

Grey zones in the psychoanalysis of psychosis and trauma

I am very happy to speak in Norway, about the psychoanalysis of psychosis and trauma, for both request special tools, in the transference, and are related to the catastrophes of History. I will address both issues as they occurred to me in your country, delineating a grey zone between the analyst and the patients stories.

I The tools of transference, which I witnessed at Stavanger

1. The patient's intelligence

I often quote to my patients or supervisees a story which happened during the ISPS symposium in Stavanger. Among the workshops, was the presentation of a patient by his analyst. I went there, quite suspicious.

When I was in the Ecole freudienne founded by Jacques Lacan, I had attended during several years his case presentation of patients which took place at the Hospital Saint Anne in Paris, in order to learn about the psychoanalysis of psychosis. After a while, I had been very disappointed. There was no psychoanalysis of psychosis there, only examples of Lacan's structural theory, and of the "foreclosure of the name of the father" at the root of psychosis. Recently, I discovered why the absence of work on the transference was so blatant. During WWI, there was no psychotherapy of trauma in France; Lacan came from that tradition and never mentioned the wars.

At that time, Jean Max and I decided to train in a public psychiatric hospital although we were not psychologists nor psychiatrists. We came from classic literature and sociology, and were faculties in an Institute of social sciences, the EHESS in Paris. So we started to be psychoanalysts with confined patients and worked in three public hospitals and outdoors consultations during 30 years, not knowing, for some time, what had led us there in the first place.

To my surprise, the presentation in Stavanger was very different. I tell you the story as it impressed my memory, not at all as an objective report.

It was a presentation of his analyst by the patient. The man had been hearing voices, so hostile to psychotherapy, that, in my souvenir, he had not even been able to look at her and dismissed whatever she proposed. She looked to me quite young and shy. Still, he said, she was not discouraged and brought, session after session, her efforts to reach him, telling him about her readings and her thoughts, while he was observing her from the corner of his eye. Then he said that in the wall surrounding him, a little hole started to open through which he could start to watch and listen. And little by little, this tiny opening widened. Now, he was able to start his own life.

I do not know this analyst, but I recognized, through the testimony of her patient, a stubbornness which always surprised me in my own case. And also a lot of work. She read, and read, and shared with him her findings.

2. Literature

I also read and read, not only psychoanalysis, but literature. For instance, Don Quixote and Tristram Shandy -- which are the best text books for psychoanalysis of psychosis and trauma--, and also Wittgenstein, who had been completely PTSD when he returned from WWI. Freud himself said in the Gradiva that there are more findings among the writers than

in psychoanalytic institutes. Before him, Auguste Comte, the inventor of the words “sociology” and “positivism” stands for the same point of view.

Auguste Comte was born in 1798, in the aftermath of the French Revolution. When he was, 28 years old, he went through a psychotic episode, was hospitalized in Esquirol’s clinic in Paris, escaped, and recovered, “in spite of psychiatric medicine, thanks to affectionate domestic cares”. Later on, he claimed that this “cerebral episode” was at the root of his findings. He stated that madness deals with the great commotions of History and suffers from an excess of lucidity which is threatened by the “vertigo of biological materialism”. He praises don Quixote as the best book to learn about madness. Already, he criticizes the sterility of researches on the physiology of the brain, which overlooks the “positive” fact that the brain is an “apparatus of dialogue between the dead and the livings”. He calls “western illness” the rupture of the links between people and considers madness, from his experience, not as a negative pathology, but as a heuristic research to create new links when they have been severed by historical catastrophes.

Well, our research center directed by Alain Touraine, called “Center for studies of social movements”, was first located in the house of Auguste Comte in Paris, near the Luxembourg Garden. During forty years, it was part of our job to hold a seminar every week on our research, in front of an interdisciplinary audience.

We entitled it “Madness and the social link” and studied every year, a different author who had been directly in touch with madness and with the ruptures of the social link. I mentioned Don Quixote and Tristram Shandy, but also, Wittgenstein, Bion, Harry Stack Sullivan, Frieda Fromm Reichmann, William Rivers and many others who all went through the experience of war traumas and psychosis.

3. Stubbornness

We consider psychosis and trauma as a research which explores the field of un symbolized matters, while there is no other, except a ruthless, perverse kind of otherness treating people like things, preventing them to think. And ourselves as co researchers, in the sense that the word “therapist”, comes from the Greek *Therapôn*, in Homer’s Iliade, which means “the second in combat”, and “the ritual double” who takes care of funeral duties.

In that perspective, the analyst has to be tested, repeatedly to show his reliability. Hence the first quality that I recognized in the Norwegian analyst, is stubbornness. I am going to give an example.

