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The Current State of Psychoanalysis in Society, Culture and the Clinic

Summary:

This article highlights that psychoanalysis continues to be what it has always been: a theory and a clinic never stabilized, shifting perpetually. In the current moment, necessarily, this situation cannot be separated from the disturbing occurrences tied to the Covid-19 pandemic and, in addition, it relates to the centennial of Freud's Oeuvre: *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) in which arguments aimed at deepening our thinking regarding the reactions of human masses newly formed by telematic technologies, are sketched out. Considerations are added about psychoanalysis itself, and its practitioners as integrated to a materialized "artificial mass" in institutions that follow or pretend to follow lines designated by the two founders: Freud and Lacan. Changes to the analytic frame consequent to social distancing laws and to fear of contagion between participants in the psychoanalyst-analysand encounter are also discussed. These have led to the almost universal acquiescence of "telematic sessions" which imply irreversible changes to the practice and technique of psychoanalysis.

Presentation:

This issue of the *European Journal of Psychoanalysis* commemorates the 25th anniversary of its influential publication, referential source for all those interested in psychoanalysis, with texts in which the invited authors, historically linked to it, formulate an evaluation of the current situation of psychoanalysis, in relation to itself and to the global situation where its practice is embedded.

It is rare that I find myself confronted with the task of tackling such a transcendental subject and to enter in full and without restriction, into the marrow residing in the interior of the vertebral spine of my life and my thought. I do it, I must confess, with that mixture of "fear and trembling," of a recognized Danish lineage.

I intend to combine the title of this invitation to write with two other unavoidable aspects of the "current" moment, this "today" of the solicited reflections: On the one hand, the global earthquake that is the pandemic of Covid-19 and, on the other, the chronological milestone, linked to by various threads, of the centennial of Sigmund Freud's publication of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921).

"The status of psychoanalysis today..." entails a sharp temporal reference that encourages a link with a "yesterday" and a "tomorrow;" that "yesterday" of a century ago and that "tomorrow" marked by the unexpected but foreseeable, and foreseen, appearance of the pandemic.

1- What is Happening Today with Psychoanalysis?

This question permits the dubious suggestion of a precise previous state which could be defined with clarity and an uncertain “current” state, whose differences should be established and diagnosed now, specifying the new coordinates and pointing to warnings for the future. But, in truth, we all know that psychoanalysis has never been static; it has an agitated history which is that of successive changes, transformations, disjunctions, disruptions, disagreements, and debates in everything referring to its theory and its practice. There was never a “current state” with precise contours in the interior of psychoanalysis (in its clinic) or in its relationship to the exterior “society and culture.”

The succession of writings of Freud between 1893 and 1939 is that of a perpetual movement where each published text implied a removal of old conceptualizations and theories, never arriving at a stable point in terms of technique or vocabulary of psychoanalysis. A “permanent revolution” that someone once dreamt about. Simultaneously, every innovation in the practice was tied to the vicissitudes of the events of that moment, at least those of the history of the West itself. Nothing is dispensable in Freud’s oeuvre. Freud never repeated himself, and even less could be said about the stabilization of psychoanalysis in a determined moment. Psychoanalysis was always “movement” (*Bewegung*). In that history one has to highlight the temporal encirclement of the final running of Freud’s obliged ink in London, in 1939, with the unexpected hatching of a renaissance: with the incremental dawn and subsequent vertiginous kaleidoscope that was Lacan’s teaching between 1933 and 1981. Freud and Lacan are examples and paradigms of a constant “becoming Freud” and “becoming Lacan,” being known by all that the “return to Freud” of the second was nothing more than an injunction to continue renewing Freud such as Freud transformed himself with each new article or book he published. Even “today,” Freud and Lacan are “*becomings*” that get renewed in the reading and reflecting that occurs with their texts.

