

'The Survival of Fireflies': Is the Current Out-Of-Date Practice Psychoanalytic?

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I will present three singularities from which one could observe the traumatic effects of social and political violence: evil, social violence intended as a derivative of evil, and the survival of the lights of hope, such as the need to bring up parcels of humanity with the desire for non-destruction.

I. What implies the cruel, the evil, a reality that violently imposes itself and takes by surprise the subject, and consequently produces transformations that take place in history, both in the collective and in the daily life of the individual: I would like to try to think about how these transformations, catastrophic and at the same time stealthy and secret, are located within the framework of our work as analysts, in theory and in praxis.

In psychoanalytic thinking we do not speak of evil as such; we transform it into concepts such as the instinct of death, aggression, destruction and perversion, the absence of a protective subject, the object of lack and the traumatic.

We experience evil in a unique and personal moment, at the time of attack or onslaught, but we can only bring it to light retroactively and, every time we narrate the event of evil, we outline another aspect of the situation in which it was revealed to us. Only through these representations or outlines will it be possible to find a path that allows us to think about it. Memory tolerates the configuration, in different magnitudes and dimensions, of what is absent or very traumatically present. It allows survivors of evil to find a representation in words, a metaphor for that which cannot be described.

Evil continually changes its shape and content; it is expressed and articulated in countless ways. However, its existence is a certainty, and it cannot be eliminated or eradicated.

In the twentieth century, we knew a particular form of evil, which was manifested during the Shoah: an unprecedented historical event. Witnesses to the terrible events of the Shoah give us an image of evil based on the transformation of the other into a thing. This embodiment of sadism is actually less horrible than the lethal effectiveness of the 'excellent' results achieved, without fear and with a single objective: to eliminate the existing order and replace it with another, consisting of 'order and cleanliness', which was achieved through the annihilation of the Jews of Europe. While the Shoah ended with the cessation of the Second World War, it represents a major leap in perpetration of evil, which is by no means as it was before. What position should be taken by the psychoanalyst in the face of the evil of the socio-politics that is inevitably transmitted in the psychoanalytic session? Since the facts leave deep marks on the individual and in the collective history we will have to discover the effects of what I call radioactive residues. The metaphor of 'radioactivity' is totally indiscriminate: we can all be passive recipients simply because we belong to a nation, to live in society. Similarly, we can all be transmitters simply because we are social subjects. The radioactive effect of social violence is inscribed in the social space. When someone is a carrier of this metaphorical radioactivity, either in his psyche or in his body, as a mark, as an identification core or in any other way, he must find himself, at some point, as if he were boxed, imprisoned and unable to live his life (Gampel, 2005, 2019).

II. I continue to refer to social political violence, thinking of it as a derivative of evil. I will only refer to events that occurred in 2014 and 2015 in Israel and Europe. Each of you can think about it from what happened in South America, Central America, Africa, etc.

If an event arises in a context of uniformity, it produces a difference, something we cannot predict. However, since January 2015, the rapid succession of events became an undifferentiated backdrop. We knew this would continue; we could predict that new events would arise, but not where they would occur. It is as if these had changed meaning and function and become part of everyday life. What we were experiencing was a way to survive rather than live.

January 2015, the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris, the knife attacks in Israel, the so-called 'refugee crisis' of the summer of 2015. A lot of people were fleeing war, terror and persecution in search of a better future. In Europe, on the one hand, there was a wave of solidarity on the part of civil society, but on the other hand there was also an intense debate on security and border control policies. The 'refugee crisis' has contributed to the resurgence of border debates as lines of demarcation of authority, law and identity in general, on the need to rub external borders while dismantling and questioning internal problems.

Paris, 13 November 2015, 22:30. The unbridled thinking of Islamism, populism, anti-Semitism, hatred that leads to the persecution of suspects, the legitimization of conspiracy theory, terror, the identification of the enemy among us. Attacking an enemy hidden under the guise of good and punishing without limit the other who would be responsible for human suffering,

On the Friday after the murder of three young men who were celebrating a birthday in a Tel Aviv bar, I received an urgent consultation request. A young woman who had come to Israel to visit relatives began to have panic attacks accompanied by tremors, crying, anguish and moments of paralysis. O. recounts that she had had to travel for work reasons, and in each of the places where she went there was a terrorist attack. She was in Paris on 13 November, near the site of the massacre. The following week, when she took the train to Belgium, she and the other passengers were forced to stay in their carriages because the city had been closed. Finally, she arrives in Israel a day before the attempt on Dizengoff Street.

