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The Oedipus complex from a daseinsanalytic perspective

*"Among all beings,
only the human being,
called upon by the voice of Being,
experiences the wonder of all wonders:
that beings are."
(Martin Heidegger)*

Dear friends, in the beginnings of 2011, the General Assembly of IFDA was held in Athens. In the margins of the General Assembly, a small congress was held with the title AGORA 2011. Allow me, first, a few words about the AGORA. I hope, its relationship with what I want to say regarding psychoanalysis, the "*Oedipus complex*" and Daseinsanalysis will become clear.

The word AGORA is a Greek word which has remained the same both in ancient Greek and in modern. This word means the open area in which I can meet other people and be with them. It means the openness in which a meeting can be, and in addition a dialog and a contradiction and an agreement and an ability to do something all together¹, -just as here, today, in this hospitable environment in Budapest.

The AGORA, (the meeting place with the other), was the heart of the town, and, at the same time, it was the heart of the individual human being, the heart of its "*Being-in-the-world*"². The ancient Greek, realized his self primarily as a citizen, as a member of the townspeople -and we all know that the worst punishment for him was to withdraw this possibility, to exile and to be ejected from the town and the AGORA. This could be a catastrophic loss or a massive deconstruction of his "world".

For the ancient Greek, at the core of his "world", which means at the core of his ex-istence, was the meeting with the other, the relationship with the other; this gave him the sense of self and was comporting him as individual.

In the AGORA, in this meeting with the other, authentic questioning and free thought were born, and the responsibility to the other, and democracy and philosophy as well. But there were also times when the AGORA and the meeting with the other took the form of populism, the form of inauthentic and unfree thought, the form of violence and the loss to "*das man*" (as Heidegger names the completely impersonal mass anonymity).

When was the one and when the other? And what is its relevance to the question of Oedipus complex?

In this AGORA of the IFDA 2011, then, amongst other very interesting speeches, there was one from the very respected and good friend, Erik Craig, with the title "*Freud's forgotten place at the Daseinsanalytic table*". In addition, a few months earlier, another good friend, Ado Huygens sent to the members of IFDA a very

¹ In modern Greek, this word is gradually losing its original meaning and has reached the point where it refers only to the market place in which financial exchanges take place...

² I remind you that this fundamental notion of Daseinsanalysis, "*Being-in-the-world*" (*In-der-welt-sein*), means a whole in the sense of the all-embracing horizon of feeling and meaning in which all human experience, thinking, and acting takes place. The human being, each individual person, is already and from the beginning in a "world", is "thrown" into a "world", moves in a "world" and everything that happens to him, everything he undertakes, all his experiences and behavior have (or have not) a meaning in this "world".

interesting text with the title “*From Psychoanalysis to the analysis of Dasein*”. These two texts enlivened and inspired again my interest regarding the dialog with psychoanalysis.

Dear friends, of course, we all know the relationship between Daseinsanalysis and Psychoanalysis. We all know that it constitutes one of the places of our origin not only because the two main figures of Daseinsanalysis and founders of our school (Binswanger and Medard Boss) had very close relationships with Freud, but, because, even if Daseinsanalysis does not represent the theoretical structure of psychoanalysis the latter continues to be a source of inspiration and also the underlying basis of our common therapeutic practice.

But what does it mean to be in dialog with psychoanalysis? How and from which point (ort) can Daseinsanalysis interact with psychoanalysis? Which is its own and particular way of entering into such a Dialog?

I hope the following thoughts, regarding the “*Oedipus complex*”, could contribute to this.

I don't like to bore you with details, as I'm sure you are familiar enough with the key points of the *Oedipus complex*, this cornerstone, according to Freud, of human development and the psychoanalytic edifice. It is well known that through this notion, Freud describes a boy's feelings of desire for his mother and jealousy and anger towards his father. Essentially, a boy feels like he is in competition with his father for possession of his mother. He views his father as a rival for her attentions and affections. Freud theorized that all small boys select their mother as their primary object of desire. They unconsciously wish to usurp their fathers and become their mothers' lover.

