

## On Mysteriousness

I am doubly foreign today here in Delhi. Foreign like all the other guests, but doubly foreign because in an Indo-Italian meeting, I am neither Indian nor Italian. This foreignness "raised to the second degree" helps explain the reason I am here, the reason I accepted Sudhir's invitation. But first maybe I should correct what I just said.

Because it is not true that I am not Italian: I have two passports, an Argentine one and an Italian one. I have the Italian passport – not because I have more ties to Italian culture than any other Westerner formatted by the Roman Empire – but because I married an Italian woman, who was not born in Italy either.

Nor is it true that I am the only foreigner, because it is clear that we all are. Not only because the unconscious makes us all foreigners in our own home, but because the *ius solii* is a fiction; local people do not exist. Even a millenarian culture like the Indian settled on this soil comes from somewhere else, everyone comes from the Other.

Everyone comes from the other because of migrations, because of a first pilgrimage - in this case, the Indo-Aryan, in another case because Abraham abandoned his land to settle another, and today due to the flood of refugees seeking their own promised land - but not for that reason only. The Other is also present in one's own land: many have been here - the Persians, the Arabs, the Mongols, the English ... so autochtony is not possible, and this is not unfortunate. This is especially so with psychoanalysis, which we could call an art of foreignness.

This squared foreignness allows me to tell you the reason why I have made the long journey here. On the one hand, because the trip itself is a good metaphor to describe an analysis, which is a trip to another place, the most intimate and unexplored place. It is a trip that is undertaken without knowing where it is going to end and in this way, as Goethe said, it allows us to go even further. It is a journey that is in some way a spiritual transformation. It is a trip to the heart of the spiritual, to perhaps stimulate thought about how the spiritual is linked to psychoanalysis.

It is a trip where I have come to learn. It is here where the clinical and political dimensions of psychoanalysis intersect. The psychoanalytic device in clinical

terms, requires that the practicing analyst situate himself in a marginal place; that is, outside the visual field of the analysand, almost like a left-over or an object that reserves for the patient, the place of a subject. An analyst with excess protagonistic desire would do better in dedicating himself to theater or to look for a place in Hollywood because he would irremediably impede any intended cure.

In politico-institutional or epistemological terms, the same happens when we approach the edges of the psychoanalytic world – such as India – to bring frozen knowledge packaged from the West, an impertinent and senseless idea. In psychoanalysis, true knowledge, textual knowledge, and not the referential, is in the Other. So I am here to listen to you, although now I have to talk.

Our great teachers knew that outside the West there was something to learn. It was not due to a question of a birth - Bion was born here - but to a question of structure: the Persian tapestries that covered Freud's couch or his collection of Oriental antiques, or Lacan's fascination with Japan, do nothing but direct our gaze towards the land where the sun rises before our shores. Founded at the edge of Europe, psychoanalysis would not have existed without the alluvial contribution of Asia through the tide of languages and cultures that made up the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

I think that psychoanalysis is in trouble in the West because it has lost part of its mysteriousness. I suspect that there is a quarry here to investigate how to recover it.

I do not think we should approach the margins of the western world like missionaries bringing the Word to convert primitives, but be open to the fertile contamination of which Lorena Preta has spoken. Maybe it's easier for me, since I have an Italian passport and live in a marginal country ... to a certain extent; Argentina is a strange country where psychoanalysis is popular. Even Pope Francisco admits to having been analyzed, and fruitfully.

There, according to Elisabeth Roudinesco, the habit of analyzing oneself even in the absence of any psychopathology was invented; there, psychoanalysis is part of the culture. Argentina is where the great historian of psychoanalysis recommends - to the psychoanalysts of the world - to undergo at least one season of analysis ... In this strange place - you might call it the center of the margin- if you permit me to call it as such - psychoanalysis has reached a level of maturity

where you can capture what you lose when you reach that point: the original mystery. So, I am here to tell you my experience but above all to rediscover it.

### **Barbarian psychoanalysis**

Like Michaux, I'm a barbarian in Asia. It is appropriate to define not only who you are talking to, but where you are speaking from. I speak from the place of a barbarian, a place fitting to a psychoanalyst, wherever he may be. The subtlety of Michaux is in the reversal of roles and positioning himself as a foreigner on his visit to Asia. He, then, is the one who does not know the language of the other, he is the one who does not speak Greek (from there, as you remember, comes the term *barbarian* from *bar bar*, an onomatopoeia from the Other's language as Greek ears heard it).