In 2021, it will have been 40 years since Lacan’s death. Have his followers, in the multiple associations that consider themselves his heirs (the Lacanian galaxy), and have Freud’s successors in the association he founded, the IPA, been promoters of some fundamental change in the psychoanalytic clinic; an innovative reflection, accepted by the analytic community, of the constant transformation that they both, without arranging it, have imposed on the discipline? Is there a point, a conceptual turn, a term, an innovation that has attained the adhesion, let’s say, so as to not be too demanding, of 50% of psychoanalysts? Is there a new “*matheme*” in the theory of psychoanalysis post Lacan’s death? Or do we admit that what is fundamental to psychoanalysis exists solely from what has emerged from the words of those two masters, that survives perhaps, like an emulous to M. Valdemar, hypnotized by the mechanical repetition, almost compulsive, with tiny variations (*Wiederholungszwang*) of its innovative proposals?

With this question I want to progress toward the nodal in psychoanalysis without ignoring nor devaluing the meritorious production of many epigones of those two great referents, the pleiad of authors whom I have followed and continue following with interest during these 40 years, I ask myself (and I include here my own contributions) about the presence of something authentically new and destined to persist, impossible to ignore, in the way it happens with each of the texts of the Viennese, and the writings and seminars of the Parisian. And here I also confess my unease: among us all, we have produced an immense collection of side notes, commentaries, citations and repetitions, often impoverished, of these revered creators. Freud and Lacan worked in conjunction with colleagues who collaborated in and even deepened the furrows they laid bare. Alongside and apart from Freud were: Ferenczi, Klein, Groddeck, Binswanger (the list is not exhaustive). Alongside and apart from Lacan we find: Dolto, Leclaire, Clavreul, Safouan. Sometimes, and this must also be said, there existed dissidents of real stature that forced the two creators to clarify their positions in order to better confront them: Stekel, Jung, Rank, etc. for Freud; Bataille, Lagache, Aulagnier, Guattari, Derrida, etc. for Lacan.

In this now long history, we must highlight the probable disparity between the valuable clinical practice of psychoanalysis and the theoretical formulation of the results of that labor which can be read in the previously alluded to texts of the epigones. Psychoanalysis does not live solely in libraries that bear witness to the

yellowing of their pages, but also, and fundamentally, in offices, consulting rooms, psychiatric hospitals, in the transmission of unconscious knowledge, where these theories are put to the test of human suffering and the possibility of responding to it. It's these followers, practicing analysts, the ones that have maintained lit the torches of Freud and Lacan in every corner of the world and the ones that have preserved, through didactic analyses and supervision, the life of psychoanalysis as a movement, with a beating presence "in culture and society."

The "status of psychoanalysis today," that I aim to portray, leads me to point to that presence that it aches me to see, alongside my colleagues, with a real distaste, the dislodgement and exile that gradually makes itself known in the universities, in assistance centers and in consulting rooms, in all stages of theory and practice consistent with the radical proposals that serve as our point of departure and around which "passing through its signifiers" we recognize ourselves. Equally I believe that the precise distinction is being lost between psychoanalysis as a heterodox discourse clearly delineated and original in relation to its aspiring competitors in the institutions and in the thought that governs our contemporaries at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century. Psychoanalysis has a vocation for dissidence and opposition to the conventional: it will embody the subversion of the subject in the dialectic of its desire, or it will cease to be. The references to Freud and Lacan become ever more infrequent, experiencing a thinning in the onomastic indexes of the works published by the most widely cited and active authors in the current debate of ideas. The internal tendency to hybridize psychoanalysis with "interdisciplinary" resources taken from psychopharmacology and the cognitive behavioral therapies is strong, with the disqualifying of unconscious desire in favor of responding to the demand for empathy and with the return to a *two person psychology* extolled principally in the United States and departing from the work of "analytically oriented" authors like Franz Alexander, Jay Greenberg or Harry S. Sullivan (Kirman 1998).

2- An Unavoidable Commemoration: The Mass of Psychoanalysts

The search for reasons to understand this dilution, at least public and institutional, of the presence of psychoanalysis in these times lures me, in a perhaps unusual way, to consider, to allow the intrusion I would say, of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (Freud 1979[1921]) during the centenary of its publication. Could the Freudian clarification on the subject of the masses be applied, and in which way, to psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts as a mass?[1] Would that consideration be useful to us in understanding the "current state" that is our theme of "today"?