The *Oedipus complex*, so, was defined by Freud as an unconscious set of loving and hostile desires which the subject experiences in relation to its parents; the subject desires one parent, and thus enters into rivalry with the other parent. Because the child suspects that acting on these feelings would lead to danger, desires are repressed, leading to anxiety.

All psychoanalytical post-Freudian theories, Melanie Klein, and object's relation theory, Winnicott, Bion, Ego-psychology, Lacan, all of them and many other post-Freudians, despite the differences and the contradictions between them, follow Freud in regarding the *Oedipus complex* as the main issue toward individualization -although they differ from Freud on a number of important points.

The common ground, the essential issue in all psychoanalytic –Freudian and post Freudian- theories, is that the *Oedipus complex* is an individualized process in which a paradigmatic triangular structure is created, in contrast with the previous undifferentiated –child-mother- entirety. The key function in the *Oedipus complex* is that of the father, the third term, the “other”, which transforms the relation between mother and child into a triadic structure and indicates an impossible totalization.

So, we could say that the subject of the *Oedipus complex*, is the way individualization appears in the Freudian and post-Freudian theory. This is the psychoanalytical attempt to speak about the individualization of the human being.

In this attempt, we can clearly see both the virtues and the problematic aspects of Freud. He has the ability for an acute observation regarding human situations but at the same time he obscures these as he tries to explain and to entirely keep them in his theory. As Ado Huygens says: “(The Freudian theory), like positivist sciences, reduces man to the idea of the homo natura which wedges man between the impulse

and the illusion". Freud (according to Heidegger in *Zollikon seminars*) through causal-mechanistic assumptions identified the human being as something 'present-at-hand' in nature. He was, first of all, oblivious to the ontological difference (beings versus being) and failed to see the mystery in the very being of human being.

However, Erik Craig is right when he reminds us how Daseinsanalysis is inescapably indebted to Sigmund Freud and when he suggests to us to "invite Freud to join us around the table of our daseinanalytic conversations". It is certain that such a dialog enriches both Daseinsanalysis and Psychoanalysis.

But, if we try such a dialog, we should always remind ourselves that the Daseinsanalytical perspective is an ontological one, in the way of hermeneutic phenomenology. That means that the Daseinsanalysis comes to dialog not only with the said, but also with the unsaid and the implicit which remain hidden.

Regarding the *Oedipus complex*, then, we can see that in the psychoanalytic theory, human individualization begins with a founding separation from an undifferentiated entirety (Holon), the intrauterine embryonic state. The human individualization originates from a literal and a metaphorical "birth trauma". Through the breach, through the absence, through the nothing... this is the first trace of the appearance of the other and at the same time of myself..! This is the first opening of my ex-istence!

Nevertheless, according to psychoanalysis, at that particular moment the otherness appears, its rejection takes place, as the child escapes to a place that has just been created, which is the place of "fantasy". The upcoming fantasy covers the breach, and maintains in an illusionary way the continuity of the unity. So, it seems as the rejection of the relation is the first event of the relation. At the time the other appears, the individual rejects him by setting him inside itself, in the place of its illusionary fantasy, where – for example the mother – doesn't exist as a different person from the child, as a separate being. It seems like the infant tries to prolong and maintain the intrauterine embryonic state in the extra uterine environment..!

At that point, the threat that originates from the father (the "castration" in the Freudian terminology) stops the way back and activates the breach, the founding separation which accompanies life, from its beginnings. The father is like to repeat and activate the "birth trauma" and, in this sense, he becomes the parent who gives the child its ex-istence! This is the important role of the appearance of the other: the otherness as an ontological lack, which by undermining the illusionary construction, cracks it and opens up an area in which an ex-istence and "life order" may be born. This event is the ultimate creative act of ex-isting. This allows and at the same time obliges the human being, not to coincide with itself, but, constantly and by definition, to be in reference to something else. In the core of the existence, there is the otherness, and at first it ex-ists as a crack, threat, breach, separation, -in other words, as nothingness...

