

The sparkle that cuts: ethics, movement, resurgences

“The endless cruelty of a catastrophe consists in that its impact is most often felt entirely too late” - *Sentir le grisou (Smelling the Firedamp)*, Didi-Huberman. “Smelling the firedamp is so difficult”.

We are now going underground. Firedamp (*grisou* in French) is an odourless and colourless gas that builds up underground in mines. It is not toxic but it is highly flammable. When found in large concentrations it leads to fires and explosions. Because it is odourless, miners had no way of sensing the mounting danger and when they did, it was too late. Curiously, however, it was noticed that birds could smell the firedamp. Miners then started taking cages with birds in down the mines with them; when they started ruffling their feathers it was a sign of a high concentration. It was as if “they could see” the approaching danger.

Birds therefore became invested with this “seeing” the wave arrive. Didi-Huberman works with art and poetics, taking some images “from the depths of the mine”, to evoke the unease felt during the *mauvais air* – the bad weather – of history. This reading takes its lead from Walter Benjamin, for whom history is inscribed and surfaces in the urgency of a moment of danger. It is not a question of commemorating a past catastrophe as a site of memory, but rather remembering a past catastrophe to shed light on the current situation from the angle of coming fires.

He writes: it is easy to say “that was a catastrophe” when it has already occurred; or even to say in the absolute future “that will be a catastrophe”. But it is a lot more difficult to state: “look at this catastrophe unfolding now, right where we are”. The possible reading of history is linked to its condition of recognition, of formulation. A “state of emergency” in which an act of speech can bring up issues that cannot be pacified. The word emergency has an open meaning: something that emerges, as well as a certain urgency. This includes experiencing an active time, it proposes, so that we can situate ourselves in the face of the complexity of the issues.

An active time had to unfold throughout the global pandemic, in locked down lives facing all kinds of dangers. We psychoanalysts had to re-position ourselves and recreate resources to practise psychoanalysis, which was immensely valuable in those “invaded” times.

It is important to underline the issue of anxiety – which affected all of us, analysts and analysed alike, to such an extent that we had to work hard to avoid it leading to an overwhelming sense of invasion, trauma and paralysis. We also had to strive so that it could once again play the role of signal anxiety, something not to be eradicated but to help us in our psychoanalytical work. Anxiety and disorientation: when the knot is disoriented, so to speak, attempts are made, psychic work is carried out that requires/seeks new ways of reconnecting and finding references that recreate boundaries and recognise limits that are newly possible. Yes, the working link within transference was maintained, providing what we had: online practice, now at a time when we can formulate questions from that experience. We were in lock down but we also recreated, even when it was difficult, spaces in which to meet up, practice shared with other analysts, transmission and links.

It is a great pleasure to me that our first face-to-face Congress is precisely here in Barcelona, the city where the Convergence movement was founded in 1998 (the pre foundation in 97), where we were gathered together with so many colleagues with whom we continued our journey and adventure. Let’s underline the term movement, which today is of the greatest importance. By which I mean that it has been a great challenge and of immeasurable value to conduct the institutional work that we have been carrying out and that has earned us a place alongside others involved in psychoanalysis – in different places, in Möbian fashion.

The APPOA collated several texts in the first months of the pandemic. The one written by Erik Porge stated: In the depths of lock down, out of confinement, there is enunciation.

An open space for enunciation, for that unknown place; perhaps this is one of the greatest challenges when we think about maintaining ethics in psychoanalytical practice in the present day.

Today, now we are in some ways post-pandemic, we are faced with many questions that are also addressed at this Congress: excesses, continued pleasure-seeking – consumption, objectalization of subjects, super-inflated markets, the search for quick solutions, the anaesthetic effect of drugs, and super-medicalization that seeks to sedate anxiety and suffering.

Where are we?

We live in an age of extreme binaries that are linked to the practice of violence, of segregations, of cancel culture on social media. A kind of totalitarianism in language, certainties in confrontation but without nuance or questioning, the weakening of symbolic entities, of differences. A symptom in social relations, that undoubtedly affects the practice of our ethics. In *Les non dupes errent* Lacan draws attention to this different ethics that, he argues, is based on the refusal to be *non dupe*, in being increasingly duped of the unconscious - our only patrimony of knowledge.

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The ethics of psychoanalysis, the ethics of speaking well.

The ethics of speaking well has to do with finding oneself in the unconscious, argues Lacan (*Télévision*): finding oneself in the structure, the opening up of a space for enunciation.

Responding to a question about psychoanalysis within the neo-liberal world, a colleague answered: neo-liberalism highlights, separates the subject from others. It thus creates a permanent rivalry. Every man for himself.

