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Stranger in the city The circular relationship between alienation and psychosis and the healing power of human reconnection. The relationship of psychosis with migration, social exclusion and low status groups.

Abstract

During forty years, Jean Max Gaudillière and I held a seminar entitled “Madness and the social link” in our Institute of Social Sciences, the École des Hautes Etudes in Paris. At the same time we were psychoanalysts in public psychiatric hospitals where patients were immigrants not only from far away countries but also from rural areas which had been wiped out of the maps when they came to the city. From that experience we considered madness as a co research with our patients on broken social links, at the junction of their stories of abuses and of the catastrophes of History. This co research does not fit with classical psychoanalysis as the symbolic chain is broken by a ruthless agency which treat people like things. In the “psychotic transference”, the unconscious at work is not repressed with signifiers for there is no otherness. We deal with a cut out unconscious made of surviving images, which are triggered also on the side of the analyst especially in critical moments when the ruthless agency suddenly takes her place. I will give the example of Aby Warburg for this specific transference, as an interference through which “a transitional subject”, coined by Benedetti, may emerge and transform the stranger in the city into a visitor greeted by a host. And I will conclude with quotes from literature, showing that this new paradigm in psychoanalysis is as old as the wars.

I. Madness is a mode or research

As faculties in a sociological “Center of studies of Social Movements” in the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris, my husband, the late Jean Max Gaudillière and I, entitled our weekly seminar which was mandatory: “Madness and the Social link” which lasted during forty years. At the same time we had joined the École Freudienne founded by Jacques Lacan and worked also as psychoanalysts in psychiatric hospitals during thirty years.

From that experience we contended that classical psychoanalysis was indeed irrelevant for psychosis since time stopped and anamnesis did not work. Besides the analyst cannot stay neutral. Coming from social sciences, it was obvious for us that in the case of madness and trauma, objective observation or neutrality meant objectification. With our patients we discovered that madness is a research on broken social links and historical catastrophes and we are its co researchers. That I tell to my patients: your delusion is an inquiry let me be your second investigator.

Immigration is a major issue, since we deal with erased traces and the disappearance of names, of lands, of ancestors. People go in exile to big cities from far away countries, fleeing poverty and dictatorships, but also they come from rural countries of which their descendants do not speak. They have a vague impression that something terrible happened there, with a feeling of shame. Psychoanalysts who greet children in public settings coming from all over the world often wait a long time until the parents start talking about their history. Some work with abandoned babies with no history. Often, the analysts whom I see in supervision have themselves a story of immigration which was not addressed in their own analysis and which is triggered during their work.

Same thing happened to me when I felt pushed to work with crazy people whom I met in public psychiatric hospitals, outdoor consultations and in my office. I used to ask the newcomers in the ward: whom are you looking for in that asylum? Regularly they looked for ghosts of a past which did not pass – unburied people, *desaparecidos* as they call them in Argentina, but also “unclaimed experience” as says Cathy Caruth¹, of abuses and tortures, to be acknowledge by another. Still, to my question they often asked me back: “And you, what are you doing here? Progressively I realized that I was born during the war in 1943, in a combat zone in the Alps and was part of roundups, imprisonment, hostage taking, escapes in other villages and finally in another province down in the plains. When I came to Paris, to study, it was the loneliest place I could imagine, I was scared to speak in public and thought it was only a problem in my guts, as I had no clue by then about psychoanalysis. After joining Lacan’s School, I decided out of the blue to train as psychoanalyst in a psychiatric hospital although I was neither a psychologist nor a psychiatrist. There I met “strangers in the city ready to share their quest with me, for my Lacanian analyst had not s not interested by the war.

In the ward used to sit in the common room besides people who had renounced any hope. We would go to an office, only

¹ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed experience*

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**



when they asked for more privacy. What was at stake was a Proximity and an Immediacy, here and now, - which created coordinates of space and time in a no space and no time -, along with an Expectancy which opens the future, and a Simplicity: no jargon. Those are the four principles coined by Thomas Salmon, whom I did not know at that time, for what is called Forward Psychiatry during WWI, completely absent in France. Although he was a civilian, he had been sent in 1917, for a mission to the war front by the American army, before they entered the war, to give some directions for the treatment of future psychic casualties. He was chosen because of his experience with immigrants. As a psychiatrist in Ellis Island he had created a special ward for "Strangers in the city", where he had experienced those principles, and he continued when he was drafted on the front lines in France, in the regions where my grandfather had been a stretcher bearer I have always greeted such patients in my office for a few euros for usually they are broke, for I had my salary for a living.

