

If you were not there you have no idea what you have been missing About the 38th Congress of the ECF

Last week-end the 38th congress of the Ecole de la cause freudienne took place in Paris, as it does every year, when eminent colleagues, members of the ECF, speak to each other and the public, about the theme of the year.

But something was different this time!

It started with the journal of the Journee, JJ, which, for months prior to the congress carried messages and notices of both free association and ordered thought, in direct conversation with Jacques-Alain Miller, and in reflection of the theme of 'How to Become a Psychoanalyst in the 21st Century'.

At the congress itself, eminent members of the ECF still spoke, but this time they were accompanied by young non-members and all together they conversed in the most personal, intimate and singular fashion about their own analysis, about being analysand and of becoming a psychoanalyst. Each contribution was absolutely unique and free of jargon. Each room was as interesting as the next, there were 10 rooms with 6 papers each to choose from, for both the morning and the afternoon of the first day, and each talk was somehow moving, intelligent and different, responding to the same impetus, to be able to articulate what it was in one's analysis that made it possible to rise to the next level, from being analysand to being psychoanalyst.

Each paper was therefore a mini pass testimony but focused on a single turning point, an insistent logic, a dwindling identification, or a sudden realisation that had consequences. Each testimony, as far as I could make out, included an articulation that accounted for a sort of liberation from inhibition, a particular appeasement or new resolve in relation to psychoanalysis. Many authors were not members of the ECF and had not finished with their analysis, but they were able to write a few pages about how they thought the question of becoming a psychoanalyst was included in their own analysis.

For all those of us who are analysands and are training to be psychoanalysts, and also those who are not members of any school or organisation but who are thinking about how to become a member and how to become a psychoanalyst in general, this congress was surely not one to miss.

What I personally took away from it was that the answer to these difficult questions, which are both political and intimate, is not necessarily so difficult to try to put into words. One could but fail, but one would have said something along the way that was not altogether wasted. I had not had the courage to participate, but the effect of this weekend was that everybody seemed to go away trying to elaborate this question for themselves. The difference being that this time our elaboration is still wanted, is still being heard, is still going to contribute to the grand debate, because the debate has left the confines of privileged exchanges between the participants of

higher echelons – it has instead opened out to the 'public' and the true analysands in this public.

So far so good. The atmosphere is more difficult to describe, but I can only say that it was riveting. Everything seemed much lighter, more interesting, less formal, less stuffy, more exciting, more accessible and definitely momentous.

The second day turned out to be a total surprise in the way of an extravaganza. A circus number with a tightrope artist framed the opening of the morning session – metaphorising our psychoanalyses, culminating in the wish for a less encumbered relationship to living, overcoming anxiety and maybe an orientation to the open sky, away from the enigma and the difficulty beneath every tread.

Then came an interview, in the way of a 'presentation de malades', with a retired French car racing champion.... Imagine that.

Then there was a screening of a documentary film by Gerard Miller, including interviews on the subject of 'my first psychoanalytic session' with vox-pops by Carla Bruni, Karl Lagerfeld and Claude Chabrol amongst many others, put together in style.

A very interesting exchange between JAM and Jacques Stern, a cryptologist followed, based on his talk on the science of encryption – unveiling nothing but the simplest underlying principle of language – substitution. A deceptively simple presentation nevertheless gave rise to very complex associations on the question of the value of the enigma, truths and lies, the rules of the game, the notion of the semblant and of the discourses, etc.

The 'whole show' ended with a call by Jacques-Alain Miller to preserve psychoanalysis in all its best incarnations, such as we had witnessed this weekend – and to use tact, diplomacy and modesty in promoting it, but to promote it indeed. And with the Journées he had shown the way how to do it because it was never clearer to me than at this event, what it is that is so special, important and urgent about psychoanalysis. This was an event that would simply be impossible in any other school or organisation; with a lightness of touch that, although it manifested itself in a communal outpouring of pleasure was quite free from the effects of identification or communality, but was a pure demonstration of the concept of the one by one.

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