An Italian, the president of the IPA, said that the association had an official language: and it was *bad English*. I loved his definition, not only because mine – as you notice- is a *bad English*. Not only because I have written about the benefits of reading badly (the creative misreadings, according to Harold Bloom) to which we may have to add the benefits of listening badly, when the oblique listening, slanted, strange and estranging, is what allows us to listen to what nobody listens: the Other in and of himself. The adjective bad, which degrades the noun English as lingua franca, strengthens it when -like Bolognini- another qualifier "official" is added to the language.

Well, if *bad English* is the official language of the main psychoanalytic institution in the world, maybe those who speak perfect English are not the ones who are best able to take the floor. Perhaps the ideal of purity is full of holes here and so we can talk - and therefore think - in terms that are impure, mestizo, and contaminated by the Other.

Like those languages that register interactions with the Other in sedimentary layers - the explorations of new worlds, the bustle of merchant caravans, the migrants and refugees who protected the land of origin and the invaders who plagued it, the libraries that were imported - the fertile exchanges left their mark on the language we speak. Such a language can only be bad. Perhaps the English of India, with its particular intonation, colonial aftertaste and at the same time official language, is also a *bad English*, that is, an impure English. Perhaps I should convert my own language, Spanish, into *bad Spanish*.

In every society the idea of purity marks a line of reference and division (Kakar). But it can also be a curse. Perhaps the most extreme and lethal form of that idea is demonstrated by Nazism, but genocides, new versions of the euphemistic "ethnic cleansing" can also be evoked, be it in Rwanda or in the Ottoman Empire, in the disputed territories of ancient Palestine or in the destroyed former Yugoslavia, or even the nearby tragedy of the Rohingyas fleeing the Myanmar massacre.

Although psychoanalysis is undoubtedly a western practice and practiced among a tiny portion of the privileged on earth it may find its foundations by looking towards the Orient, at least the Orient that infiltrated Europe when the old empires collapsed. Although psychoanalysis boasts of its purity, its legitimacy lies in the impure and in the mestizo formations where the unconscious both displays itself and conveys.

Columbus sailed towards the Occident to find the Orient, the coveted India and its spices; I feel like I am traveling the reverse route: I sail towards the Orient to find the reason of the Occident. At least as far as psychoanalysis is concerned.

### **Around Mystery**

Consulting a psychoanalyst in the West today has become a common everyday occurrence, no more mysterious than going to the dentist.

The globalization of the psychoanalyst as a professional, his everyday presence in the cities, the increasing legal pressure for informed consent and compliance with health insurance standards, among many other factors, undermine the element of mystery inherent in the functioning of analysis.

I do not refer here to mysteriousness as if it were an esoteric cost to be charged, nor as a despicable sham that political or religious leaders or unscrupulous therapists profit from. I refer to a certain opaqueness, to the inherent strangeness of the psychoanalyst who reserves a transference place adequate to generate therapeutic effects.

The progressive loss of mysteriousness may be responsible, to some extent, for the decline of transferences to psychoanalysis in many societies. If analysis has lost something of its original mysteriousness it may be due to our fascination with science, among other things as well.

What does science do in the face of mystery? Faced with the mystery of procreation, it clarifies the way in which the gametes combine for the species to reproduce itself. Faced with mysterious findings of similar flora and fauna on both sides of the ocean, the scientist proposes the theory that both continents were once united. Facing the mystery of a golden crown whose owner did not know if it was made of gold, Archimedes announces his famous principle crying, Eureka! which means, "I have found it". Archimedes' cry just before running naked through the streets is that moment when mystery ceases to be such. This moment is similar to a moment of epiphany in literature, or the so-called *satori* or enlightenment in Zen Buddhism, and the exaltation of an insight in analysis.

Science is gratifying because it dissolves mysteries, it is defined by illuminating the dark and its prestige is measured by the intensity of its light. That is why it functions better in the hard sciences than in the human sciences. The prestige of Newton, Darwin or Archimedes is greater than that of Freud, Bourdieu or Foucault because their discoveries are reproducible and verifiable - they are more powerful and have practical consequences and, in the application of its techniques in real life, the consequences are amazing.

The human sciences do not get along well with experimentation which neglects the subjective. It is the experiential rather than the experimental which best suits the human sciences. When we study what is exceptional about each subject, science becomes irrelevant. To think of psychoanalysis as an experience implies the restitution of a certain mystery, whereas to think of it as an experiment - in a mimesis with other disciplines - implies its dilution rather than its elucidation.

Both science and psychoanalysis require questions, but where science requires answers, although tentative and provisional in the form of hypotheses to be tested, psychoanalysis creates new questions. To do this, mystery, being the incarnation of all questions, is essential.

