

Applied Psychoanalysis in Philosophy and Art

Review

**Marius DUMITRESCU, *Psihanaliza aplicată în filosofie și artă*,
Sedcom Libris Publishing House, Iași, 2014**

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If the entire history of philosophy can only be observed by applying a safe method, valid in the ontological demarche, more precisely, the phenomenological method theorized by Edmund Husserl, the history of our culture and civilisation can only be read by applying Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory. The two authors are contemporary, and they are both Jews who inhabited a German space become hostile to their ethnic origin, they both profoundly marked the philosophy of the twentieth century, however, they are at the opposite poles in what the understanding of the human psyche is concerned. The former is ultra-rationalist, whereas the latter is a radical supporter of our irrational nature.

Husserl placed the idea of the consciousness of impossibility at the centre of the phenomenological method. Translated in the area of the history of philosophy, one may easily notice that every philosopher inquired, without even inferring phenomenology, what is that which the world cannot exist without, indicating one element of this world – either the fire, the number, the spirit, the matter or the will – without whom the world could not exist. And the answers came again and again, subjectively, until recently. Freud, by elaborating the complex method of psychic investigation, revealed the fact that the truth about us is deposited in dreams, images and phantasms. Husserl was not aware of the fact that phenomenology overlaps the history of ontology, neither were the metaphysicians aware that there was a phenomenological method. Freud was only partially aware of the fact that history of culture may be read psychoanalytically, which is why he got scared when the surrealists started creating art by using the basics of psychoanalysis. He

considered that psychoanalysis may only be applied to the cultural past, in view of the future recovery of his patients, and not otherwise.

That things are not quite as they seem is to be found in a remarkable work by Professor Marius Dumitrescu, from Iași, *Psihanaliza aplicată în filosofie și artă* (*Applied Psychoanalysis in Philosophy and Art*).

Towards the end of the book, on page 429, the author writes:

Psychoanalysis is precisely the art of recovering and identifying the living behind spiritual creation, a complex process which reminds of the search for the philosophical stone which grants noblesse, immortality and everlasting youth to everything it touches (our translation).¹

In the work *The Meaning of the Creative Art*, Nikolai Berdyaev pointed to the phenomenon of objectivization in the act of spiritual creation, a phenomenon which, just as Freudian sublimation, is a result of an unconscious revelatory outburst which solidifies, then merges with the work, the revelatory experience eventually losing something of its original effervescence. This exercise of recovering “the living behind spiritual creations” is the theme of Marius Dumitrescu’s book.

The text is structured in three large parts. In the opening chapter, “*There is always a father too, or the pulsions theory in Freudian view,*” the reader is introduced to psychoanalytical theory, from its genesis and fundamental concepts to the understanding of human nature, a path led by the Freudian view on our psyche and further developed in agreement or disagreement with the father of psychoanalysis. Thus, one becomes aware of the importance of the unconscious dimension of life, of the access paths to this unknown territory, through acts of failure or dreams. Compared to other introductions to psychoanalysis, the merit of the author is that he does not confine to Freud’s heritage, but expands the discussion to the entire cultural heritage of the humankind. The theory of dream, for example, is presented in its entire historical development in the cultural spaces in which it acquired significant meanings. Human sexuality and aggressiveness are rendered through the metamorphoses they suffered in comparison with the animal world: “Human biological nature, despite its many resemblances with animals, gives the human being *a special sexual behaviour*. Man is the being with a permanent sexuality, accompanied by pleasure.”² Sexuality is correlated with aggressiveness. The *face to face* reproduction makes the partners’ eyes meet, and

¹ Marius Dumitrescu, *Psihanaliza aplicată în filosofie și artă* (*Applied Psychoanalysis in Philosophy and Art*) (Iași: Sedcom Libris Publishing House, 2014), 429.