Going to the heart of the matter: do we dare to consider Freud and Lacan as "conductors," "leaders" (*Führern*), of the mass of the psychoanalysts, and consequently, investigate the "current state," taking into account the absence of the agglutinative element in the mass that is the living presence of the leader, the man, master or original, idealized creator, now transformed into a cult object in the form of sacralized biographies and praise for each and every one of their actions and words, repeated, memorized and treated like relics? We would do well to remember that it was precisely Freud who gave the definition of the fundamental trait of masses: "*A multitude of individuals who have substituted one and the same object for their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego*" [Freud's italics] (Freud, 1921 p. 110). Is it possible to compare the psychoanalysis of our day, its institutions, with enduring and highly organized "artificial masses" whose models are the church and army, nucleated around an ideology and a cult of one or two ancestors? To validate this comparison we must return, even if in partial form, to the text of 1921, specifically to the dazzling Chapter V dedicated to the comportment of the artificial masses where the conductor no longer survives, descendant of the *Urvater*, particularly in moments in which "a great and real danger" (Freud 1921, p 92) generates a state of panic.

How, in which way, could the current of incidents that could be interpreted as a climate of increasing hostility towards psychoanalysis between 1980 and 2020 be reinforced by the angst, verging on panic, aroused by the Covid-19 pandemic that became widespread since the beginning of 2020? Are we in a

volatile state of generalized anxiety or will this transitory state of plague leave indelible marks and scars in our practice and theory? Rest assured, nothing, not even psychoanalysis, will return to be what it once was.

This reflection cannot be untangled from the change in subjectivity and from the irreversible transformations linked to the process of technification of life throughout the globe, to the “telematization” of life and of living organisms (vegetables and animals, not just humans) and even the fate of inorganic deposits of the planet. I will not enter here, for reasons of time, space and pertinence, into the essential disquisitions of the recently deceased Bernard Stiegler[2] with regard to the vital, ecologic, economic, social, and subjective disruptions that accompanies the entrance of humanity to the Anthropocene (planet earth modified by the *Anthropos* and which lives under the aegis of science and its products) and in the processes of dependency of subjects with relation to artificial “organs” of recent invention. It is these industrial objects now having become essential for more than half of the globe’s inhabitants, and soon for all, it is these prostheses, the protagonists of the process that Stiegler terms “exosomatization,” the dependence of cybernetic organs that make of each speaking being an appendix to its own cybernetic appendages. I will not enter, I said, into this inexhaustible subject, except to note that this transforming exosomatization of the modes of production of subjectivity influences the theory and practice of psychoanalysis in our moment. And this influence may be quite broad. We will see.

It’s an observable act, in distinct measure, in all the countries and territories where our craft is practiced. It’s an ever-present topic of discussion in what we might call the “accompanying plague,” the barrage of printed and virtual publications on the topic of Covid-19, in that practically every intellectual in the West feels called to articulate their opinion and clarify their position. The virus affects the thought and actions of everyone, we psychoanalysts cannot be the exception; on the contrary, we are on the front lines of interrogation regarding the modification that the exosomatic organs interfere or operate upon the somatic encounter of analyst and analysand, those immovable elements of the frame, the analytic setting, established by Freud and Lacan with differences that now seem almost anecdotal, even though they continue to have importance, regarding technique, payment, session length, the processes of analytic formation and the modalities of institutional functioning.

The “artificial mass” of analytic institutions, constituted by reference to a primitive absent father, call him Freud, call him Lacan, more or less assassinated and devoured by his followers, more or less united around a totemic figure that fuses the threads of identification between its members, must respond to the intimations that are formulated by the culture and the laws articulated by the Other with respect to variables like the prevention of contagion, quarantine, the place and social and geographical distance of the participants, the suppressed rituals, the place assigned to the devices that transmit the voice and the image but which, in themselves, are indifferent to the circumstances and contents of the encounter, etc.