At the end of an analysis, the transferential relationship will be dissolved and the analyst will go from being the mysterious receiver of questions to being less than nothing, a simple remainder left over from the experience. Like a best thriller novel, the resolution of the mystery is never on par with the mystery itself. In the end, there is always some disappointment.

But what ultimately must fall, must at first exist, and psychoanalysis is not possible if the initial mystery is not established and protected. Everything

conspires so that the analyst continues shielded with that aura of sibylline knowledge, of that oracular air, of his alienation to worldly vagaries and motivations, characteristics that place him among monks, fortune-tellers and the wise who pronounce without risk, the most absurd or dangerous things. While it is difficult to talk about the intimate with a stranger, there are things that can only be said to a stranger. There is nothing like a foreigner to represent that strangeness in its purest form.

When psychoanalysis aligns itself excessively with science, it loses power. On the one hand, it loses mystery. On the other hand, even if practice follows protocol, no matter how much investigation is based on evidence, or how many empirical investigations are carried out, psychoanalysis never receives the prestige enjoyed by science. In order to distance oneself from the place inherited by magicians, sorcerers and shamans, from those that "heal by the spirit", a blessing or a curse that falls on the analyst, many renounce their tradition and identify themselves with the figure of a scientist, losing more than they gain.

Let's see what literature does with mystery.

Freud, who postulated the "family novel of the neurotic", thought that his stories were read as novels. Although the essay is the genre that best lends itself to thinking about psychoanalysis, the one that best metaphorizes it, is the novel. Even with its impossibilities: in times of 140 characters, it seems difficult today to have the time necessary to read a novel. In the times of Netflix, few wish to dedicate time to reading *War and Peace*. But perhaps we have to think about how *War and Peace* emerged to better understand this novel of a life that is constructed in analysis. That monumental novel was, at first, a *feuilleton* or newspaper serial.

Manuel Puig, an Argentine writer, said that the unconscious has the structure of a newspaper serial. Analysis, quite similar to the romance novel with its thwarted love affairs and that unrequited love, never reciprocated except platonically, is directed towards that opaque listener. In some cases, an analysis can also be a horror novel. At times it is a historical novel but there is always something that pulls you in, a suspense, an intrigue that captures the attention of the one who reads the novel of his life without knowing that at that time, he is actually rewriting it. In that sense, every analysis is in some way a mystery novel. Javier Cercas describes the novel as "a genre that seeks to protect the questions from the answers." It is hard to think of a better definition for analysis.

Psychoanalysis has the same structure as the melodramatic newspaper novel: newspaper serials that have been appearing since the nineteenth century in Europe and stage universal conflicts that favor identification with the reader. So the weekly episodes that Dumas or Tolstoi or Salgari published which then became *The Three Musketeers*, or *War and Peace* or *Sandokan* could be compared to the sessions of an analysis. Without a strict plan, these authors wrote chapters and perfected the plots while appearing in newspapers, as with modern Latin American soap operas, capable of capturing and igniting the passions of TV viewers

So Puig must be corrected: it is not that the unconscious has the structure of the newspaper serial, but that the newspaper serial has the structure of the unconscious and that is why it captures the attention of the reader. The same mechanism is at work when we watch television series. Today's Netflix series are yesterday's newspaper serials and the structure of psychoanalysis is not that different from a series in which a protagonist unveils his own drama from session to session, always leaving a bit of mystery to guarantee the viewer's return to sit in front of the screen. It is the same bit that guarantees that the analysand rests on the couch the following session. In this series of encounters that makes up an analysis, a normal subject, neurotic or even banal, becomes a tragic hero. This is how Ricardo Piglia explains the attraction of psychoanalysis: "In the midst of the generalized crisis of experience, psychoanalysis gives rise to the epic of subjectivity" summoning us all to be tragic, extraordinary subjects, inhabited by portentous desires and passions, immersed in stories of seduction and secrecy, crimes and sins.

Piglia goes even further, and identifies the psychoanalyst with a detective.

Psychoanalysis is linked to two aspects of this genre used by Poe during the century of the newspaper serials. On the one hand, the classic English detective story in which detectives of subtle intellect like Poe's Auguste Dupin, or Hercule Poirot's Agatha Christie, solve puzzles. The psychoanalyst has been compared to a detective numerous times, a kind of Sherlock Holmes of the mind.

