

Retrieved from:

The European Journal of Psychoanalysis

Apr 18, 2024

<https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/psychoanalysis-and-clinical-practice/>

Diego Napolitani

Psychoanalysis and Clinical Practice

The Call for an Estates General of Psychoanalysis, launched by René Major in June 1997, was heard and taken up by a great number of psychoanalysts throughout the world. In this Conference, the “psychoanalytic question” was subdivided into six themes, like the six sides of a hexahedron. Each of us, with our contributions, starts from one of the six bases (*ēdra* in Greek signifies precisely a base). The historic convocation of the Estates General here, on French soil, has as its premise an epochal transformation of the socio-political structure of the State. What we expect from such an evocatively titled Congress is that the great questions which characterize each of the six bases can, by their various intertwining, revitalize the whole body of psychoanalysis, which many of us feel has closed in on itself in a posture of fatal senescence. At traditional conventions, those considering themselves the *pillars* of psychoanalysis are usually confirmed in the name of a Master and his school, according to the conviction (and convention) that the stamp of a *pensée maitrisante* [mastering thought] is sufficient to guarantee scientific validity to psychoanalytical theory and mask often substantial epistemological weaknesses. It is true that psychoanalytic institutions are for the most part like garrisons of resistance against change, as Major affirms in his Call, but it is also true that institutions are constructed by man, by his personal need to find in them that stability of knowledge, that genealogical hierarchy which can confer an identity, as rigid as an armor, which sustains him in his haphazard confrontation with his phantoms.

The notion of the “unconscious” is the cornerstone around which the drawn-out theory of Freudian thinking and all its followers turned, it is the borderline that defines the psychoanalytic field from all other human knowledge. It is that “beyond” consciousness that, to use Derrida’s expression, is the “*pas*” (“step” and “non”) completed by psychoanalysis towards its own name, its definition. It is, as suggested by French language, both a step, a passage, and its “non”, its own negation, that time and space “nothing” rationally “objectifiable” which represents the abyss, the bottomless, from which the mind emerges in its full manifestation. The thought which moves towards this abyss, overcome by an unbearable dizziness, has sought, since Socrates’ time, to make the abyss livable, to explore its external surroundings, to uncover there its specific economy (*oïkos*-dwelling / *noméa*-law) so as to establish the origin and the sequential order of phenomena. A “desistential” psychoanalysis, according to Major, if I have understood correctly, should consist of a process of knowledge which *desists* any pretension to domesticate the unconscious: this consists in a deferment of origins in the present, which is thus never a pure present, but a past *transferred* according to the Nietzschean paradigm of the Eternal Return of the Identical. This “identical” contains already everything within itself: life-death, pleasure-pain, and all other paired terms that rational reason, and logocentric passion, wished to see opposed in a conflictual, onto-logical metaphysics.

In this perspective, it is simply a question of knowing how to decipher the hieroglyphics which the mind exposes, especially in dreams, like traces of an origin which inhabits our present. And not enough. Our archive, as much private as foreign (the *Unheimlichkeit*), apart from testifying our most distant impressions and the history of our multiple identifications, has also an archival function for those elements which cross our present lives, without being even recorded by conscious thought. Major presents a masterly example of this process when he comments on Poe’s story, “The purloined letter”, Lacan’s seminar dealing with this

issue, and on the intertwining between that story and some events in the ambit of the psychoanalytic institution.

But let me mention a thought of mine which emerged from reading this story, just as thoughts emerge from listening to a dream: here, some details—which are seemingly at the edge of the narration’s signifying structure, and risk disappearing in the marginality of the obvious—can become the key to a fresh and different understanding from that offered by any attempted translation—or explanation—of the enigmatic traces of the past and its “eternal return”.

