermeneutic re-constructions which reveal the subject's interpretative defense: but on the horizon, this affect of truth points out to the subject – finally perceiving herself as something other than what she

believed herself to be – the possibility of interpreting herself otherwise, and opening herself to that otherness which dislodges her. Instead of the disgrace of an interminable conflict with the world, the subject can earn the grace to actively work with others.

Translated from the French by Claudia Vaughn

Notes:

- (1) This text was sent to the States General of Psychoanalysis – as a contribution under “The relation of psychoanalysis with the law, neuroscience, biology and genetics–which will take place in the Amphitheater of the Sorbonne in Paris from 8-11 July 2000.
- (2) See Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).
- (3) And even Wilhelm Reich – Deleuze’s thought is a form of philosophical Reichism.
- (4) Even the English philosopher Richard Wollheim, who had strong ties to the London Kleinian circle, devoted works to Freud but not to Klein or Bion.
- (5) Diego Napolitani recommends a good book on Bion by Furio Di Paola, *Il tempo della mente. Saggio sul pensiero di Wilfred Bion* (Ripatransone (AP): Sestante, 1995). But a swallow does not signify spring.
- (6) Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), pp. 156-7, 255-258; Popper, “Replies to my critics”, in P.a. Schilpp ed., *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*, book 2 (LaSalle (Ill.): Open Court, 1974), pp. 984 sgg.; Adolf Grünbaum, *Psicoanalisi. Obiezioni e risposte* (Rome: Armando, 1988). Allow me to mention my own comments on Grünbaum’s and Bouveresse’s theses : “Recensione a A. Grünbaum, *I fondamenti della psicoanalisi*, and other volumes”, *Rivista Italiana di Gruppoanalisi*, Vol. III, n. 2, July 1988, pp. 73-88; “Review of J. Bouveresse, *Philosophie, Mythologie et Pseudo-Science. Wittgenstein Lecteur de Freud*”, *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, no. 1, Spring-Summer 1995, pp. (17)2-180.
- (7) Sergio Benvenuto and Cornelius Castoriadis, “A conversation”, *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, 6, Winter 1998, p. 106.
- (8) On analysis as a rite, see Bice Benvenuto, *Concerning the Rites of Psychoanalysis. Or, The Villa of the Mysteries* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).
- (9) Freud speaks in this respect of the negative therapeutic reaction, and in fact, he considers not the clinical improvement of the patient, but rather his worsening, as a confirmation of the truth of a construction.
- (10) See for example Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (London-New York: Verso, 1999).
- (11) This does not take away from the fact that the sciences, in their effort to make the contingent world predictable, make ever more use of mathematical instruments : but they can make use of them precisely because one is dealing with a mere instrument, and not a predetermined image of the world.
- (12) O.W. Quine’s famous essay, *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* (in Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961]), gave a new dimension to this claim: logico-mathematical certainties belong to a cognitive system and thus one is not dealing with mere tautologies. There are not, on the one hand, propositions which are cognitive and synthetic, and on the other, analytic and purely tautological. This heads however in an even more anti-Cartesian direction: not even logico-mathematical propositions are certain, even they are connected to knowledge as a whole.
- (13) *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, 6.43, 6.52.
- (14) Cfr. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (par. 122) and *Bemerkungen über Frazers “The Golden Bough”, “Synthèse”*, 1967, Dordrecht. The perspicuous representation “designs our representative form, the way in which we see things”; the specific intelligibility furnished us by a representation of this type stems from the fact that it makes us clearly discern the connections, intermediate rings and transitions, the similarities and differences between separate elements.
- (15) It is a humanistic prejudice to think that historic narration regards solely human events. In fact,

paleontology, for example, is an historic science of biological life.

(16) Verification or falsification, in history as in the natural sciences, are impossible: one can only increase or diminish the truthfulness or the “falsefulness” of hypotheses and narrations. Detective stories are full of examples which show how a very likely reconstruction of a crime in the end collapses because by chance a small detail emerges which puts everything into question. Certain truth is never reached.

(17) In this case, however, the only certainty was Freud’s: his patient never really accepted this reconstruction, and later even excluded that he could possibly have witnessed any scene of this sort.

(18) For all other sciences, the fact of enunciating some truths never coincides with a useful action: some technology must necessarily be put into action in order for the discovery of truth to have some practical effects. To speak some truths about the river does not imply ipso facto that the river deviates: it is necessary to construct a dike.

(19) Bion, in his last years, was wont to say that analysands for the most part did nothing other than produce dreams, fantasies and recollections to please their analysts [I owe this information to Bice Benvenuto]. Bion interpreted dreams and fantasies as interpretations, on the part of the patient, of that which the analyst desired that he dream or fantasize. In effect, the analyst, by simply being there, alive and (sometimes) attentive, interprets and is interpreted. It is impossible to escape the hermeneutic circle.

(20) “Il rovescio dell’interpretazione”, in *La Psicoanalisi*, 19, 1996, p. 121.

(21) *Ibid.*, p. 124.

(22) *Ibid.*, p. 122.

(23) Regarding this growing diffidence towards interpretation, cfr. Lucia Pancheri, “Interpretation and change in psychoanalysis : What is left of classical interpretation”, *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, 6, 1998, pp. 3-17; Sergio Benvenuto, “The crisis of interpretation”, *cit.*, pp. 19-46. In Italy, Giampaolo Lai and his *Accademia delle Tecniche Conversazionali* practice a form of analysis that refuses the risk of interpretations.

(24) *Ibid.*, p. 125.

(25) This reverse-interpretation would consist “in not adding an S2 but in isolating an S1 – that is, in guiding the subject to the really basic signifiers over which, in his neurosis, he

(26) See above all Jean Laplanche, “La psychanalyse comme antiherméneutique” in *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, 1995, pp. 13-24; “Aims of the psychoanalytic process”, in *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, no. 5, 1997, pp. 71-81.

(27) Jürgen Habermas, *Conoscenza e interesse* (Roma: Laterza, 1973), pp. 239-254.

(28) Every objectivist approach implies in fact the presupposition according to which every complex is reducible to a composition of ultimate elements. The atom, or element, or indivisible individual lies at the base and/or origin of every concrete historical event. Atomism is however impracticable in psychoanalysis which, in practice, never goes from the complex to the simple, but from the complex to the complex (and not just that of Oedipus).

(29) This is the inaugural slogan of a very influential philosophy in Italy, that of Gianni Vattimo, and in general of that trend known as weak thought (*pensiero debole*). This end-of-Millennium romanticism is an exaltation of the interpreting subjectivity versus the selective pretexts of objectivity.

(30) Sebastiano Timpanaro, *The Freudian Slip. Psychoanalysis and Textual Criticism* (London: NLB, 1976).

(31) Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Conversations on Freud” in C. Barret, ed., *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of Calif. Press), p. 41-52.

(32) GW, IV, pp. 12-19; SE, .

(33) With respect to biological impulses, a good part of French psychoanalysis places its cards on the clear distinction between *besoins* (biological) and *désirs* (mental, cultural, symbolic). Psychoanalysis was thus too much separated from the body. In my opinion, this is a characteristic error of the French humanistic and spiritualistic mentality. Psychoanalysis made a big impression this past century precisely because on the contrary it allowed us to touch with our hands the force of biological drives, and the fact that the subject must impossibly strive to control and contain them, by interpreting them.