

Retrieved from:
The European Journal of Psychoanalysis
Dec 5, 2023
<https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/remarks/>

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Remarks

Summary:

As someone attending the recent conference in Paris, the author poses to himself some intentionally limited questions about some partial aspects of the discussion. Even though his premise is a positive valuation of such an occasion intended for hundreds of people who wished to meet and debate contemporary psychoanalysis's most recurrent topics, he wonders if a certain relativism, typical of modernity, does not have its devastating effects on a discipline which, because of its extraordinarily rigorous ethical standing, appears little keen to agree with the times. A particular consideration is dedicated to neurosciences's position.

I was so enthusiastic about joining the Estates General, that I was the fiftieth subscriber! I had too much enthusiasm perhaps and therefore over-expectation: this is not the best condition for reflection. But how can one avoid over-expectation when a conference aims overtly at giving everybody the opportunity to present innovative ideas about psychoanalysis and its future, at the brink of the new millennium? However it is not so easy to raise new ideas. Moreover: does any stake for psychoanalysis really exist? One stake might be acquiring and keeping up the ability to get out from the traps of social conformities, including those to which all *maîtres à penser* lead relentlessly.

Joining any kind of Zeitgeist is a symptom – there is little doubt about this – but it would be a pure utopia to expect that the *air du temps* should not work in Paris!

I have chosen to alternate here particular impressions with general considerations. Firstly I wish to state that it was an interesting and by many ways successful initiative, last but not least, because of the opportunity it gave to anybody to speak. Welcome then a second act. Then we shall see.

There is little doubt that the problem of the so called “crisis” of psychoanalysis was at the origin of this project, but it seems to me that the difference between crisis of the field (of the model) and uneasiness of the psychoanalyst was not enough underlined. Maybe the over-presence of the so called psychoanalysts, intended to be those who should convey psychoanalytic knowledge through an interpersonal relationship, fostered a confusion between personal uneasiness and the general situation of the Freudian field.

Over-presence and overwriting: writing is very important for an analyst in order to feel one, too important if, at least, we take into account how easily the boundaries of caution and restraint, which are used in other fields, are ignored here. Much less writing would be quite enough to speak to one another.

As for the “crisis”, it seems to me that there are two different points of view. The first one raises the problem of a renewal of the relationship between the Freudian unconscious and reality that might be achieved by facing the present world's transformations. One can see in the background the idea of the crisis as a present reality, because of the loss of such a relationship.

I believe this was the meaning of many interventions concerning the relationship between psychoanalysis, society and politics. The Freudian unconscious has often been presented as something to be revised inasmuch as it would be no longer in accordance with our time and, some extremist fringe pushes this opinion to the point that the concept itself is old-fashioned and therefore irrelevant. This position is taken up by those who are preoccupied with a more relevant setting for psychoanalysis, who are more sensitive to criticisms about its poor reliability (which means its poor scientific nature) and who share these blames.

From the second point of view, the unconscious is still considered an heuristic concept and the reasons for the discomfort, so widely shared among psychoanalysts, are considered to derive from a certain degree of crisis in the field, which is seen as a consequence of having renounced that definite position that Freud gave psychoanalysis, in relation to all manifestations of culture. But the crisis of the field cannot be totally identified with personal discomfort.

In the presentation of the different items, the repetition, again and again, of the following phrase struck me: “The relationship of psychoanalysis with.....”. I was especially interested in the way to deal with the problems with which neurosciences, the favorite toy of modernity, confront psychoanalysis.

Politics, philosophy and even arts were dealt with in an interesting and sometimes even fascinating way, but in these fields one can perceive, more than elsewhere, the oppressive weight of the politically correct and the aesthetical enchantment risks again and again to interfere with a precise evaluation of the real nature of things. I am not sure at all that psychoanalysts can speak with a specific competence about sociopolitical issues. The problem does not lie in everybody’s opinions but in the idea that Freudian psychoanalysis (if it still does exist) is entitled to get involved, from a psychoanalytical point of view, in society and politics since it has some responsibilities here.