The prefect of police turns to Dupin in the hope that he might help him track down the letter purloined from Minister D, about whom the prefect states: “He’s not at all crazy; nonetheless he is a poet which, in my opinion, is not so different than being crazy”. At first, this parenthetical comment on the relation between something poetical and madness seems completely irrelevant in the context of the prefect’s discourse on his minute and vain search for this letter in the Minister’s home. But it takes on an enormous relevance when Dupin responds to his incredulous interlocutor regarding his technique for finding the purloined letter in the Minister’s house. He tells the tale of a child (an innocent *puer*) who always managed to guess the number of marbles, whether even or uneven, held in his playmate’s closed fist. This child explained his trick, stating that he would first affect the same face as that of his playmates, and then once having identified himself completely with them, would wait for thoughts to emerge which would lead him to the truth of the strategies adopted by the other. Dupin comments: “This schoolboy’s response confounds in no small way all the sophisticated wisdom attributed to La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, Machiavelli and Campanella”.

The prefect’s entire investigative apparatus had carried out to perfection the general procedures of the police investigation, overlooking absolutely nothing in the Minister’s house, in his sophisticated “archive” (we might say here, paraphrasing the cryptic places that a “good analyst” finds herself investigating in the internal world of her patient). But, says Dupin, the prefect had been taken in by his conviction that the Minister, being a poet, was also a bit crazy, and thus could not invent a hiding place that an experienced police investigator could not find. It is true, comments Dupin, that the Minister was a poet, but he was also famous for “having written an important volume on differential and integral calculus”. But if he had reasoned only with mathematical reason, he would have hidden something in a manner perfectly in keeping with the investigative manner of the “scientific” police. And here Dupin lets himself be carried away in demonstrating the “stupidity” of mathematical conventions, starting by quoting Chamfort: “*Il y a à parier que toute idée publique, toute convention reçue, est une sottise, car elle a convenu au plus grand nombre*”. In conclusion, he will recount how he himself behaved like the child of “even or uneven”, so that by identifying himself not with the mathematician Minister, but with the poet-madman, he allowed himself to be carried along in his investigation by thoughts far from the abstract logical-scientific rigor followed by the diligent police investigation.

The child’s anecdote provides the hinge, as for a revolving door, for this excerpt (from the theft carried out by the Minister to that carried out by Dupin): for him who, with the clinical eye of the psychiatrist or psychoanalyst, observed everything intent on reproducing the facial expression of his playmate, some psychopathological diagnosis would emerge; he who succeeded in identifying himself with him, intent on identifying himself with the other, would grasp the *poiesis*. What does the poet do if not discover the truth of the world with which he identifies, beyond the compulsion to repeat ancient “archived” identifications? Passing through this revolving door, there are some who enter archiving the world with the certainty of their own rock hard archives, and others who enter with the trembling truth of a poetic thought. Besides, Freud said that “*poets are the only ones to know a quantity of things between heaven and earth that not even our philosophy suspects. Particularly as regards spiritual knowledge, they surpass by far we common mortals, because they touch on sources that have not yet been opened to science*”.

In conclusion, I would like to put forth the proposal (more articulately presented in my work, “Psychoanalysis has completed the Time of its Life”) that the Derridean concept of “*différance*”, which

Major takes up again and re-launches in his writings, can be taken not only as a deferment of the past in the present, or as a transferal deferment, but also as the intrinsic diverging, in the approximate notion of the unconscious, of two forms of the human experience. One is the unconscious which indicates that which is already completely and perfectly noted, which turns out missing, removed, hidden, and travestied (like the letter that Dupin discovers in the Minister's home "archive") and that which is not yet noted, in so far as it belongs to becoming, to the transformation possible *in* and *of* the human spirit. I believe that psychoanalytic thought that moves only between the already noted of the analyst and the already noted of the patient is destined to be archived by post-modern culture (with all the honors which were attributed to the pharaohs and their tombs). Instead the very same psychoanalysis which knows how to methodically oscillate between its mathematics and its own poetic madness envisions unthinkable possibilities for fertile alliances with other thinking, such as in the exciting perspective presented by Jaqueline Rousseau-Dujardin in her work "Alliances?"

Translated from the Italian by Joan Tambureno