2. The healing power of reconnection

We met in a common quest of truth, on my side too. Some parts I discovered past 60 years old. "The subject of historical truth" is the aim given by Freud to psychoanalysis in "Moses and Monotheism" written at the end of his life, when his books were burnt by Goering in Berlin and his life threatened. ²Beyond the limits of the repressed unconscious, "the discourse of the Other" according to Lacan, the subject of erased truth is exiled for there is no otherness. The symbolic chain is broken by a ruthless agency which treats people like things. We deal with an unconscious which is cut out, not constituted by signifiers for speech does not hold, but by vivid images, voices and visions, bodily sensations which testify of cutout truths. Our job in analysis is to validate them in order to get out of a perverse social link. But we cannot avoid the entrance of the lawless agency in the sessions, which will sooner or later take our place in the transference so that we may name it and get rid of it. The etymology of the word therapy is: *therapon*, an old Greek word attested in Homer's Iliad, which has two meanings: the second in combat and the ritual double in charge of funeral duties. In that respect, I discovered much later, that Netherland was a pioneer country in that respect, since the aftermath of the war, greeting the returning deportees, completely estranged from home by the survival tools of "dissociation".

I will give an example of the healing power of reconnection, about the historian of Renaissance art Aby Warburg, who became mad at the beginning of WWI. He calls the images stemming from the cut out unconscious "surviving images, *nachleben*". Haunted by such images, he was able to heal and get out of his confinement in Binswanger clinic. But this was not due, as the saying goes, to Binswanger who did not believe in his recovery. In a letter to Freud, dated of November 1921, he writes that his famous patient "will never resume his scientific activities". Aby was healed thanks to his connection with his disciple Fritz Saxl who was just demobilized from WWI, whose experience of the traumas of war made him trust the integrity of his teacher's intelligence. He brought him books regularly, telling him that his research was still at work through madness. When Aby Warburg shouted in the clinic at the beginning of the twenties, that all the Jews would be assassinated and that Binswanger was the chief butcher, he just showed what could not be said. As Hannah Arendt noted, mass anti-Semitism started in Germany in the aftermath of the 1870 Franco Prussian war. During his childhood and adolescence, he had witnessed the threat against his Jewish family of bankers in Hamburg, and "his body kept the score"³. When he cried in the clinic that he wanted to get out of this hell, Binswanger challenged him: he would discharge him if he was able to give a conference during one hour in front of the staff and the patients, to prove that he was not nuts.

That he did with the help of Fritz Saxl his genuine therapist. His own renaissance was achieved through his now famous Conference on the Ritual of the Snake among the Hopis whom he had visited at the end of the XIXth century. Like other tribes, they had been in exile into reservations, immigrant on their own land and threatened by genocide like the Jews After his conference, Binswanger kept his promise to discharge him and Aby resumed his scientific activities.

This story shows two major issues in the psychoanalysis of psychosis and trauma. First the turning moment of the analysis when I embody the ruthless agency, usually after I made some blunder. By acknowledging the part I play in that critical moment, by manifesting some erased parts in my own story, I take responsibility in the present time for the exile of the subject on a precise event. Then the "psychotic transference" becomes a host for homeless images and "thoughts without a thinker", as Bion calls them after his war experience, in a co research transmitted by words. The symbolic chain is knitted again. The word symbolic comes from the Greek verb *sumballô*: I put together, and from a custom linking a host to a visitor for the times to come. When they are going to part, they break a piece of clay, keeping each a broken bit, which their descendants will be able to adjust when they meet in the future, *sumballein*, and acknowledge their alliance. Time can flow, even it has been frozen by attacks on linking.

The main issue is a first mirror for ghosts which are beyond the looking glass when mirrors explode with the destruction of the

² Freud *Moses and the Monotheism*

³ Bessel Van der Kolk

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**



symbolic order by ruthless agencies at work in abuses and in wars. Then the self is no more reflected and cannot reflect in the cognitive sense, without the presence of a witness, says Dori Laub⁴, who is engaged in an analogous process. Patients manifest an underground intelligence which scans the analyst's faults, to provoke her to speak out and connect timeless events in a common narrative.

"My delusion stems at the crossroad of my little story and the big History" said one of my patients. Transference then is an interference, at the crossroad of the analyst's story and History, giving birth to "a transitional subject" as Benedetti calls the subject of erased historical truths. This interference happens by chance. Patients often ask me: by what luck did I meet you? And also they add: "What was useful was not your theories but the stories you told and especially little bits of your own story. Indeed, those bits were triggered by their search and had not been addressed in my own analysis but had remained in exile until they were interwoven in the transference.

Each analyst works with his own hobby horse. When I greet patients who are immigrants, from far away countries, or from the country where their ancestors land has been erased, I take a map and look with them at places which were once familiar, now estranged. Even if they are mentioned everyday in the news, they are no more inscribed in a transmission. When I greet analysts for supervision I ask also: "Where do your patient comes from?" The answer is often very vague: Africa, Sri Lanka, China, Syria or a village in France out of nowhere. But those places are really big I say. Where in Africa, in the Middle East, in which province in France etc... ? I don't know say the supervisees not because they are dumb: they manifest the absence of inscription and the destruction of intergenerational transmission.

