

**Seven critical and invigorating remarks on the contemporary contemporaneity of arts and psychoanalysis, with a succinct preamble and no conclusion.**

Preamble

The Lacanian doxa says that the object of creation (with 'artistic value' if it has an impact on the Other) goes through a transformation, called sublimation, consisting in its elevation to the dignity of the Thing. In later Lacanian words: the artwork occupies an emptiness, a real created by the Signifier, and allows some veiling of it, some recuperation of the object-loss (not dissimilar from a joke in some ways, from humour especially). Doesn't this 'elevation of the object' echo with the Christian consecration? Is there not a discursive reification of this great 'Absence-Emptiness-Loss' in the metaphor of the empty tabernacle?

Remarks

- Firstly, psychoanalysis claims to learn from artists following the idea that artists precede\* psychoanalysts. From Sophocles, Leonardo, Holbein, Shakespeare, Joyce, Duras, etc. But you may have noticed that there is not much taken from Expressionism, abstract or not, Pop art, so-called Conceptual art for example, and even less from the entire field of music. So we could wonder what psychoanalysis has learned from the arts? Would it often be as illustrations or analogies of a point already encountered elsewhere - in the praxis perhaps? - that psychoanalysis has used references in art? Not always though. If Freud found in Sophocles something that suited him, Duras, according to Lacan, knew things without him and Joyce inspired him a great deal.

When it comes to the so-called 'decline of the Father' and the changes of the Symbolic order nowadays, we could refer to Futurism, Dada or Fluxus. These more or less fleeting outbursts of artistic endeavours have pounded on if not deposed the ideals linked to the imago of the Father quite a while ago. The invention of Collage, Ready-mades, Sound poetry, Performance art, Chance or constraint generated texts, Assemblage, Appropriations, not to mention composers intrigued by indeterminacy for instance, could prove to be mines of ideas for those wondering about the plurality of the Names-of-The-Father, or creation and works of art as symptomatic ways of organising modes of living with-out *The Name-of-The-Father*. Marinetti's call for the 'destruction of syntax', Tzara's or Khlebnikov's poetry may echo Joyce's efforts in fruitful ways. And the 'art of noises' of Luigi Russolo just as much. Perhaps the relative lack of attention of psychoanalysts to these creations is due to the difficulty psychoanalysis has to do without the figure of the Father (and that of the Mother too?), transcendence and verticality. To do without transcendence while making use of it is perhaps more easily said than done.

- Secondly, it would be ludicrous to make general statements about the arts today. So let us try.

By and large the arts today do not support hopes for a new world, a revolution of some kind, a break from the past as did artists (and intellectuals, philosophers or politicians) at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But we do not observe a return to the

past either. There is rather an exaltation of the present, in its 'post-modern' guises or otherwise. A generalised thirst for the new, yes just as before, but now all consumed in its novelty, not as the inception of something to come: the every day Phoenix, rising again and again from its 'ashes'. No wonder many people often ponder about the difference between works of art and gadgets, especially in art fairs (unless, of course, one indulges in spiritual ambitions like an Anselm Kiefer for example). This urgency of the present, the craving for surprises and shocks, the supreme Now, the persistent demand for a 'New Now', testifies to something well known in psychoanalysis: the urgency of satisfaction. After all, is it not an ideal that gives you a good enough reason to postpone your satisfaction? Or, perhaps, a power that wields enough peremptory dictates to defer dreaming of satisfaction as it urges to reach immediacy. Some see signs of such increasing authoritarianism in many institutions today.

Many works of art (one will remember the circumstances of the submission and rejection of Mr Mutt's urinal) seem to highlight if not denounce the super-egoic effects of contemporary Western economies and ecologies. But for a while now it has been increasingly difficult to distinguish these denunciations from collaborations.

- Thirdly, the avant-gardes\* have asked the public not to believe in appearances, they wanted the audience to be unsettled, to reflect, to ponder, to think things through. But, still, they proposed appearances to the public unless, like some conceptual artists, they wished, pious hope, to only present ideas. They did not write philosophy though. It is true that philosophy may lack visual popularity in galleries and which artefacts would we then find in museum shops? For a long while now the avant-gardes have taken ideals apart and tried to allude to, to manifest, to show the real, the world as it is. Yet, interestingly and as an effect perhaps? the arts have been idealised. It suffices to see the crowds gathered for some exhibitions – and not only for the various celebrations of impressionism. But on the other hand, the arts have also been de-idealised, the mercantilism of the art world shows that well. We are, luckily maybe, far from the supposed sacred roots of all arts.

