

# The Same, The Other

**Dra. Silvana Rea**

**The same, the other.** This theme is emblematic of the moment we live in, as it deals with questions of otherness, and can be thought of from theoretical-clinical and social perspectives. Hence, this topic was chosen by the Brazilian Psychoanalysis Society of São Paulo's scientific board for the 2017-2018 term.

We have recently been befuddled by the USA President Donald Trump's approach to the issue of illegal immigration by separating immigrant children from their families. In Europe, refugees from countries at war remain adrift. The urban violence in Brazil's major cities and the recent terrorist attacks across the world lead people to distrust those sitting next to them. The resurgence of national identity discourses incite hatred against foreigners and everything that is different.

In an interview with a Brazilian newspaper, French philosopher Alain Badiou maintains that the reduction of money in circulation, alongside capitalism's incapacity to redistribute wealth, leads to a movement towards authoritarianism. The democratic regime hits its crisis, xenophobic and racist discourses proliferate, and borders are closed.

Indeed, the 21st century summons people to close in on themselves. This trend can be observed everyday in the phenomenon of *selfies*, which reveals an affirmation of the "I" as an image that is quickly dispersed and liquefied. Condemned to the eternal present, to the rapidity of information, to virtuality, to the quickness of consumerist devouring, and to the easy digestion of mass culture, the contemporary subject is paradoxically hyper-satiated and unsatisfied. Therefore, s/he is an easy prey for neo-truths and fake news.

As with every cultural phenomenon, psychoanalysis must be contextualized in political, economical, and social dimensions. As it emerges from the clinical exercise, in order to examine psychoanalysis today, it is fundamental to understand the contemporary person's experience of existing in the world – that person who comes to our offices.

However, in order to get to the contemporary person, it is important to go back in history.

Let us remember the 18th century, the age of Enlightenment, the formation of Nation States, and economic liberalism, all leading to the emphasis on the idea of the individual, of an individual identity centered in the "I".

Subsequently, the notion of "I" necessarily brings to mind the idea of "the other". It is then that Daniel Defoe writes *Robinson Crusoe*, and Jonathan Swift pens *Gulliver's Travels* – both metaphors for the adventure of otherness.

By the end of the 19th century, Enlightenment's concept of reason and the notion of identity founded on the identical are no longer sustainable. It is then that Freud develops psychoanalysis – simultaneously a result of and a conscious criticism on modernity – which produces, in turn, the man in crisis: cleaved, multidimensional, and decentered. This very man is represented in literature by characters such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll & Hyde*, as well as, later on, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. It would also be remiss to forget Golyadkin, the main character

of Dostoevsky's *The Double*.

It was in this atmosphere that Freud understood the suffering of his hysterical patients, who led him to the notion of the unconscious – the unavoidable otherness of oneself. Mechanisms of repression reveal this other of myself who inhabits me and who I do not know. My stranger – the uncanny me.

Indeed, for psychoanalysis, who I am always refers to someone else. The bases of human life and its process of subjectivity arise from the – more or less traumatic – founding presence of the other. The concept of identification – the first experience of an affective link with another person – describes a fundamental way through which the other is present in us, and through which we are present in the other. Not to forget the importance of the different one in the oedipal scenario – the presence of the father as the foreigner who arrives to configure the other.

We no longer live in the same world as Freud did. The contemporary subject displays pathologies of emptiness, acting out, addictions, and eating disorders. As an image, the “I” dissolves itself, which leads to permissive, hedonist, and self-centered ethics. That is to say that our experience is another one, our work is another one, and our patients, as others, challenge us to widen our epistemological reflections and technical positioning – which makes us think about the multiplicity of the psychoanalytical work, or even, to use the plural form, works. After all, each patient demands from us the use of one specific theory and one specific technical approach. Each patient, at each given step of the process, invites us to look at them as the other, and not to consider them the same.

On the other hand, the psychoanalytical experience offers us, through its transference, a place in which we are multiple – where I inhabit the other and am inhabited by them. There, I step away from the experience of me as identical and open myself to that who confronts, questions, and decenters me – to that who shows what I do not see about myself. The otherness, as well as the other, is always interrogating me.

The theme **The same, the other** also brings up the movement of leaving and returning, which is evocative of Ulysses' return to Ithaca, where he docks transformed. This movement is also similar to the game of *fort-da*; it is a “come and go” that creates places of foundation of the subject. However, in the path between the nearby and the distant, between me and someone else, there is a threat to the stability of one's very existence, since the cotton reel risks to get lost – the same risk that is incurred by h/she who launches it far away.

Nevertheless, we cannot forget that Freud also uses the cotton reel game to weave his reflection about compulsion to repetition – that is, about the presence of death drive within the human psyche. Here, the other, separate and outside of me, occupies the place of the non-identified object, which does not allow identification and is, therefore, threatening. This is how poor people, immigrants, refugees, and foreigners are often seen.

To circulate between the same and the other invites us to leave the comfort of our homeland, which implies estrangement. It is always through the cracks of their own world that the traveller penetrates, opening their way into foreign landscapes. The circumstance of being a foreigner does not simply state the strangeness of the visited world, but is proof of the disarrangements of the territory of the one who travels – the identity cracks and fissures of the fragile familiarity within one's inner self. Then, upon return, it becomes clear that we can only reach the other by being another in ourselves; that we do not reach the other from the outside if we do not previously reach them from the inside.

Translated from the Portuguese by Mr. Gabriel Hirschhorn, London, UK