I will not bore you with more details. I'm just trying to emphasize and highlight the first step of the *Oedipus* process, which has to do with the deconstruction of the illusionary and narcissistic constructions, just at the time the "father's role" appears. We could say that this destabilization is an experience of "nothing" around of which a "self" -that is, a "world"- is built and a new symbolic framework. The *Oedipus* so, means the opening of a region, an abode in which the human being can dwell.

We all know however, especially from our experience as psychotherapists, that the *Oedipus complex*, (as many other things in life) doesn't always evolve in an ideal way. Sometimes, this crack, this deconstruction is extremely violent. The appearance

of the other is, of course, at the core of existence, but sometimes this appearance may be characterized by terror and violence and may be traumatic.

So, we should ask ourselves: what is this which defines that through the breach, through this trace of nothing, will the openness of a “world” appear? I think our therapeutic experience comes easily to answer that it depends on the existing relational context, and that means: opening to temporality and to language.

Regarding this, let us think for a moment about the difference between a father who keeps in mind and takes into account the child itself and respects its otherness; and let us compare him to Laius, Oedipus’s father. Laius not only did not respect his son but denied him because he tried to deny the face of the future, that is, his own death. Laius refused to be exposed to time and was unable to wonder in the realm of the unknown. So, he was unable to be a real father who gives language, who gives life, who gives the child its ex-istence!

When the appearance of father (like Lius) shatters and destroys temporality and language, that is the relation in which the “*Oedipus complex*” can be held, it becomes a catastrophic loss of any “*being-in-the-world*”. In this case, the experience of the other becomes the experience of a traumatic unfamiliarity, a psychological “trauma”, around which new illusionary constructions are created.

Dear friends, at this point, we could see in an even deeper way the ontological dimension of the “*Oedipus complex*” so as to feel the abysmal mystery of the human being which is hidden in it. It could happen if we allow another to enter into the dialog between Daseinsanalysis and psychoanalysis, something like a third term, an otherness, something like a spark which may light up and activate our thought more. It’s a small fragment which comes from ancient Greece. It’s a quite elaborate and cryptic fragment from Heraclitus (*Fragm.119*) and it’s only three words: «ἦθος ανθρώπω δαίμων» (***Ethos Anthropon Demon***). Three very small words which say almost everything...

This is usually translated “*The Ethos of the human being is its Demon*” or “*a man’s character is his demon*” something like “*a man’s character has to do with his personal guiding spirit*”. But this translation thinks in a modern way, not a Greek one. We should always bear in mind that the fragments of Heraclitus, like many of the ancient Greek myths and the tragedies are fingers, forefingers that show. Sometimes they say what cannot be said and they try to express what cannot be expressed...

The word “ἦθος”, *Ethos*, from which the word “Ethics” (and the moral philosophy) is derived, remained the same both in ancient Greek and in modern, just as the word “AGORA”. In modern Greek, it means the way and the habit in which human beings live. In ancient Greek, it meant not only the way and the habit, but primarily meant the abode, the dwelling place, the open region in which the human being dwells. In association with this word is the old German “situ” and the new German “Sitte”, «το ἦθος», the French “site” and “situer” and in English the “situation”.

In this open region, then, a Demon appears. But what is a Demon? Regarding this, there is a further point to be made, which is implicit in the above fragment, implicit to language (as language speaks itself...). The original meaning of the word *Demon* comes from the verb “δαίω” [*daio*] which, at first, means *divide* [lat.. *dīves*] and *share out*. Also then, it means *burn, blazed with fire, conflict, separate*, but also, *I take place in a symposium, a feast, in eating and drinking*, (in modern Greek “πανδαισία”). Perhaps, we can suspect now another meaning of the Heraclitus’ fragment.

It seems to say that “*the human being is an open region in which, all the above can be shared and can take place*”. Both, hostility and friendship, violence and peace...

All these voices, all these purposes, all these yearnings, all the pain, all the joys, all these are the river which shares “δαίει” [daio-] - it is the music of life.

What is a Demon then?