She asks me if I know any place in the world with a context of peace. I was learning from her narrative in the daily sessions we had that week that, for O., violence is a persistent condition, not just a serious turnout. The conversation was sometimes interrupted by her inner confusion, while, at other times, her narrative was strongly associative. Through connective thinking, critical, painful, unthinkable moments arose, linked to political and social violence.

These moments had been impossible to contain and had acted as cumulative traumas that led her into exile, in search of a transitional space on Planet Earth. O. is from South Africa, she and her co-workers were attacked with knives in her office. Some died, but she was saved. However, a week later she left her native country and began wandering around the world.

Chills have subsided. Anguish and fear persist, but with less intensity. She can work and communicate with others. During our fifth meeting, the anxious tone is reduced, but great pain and great fragility persist. She refers to a dream that gives rise to a sad mood. I point out that I think she is sad today. She bursts into tears and begins to talk about how difficult it is for her not to be able to live in South Africa. It is a beautiful country, with a magnificent landscape of mountains and forests. She thought she would always live there, but this will not be.

She recounts two other horrific episodes of attacks on remote chalets by rapist and murderous gangs. She will never be able to make a decision freely.

My job as a psychoanalyst during the preceding months, in the summer of 2014, was a constant challenge. In the midst of the Gaza war, I was in contact with my Israeli patients in the office and with my colleagues in Gaza, through constant consultation talks. The work during that period involved a constant challenge a web of overlap of worlds (Puget & Wender, 1982) in which patients and therapists coexist; there is, and, at the same time, there is not cessation, a synapse, a link, a different dynamic of transfer-countertransfer. In Israel, there is a passage from an interior to an outer that demands action; it is the siren and the need to go to the shelters and return to the session. In Gaza, homeless children and women were attacked by Israel from the air and, at the same time, forced to remain in the place by men whose extremist ideology of sacrifice demanded that they accept death. There was so much suffering on both sides... how can you go on? And yet we do. The link, the bridge allows you to move from one side to the other.

How can we elaborate this in the analysis? What are the displacements we create in our understanding of victims and perpetrators? How do we conceptualize the fear of imminent annihilation by the environment and the impact of such fear on individuals? How can we avoid the tendency to look the other way in the face of the suffering of the other in the name of the social context? How can we acquire historical consciousness without losing the theoretical universe of the intra-subjective and intersubjective unconscious of psychoanalysis?

Within this reality, the retreat (to the office) acquires a nuance of flight from pain and pseudo-independence. And while I feel that this reality is not entirely mine, I contribute to generating it even if I do not intervene, because I am part of this country, and my relationship with Israel is one of personal involvement. I also wonder, as an analyst: how can I maintain a complex and 'correct' experience of historical consciousness without losing the ability to sustain the firm, consistent and focused singular state of permanent attention that characterizes psychoanalysis?

III. 'Searching for Fireflies', published by Pier Paolo Pasolini in *Corsair Writings* (1975), in which he uses the poetic image of fireflies and their inexorable extinction by air and river pollution as a metaphor for also explaining the disappearance of a way of thinking and feeling of people, disappearance that leads to an indoctrination and meekness as dangerous as real.

In his book *The Survival of Fireflies*, the French essayist **Georges Didi-Huberman** collects the apocalyptic prophecy launched by Pasolini and traces a lucid replica, without dogmatism, where he leaves room still for hope. Huberman thinks that the totalitarian machine recognized by the Italian poet and filmmaker wants us to think exactly that, that he has won, and convince us of his victory. This is the first thing it intends to install in human consciousness so that the glimmer of resistance goes out, like the light of the fireflies. However, for Huberman, fireflies do not disappear, but leave. We stopped seeing them because **we refuse to follow them, to look for them**. He does not deny that there are reasons to justify the pessimism prevailing today, 'but it is therefore more necessary to open one's eyes in the middle of the night, to move relentlessly, to go looking for fireflies'.

He adds: '**It is not fireflies that have been destroyed, but rather a central thing of the desire to see**'. The firefly, as a resistance to obscurity, as a light for all thought, finishes disappearing from our sight and goes to a place where it will be, perhaps, perceived by some other, where its survival can still be observed... **It only depends on us**, he concludes, **that we don't see the fireflies disappear**'.

but, to achieve it, 'we must ourselves assume freedom of movement, withdrawal other than retreat, diagonal force, the ability to make parcels of humanity appear, the indestructible desire. We must therefore become fireflies ourselves and re-form a community of desire'. We must assume freedom of movement so that the withdrawal is not withdrawn.

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