² Dumitrescu, *Psihanaliza aplicată în filosofie și artă*, 84.

sex resembles a fight between partners. By emphasizing the nature of the aggressive and sex drives, the author underlines the major importance of the never-ending fight between Eros and Thanatos. The analysis of aggressiveness and its typological exposure put forward the complex nature of the human being, the only one that kills intra-specifically. The most refined form of aggressiveness is power, which is granted a special chapter, which reviews various ways of understanding power – from the magical, impersonal one of the archaic world, to the personalized one in the civilized world (in adjectivised form, as religious, military, economic and political power). The erotic experience resembles the experience of power, which allows the understanding of power as an energy which ensures the necessary support for granting a wish.³ In what recent history is concerned, the author notes the desacralisation and de-adjectivisation of power, which makes it converge towards sheer aggressiveness.

Human aggressiveness is vital for the human being and, far from any need for its amputation, it sooner should be directed towards non-violent paths. On page 114, Marius Dumitrescu provides an overview of the possible solutions for the inhibition of aggressiveness, with all our intra-specific violence manifested as cannibalism or war crimes. Among the strategies for avoiding violence, a significant number of pages are assigned to cultural solutions, following Freud's analyses dedicated to the spiritual word, up to the understanding of humour, laughter and comic.

How was Freud perceived by his contemporaries? As a disgusting figure, as he provided an unimaginable tableau of the human being: man, an ambivalent being which manifests, at the same time, love and hate to everything that surrounds him, an aggressive being, endowed with criminal instincts, prone to suicide and incest, with an infantile and aberrant sexuality. Beyond any bias and prejudice, the continent discovered by Freud – the unconscious, as the reservoir of psychic energies – fulfils our view on man, revealing the missing link between the body and the rational ego:

*Instincts, pulsions, unimaginable thoughts of a consciousness assumed by the Ego knock at its gates, assaulting it with failures, dreams and desires to escape from reality. At some point, the ego must give up to the unconscious, which authoritatively claims its priority.*⁴ (our translation)

Along these lines, one should be aware that, up to the Viennese psychoanalyst, the great creators had only inferred the functioning of some

³ *Ibidem*, 105.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 145.

mechanisms, without being able to explain them as they actually are. On the following pages, Marius Dumitrescu applies psychoanalysis on the creative intuitions of some remarkable figures of European culture.

Thus, the second part of the book, entitled *The Psychoanalysis of Philosophy*, is dedicated, for the most part, to René Descartes. Apparently, an attempt at psychoanalyzing the life and work of the father of European rationalism, of a philosopher who marked the modern view of man as an essentially rational being, would contradict the perspective of the abysmal vision. In a schematic understanding, one may notice that modernity begins with the Cartesian reasoning and ends with the Freudian irrational.

Marius Dumitrescu goes beyond the appearances of the historiographic schemes and enters, organically, the world of the Cartesian spirit. When following the internal sense and the time of the French philosopher, we witness the transition of Europe from the universe of faith to the universal reason, a transition not at all in default of temptation, dreads and threats, lived – in historical sense – as the religious Thirty Years War (1618-1648), which the illustrious scholar witnesses (and in which he also participates, to a certain extent). In a Europe that had lost the universal spirit of faith when the Lutheran doubt contested the principles of the historical settlement of this faith, R. Descartes dares, in a circle of solitude, to reconfigure this universe on rational bases. Unlike the classical exegesis, the author of the book in focus in this review retraces the Cartesian demarche by foraying in his individual psyche, in the depths where the great emotions that triggered the unicity of the life and creation were built. The three dreams on the night of 10-11 November 1619, *on the occasion of discovering the basics of an amazing science*, represent the core of the psychoanalysis applied to the understanding of the work of the rationalist philosopher. The dreams' tension determines Descartes to attempt at their interpretation, and this does not go unnoticed by commentators, and, pressured by Maxime Leroy, Freud himself draws on them, giving us “just a page and a half on the most famous dreams in history”.⁵ Marius Dumitrescu introduces the reader in the intimacy of the Cartesian philosophical demarche through this royal gate – the dream – of unravelling “the secret of being” (as Sartre will put it), which, as a whole, provides the direction for the motion of European conscience. Impressive as the human universe discovered and described by Freud may be, one should fully acknowledge the fact that this demarche is pursued with the tools of Cartesian reasoning. And if one reads in the