So I tell them to take a map of the region and look at it with their patients. When human cannot speak, the names of rivers, woods, paths, mountains, will speak at their place and offer a plural body of survival. That is my experience. Nobody survives alone, and in a total loneliness, things, clouds, plants, flowers, trees, insects, birds, animals talk to the lonely one. The analyst may be attuned or not with this old animistic ways of connecting with a once safe environment.

3. Telling stories from literature

As I told you, I am not a psychologist nor a psychiatrist, but trained in classical literature and sociology. Our Institute of social science was founded by historians like Marc Bloch who had been assassinated by the Nazis in 1944. I joined Lacan school, for his insistence on the Other, big and small. But a limit was reached when I read in the *Écrits* he refused to address the question of transference in psychosis⁵. So Jan max and I migrated like the birds, every summer to Austen Riggs Center, where that kind of transference had been discovered again and again, from the time of WWI. We discovered the names of Frieda Fromm Reichmann and HS Sullivan, unknown in France There we met once, Benedetti who was also unknown in our country. We invited him in our Institute of research and in our hospital and he invited us to join the ISPS.

The inventors of a new paradigm for psychoanalysis were often immigrants, or descendants of immigrants such as Harry Stack Sullivan. His grand parents were boat people fleeing the potato famine in Ireland. On the boat, his grand mother had lost her husband and her first child. Frieda Fromm Reichmann too arrived at Chestnut Lodge for a summer job in 1935, fleeing the Nazis persecution of the Jews in Germany. During WWI, she had been in charge of a ward in a military hospital in Königsberg, the town of Hannah Arendt, for soldiers injured in the brain. Thomas Salmon's father too was an immigrant. Now, I am dumfounded by the periodical erasure of their findings as if psychoanalysis had to be reinvented from scratch at each catastrophe, as if we must rediscover the wheel. This is a property of the field of madness and trauma where time stops, and the subject of speech has to be regenerated out of annihilations. "The circular relationship of alienation and psychosis and the healing human reconnection is as old as the wars", and always forgotten in the long week end between two wars. Since antiquity, the cut out unconscious made of vivid bodily images which come back as reviviscences, searches another to weave its crazy elements to other resonant elements.

It is not I who says that but Socrates in the *Theaetetus*⁶, who calls "alogia, without reason", the primary elements, which may be "woven" with other elements and create the "logos, speech and reason". The process of this interweaving occurs through a special kind of transference of which he speaks in the *Symposium*, through the mouth of a woman, Diotima. She gives a filiation to this transference: Eros in this case is the son of *Poros*, Porosity, and *Penia*, Penury. The porosity of the analysts meets the poverty of the immigrants who come to see them. At the end of the Dialogue, Socrates is praised as a veteran by Alcibiades who enters the symposium completely drunk, telling Socrates' story. He took part in the wars between cities in Greece; he was brave and a wonderful healer for Alcibiades himself who was their general, when he was wounded on the battlefield, and for his companions .

⁴ Dori Laub

⁵ Lacan *Écrits, Question préliminaire à tout traitement de la psychose* ;

⁶ Platon

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**



For the subject of our meeting, I have two more quotations from literature.

Jack Kerouac first book: "The Town and the City"⁷, is a tale of disintegration of the little town where he was born, Lowell Massachusetts, when the depression and the war sent "on the roads" he says millions of Americans. His family ended in New York where they exploded. He writes relentlessly to testify on this errant reality, silenced under the American dream.

And a last story of an immigrant, stranger in the city, from Virgil epic the Aeneid⁸. Aeneas and his friend Achates are landing as boat people do, in Carthage fleeing the disaster of Trojan war across the Mediterranean. While he waits for the queen Didon, he is completely numb, and looks at a temple she is building, watching the bas relief. They represent episodes of the Trojan war. Suddenly he sees himself, pictured in three dimensions on the stone. Only then he can cry for the first time. The fact that a perfect stranger, the queen Dido, - herself an immigrant from Phoenicia where her brothers wanted to kill her -, connects him with the dissociated parts of his story.

I leave you with the famous verse which he says while crying. It summarizes my talk:

"Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt. There are tears in the universe and sometimes, mortal things touch the mind. He emphasizes the importance of "*mentem*", the mind which can be touched when another is present.

In our work of psychoanalysts with trauma and psychosis, the healing power, is not only the words we say, but the rhythm of resonances between analyst and patient, which is the rhythm of poetry, sometimes soft, sometimes harsh, giving life to silenced matters for the first time.

⁷ Kerouac

⁸ Virgile Eneid Iv. 462.

**ON THE HEALING POWER
OF HUMAN RECONNECTION**