So with the avant-gardes we have ended up again and again with strange paradoxes often open to the criticisms of intellectualism and hermeticism. Typically, any piece of art that remotely relies on the enunciation: 'this is art because I say so'. Thereby contemporary art runs the risk of being so auto-referential that it loses any real impact other than some in-crowd self-centred enjoyment. This accentuation of enunciation has, of course, not escaped the analysts' attention. Indeed, for them too, enunciation is most important. But one would hope that analysts find ways to separate their egos from their acts.

Perhaps there are 'artists' but there are only 'quasi- psychoanalysts'! 'Psychoanalyst' as an identification, is ensuring very little being, one can only practice psychoanalysis. Is art a practice, despite the phrase being used a lot? Does one practice art, is art a discipline, especially if 'anything goes'? The practice of the elevation of *any-thing*?

- Fourthly, why did Lacan not write an artistic discourse along the five others he put forward? I would suggest that the arts always intervene in an already existing

discourse. They do not constitute or create a discourse by themselves. They invent something in the inconsistency or incompleteness of a given discourse. Art is always an intervention, an interpretation. Unless, reversely, they honour, eulogize or memorialize an existing discourse and therefore belong to academism. Their interventions then can be called collaborations.

Contemporary art (i.e. art that has a pertinence on the master discourse of the day) intervenes on an instance of inexistence of the Other [an instance of  $S(\emptyset)$ ]. When they create something the arts, the artists, the works of art do not amount to the formation of a social bond but they provoke *transformations* of social bonds – what we call changes of taste.

(Psychoanalysis is a social bond inasmuch as it allows passages from an established discourse to another by ways of eliciting what is at stake in them and, ultimately – if it can reach that limit-point, in its own. So, conjecturally, the arts have an ‘intra-discourse’ tropism when psychoanalysis’ tropism passes ‘inter-discourse’.)

- Fifthly, what about the mutual enrichment of the arts and psychoanalysis or: what about their difference?

Psychoanalysis produces, aims at producing a new knowledge about the singular modes of enjoyment of a subject and, in the end, aims at that subject finding a new arrangement with them. The aim would be, in fortunate cases, that the knowledge opens onto an invention: a ‘savoir-y-faire’, a know-some-how with one’s *sinthome*.

The arts do invent, they create new forms, new arrangements, new inhabitations of satisfaction. Do they also produce new knowledge? That is less sure. It can happen of course but it is not a necessary part of the creation itself. And public success is certainly not a guarantee of it. What is sure though is that the artist, with a degree in Fine Art or not, is not that often the best person to speak about his own work (when, in psychoanalysis, the analysand is the only one who could testify to his experience).

- Sixthly, psychoanalysis does not show a keen taste for music but I would like to draw your attention, amongst so many others, to the music of Giacinto Scelsi. Most of his works are evocative rather than explicit. Most of his developments form a space-time of indistinctness. A music in which it is not easy to pin things down, to attribute identifications. It is constructed music though. We could say it is music of sounding marks in constant transformation. It does not offer itself as clearly legible and by doing so it makes present both the problem of legibility and the possibilities of transformation. A music of *poiesis*. A music that could inspire psychoanalysts.

- Seventhly, what can psychoanalysis learn from the arts of today?

Amongst many things, one main, obvious and massive evidence: that everything, anything can and will be exploited. The appetite for the ‘New Now’, as I called it, combined with the self-commented enunciation confirms the effectuation of the object of satisfaction, the object we call object (a) with Lacan, the object *petit (a)*, the (a)-*petit*, the (a)*ppetite*. Particularly in its addictive guises?

Another thing also: that the diversity of artistic endeavours is such that it becomes very difficult to classify them. And perhaps that is not necessarily a ‘bad thing’, it attracts modes of legibility other than that of identifying discriminants.

And this as well: as imperious as ever, the detritus, the ready-debris, the refuse perseveres (*per-severs*).

Plenty to play with (*cheek in tongue*).

**Vincent Dachy**, *February 2013*