In psychoanalysis, conversely, a subject is always placed in relation to the Other.

What effects of the subject are encouraged in an age that disqualifies the values that a subject could receive via transmission from the Other? Where can an ideal seem so attached to ideals controlled by superego imperatives or by drive urgencies disentangled from desire?

Pathos develops in social ties precisely when, in discourse, the subject is discouraged from finding themselves, from finding this speaking well, their place in relation to their desire and the commitments and work that desire also implies. To quote Chemama: This discouragement always comes from a disqualification of speech".

The question of enunciation is therefore crucial today, I would argue.

Doesn't the very recent phenomenon of ChatGPT seems fascinating and *unheimliche* (uncanny)?

You input a handful of words and a well-written even sophisticated text appears that shockingly subscribers can have access to, disconnected from anyone's experience. Who is writing it?

Benjamin stated back in the 1920s, a century ago, that "we have become impoverished" when trying to demarcate the difference between the inventive and the instrumental dimensions of language. The inventive dimension is when in the act of creating, something is preserved that goes beyond a product and, more than that, also recreates something from the void, from the lack of completeness. On the other hand, the instrumental dimension is the inundation of repeated clichés, fixations, alienations or instrumentalization within ties.

To refer to Safatle in *Maneiras de transformar o mundo* (Ways to Change the World): a role of practice is to think about transference and its dissolution, in an analytical process, as the possibility of transforming a tie that may not be in a position of psychic subjection.

"Experience has fallen in value": Benjamin wrote, in a direct allusion to the valuations linked to "the market". But the word *gefallen* (fallen, failed), this state of falling is not the same as elimination.

Even falling is a movement. What drops does not "disappear", it is also a question of all the complexity of the movement of resurgence (just like the decline of the figure of the storyteller in his text *The Storyteller*) – it is recourse of desire and of experience in the context of the simplest and most banal choices and decisions we make in our everyday lives.

This is what Didi-Huberman proposes in *The Survival of the Fireflies*, dialoguing with the contemporary, and something we can also disseminate in relation to the ethics of our practice in the face of the risk in our times of repression that could perhaps impact on enunciation itself.

Dealing with these resurgences where destruction and creation also dialogue with ethics and an aesthetic that has to do with the surprise of new forms, with the piercing of totalizations, with the re-launching of discontinuities that permit new links.

We don't notice the same things if our gaze points to the horizon that extends, immense, immobile, far off, a kind of completeness, of totalization beyond us; or if our gaze allows itself to be affected by the flash of light (partiality) that transits, that emerges, that cuts across, that disturbs, that affects us. Like a comet, a ball of fire that cuts across the horizon...

There are reasons for us to be pessimists, but at the same time it is so much more necessary to open our eyes at night, be able to move around without resting (here again we re-encounter the idea of movement), to look for fireflies again. Didi-Huberman links this precisely to the particle of the indestructibility of desire, in Freud's work, at the end of the Interpretation of Dreams.

Indestructible/fragile at one and the same time.

He returns to wartime Italy, in 1941, where in Bologna Pasolini, a young student of the Arts, worked his way through Freud, philosophy and modern poetry, and wrote a letter to his friend from his teenage years. Small lights of life in the midst of the heavy gloom of anxiety. He recounts an extremely beautiful night that January when they went to the hill outside the city and saw a vast number of fireflies that formed small thickets of fire in the thickets of bushes. And he envied them. Because "they loved each other and searched for each other in their amorous flights and their lights" while in the world the opposite was true: great cannons of light pierced the darkness, the projectors of fascism that brought destruction with them.

The question that the author poses, bringing us back to the present, is: did the fireflies really disappear? "Do they still emit – but from where? - their wonderful intermittent signals? Are they still looking for each other somewhere, talking to each other, loving each other despite everything, despite of the whole of the machine, despite the darkness of the night, despite the ferocious projectors?"

This is not just a matter of survival but of the experience of re-emerging, maintaining, sustaining an implication that permits a place from where to situate oneself and speak.

The opening up of a space of creativity and invention, in relation to the subject. The experience of listening from the analyst's side. With others, who we count on with regard to this place where we enunciate from, but that is unknown to us. The creation of something "common" in discreet brotherhood, like "the community that is coming" to quote Agamben – not a future one, but the one that is always coming, never totally arriving, and which therefore also acts as a kind of screen on the one hand for the collective and on the other for the individual.

A resurgence of desire, that appears as flashes of light with the paradoxical image of the fragility and strength of the firefly.

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