Heidegger, in his “*Letter on Humanism*”, translates the fragment of Heraclitus as: “*The (familiar) abode for man is the open region for the presencing of god (the unfamiliar one)*”.

But here, a mess and confusion can be created which could obscure us and increase our reservations. It could happen if we think that here simply speaks the old and well-known traditional theological idea, which gives a fixed and constant ground... and support... and guidance to the human being through a God. We could think that it is a kind of spiritualism or mysticism. Is that all? Or maybe not?

So, let us look at this further:

If Heidegger’s thought consists of a movement of the consideration of appearances to the question concerning appearing itself, from presence to presencing, from what stands in the open to the opening that grants presence, this move should not be misunderstood in a simple Platonism, that is, as an ascending from the cavernous shadows up to the contemplation of the sun outside the cave. Rather, it must be understood, from the hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective, as a movement from what is manifest back to what is not revealed, back to what does not shine. *Unconcealment (clearing)* comprises *concealment*. What is constantly covered up is not the light of truth that shines behind the veil of deceptive appearances; what is covered up is the secret/mystery (*Geheimnis* in Heidegger’s words) that holds sway throughout Dasein’s engagement in the open. That means that Daseinsanalysis cannot be a simple description of representations. It’s rather a continuous dialog with this which cannot be a representation -the unknown, the implicit, the unsaid. Each representation presupposes the unrepresentable as its source -and that means the Secret, the Mystery (the *Geheimnis*), that is, the “Unheimlich” the ‘not-being-at-home’ the ‘uncanny’.

Da-sein dwells as the disclosure of Being (the Da- of the Sein), and this is the most “*unfamiliar one*”. The unfamiliar, the implicit and the unsaid, the nothing, stands as our groundless ground and source of meaning. *The nothing*, Heidegger says, *makes possible the openness of beings*.

Demon then, is not the God of the Gospel, neither Zeus, nor is it a personal guiding spirit. In the above fragment of Heraclitus -which consists of only three words- speaks a real demonic depth which calls us to feel the Being, the sharing itself. This is a journey which demands our engagement and our trust. A journey which, at first, demands the Oedipus breach as the outcome of our illusionary security.

It seems clear to me that we can see the *Oedipus* experience in the light of this ontological depth, which characterizes the human being as Da-sein. Certainly, in this light, the Freudian field comes to be a totally different field. We can see *Oedipus* as the touch of Demon, the touch of the unfamiliar, the touch of the mystery. This touch may be more or less integrated or disassociated, depending on the degree to which it will find a language in which it could be held... like the ancient AGORA... an authentic meeting and dialog with the other...

Perhaps, we can now turn again to the questions raised at the beginning, regarding the AGORA, the “*Oedipus complex*” and the dialog between Daseinsanalysis and Psychoanalysis: *When the experience of the other can be an open region? How and from which point can Daseinsanalysis interact with psychoanalysis? Which is its own and particular way of entering into such a Dialog?*

What we tried to express up to here is an attempt to take just a glimpse...

Unfortunately, in our therapeutic practice we tend more and more, to think in a technical way, only for practical purposes. This blocks our capacity for wonder and we loss the capacity to experience and appreciate mystery. So little by little, the magical evocative power of these experiences tends to disappear... Very often, in psychotherapy, the most uniquely “Da-sein” (the sense of the mystery of Being and no-thing into my existence, the mystery of the open realm in which happens the movement between concealment and un-concealment) disappears in rationalistic concepts and generalizations, in a communication without communion, in short, in a completely impersonal anonymity...

Perhaps in the word “Da-sein”, first of all, speaks the experience of the Demon, the experience of the abysmal unfamiliarity which is the core of human existence... Perhaps the real treasure and the secret of Daseinsanalysis, is not its teaching and its said but its abysmal unsaid... its effort to express what cannot be expressed ...

Dear friends,

In another Fragment of Heraclitus, this strange man said: *“Not understanding although they have heard, they are like the deaf. The proverb bears witness to them: Present yet absent.”* [Fragm. 34]

What is being said in these amazing lines?