In Paris, an energetic refusal of the questions I just posed prevailed. I think that the changes of culture, of the psycho-affective discontents of the symptoms, bring us new problems, even though, in the perspective of rethinking their forms, everything still remains largely to be framed within the original Freudian vision.

Freud established a cultural prohibition at the origin of the cultural development, one outside memory, out of time then and out of any rational logic; this prohibition characterizes the human being as continuously escaping himself and herself. In this classic perspective, the whole cultural process – including religion, to which the Estates General denied the dignity of an autonomous item – has the same starting point as neurosis. In this way, he asserted on one hand the unity of the cultural field, and on the other also the possibility to explore its expressions, to question the blind spots of culture through a logic which supports the structure of both neurosis and symptom.

Adhering to the *Zeitgeist* is a symptom. In fact this adhesion is motivated by the purpose of fostering and/or maintaining the cohesion of any group (and also of any neurotic structure) rather than by the zest for inquiry or search: the renewal of a myth’s content is always functional for this purpose.

The symptom also holds a mythical thought, whose form always renews itself by transforming the symptom as well, almost by dragging it. But the symptomatic structure remains. For example: could the neurosciences be one of the myths of our time?

I briefly will beat about the bush in order to better explain the perspective into which my observations should be placed.

All manifestations of science today seem to express the idea of a future which is totally submitted to human beings’ organization and reorganization. They also give the impression of a planning which no longer has any need to be submitted to the conditions and limits of a natural and never modifiable finality. This type of science influences social life through “technology”. On the one hand the latter establishes itself as independent from other social activities, on the other, since it has previously neutralized the subject, it determines its own purposes in terms of an operational performance with no regard for private viewpoints. It seems that the neurosciences clearly expose this technological power which moves into an horizon hardly

commensurable with psychoanalysis, as far as psychoanalysis' axis of observation is oriented toward the inner conditions of cultural education.

Are the eurosciences then a symptom? In Paris nothing was said on this point. That would not be so bad anyway: the organization both of the symptom and of neurosis may always question the elusive points of culture, including the sciences. But what is neuroscience a symptom of? It is a symptom due to a split which cannot be dealt with if science does not deal first with the sense of an ethics as necessary, whatever that ethics could be, bringing the subject back to the center of its research. Maybe philosophers are more aware of this point than scientists and psychoanalysts; this is why the formers, even if they are not amazed at all by this lack of awareness, stress this lack, as Derrida did in his intervention at the Estates General (now published in French at Galilée).

Culture today vividly rebukes psychoanalysis even in polemical tones, reproaching it as being unscientific, obscure when not quack, ineffectual and therefore useless or maybe even harmful.

Psychoanalysts' answers sound feeble, timid and hesitating, as if they were conditioned from their early feeling of being ontologically weak. Anyway their answers sound very different from Freud's, who was listened to and had an authority even over those who were his opponents.

In Paris I could easily feel the difficulty for the psychoanalysts to detect the reactive character which so often characterizes science's positions concerning a real problem of contemporary psychoanalysis. This problem lies behind the emphasis which was put on *the relationship*, as in "the relationship of psychoanalysis with.....". Such statements testify the fact that our position is now blurred, maybe lost, and that we are trying to find it again, but too often by placing ourselves at the same level as "others" require, as if we should give a preventive sign of our good will.

So the psychoanalysts may have become not too little but too much scientific. And too little psychoanalytical. All of this begins with language, through a series of slight drifts which can substantially alter the substance of any matter. Such alterations have become common since Freud's time. So P.-L. Assoun noted that Freud contested the transformation of the Ego "dependence" on the Id, into a "weakness" of the Ego, replacing a functional word with a metaphysical one, in this way claiming a kind ontological inferiority of the Ego. This transformation would imply a shift of the whole conceptual field towards a speculative level, in this way abolishing from the beginning, before any discussion, any claim on psychoanalysis's being scientific, because of its inclusion in the field of philosophical *Weltanschauungen*.

