

# The place the hands can't seek – VI – Physics, hermeneutics, language and the conditions of interpretation

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'The Spirit produces itself, it makes itself what it is. [...] This process, mediation of itself with itself and by itself (and not by another) implies that the Spirit differentiates itself in distinct Moments. [...] All that is historical is a step of this self-knowledge.' Georg W. F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, II. The realisation of the Spirit in History, « The ultimate end »

In her article on one Hans-Georg Gadamer's 1977 text about hermeneutics, poetry and language, French philosopher Isabel Weiss commented<sup>1</sup> : 'All language is a relation and the human itself is a relation – it is not only a producer of relations, it is related, diversely, to things and beings. [...] It is as well our connection to things that escapes the obsolescence affecting the consumed things or the words and ideas that come and go without finding anchor. [...] The relation between the I of the poet and the I of the reader [...] isn't an identification but a coming closer together<sup>2</sup>, a connection that takes the shape of a meeting around and next to things.'

We could not help thinking of Freud's allegation that the erotic drives are more plastic, more subject to derivation and moves than the drives of destruction.<sup>3</sup> The libido is up to shift and move, working at the service of pleasure, avoiding the stasis and easing the release of unpleasurable sensations.<sup>4</sup> According to Freud, the objects of this release are indifferent, as long as the unpleasurable sensations are evacuated.

Then to summarise his *second Topic*, he states : 'the id is totally amoral, the ego endeavours to be moral, the super-ego can become hyper-moral and then as cruel as only the id can be.'<sup>5</sup>

In this article, we wish to speak of the conceptions of reality, shaped through language and the *implicit relational meanings*<sup>6</sup> it implies throughout life. More specifically, we have been intrigued by those Freud's words that 'What has been in this way discarded by repression opposes, in analysis, the ego, and the analysis finds itself in front of the task to suppress the resistances that the ego manifests when we are dealing with the repressed.'<sup>7</sup>

One concept from Physics comes in mind that is the concept of *couple* in Mechanics. Couple is the balance between two opposite and equivalent forces. If we trust Isabel Weiss's commentary on Gadamer's text that the poem is substantial because it has the ability to stand by itself, that it is an 'open and plastic stability', we can speculate over a connection between the conditions of interpretation through language, the poetic condition of language itself and our relation to reality.

'Whenever the ego adopts the characteristics of the object, it imposes itself to the id as an object of love so to speak, it tries to replace for it what it has lost saying : « You can love me too, see how I look like the object. »'<sup>8</sup> A force opposes the realisation of whatever proper energy of the body, as sensorimotor, is seen as an aggression to the moral laws and social norms. This force, first represented by the parents, is in a way synthesised in the individual's character, behaviour and psyche – what Freud called the super-ego, speaking for the id against any of the ego's transgressions.

So it is a struggle between forces, that has been internalised into self-inflicted rules and restrictions of behaviour. The latter has to be moral to be fitting the social milieu of the person.

<sup>1</sup> In Isabel Weiss, *Le langage : Herméneutique du poétique*, Revue Philopsis, 2014, <http://www.philopsis.fr/spip.php?article268>

<sup>2</sup> We shall treat the relation of this idea to the paradox of the gazed hand in a following text.

<sup>3</sup> In Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, « The two kinds of drives », 1923

<sup>4</sup> Concepts developed by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, « The relations of dependence of the ego »

<sup>6</sup> From psychoanalyst Daniel Stern's terms. See previous articles.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, « Conscious and unconscious »

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, « The ego and the super-ego (ideal of the ego) »

Poetry can then be seen as a space of freedom amongst the diverse spaces of action – some of which have become spaces of reaction and inhibition. But why ?

In Physics, we can parallel the birth of variational calculus. It started between the XVIIth and XVIIIth century with French mathematician Pierre de Fermat's principle (1662) that in order to go from one point to another, light did not use the shortest way but the way that would take the least time. Leonhard Euler continued this mathematical observation of the optimisation phenomena in the physical laws. Yet it was Pierre de Maupertuis who allegedly proposed first his principle of Least Action for Mechanics, then taken up and clarified by Joseph-Louis de Lagrange in his *Analytical Mechanics* of 1788.

In other words, if you are on a running train and drop a marble from the window, this one would touch the ground using the way that demands the least effort. The trajectory, the arch described by it would be mathematically expressed by the principles of extremum. For example, the 2<sup>nd</sup> principle of Thermodynamics states that : *a thermodynamic system reaches balance for a maximum of its entropy*, entropy being the degree of disorder of a system ; for instance, a tank of gas. The more you reduce the volume of the tank with the same quantity of gas, the higher the pressure raises and the more chaotic the behaviour of its particles is.