In the first hospital where we became psychoanalysts, I used to stand, in the common room, besides a patient who never spoke. Her name was Blue Flower. She stood every day in front of a radiator, her blue eyes wide open like a child’s stare. While I stood at her side, I used to comment what was going on in the room or speak out my thoughts.

This lasted perhaps a year, until one day, in 1974, when I became pregnant of our first son, I could no more travel by car. The hospital was situated on the grounds of an old abbey in the North of France and there were no trains to go there. So I asked Jean Max to take my place besides her.

Jean Max told her that we would soon have a child. After some months she told him “I heard you say a big Yes and I knew I could talk to you.” She then started to speak and told him the following story in the present tense as if time had not passed.

She is 8 years old, during WWII and lives near a little town by a canal, -there are many canals in the North of France. Her mother’s job is to open the lock, for the barges while her father is at war. The mother disappears at times.

One day the little girl follows her. She sees her mother meeting a German soldier. Coming back home, her mother who has been aware of her daughter’s presence, tells her:

“You want to know what I do? Look”. And she raises her skirt to show her genitals. Soon after, the little girl jumps into the canal. While drowning, she describes to Jean Max how the fish and the weeds were watching her, very surprised.

Then, a sailor on a barge which was moored on a dock nearby, jumps into the water and rescues her. The barge has an amazing name that she remembers: “*Quand j’y pense*, When I think of it”. Then life goes on, until later, she marries, gets pregnant, delivers her son, and stops talking and is confined ever since. After her narrative, she was eventually able to get out of the hospital. By then, the medical director was appointed in another hospital near Paris where we followed him.

4. Coincidences

Interferences with the analyst’s story happen by chance. My pregnancy and Jean Max becoming a father created an opening in the wall erected around her.

“Were of one cannot speak, one should stay silent”, said Wittgenstein in the last sentence of the Tractatus philosophicus, written on the front of WWI. Then he became PTSD and ten years later returned to Cambridge to resume his philosophy “as a therapy”. Then he changed this sentence into: “.... thereof one cannot help showing what cannot be said.”

When Blue Flower delivered her baby, what could not be said of her mother’s prostitution and her father’s betrayal, was shown by her eyes wide open, until she heard a “yes, you are seeing something, and I can be a witness at your side, from my own experience.”

So, we had stood beside her, one after the other, not knowing what the outcome would be. Perhaps the fact I trusted Jean Max to take my place, in the circumstance of childbirth when she had stopped talking, created a link of faith thanks to which the scene stuck on her eyes could be addressed. By another coincidence, we were all children of the war.

I speak of chance for we cannot use causality when the symbolic chain is broken, as well as the realm of truth and trust. At that point time stops for time is measured by symbols. Blue Flower tells her story in the present tense as if long ago was today.

The stoppage of time forbids us speak of “because” and “therefore”, for a cause has to be in the past and its effect in the future. There is no use to tell ourselves she is mad because she discovered her mother’s prostitution. If she had spoken, she would have said: “I know and so what? “

At that point there is no other, -warrant of the symbolic chain, -and no other in the mirror, but a ruthless agency embodied by the Nazi system. So what happens? Coincidences happen. that we have to catch here and know, to tie a minimum of otherness. In her story, the presence of the sailor who saved her life, the fish and the weeds watching her, and the name of the barge which she never forgot: “When I think of it”, are embryonic shapes of otherness, too often neglected.

II. My second point is about the war and the catastrophes of History

It is also linked for me to Norway where my uncle fought in the French Alpine troops, in the battle of Narvik.

1. Surrealism, surviving images

The scene I told you is surrealistic, a word created by the French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire, while he fought on the front of WWI. BION also was a captain of tanks during the same war. For such cases, he speaks about "thoughts without a thinker, waiting for a thinker to be thought". He also says: "Things are thoughts and thoughts are things".

The barge thinks that its sailor had better jump. The fish and the weeds watched her sink. And I forgot another detail, the metallic bollard to which the barge was tied on the dock, is called "*bitte*" in French, the same word as the slang word for "cock," the male genitals. The German "*bitte*" which fucked her mother was identified with the thing until it happened to be transformed into a source of life.

Our Lacanian training would recognize a "signifier" in that word, but it is not a signifier, as nothing is inscribed in the repressed unconscious, only silence. Still, her memory is constituted by "surviving images" which she cannot forget, very precise, in the present tense, 35 years later.