While writing these lines, I must point to the fact of uncertainty, mine and of everyone, in relation to the future of fluctuating situations, with little knowledge and unpredictable duration. When –and will we– find an effective and universal vaccine capable of returning the *status quo ante*? What will be the degree and time of immunity, what will be the possibilities of reinfection, and what of the eventual mutations of the coronavirus that are imperfectly known today? What measures will be advised or mandated by the dictates of the epidemiologists who are oblivious (immune) to the repercussions on psychoanalysis? In truth, about these topics, everything is conjectural, nobody knows, many are those who pretend to know.

3- Telematic Practice

The telematization[3] of analytic practice started many years ago with the, at first scandalous, use of the phone as a means to maintain analysis when physical distance or other transient considerations made it impossible to continue regularly. It spread further, principally in the United States, given the increased transience of the population and the need to travel for work which made difficult the continued labor of an

analysis, in addition to the cultural characteristics of the *American way of life* that was always so contemptible in the eyes of Freud and Lacan. In Europe, particularly in France, telematic analysis continued to be the exception which provoked criticisms from the majority of colleagues who saw in it an unacceptable degradation of the analytic work. The situation provoked by the pandemic and the quarantine presented certain analysts with the option of exercising their practice through telematic means or abandon it and interrupt in this way analyses of long duration or which were performed for didactic ends. The immense majority accepted, by force of the circumstances, a change to the method which carried restrictions to its two essential, and reciprocally complementary, requirements: free floating attention and free association. Let us set aside some concomitant aspects such as the payment through “bank transfer” which little has to do with the gesture of payment in the homonymously named “transference” (*Übertragung*) in the frame of the analytic encounter. A dear French colleague (Daniel Koren) pointed out to me an aspect I recognized retroactively in my own practice: in the in-person session one can distinguish different kinds of silence; for example, the silence of resistance, the silence of angst, the expectant silence that awaits the intervention of the analyst and which promotes the continuation of associations, etc. In the telematic session it is very difficult or even impossible to make a distinction between these different kinds of silences, and even one or the other of the parties in the analytic couple might suppose that there is a malfunction in the device such that a doubt arises regarding whether there is a silence occurring between them at all (“Can you hear me, Doctor?” “What did you say ma’am?”).

An analysand, a physician, has been summoned to the hospital in the time reserved for his session. He calls his analyst from his place of work and speaks to him while he paces the corridors or finds a comfortable and quiet space for his session. Or he is confined to his home with other members of his family and cannot be sure of the privacy of his speech, etc. Situations like these repeat in various unpredictable ways with those of us that practice telematic analysis. Classical psychoanalysis assumes the stability of the spatial and temporal frames of the encounter, the imaginary preparation, the decision over attire, the election of the mode of transportation to the consulting room, etc.; all of this becomes abolished in these new conditions. Psychoanalysts, in general, seek to maintain conditions that, rather than being capricious, are essential for our action: silence, the absence of thirds, couch and chair, a position comparable to that of sleeping yet retaining a state of vigilance with the expectation of verbalizing all concurrent thoughts with the aim of creating a state as close as possible to the manifestation of oneiric phenomena, the royal road to access the unconscious...also in the session.

Equally, or more than ever, it's important to note that the lives of our current analysands unfold between the increasingly greater time they pass *online* at the expense of time *off line*. It is unfortunate for our practice to frame the transit of analytic time and space *on-line* which admits the interposition of the telematic apparatus connected to artificial satellites and which replaces the relationship between bodies and discourses that is typical of the very frame that was invented as “psychoanalytic method” by Freud and Lacan, following, with some variations, that archetypal paradigmatic protocol of “analytic technique.” It is difficult to imagine that these telematic analyses, so called “didactic,” could be considered suitable for the transmission for those who pretend to carry through to the end the process after which they could authorize themselves as analysts.

