The American Psychological Association recently conducted an election for the presidency of the association. Steven Reisner, a psychoanalyst and the president of Psychologists for Social Responsibility, was a candidate in that election. Although he did not win, his second place finish receiving nearly 30% of the votes cast warrants our attention. Reisner’s platform and his commitment to fundamental ethical principles as the primary focus of organizational leadership have made this election something more than the usual administrative act. That Reisner is a psychoanalyst as well as a psychologist is not incidental to his significance. And not only for those of us who share that profession, but also for the entire field of psychology.

Paraphrasing Freud, psychoanalysis is both a method for helping people with their mental and emotional conflicts and for the study of the human spirit. However, in addition to these accepted functions, psychoanalysis also provides the basis for a new and distinct ethical framework. The fundamental psychoanalytic principle that human subjects are largely unconscious of their own desires, and that we can come to name them only through an engaged interaction with another human subject, means that we are linked to one another in ways that alter our sense of ethical responsibility and of the distinctly social dimension of being human. Psychoanalysis has thereby added a significant dimension to the general principles of modern liberal ethics. This dimension has to do with how uncertain we are as individuals in our knowledge of ourselves, and that the way to live with this divided and inescapably uncertain subjectivity is through a commitment to a radical engagement with the other, another divided subject. The distinctly psychoanalytic view of the social character of our divided subjectivity requires a commitment to the other as the fundamental and inextricable root of being human. It also requires the recognition that such a commitment is

**An Other Ethic**

David LICHTENSTEIN, Editor
chambers we access rooms of projection that consistently envelop us empathetically, for in these chambers we sense the depth of an intimate experience. Resting on the border of the screen of projection, this particular “feeling into” the space can become a mutual boundary to cross. And thus, safely positioned at a distance, we too can engage our own perilous history of projection: a voyage to—and a view from home.

References


Always a Face to Remind You

Bettina MATHES

The idea that the surface is the level of the superficial is itself dangerous...for it is on the surface that depth is seen, as when one’s face breaks out in pimples on holidays.


In thinking of the psychology of mysticism it is usual to concentrate on the understanding of the mystic’s withdrawal into a personal inner world of sophisticated introjects. Perhaps not enough attention has been paid to the mystic’s retreat into a position in which he can communicate secretly with subjective objects and phenomena, the loss of contact with the world of shared reality being counterbalanced by a gain in terms of feeling real.

—D. W. Winnicott, “Communicating and Not Communicating”

If I were a film, it would be Robert Bresson’s 1951 Journal d’un curé de campagne (The Diary of a Country Priest). Based on the novel by George Bernanos, this quiet and detached film about the loneliness and eventual passing away (dying would be the wrong word here) of a young priest speaks to me like no other. Why? Perhaps because Bresson knows how to protect his characters. Beneath the surface of this tenderly austere black-and-white feature there is an ongoing private conversation that never gets communicated but makes itself felt throughout the film. Bresson is a believer, not a psychologist. He doesn’t analyze his characters. He moves them. But we don’t get to know their motivation. Observing the priest—never hear his name—I learn to love the surface. Not the superficial but the face. His face! For that’s where it comes to life on the screen, where he shines, where he is racing.

Friday, June 14–00:02:05

/AMBRICOURT/ letters, a road sign, then a dissolve into a close-up of the young priest’s face—a sheet, the direction of the cure; and, perhaps, the direction of the cure? This is his first parish: mon paradis, mon première paradiise! and I know he’s not well, though there are no pimples breaking out on this otherworldly, saintly face. So pale, so innocent, so tender. So sad. Like a mirror that’s never seen a reflection, a wounded soul, unknown, incomunicado, an unwritten page. The whitest pain you’ve ever seen. Feel the coolness of my gaze! I wish he could. Will someone answer him, receive him, find him when he gives himself over? That morning as he arrives in his parish, i see him lose his faith, before my very eyes. So he clings to the wish to be found and to remain hidden at the same time. My heart is racing.

If I were to write about this film, that face, that surface, it would have to be in the form of a diary—the perfect form to accommodate the wish to be found and to remain hidden at the same time. My heart is racing.

transference. The transference is a space where both patient and analyst can find entirely each other as intimate strangers; whereas they are free to imagine one another. For some patients the transference is the first experience of being imagined without being invaded or used. A space where silence can be a retreat and an invitation (a call) to the analyst to tend to the surface, a space where we can be found without the danger of being found out, violated, raped. Lacan is right: “The idea that the surface is the level of the superficial is dangerous.” Depth reveals itself on the surface, no need to dig deep, no need to penetrate. Why not? Because. As every infant knows, in the beginning is the face—the mother’s face. We need a surface on which to appear. We need another to form an image of who we are. We need to be imagined to feel real. Is that why we cry at the movies? This is what I know: although transference is more than projection, The Diary of a Country Priest tells me something important about this need to be imagined. * * *

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ink like blood will have to keep him going, keeping track of a life without any trace of mystery, that’s a meager diet, and he knows it. he calls it faire face, face up to the world. he may not be aware of it but he lives for the close-up, that most wondrous of all cinematic framing techniques: when the face fills the screen—huge, larger than life, so close, we are newborns. and so is he. the blankness of his face, the searching eyes, hoping for a mirror. when Bresson gives me a close up of the priest’s face—and he gives me many!—the intimacy he conveys is one of withdrawal, detachment, disappearance. as the camera zooms in on the priest’s face, the image is drained of its sound. momentarily still, i lose him. i see him withdraw, watch him retreat into himself; i hear his voice, listen to his diary. he is speaking to himself, and i am his witness. the priest’s first-person narration—the sharing of his journal containing only insignificant secrets—is his way of shutting me out and keeping me interested. someone like me.

he knows a secret when he sees one. the count and the government: furtive glances, stolen embraces in the park. they know that he knows…they don’t like it…and he can’t help it. he’s a troublemaker. taking everything to heart, too hard.

i know an unwelcome child when I see one. always slightly out of place, out of time, out of touch. why is he here, if no one receives him with love? what a strange question, his mentor the priest of Torcy scolds him, it’s a job. you are the priest, you shouldn’t expect love, so he tries. so he contacts the count, pays a visit to the mansion. but the count forgets the appointment. he meets the countess, and i am his witness. the priest’s first-person narration— the sharing of his journal containing only insignificant secrets—is his way of shutting me out and keeping me interested. someone like me.

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