This expression stemmed also from the first WW. It was created by Aby Warburg, --, a famous art historian of the Renaissance, who became mad in 1914. Ten years later, he was discharged from the clinic of Binswanger, in Switzerland, and resumed his scientific work. In spite of Freud and Binswanger's opinion that he would never be able to recover his intelligence. In fact, during his stay at the clinic he shouted that all the Jews would be exterminated.

Aby Warburg calls "surviving images: after life, *nachleben*", the sensorial images which survive chaos. They may be little things, shared with no one as there is nobody there. For Aby they were "his dear soap, his carpet, moths during the night which he called the souls of the dead"; For Blue Flower, eventually they may be shared in a game of language with another, the analyst, at the condition he is able to step out of neutrality and give some clue, to say: "touché", another French word belonging to the art of fencing. Where of this resonance proceeds?

2. The cut out unconscious

Why was I, so to speak, unwittingly convinced that she was showing me something? For her diagnosis was hopeless. Besides, we were taught, at that time, that there is no transference in psychosis, or at least, Lacan, refused explicitly to speak about it.

There is indeed no classical transference for a simple reason. In that case, anamnesis does not work since the past is not past. The repressed unconscious is not available for the symbolic chain is broken, there is no metaphor no metonymy, therefore, anamnesis and free association are useless, plus -- big scandal! --, neutrality leads nowhere, reduplicating the absence of otherness.

A new paradigm is at work, for psychoanalysis, which is not so new, since the psychotherapy of traumas is as old as the wars. It is regularly forgotten during peacetime, so that it has to be reinvented from scratch, each time. What is that new and old paradigm, in the case of psychosis and trauma?

The unconscious at work is not a repressed unconscious. Freud said so in his texts about madness and traumas, like the Gradiva, the Uncanny, and the Moses which he started to write while his books were burnt in Berlin. He says that all the repressed is unconscious but not all unconscious is repressed. I call it a cut out unconscious, dissociated if you prefer, or “entrenched”, which speaks closer to the battle field.

Transference in that case is an interference with a cut out unconscious on the side of the analyst. How to handle it?

I often use geographic maps as patients always ask the question, even silently, who are you? So I can speak to you, where do you come from?

As a matter of fact, we did not know where we came from when we started to work in that first public hospital. I told you that it was situated in the North of France. To get there, we crossed military cemeteries. There was a sea of white crosses on each side of the road, from the previous world wars and we paid no attention to them, as if it were a normal landscape in those regions.

Only when Blue Flower and other patients triggered that part of our story, I started to dream about my one of my grand fathers who had been there a stretcher bearer, the other on horse back had been gassed Only then did I realize that I had never mentioned them to my Lacanian analysis.

I was born in 1943 in a war zone in the Alps, where my father was in the Resistance. At the end of 1942, my mother had been caught, just pregnant of me, and sent to prison by the Nazis. She was nearly deported in the first trains to concentration camps. When my father managed to have her released, she was skinny and filthy with a big belly and did not speak during months. The only words she told me were: “If I had been a Jew, I would not be here”. At times, her eyes would turn into stone, but I never asked about the scenes which were stuck on them. Only after her death did I realize that this difficult mother had been traumatized.

Perhaps I joined mute patients, by some familiarity with their experience, perhaps to ask them what happened, and for sure, they taught me what was my question. I was unwittingly pushed or convinced that I could be “a witness for events without a witness”, as says Dori Laub, the creator of the Video Testimonies of the Holocaust at Yale.

3. Interferences

Another feature of this transference is the step that the analyst, usually through his blunders, makes into the death area where the patient is stuck. He has to give some clues of his bearings, in order to create a reconnaissance of this apparent non sense.

This outcome is parallel to the discovery of a new paradigm in science. Erwin Schrödinger, the inventor of the equations of Quantum Physics, summons us, psychoanalysts, to shake our neutrality. In his conferences at Cambridge called Mind and Matter, he throws down the principle of objectivity and reverses the arrow of time in the field of subatomic particles. As photons cannot be observed without a light which disturbs the field of observation, the scientist can only grasp the interference between the observer and his field of observation. Likewise, psychotherapists cannot pretend to stay neutral and interfere with the field brought by their patients.

Schrödinger had some experience of madness. His wife became crazy when they fled the Nazi regime to Ireland. He was the only not Jewish scientist to do so, although he had been appointed to the Max Planck chair in Berlin. In Ireland, her psychiatrist was a disciple of Wittgenstein, Maurice O’Drury.

4. Psychosis and trauma, a same field of research

We are again in war time, and perhaps you will think that I am obsessed by wars, like Don Quixote's delusions or the hobby horse of uncle Toby in *Tristram Shandy*. And you are right, I was born in a hospital full of dead and wounded people as I was told recently. Time does not pass.