But there is also another aspect of the detective novel – that of the Black novel originating in North America – that is not so much about English analytical ingenuity as about the actual detective. Like Sam Spade or Phillip Marlowe, the unforgettable characters of Hammett and Chandler, he is usually declassed and

stuck in the mud of the crimes he investigates. According to Piglia, here the enigma of a place where law and truth do not coincide, like a secret society, also appears. Here, the detective -the analyst- who immerses himself in that vortex, can interpret it because he is isolated from every institution; he has just the right distance, and he is also a marginal, a foreigner.

Mystery is present in both aspects of the genre, and it is metaphorized in analytic work. Sherlock Holmes' art of the interpretation of clues is brought together with Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* or Lacan's primacy of the symbolic. However, the art of swimming in dark sludge, at the center of social inconsistencies brings together Philippe Marlowe with Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* or Lacan's concept of the *real*, as well as our daily practice of today, where we are less fortune tellers than craftsmen, less archaeologists than forensic anthropologists.

Piglia also said that writers felt that analysts talked about something they already knew, but about which it was better to keep quiet. He sustained that there is an ambiguous relationship, because although psychoanalysis advances through that dark zone that the artist preserves and wishes to forget, it actually does the same thing as art: it constructs a secret story with a hermetic plot that is full of passions and beliefs, carving out experience.

What is a work of art if not an object valued for its mysteriousness? The mystery portrayed in Mona Lisa's gaze has been talked about for centuries, but until the advent of contemporary art, the artist's technical expertise and his search for beauty veiled the mystery that every work of true art encompasses. Contemporary art takes things to the extreme, everything is more transparent today.

Why does someone admire a urinal or pay millions of dollars for a shark in formaldehyde? It is not about Duchamp or Damien Hirst and his technical mastery, but rather about the creators of objects that carry a mystery, and as such are capable of eliciting multiple readings over the ages. They are opaque objects that make us speak, interpreting us while we interpret them. A work of art is a device that encapsulates mystery and that is why we travel unlikely distances to contemplate them and build gigantic cases -the museums- to house them.

Religion - from the Greek and Roman mystery cults, which come from Asia – is originally linked to mystery.



Mystery comes from the Latin word, *mysterium*, which in turn comes from the Greek *mysterión*, derivation of *myo*, which means to close the eyes and in more ancient times, to close the lips. There is a connection with the Indo-European root *mu*, a sound that can be made with closed lips. Esoteric knowledge could only be transmitted to initiates and could not be spoken of outside of that circle.

If we take advantage of the wisdom of language, there are two essential features of the analyst which allow the emergence of listening: closing the eyes and closing the lips. The absence of eye contact during a session, somehow, allowed for the emergence of psychoanalysis, a practice in which, although the analyst from time to time offers an interpretation, he is usually silent. His lips are closed as he listens.

That root, *mu*, is homophonic and refers to an ideogram that is pronounced /*Mu*/ which in Japanese refers to what may be behind all mystery.

Foucault identified psychoanalysis as the offspring of self-care practices from some Greek philosophical schools. In both cases, it refers to the relationship of the individual with the truth and the transformation of the individual upon contact with the truth. In psychoanalysis, the truth is related to the sexual, another mystery at the center of the Dionysian mysteries. The Latin plural *Misteria*, almost homophonic with *Hysteria*, offers a clue: the hysteric is the one responsible, from the origin of psychoanalysis, either paradoxically, or with subtlety through their intrigues and pauses, their seductive or deceptive countenances, to make mystery the engine of analytical work. When we say that a subject has to be hystericized so that an analysis can take place, it is a matter of turning that mystery through transference into something operative.

### **Socrates, more than Archimedes**

Transference was not calculated *a priori*; it surprised Freud, who was able to remain there where Breuer could not. Its appearance does not cease to be a mystery, the emergence of love there where it was assumed that respect would be enough.

Mystery is the gravitational center around which the life of a subject orbits, and there is no way to unveil it except when that center moves transferentially, in a phenomenal fiction, to that stranger who will come to occupy the most

important, the most intimate and at the same time the most exterior place, the analyst.

To analyze oneself implies following the thread of that incarnated mystery, that of the historical determinations that mark us as subjects in that other which is the analyst. That transient tenant of transference opacity is that person who embodies a question, and that incarnated question is what will make the one being analyzed work hard. Remember what Derrida said, without knowing that he was referring to the place of the analyst: it is the foreigner who carries the questions. An analysis is the story -always retroactive- of the unfolding of those questions.

As in the ancient Dionysian mysteries, there is something initiatory in the formation of the psychoanalyst, a rite of passage in which evidence of having crossed a threshold must be given, where something mysterious ceases to be. That the end of analysis hinges on that moment - in which an analysand finally becomes, after a long process, an analyst - is an important clue to what mystery is all about.

