

Maruani, Guy - Préface

In Lang, T. & Lang, M. (1989). Families Je Vous Aime ('Families I Love You') (french ed. of Corrupting the Young and Other Stories of a Family Therapist, 1986.). (G. Maruani, Trans.). France: Alpha Bleue Publications.

It is now known that the eventual success of psychotherapeutic treatment depends less on method than on unspecific factors linked to the individual therapist. So one must ask the question: how should the therapist be chosen and trained? If the success of psychotherapy, like cooking or war is in the execution then some talent is necessary.

However talent is not learned even if it is essential to learn in order to exercise one's talent. In my opinion the least pretentious but most satisfying answer to the question is by example. We learn by virtue of examples. We learn through a kind of identifying imprint of a master, like Karl Lorenz's little silver bird. In this slim, compact volume, Tesse and Moshe Lang's reply is that we learn by the example of humour. In the apprenticeship process humour acts as a short circuit of personality defences, as a gentle lever for suppression, involving the whole body through laughter. The first delicious story they tell, about the sandwiches, is a perfect illustration of these two points: humour and imprint.

These short tales are not confined however to stirring up feelings. They are also a marvellous lesson in rational strategies useful to all, be they psychotherapists, patients, buyers, sellers, mothers, daughters, seducers or flirts (cock teasers!). These stories all contain examples of the virtue convincing people possess, of the respect for the freedom of others in order to give up their own freedom to self-destruct. We should not forget that the symptoms however serious are the result of freedom: it can be the implied freedom of the subject experiencing the tension of his subconscious desire or the freedom from family interplay which determines each person's place in the game.

Tesse and Moshe Lang call themselves family therapists at the same time as being wholly familiar with the mysteries of psychoanalysis. I believe their choice comes from their desire never to use interpretation as a means of reaching understanding. They know the extreme danger in this and in the end prefer that understanding and insight are self-generating. What interests them is that people should be happy not that they should be more intelligent.

With this aim, and without appearing to, Moshe Lang uses a whole arsenal of paradoxes, absurd admonitions, Milton Erickson-type chatter, falsely naive questions, vows and protestations. But take note, he never lies. Sometimes he bluffs, sometimes he cedes to a full hand while holding a straight flush in his hand. He is an artist.

It is true to say, he has understood better than anyone the new epistemology necessary for interactional psychology. Most supposedly systemic therapists reject the Freudian theory of subconscious forces but remain locked into the Newtonian theory of vehicles of attraction (or repulsion) that two or more protagonists use reciprocally. They think in terms of Moreno or Kurt Lewin with a Palo Alto sauce. But really, systemic epistemology should force itself to think along the lines of Einstein's general theory of relativity, that the forces of gravity travel at the speed of light and translate into fact the changes that are made to the interval of time by the simple presence of the protagonists.

In other words an interaction is not the result of a number of empirical forces but of a particular way of being; a unique result of substance which captures something of the infinite, the temporary and existential incarnation of a shape consisting of beings that are present. This is why in order to learn it is necessary to bend and in order to survive it is best to see with humour.

Moshe Lang is the expert, we should follow him.

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