

P.L.A.C.E

Place - It's Not About the Couch

Does Psychoanalysis Intellectualize the Emotions?

Contrary to what is habitually presumed, psychoanalysis is not the intellectualization of one's life or emotions, but the one contemporary discourse that does not 'de-realize' passion and suffering into the mere expression of emotions or feelings of pain. To see how this is so, it suffices to observe what happens in the communication of an emotion in everyday life: there is a moment which always goes beyond a mere spontaneous feeling and requires a clarification, not only to oneself, but to others. In this respect, an emotion is always encountered two times: as emotion and as 'thinking of emotion'. Without pushing this analysis any further, it is simple to recognize that this 'thinking of emotion' does not introduce anything exterior or alien to the emotions, but rather situates the problem and necessity of their expression vis-a-vis the 'other'. Indeed, for every emotion there is already a sign of emotion which is said to express it: happiness = a smile, sadness = a frown, etc.

In a general way, an emotion is always anticipatable in signs: that is to say in a *doxa* — the representations of the social group, family, and friends. But the moment an emotion is no longer expressible as a sign is the moment it presents a *para-doxa*, which then reveals a failure of expression in the form of a *passion*. Take two people in love, for instance, constantly faced with the problem of revealing their emotions in signs which are continually insufficient to the task of communication: one being fooled by a kiss, the other kissing a fool; the wife claiming she was an idiot to listen to her husband's promises, the husband claiming he did not notice she was an idiot because he was in love. Here, not only does it become evident that language is insufficient to the expression of an emotion, but it seems by this very fact to allow one to say the opposite of what signs normally mean: for example, one calling the other a 'pig' in order to say 'I love you.'

Otherwise stated, emotions reveal themselves as passions to the degree that the speaker is left in a state of suspended certainty as to what they are. What is certain, however, is not such passions as love or hate, but the resulting *passion of ignorance* which their signs produce. For this reason, psychoanalysis is not a place you go to think about or intellectualize your emotions, but to articulate the ignorance of a passion: an emotion that simultaneously asserts and denies its own comprehension. This is because in what is commonly called an emotional experience, there is no need to introduce an intellectual

dimension that would interpret it: the emotions are never simply opposed to the 'thinking of emotions.' Rather, any emotional experience automatically includes the clarification of its own 'un-thought' — an ignorance which is not merely a difficulty of expression, but what Freud would call a *repression*. By calling a problem of emotional expression a repression, psychoanalysis displaces the question of emotions from an immediate expression of the self to a revelation of what is systematically 'other' in the recognition of the self: the question of desire and passion.

It is in addressing this 'other', that psychoanalysis does *not* de-realize the passions, for it neither attempts to objectify the 'internal causes' of this otherness in a psychology nor moralize it with 'exterior causes' in a philosophy or religion. Rather by focusing on the immanent Other of an emotional experience, it reopens an investigation into the cause of desire and passion in the formation of anything mental: the mental being by definition ill, or at least symptomatic, to the extent it is affected by the material of its paradoxical expression — its language, signifiers, and writing.

In conclusion, on the one hand, it is easy enough to recognize that the major clinical discoveries of psychoanalysis have consisted in analyzing the symptom as a desire to be read and written, whereas normative psychology and psychiatry have only imagined the symptom as forms of mental illness. On the other hand, it has been art and literature which have pointed towards the symptom by addressing the public in the language of the passions — and often in signs which counter the norms of any particular society in which they are found. It was psychoanalysis which reintroduced an interrogation of the passions into a medical discourse by taking seriously their irreality, not merely as the expression of a fiction or imaginary, but as a guide to a real repression in the life of the individual. Neither art nor psychiatry, psychoanalysis opens up the reality of suffering and passion, in the sense that their repression would find a place to be listened to, constructed, and read — and not simply reduced to an intellectualization or sublimation of the individual's interior feelings of pain and emotion.

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