⁵ *Ibidem*, 218.

book in focus here that Descartes was terrified in front of the “other world”, belonging to an Evil Genius, one should also understand that he only wanted to save himself by saving that reality to which mathematics applies. We completely agree with a statement on page 249: “Descartes’ case is, perhaps, one of the very few in the history of philosophy in which, much earlier than Freud, one finds an attempt at reasonably explain the dream, at entering the irrational and apparently chaotic world of the dreams’ phantasms with the means of reason” (our translation). The footnotes of the chapters dedicated to the French philosopher are a remarkable invitation to a new and completely different reading of the founder of modern rationalism.

The third chapter rounds off the present volume with an equally simple title, *The Psychoanalysis of Art*. As it deals with artistic creation, a human form of expressing ideas through feelings, through recourse to images and imaginary, hence, with a manifestation on the border of oneirism and abysmal, one may easily understand that the psychoanalytical survey of this territory is much more facile. Freud drew himself away from philosophy and philosophers, but proved particularly generous with the artists in his writings in applied psychoanalysis. Without the support of the Greek spirit, one may not dive into the deep well of human psyche. When constrained to do so, Freud took over the linguistic metaphors of the ancient imaginary. His works abound in references to the universe of pagan Hellas literature and mythology, which gave a symbolic birth to our psychic mechanisms of survival.

In his incursion into the psychoanalysis of art, Marius Dumitrescu enters the Homeric universe, from where he extracts the substance of the transformations suffered by the Greek civilization in its transition from matriarchy to patriarchy. God and man, both subject to Fate, enter the Oracle’s game of the unconscious to which we are not granted access. The Gods shape the destiny of the mortals through their giving force. Trustful of their gift, the heroes defy the Fate and become a prey to the oracle’s curse and to divine punishment. This titanic confrontation is exposed not only in reference to the destiny of Achilles or Ulysses, Hector, Agamemnon, Paris or Orestes, but also to the biblical Job, or to Faust, through whom Goethe wants to immortalize the universal spectacle of the confrontation with the abyss’ advocate: the torturer. Analysing *The Brothers Karamazov*, the novel which also constituted the foundation of the Freudian study *Totem and Taboo*, the author provides his readers with insights of the great psychoanalytic intuition of Dostoevsky, as forerunner of the knowledge of the abyss.

If in the chapter *The Psychoanalysis of Philosophy*, the psychoanalysis of Descartes' works represents the most valuable contribution to this book, in what the last part of the book is concerned, the author deserves praise for the exegetic exercise on two great artists: Dante Alighieri and Salvador Dali. *The mnemonics of sins in Divine Comedy's Inferno*, and the next chapter, *Dante's Inferno in Dali's imaginary*, are texts which impress through their interpretative accuracy and ability to communicate with the reader. A review can only alter nuances. If the psychoanalysis of Descartes made me wish to reread and re-evaluate the works of this author, the chapters dedicated to the psychoanalysis of Inferno made me reconsider my chances for redemption. It is not haphazardly that the last chapter is entitled *It's difficult to be a man*, just like nothing written or acknowledged by the author is arbitrary.

The book *Psihanaliza aplicată în filosofie și artă* also excels through the illustrations that psychoanalytically, philosophically and artistically accompany the cover, then the chapter and subchapter pages, with remarkable imagery in the field of the projected discourse. The figurative spectacle has been brilliantly selected by the author from the artistic creation of the mankind, but also from personal photographs which attest the purported documentation at the places where the heroes of this book dwelled.

Bibliography:

1. Dumitrescu, Marius. *Psihanaliza aplicată în filosofie și artă* (Applied Psychoanalysis in Philosophy and Art). Iași: Sedcom Libris Publishing House, 2014.