

YOUR EGO ONLINE, PSYCHOANALYSIS IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA AGE

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What becomes of psychoanalysis in our hyper-connected digital world? The question is ripe, as new technologies capture the psyche and absorb the libido of each and every one of us. As relations among individuals are now broadcast to everyone, your relationship with yourself is fundamentally altered. This changes the status of speech and language, of intimacy and secrecy, of the image we offer of ourselves to others.

Multiple apps now rule our relationships — social, romantic, familial — and thus slip into the very core of our existence. They redirect our relationship to our own selves and the Other by always accelerating the transmission process of information and exhibition of that which is intimate.

It's the relation of a subject to its own existential temporality that ends up being transformed. Confessions, avowals, unveilings abound on the web. The rapidity, the acceleration, the "always more and always faster" describes the zeitgeist of this new globalized ego.

What is becoming globalized isn't just economic exchanges, social and political relations, but the individual intimacy of us all. As if the "nucleus of our being" — "das Kern unseres Wesen," as Freud put it — not only eluded us but was given over to a faceless Other, devoid of desire and incarnation but not of voracity: the online Other, the Other of social networks, of the "likes" and "dislikes."

We are thus living in a time of ego **hypertrophy**, correlated to a globalization of our compulsive needs.

Mass narcissism is the distinctive characteristic of the present moment. Self-promotion knows no boundaries. The relationship to sexuality, which Freud transformed back in his day by liberating speech, is no longer repressed nor punished. Everybody wants more **jouissance** (a French term that means both enjoyment and sexual orgasm) and often counts on new technologies to meet this deficiency efficiently, and sometimes even as an answer to angst and dereliction.

Everything is known, everything is shown.

What condition is required for psychoanalysis to continue to produce an effect of drastic change and subjective transformation in a world where everything is told, everything is known, everything is shown? Is there still space for listening and interpretation when everything can now be unveiled, revealed, published and echoed around the world with a single click, without ever knowing who you're actually addressing?

We can indeed ask ourselves what room our contemporary world leaves for the breakthroughs of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). Should psychoanalysis conform to the zeitgeist in order to appear attractive? Should it repackage itself and consent to the virtualization of its

presence? If psychoanalysis must be reinvented according to the changing symptoms of the times, our day and age must now show what psychoanalysis will become in the era of the globalized ego.

For it would be dangerous for psychoanalysis to lose interest in and cut itself off from the present. But it would be equally dangerous for it to obey the injunctions of the times and forget the value of the established norms of the analytic experiment, its **out-of-the-ordinary** status, its singular tone, so different from your everyday conversation and the never-ending blah blah of social networks?

Shouldn't we be wary of these deviations that lead to making people believe that seeing a psychoanalyst is as easy as using their iPhone and that they can dispose of their anxieties with online experts who answer their questions?

The object of psychoanalysis, since it was discovered by Freud in the early 20th century, is the "speaking subject." The territory of analytical experience is "the I", in that it might lead you to explore your being from your subconscious. It is through this talking cure that a person who engages in analysis can have an unprecedented connection to their inhibitions, their symptoms, their anxieties.

To enter analysis, you need to want to know something about yourself through what you tell an Other, whom you trust to interpret what is said. Therefore, it's not just any of the subject's words that have an analytical value, and similarly, it's not just any Other who is in a position to receive your words, and address your demand for **deciphering your mysteries**.

In the 21st century, for psychoanalysis to remain a special experience among subjective experiences, we, therefore, need to return to its roots. Freud's starting point was the radical distinction between the conscious and the unconscious. Lacan's starting point was another, but equally fundamental, distinction between the ego (the "me", moi in French) and the "I" (je in French).

The narcissist boom is the symptom of our times

Lacan's thesis in the 1950s, in reaction to **the ego psychology** of post-Freudians, was that the ego isn't the "I." Confusing the narcissism of the ego (moi) with what the subject says about unconscious desire will lead to the **death** of psychoanalysis. For access to the unconscious implies going through the narcissism and the belief in an identity fabricated from representations of ourselves.

This Lacanian distinction between our narcissist relation to ourselves and our strangely worrying relation to our subconscious is enlightening now more than ever to understand how relevant a role psychoanalysis can have in the 21st century. Because the narcissist boom, the symptom of our times, will never give access to the desire and the secret of the being. Screenwriting your life online will never stem anxiety. The comments and judgments that anybody can give on the life choices of other people often contribute to increasing anxiety of those who are looking to the Other for an answer to their existential questioning.

To be able to say something about this part of strangeness that lies within each of us and causes us anxiety, you need to be able to address a personified Other, not just anybody. A psychoanalyst is an Other in the flesh, one who will lend his or her body to listen to what can't be heard because he will have experienced the analysis and its subjective effects himself. An Other who is there to answer what

is being said beyond what the subject means. An Other who takes an interest in dreams and lapses, as hallmarks of the subconscious on the subject's very being.

A psychoanalyst, as opposed to the online Other, is not an Other who judges, gives opinions, advice, who "likes" or "dislikes." He's an Other who doesn't bear judgment on what is said and who authorizes those who speak to say they don't understand.

Letting the words flow, in psychoanalysis, doesn't mean saying everything to anybody but rather to speak the unpronounceable to an Other who is in a position to respond. The 21st century psychoanalyst is different from the anonymous recipient of digital information in that he isn't an Other who seeks pleasure from what he sees and hears. In the era of the globalized ego, you could consider that this Other, capable of **listening without judging** and without taking pleasure out of it, is necessary because the acceleration of the demand for enjoyment contributes to the rise of anxiety.

This Other is interested in what is most singular in what the subject says. Lacan put it elegantly in his founding work **The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis**. What does it mean to consider that we speak "the same language" as somebody else? It doesn't mean that "you encounter each other in the discourse of everyman, but that you're united with that person by a particular way of speaking." Psychoanalysis, therefore, is an exception in the world of globalized communication as it keeps alive this particular language, that of each and every person's subconscious.

Mass narcissism eventually diverts everybody from their own existence.

This language is spoken in the first person and it fulfills itself in an "Us" that doesn't include everybody, but exists during the time of a session. It's spoken by making the signifiers of your destiny go through your throat, for it's also spoken with your voice, that is to say with your body. The role of psychoanalysis is to make this particular language resonate with what allows us to **tear ourselves away from**

narcissism. Because The danger of mass narcissism is that it eventually diverts everybody from their own existence. The desire to exist in the imagination of someone else who's seeking pleasure through consumption of his image, the subject winds up missing out of his own life. He winds up not knowing what he was trying to discover for himself, as he keeps getting lost in the world of the Other.

It is true that in the era of the globalized ego, psychoanalysis has changed. It has come to stand at the service of mass narcissism. It has been forced to look at this hypertrophied narcissism as a wall that separates the subject from his desire, to be left alone with his urges.

In 1968, Lacan described a "surplus-jouissance," evoking a new imperative at the time to "enjoy oneself/ come more" ("jouir plus"). In this sense, Lacanian psychoanalysis has the means to fit in with the current times: By leading the subject to see the point where he loses himself in a "jouissance" imperative that's blinding him, we can continue to hold on to the most extraordinary part of speech: its ability to unveil a truth and a desire that can bring back meaning to our existence.

*Clotilde Leguil is a French psychoanalyst and philosopher. She's also a member of the School of the Freudian Cause and of the International Psychoanalytic Association, as well as professor at the University of Paris 8 - Saint-Denis.

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