This internal chaos cannot reduce but only increase or find balance ; or you would have to transfer the gas to another system. Anyway, the mass of energy would be contained in a lower volume, and the effort pushed on the structure of the tank would increase. This is the inertia of entropy.

Relation demands stability and stability demands attention and then, a certain level of identification to the objects of attention. Yet if the physical reality is fluid because matter is dynamic, the rules of our expectations are not often. Energy is contained, and it is expected to be transferred to another system.

Hence, the poem is an open system of meaning and expectation to action. We don't have to act the poem, the poem is acting us. But we need a circulation, to find fluidity where the vanishing character of fluids has been banned. The moral laws demand predictability from us – then we wipe out our wastes.

The poem stands by itself because it takes the way to the heart and creative nature of language that demands the least effort. It demands the least effort to the language of the poem, but it may not demand less effort from the reader or the poet themselves. The poem is in a way *made by itself* inside of this moment of meeting of the poet with the subject of writing the poem, that is expressing, somehow, the desire of the dynamic self – or the id.

It makes a deal with the moral restrictions. It reverses the thing. It is not anymore the ego that has to identify with the objects of obedience that the super-ego, representing moral order, presents. It *demand*s the super-ego to identify with the ego, to help it invest the chaotic and plastic non-communicable part of the self.<sup>9</sup> And it does so that the *mnesic traces* of experience contained in the words of language reflect on the world and personal reality. The latter is shaped by the representations of both the structures of culture and structures of the self.

Following Isabel Weiss's lead and according to Gadamer, we understand that Poetics is included in Hermeneutics, and not the opposite. As well, the metaphoric impact that Sciences take over the way we perceive reality is important. The scales of space and time are important.

In 1948, physicist Richard Phillips Feynman reunited Fermat, Maupertuis, Euler, Lagrange and others' ideas from variational system to formalise the calculus of *path integrals*, as a new vision given to the Lagrange-Hamilton principle. It was inaugurating probabilistic approach to quantum scales. Path integrals allow to calculate any wave function of a particle at the dynamic point *r* and time *t* as the sum of terms that each are attached to a possible trajectory of the particle to get to *r* at the same time *t*.

What is important in that is not only the perspective of Quantum Physics, but the fragmentation of reality. Probabilistic approach gained many other fields, like high-technology

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<sup>9</sup> From Donal W. Winnicott's term.

industry, (bio)chemistry, sociology, public relations... It pertained to a fragmentation of reality, in course with a political agenda. We wager on presence. Unlike the poem, that has a source in the inalienable nature of language, probabilistic reality does not *stand by itself*. It is pretty much an idlike world, where the moral structures are vacant. It is fluid but with no room and time for the edification of an identity. Identification has become obsolete for lack of a distanced mnesic structure.

Freud uses the expression of *nostalgia for the father* when describing the mastering of the Oedipus complex by the ego and the submission to the id. When the reality is fragmented, there are too many partial objects to invest. We have learnt to abandon most of them as children, when taught to obey by the moral rules. Those investments are sedimented, as described by Freud. As such, they could become the object of poetry, located in language, in words, in the experiential reality they represent. But if there are too many objects belonging to the same father and we are so many under his rule and he has disappeared, how am I different from the other child next to me ?

The problem with fragmentation in mass consumption and politics, is that we owe everything to the same absent people, absent fathers, uninterested in their children, but only in the benefits of pressuring them. We have laws, but also those distant judges and markers, a distant authority, that we cannot grasp nor confront.

That is the manifestation of neoliberal ideology, to break up and shatter reality in bits, that can be consumed by anyone because they are cheap. But the cost of it, like psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva expressed in the *Powers of horror* (1980) on another topic, is the absorption of the alien, the disgust of not having anyone to answer to except from its wastes.

It is scattering the only few moral markers that parents or culture can be, crushing today's society's rules into crumbs of relation to the *political* – already noticed by Benjamin Constant in his 1819 speech at the Athénée Royal. Then we cannot but strictly go back to the anal stage and throw it up as mass consumption is compulsively making us *throw up* our sense of relation - relation in the manner poetry rises up. Psychoanalyst Elise Pestre - author of *La vie psychique des réfugiés* (2014) -, underlined in her preface of *The Ego and the Id's* French edition the effects of a dismissed ideal as one of the origins of young people's commitment to modern terrorism – as well as the resistance to narcissistic collapsing.

We are forced to expect the whole of our emotional life from the crumbs of a lost hope in the unity of social, cultural and family structures. We are forced to pressure empty raisin skin bags through a symbolic order of how we should manage our immediate urges and anguish. But as authority is too distant, and the relational means to it too thin, too immature and inconsistent, we cannot but wait. And while we wait, we continue the fragmentation of the little resources we have – and that's it.

We are literally trying to make poetry, or at least a valid narrative out of crap.