

# Some Motifs in Psychoanalysis on the Work of Laurence Kahn

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A conference was held on the work of Laurence Kahn, at Cerisy-la-Salle from July 13 to 20, 2018, titled *La psychanalyse: anatomie de sa modernité*. It was organized by Françoise Neau, Catherine Matha and Odile Bombarde, and its proceedings have recently been published[1]. Speakers at this conference included anthropologists, psychoanalysts and philosophers who retraced the intellectual and clinical trajectory of Laurence Kahn which include: different perspectives on myths[2], psychoanalysis with children[3], the analytic method of listening[4], sex and gender[5], the use of language[6] and the postwar and postmodern development of psychoanalysis[7].

It is particularly relevant to speak about this book in conjunction with the latest issue of *Psychoanalysis Today* which is devoted to contemporary politics. Indeed, like Laurence Kahn affirmed in 2004, in an interview with Michel Enaudeau[8], anthropology, as a way of reading Freud's texts, was closely articulated with the question of politics. An historian and scholar of Greek culture before becoming a psychoanalyst, she combines her knowledge of Greek myths and ancient tragedy with the anthropological texts of Freud to enrich her clinical and theoretical reflection.

In this brief note, it seems appropriate, a century after the publication of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, to evoke a common thread of this book: the irreversible submission of humanity to the compulsion to repeat and to the conflict between the opposing forces of Eros and Thanatos.

Laurence Kahn reflects on that which

within each individual, regardless of this so-called progress of civilization, very regularly instills anew an absolute hatred of the other, as an enemy, as different, as stranger to oneself. Yet he [Freud] does not seek the origin of barbarism – since that itself is the problem – in the historical transformations of societies, he searches it within the configuration of each individual. Ultimately, Freud thought that the origin of barbarism lies in a primary organization of the individual[9].

This question has been left aside by contemporary psychoanalysis which has 'not taken into account the clinical and theoretical disorientation, inflicted by the outbreak of the Nazi movement'[10].

Instead of thinking about the reasons why the masses gathered around a Führer, contemporary psychoanalysis has focused instead on the empathetic listening of the trauma and the pathologies of the victims of the Shoah. What place should be given to affects related to the experience of Auschwitz?

For Laurence Kahn, affect is indicated by 'the action of form'[11].

Affect is in the details since its mobility is the sign of its ability to unite with one representation or another, in total indifference to the representation in question. Affect is only a legitimate guide if it gives access to the repressed representation. In the patient's voice and speech, the analyst will focus on what comes out of the emotional and bodily dimension and which escapes meaning.[12]

To do this, the psychoanalyst must remain indifferent, 'apathetic'[13] in order to grasp the essence, a motive, the 'small things'[14] – apathetic in the sense of without pathos, like Kertész uses the term to speak of Auschwitz. Laurence Kahn refers to this apathy in *Le psychanalyste apathique et le patient postmoderne (Psychoanalysis, Apathy and the Postmodern Patient)*.

Freud, as already as 1925, feared that American analysts would wrest 'his poison fangs' from psychoanalysis (*The Question of Lay Analysis*). Wallerstein's 1987 lecture, 'One Psychoanalysis or Many?' allowed from the coexistence of different currents in the IPA.

Udo Hock<sup>[15]</sup> takes up this point in his paper. For him, this current pluralism leads to an impasse. He tries to get out of it by appealing to the *Entstellung* (Distortion), a key Freudian concept that drives all thought. Every current in contemporary psychoanalysis would be an *Entstellung*, a distorted version of Freud's text. The transference, according to him, would be a 'sort of *Entstellung* in two ways: *Entstellung* of remembrance, *Entstellung* of relation'. This is a very controversial reflection, because it implies that transference is resistance, not alliance, which runs counter to intersubjectivist and relationist currents. 'To each his own Freud', says Udo Hock, on the condition of not forgetting, adds Laurence Kahn, the Freud who writes in *Moses and Monotheism* that the distortion of a text is like murder. This makes her ask if Wallerstein might not have legitimized 'levels of deadly distortions in the very reading of the Freudian text and in relation to practice'.

This is one of the threads of reflection that I have chosen to present this book to you: Quelques motifs de la psychanalyse. À partir des travaux de Laurence Kahn. I highly recommend reading it.

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[1] *Quelques motifs de la psychanalyse. À partir des travaux de Laurence Kahn*. Textes réunis par Odile Bombarde, Françoise Neau et Catherine Matha. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2020. The lively debates that followed the interventions are present in the volume.

[2] Patrice Bidou, 'Les déclinaisons mythiques de l'inutilisable : une théorie amazonienne de l'évolution'.

Ellen Corin, 'L'actualité des mythes indiens et leur mise en abîme'.

Patrick Merot, 'Les mythes en héritage'.

Paul Denis, 'Œdipe créateur des mythes originaires'.

[3] Viviane Abel Prot, 'L'unité de la psychanalyse'.

Jocelyne Malosto, 'Le psychanalyste et l'enfant : entre le Charybde de la désexualisation et le Scylla de la resexualisation'.

Aline Cohen de Lara, 'Quelques considérations actuelles sur "Les petites choses. Enfants du Coteau, temps de guerre."'.

Sylvain Missonnier, 'Au commencement était le mouvement'.

[4] Françoise Coblenche, 'Les embûches de l'affect'.

Laurence Kahn, 'L'écoute analytique selon Daniel Widlöcher. Intentionnalité, réalité psychique et théorie de la lacune'.

Catherine Chabert, 'L'entente et la surdité'.

Pierre-Henri Castel, 'Laurence Kahn, l'esprit de Freud et l'ennemi à l'intérieur de la psychanalyse'.

[5] Jean-Yves Tamet, 'Au sujet des demandes actuelles de changement de sexe'.

[6] Laurent Danon-Boileau, 'La force, le sens, et quelques bons sentiments aussi dangereux qu'incontournables'.

Dominique Scarfone, 'Trace et transduction'.

Corinne Enaudeau, 'Les langues étrangères de la psychanalyse'.

[7] Udo Hock, 'Sortir des impasses du pluralisme : la notion d'Entstellung'.

Jean-François Chiantaretto, 'Survivre/penser : l'écriture de Kertész pour le psychanalyste'.

Jacob Rogozinski, 'Ce que Hitler aurait appris à Freud'.

[8] Laurence Kahn, *Fiction et Vérité freudiennes, Entretiens avec Michel Enaudeau*. Paris:Les Belles Lettres, 2018, p. 161.

[9] Op. cit. p. 181.

[10] Laurence Kahn, *Ce que le nazisme a fait à la psychanalyse*. Paris: PUF, 2018.

[11] Laurence Kahn, *L'écoute de l'analyste, De l'acte à la forme*. Paris: PUF 2012.

[12] Françoise Coblence, op. cit.

[13] Laurence Kahn, *Le psychanalyste apathique et le patient postmoderne*, Paris: Editions de l'Olivier, 2014.

[14] Aline Cohen de Lara, op. cit.

[15] Udo Hock, op. cit.

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