After years of supposed "self-knowledge", the paradoxical result of psychoanalytic training is to produce a foreigner, someone who accepts to occupy -not without its costs- that place.

If I critiqued film, I would place a phrase here: "Alert! Spoiler!" so that those who do not want to listen can cover their ears, so that whoever does not want to know how the film on analysis ends can maintain the illusion. The secret that I reveal is that there is nothing "behind". At the end of the mystery there is nothing. Borges wrote it: *the only thing lost is that which was never had*.

The encounter with this built-in void is what differentiates analysis from indoctrination. The discovery of that nothingness will imply for the subject being analyzed to reel in the line, recuperate the transference of credibility, free himself from the analyst and through him, free himself from every master, except his unconscious. Mystery ends and in this way, desire begins.

When one receives a gift in Japan, even though tiny, one is faced with a wrapper that envelops another wrapper which in turn envelops another, and so on. The

Occident's anxiety to get to the bottom of things - to discover the gift that the wrapping conceals - prevents us from seeing that the real gift is the wrapping itself, and that what it envelops is a mystery. The wrapping is worth what it conceals, protects and designates.

A wrapping can also take the form of a Silenus, a kind of satyr whose figure could function among the Greeks as a jewelry box. Lacan uses that figure to describe Socrates, old and unattractive, yet able to awaken the desire of the young and beautiful Alcibiades. If Socrates had the power to capture desire, it was because he enveloped something tremendously valuable, a jewel. Lacan called that jewel - following Plato - *agalma*, one of the names of the object that causes desire, one of the keys to understanding the mystery that the analyst embodies, one of the figures to understand something of that other mystery that is love, and its most mysterious form, transference love.

Mysteriousness is needed in psychoanalysis, it requires a nebulous atmosphere where its practice is not completely clear. Not because it gives in to its pretensions: the conceptual rigor of psychoanalysis and the demands of the training of analysts do not lag behind that of any science, and in many cases it is greater than that of many medical specialties.

Mysteriousness is needed in psychoanalysis because, on the one hand, both the way theory is constructed and the way to interpret are allusive, skewed. Psychoanalysis has more affinity with poetry than with prose, it is enhanced in the contrast of light and shadow, in the nuances, in the art of veiling. The analyst promises - without saying it - the keys to reading a mystery, at the same time whisking them away.

On the other hand, the mysteriousness veils the central void, that nothing that constitutes us and whose vision resembles that of the Gorgon, the unbearable horror that petrifies those who look upon it unknowingly. Mysteriousness is also a provisional reassurance against anguish.

Rescuing the trademark of foreignness that defines psychoanalysis from its beginnings, and that nowadays is dizzyingly diluted, implies recovering a certain mysteriousness. Those who consult us believe that they pay to reveal a mystery, but they really pay for that mystery to exist.

## Thinking from scratch

Arrogance is consubstantial with the Occident. There, said Borges, we are all Greeks and Jews; that is our founding heritage. Freud wrote something similar when he wrote to Romain Rolland: "I am now trying to penetrate the Hindu jungle which had eluded me until now due to a certain mix of the Greek love of limits, *Jewish moderation* and philistine anxiety".

If behind the mysteriousness there is a certain *nothing* hidden with care, the Baroque is the culminating point of its veiling. Aristotle said that nature - also human nature - has a horror of emptiness. The consumer society is nothing other than the incessant manufacture of objects that promise to fill the central void in each subject. In the Orient, people coexist better with this emptiness, for us it is an arduous task to discover it.

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the figure 0, a mathematical revolution, was invented in India. The 0 did not exist in Greece or Israel. The representations of the numbers in those cultures were alphabetic - the same number served as letter and number - and they were ambiguous and very limited numerical systems. Roman numerals, an endless string of letters that made any calculation impossible, are an example of occidental clumsiness on this point.

Behind mysteriousness, the *agalma*, the precious object that attracts transference. Behind the *agalma*, nothing: *Sunya*, emptiness.

The Indian invention-carried to the West by the Arabs-is more complex than the mere indication of emptiness-the Mu of the Japanese-for they had discovered a positional number system: the value of a number was not absolute but depended on the position it was in, of place.

I like to think that I am here in New Delhi thinking in positional terms too, and that to speak of repression or unconsciousness here must be different than doing it in London or in my country. I like to put concepts to that test of the foreign. Although the result is uncertain, although it implies questioning our certainties and having to rethink everything, thinking from scratch, from nothing, from zero.