Here it would be impossible not to speak of the unconscious. The particular scientific character of psychoanalysis cannot be separated from the "epistemic" quality of its relationship with its founding object which, rightly or wrongly, Freud called "unconscious", basing its statute on its quality of being quite "unknowable".

Because of this specific quality, it has nothing to do with the kind of unknown concerning the transformations of the matter studied by chemistry and physics. Their scientific statute is not based on their inability to know their matter, on the contrary! They believe in the possibility of determining precise laws which extend knowledge. On the contrary, the whole clinical and theoretical praxis of psychoanalysis – in its widest cultural sense, the scientific one included – gets its meaning not from the unconscious itself: it is based on the ontological quality of "the unknown" as something which is both impossible to know and also lacks the idea of the possibility of being known. Without this original condition, out of memory, time, rationality, we would produce no culture and nothing else – no science, arts, religion, maybe no neuroses, perversions and symptoms.

How can we find then a dialogue with the neurosciences, even when they speak through qualified persons, devoid of any negative purpose or prejudice (see the valuable paper of A. Cohen and F. Varela, published in this same issue)? How can we find a dialogue when, for instance, neuroscientists inform us that they might

also accept the concept of psychoanalytical unconscious because we can now prove its existence? In other words, the neurosciences have found the place of the unconscious, and maybe its name is intrinsic memory!

As a matter of fact an analyst – in the widest sense of the word, as somebody who knows theory and technique even if s/he is not interested in transmitting them to other people – perhaps only tries to understand how and why someone produces an artistic object rather than a symptom (however they clash), a child instead of a theory (but maybe there are also theoretic children), or both together and something more, or which relationships exist inside a person and why. All this is based on what we know of this person by talking with him or her, not by inserting this person into a formula or a theoretical frame.

The last sentence of the presentation of the 6th item seems to seize both our dismay in front of the ravaging power of today's science and our avoidance of the ethical problem regarding social conformity. This problem is whether we may accept a formulation which requires renouncing oneself in order to reach a possible social agreement. This is my way of understanding this sentence: "Conversely, what is the effect of the frequent exclusion of the subject of the unconscious from the field of sciences?.....", a sentence which in the English version looks very different, by the way, from the French one.

We could also ask plenty of other questions: what is the relationship of psychoanalysis with different languages? Does a non-anglophone psychoanalysis still exist? Maybe is this the final meaning of the Estates General, a proud "yes" answered to such a question?

If the relationship in itself is already given, wouldn't it be better for us to limit the discussion to the deviations from it, and why and how these occur?

I believe that the universe of social representations – which makes use of the media 's extraordinarily striking impact, mainly through visual image – finally produces an overturning of the analysis about the conditions of its link to psychological dynamics. This link emerged and was instituted in a "Manifesto" by the Freudian psychoanalysis.

The real point is not to contest the instinctual theory (surely we can contest it: I think that the psychoanalytical subject was never based on it), but rather the possibility, through a reduction of the Freudian unconscious to instincts, of abolishing, at the end, the very subject of the unconscious.

Often both outsiders and many psychoanalysts do not take into account the fact that the position of psychoanalysis is already established from the beginning – but perhaps we lost it. How can we find it again, then? Not by an anxious criticism of scientific omnipotence, nor a conceited reaction of people who consider themselves privileged interpreters, always capable outlining the right terms of our concrete performances vis-à-vis the problems produced by science today.

On the contrary, we are peremptorily requested to return to the feeling of dizziness which belongs to the vertex from which we are destined to speak, a fading place slipping away from us while we slip away from ourselves. In this way we shall continue to give life to the voice of desire against the occluding claims of reality as "Zeitgeist". We are only at the beginning of this enterprise.

So then: one, a hundred, a thousand Estates General! Psychoanalysts from all over the world, disunite yourselves–but speak to one another!