On that issue, I will quote one of my patients. He was quasi catatonic when he arrived, shuffling his feet and not answering anything. He started to speak by making a statement which I will never forget: "My delusion stems at the cross road of my little story and the big History."

The quest of truth is the very field where trauma and psychosis meet, in order to find an other able to acknowledge events which have been erased by denial: unburied corpses, abuse which have been silenced, *disaparecidos* as they say in Latin America. Both deal with the collapse of the symbolic order, as it happens in countries or families where terror is the rule.

One of the definition of trauma, also valid for psychosis, is the betrayal of one's own command, of one's own people, at whatever scale, a country or a family. In my family there is an example of such a betrayal, with borderlines symptoms along the generations.

My uncle came back from Narvik after the victory was erased, in the hold of a ship. He had to fight with his bayonet as soon as they landed in France and joined the Resistance, was deported to Mathausen and came back with medical experiments made on his body. His first gesture was to send back to Paris all his decorations and never talked about his war. When he died, his widow received no pension, his son joined a cult and one of his grandson died recently of "depression".

Perhaps I speak here on the behalf of silenced people, by sismotherapies and heavy chemical treatments which are so banal nowadays. What a regression from the findings of the pioneers of the psychoanalysis of psychosis who met around Benedetti in the fifties.

Since WWI, many were veterans like Bion, or psychotherapists in military hospitals: Frieda Fromm Reichman in Koenigsberg, Sullivan in Saint Elizabeth hospital, Ferenczi in Hungary, William Rivers at Craiglockhart in Scotland and many others. They had also a personal experience of immigration, Sullivan's grand parents were boat people fleeing the potato famine in Ireland, Frieda, fled the Nazis, and Salmon, the inventor of the principles of forward psychiatry for traumatized soldiers, had worked as a medical doctor at Ellis Island, before he was sent to France by the military when they entered WWI.

Each of them bears witness of the grey zones in between their stories and their patients.

In conclusion, I will tell you a little story connected to the big History, which happened to Bion. In his seventies, he exiled himself in Los Angeles, where he fled "the cosy domesticity of England". Until then, he had used his Grid, and given no clue about what had happened to him, namely during WWI from which he returned with prestigious French and English decorations but also as a wreck.

After his exile, he does not quote Melanie Klein so often, and writes about his war in two autobiographical books, *The Long week end* and *All my sins remembered*, as well as in a book of fiction: *A Memoir of the Future*. He also gave seminars in Brazil in which he appears much more relaxed.

I contend that in LA, he heard the American accent which triggered the soldiers who had fought at his side in the North of France, as well as his dead comrades for whom he searches an inscription as a name on a grave. – according to the second meaning of

thearapôn. The inscription of what cannot be said, is the aim of the psychotherapy of psychosis and trauma.

At that time in the US, a bestseller was published by Kurt Vonegut, -- another veteran of WWII, -- entitled Slaughter House five. It is the story of the destruction of Dresden, witnessed by American prisoners who had been incarcerated in the cellars of a slaughter house on the suburb of the city. Vonegut' is embodied in his book by a fool called Billy Pilgrim. He is "the most unsoldierly soldier of them all. Back to the US, he will tell the story impossible to tell, through a delusion in which he is kidnapped by extraterrestrials. They carry him out of space and time in their spaceship, to put him in a zoo, like a strange animal for the enjoyment of their people. When his daughter scolds him because he ridicules the family, he answers: "But it is all true!!"

The novel proceeds through "time warps", "time windows," when time stops. Three times Vonegut uses the expression "Memory of the future", which Bion will transform into "A Memoir of the Future".

In that book, Bion invents dialogues between different ages of his life, in the present tense, since his embryonic cells which he calls "somites". At the end of the second part of A Memoir of the Future: "The past presented", Bion, the psychoanalyst whom he calls PA, encounters his ghost, who on the battle fields in the North of France. Several times he has written: "Yes, I died in Amiens, in Cambrai", when all his crew perished in their tanks.

The ghost of Bion tells P.A.: "Hello old chap you are happy to see me again." And the psychoanalyst answers, "Indeed, but I was so afraid to meet you."

At some point, at critical moments of the psychoanalysis of psychosis and trauma the analyst has to meet his ghosts returning from "Timequakes" of History, -- another title of Kurt Vonegut--, to make possible for patients to claim their "Unclaimed experience", -- as says to the title of Cathy Caruth's book on the gray zone lying between "trauma, narrative and history". We may add, and psychosis.

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