A constant complaint among those who debate these new modalities concerns the devouring of time and the contents of the analysand's discourse by casual occurrences and trivialities to the detriment of unexpected and surprising associations, the recovery of archaic memories, confusion in the ordering of words with consequent doubts about the meaning of phrases, the account of dreams and extravagant disquisitions. According to a very diffuse complaint, discourse directed at a glass screen tends to the superficial, to the insistence of banalities that obligates the analyst to cut away resistance and, apparently in contradiction with the rule of saying everything, to opt between the abrupt end of the session, the great Lacanian recourse, or interrupting that discourse with an injunction made to the analysand so that they will speak about themselves and step out of the “small talk”, the insubstantial chatter of empty speech. You cannot apply the fundamental rule of “say whatever comes to mind even if it seems rubbish” because speaking to a screen seems to facilitate the incontinent profusion of true rubbish. Of course, it is not necessarily like this. The abrupt cut, being so effective in regular analysis, loses much of its utility when, as is often the case today,

the time between one session and the next extends over many days, frequently an entire week; then the everyday comes to blur the effect of relaunch that we aim to reach, the closing and opening of the unconscious with the unexpected end of the session. In the next day's session, it is difficult not to evoke yesterday's session. The weekly suspension between one session and the following, in a good part of the analyses that occur today, for reasons that seem dictated by "reality," alters not only the assiduousness but also the depths of the analytic work whose goal is "to put the unconscious into words," or put more clearly, how I explained it in other texts "to put word to jouissance" (Braunstein 1990, 2006, 2020). I find that in many places (France, Argentina, Mexico, United States) the availability of the "analysands" for sessions tends to be reduced to once a week, with a lesser number of cures tending to a rhythm of two times a week, rarely arriving at three. This waning periodicity seems to also translate to "training" or didactic psychoanalyses. It is legitimate to question the ongoing viability of Freudian analysis when the new practitioners of the discipline, alluding to these "real" causes, have not had the opportunity to analyze in depth the formations of their unconscious, their dreams and the very symptoms of everyday life.

4- Psychoanalysis in the Concurrence

This "reality" also includes the proliferation of therapies of all kinds that are presented as "advantageous" alternatives (??) in relation to "traditional" psychoanalysis (?) and among these improvements that one can "take advantage of" figures the easy and constant availability of the therapist (often times enrolled in the "cognitive behavioral" and not always reluctant to prescribe psychopharmaceuticals). Faced with a campaign intent on discrediting psychoanalysis (*Freud bashing* is a colloquial term in the United States[4]) and Lacanism; in the midst of battling for the autism market, where the disqualification of the psychoanalyst predominates for patients thus diagnosed, with arguments that invoke the causal determination of the "disorder" based on false genetic or neurological data; faced with diminishing options for studying and practicing psychoanalysis in universities and hospitals; faced with such environmental hostility, many psychoanalyses have come to admit and tolerate defensive measures and speech to maintain their hard earned, territory and prestige, until a nauseating tide of "new" stamp approaches promoting good, fast and cheap means of treating the subjects who are the most vulnerable victims of this "cultural malaise", that coincides not casually with the death of Lacan, with the institutional ruptures and battles that followed the dissolution of his School and that depend a great deal on the irruption-disruption generated by the development of telematic technologies in all their infinite varieties (*coaching*, tutorials, *counseling*).

The treatment of subjective malaise has become a *marketing* issue, generating competition in which a poorly and erroneously informed public confuses the outcomes and results of one or another technique, weighing them with the same scale, as if the objectives and the results sought were equivalent, as if you could "evaluate" psychoanalysis with some sort of homogenizing scale alongside cognitive behavioral symptom focused therapies, psychopharmaceutical drugs and methods of self-help, *coaching*, or physical exercise. Under these conditions it is not rare to see psychoanalysts ceding ground to the standardizing pressures of the market, or that fail to distinguish their proposal from the rest of what is on offer. It could be said that they are not true psychoanalysts (PINO), but those of us who believe we are cannot ignore that this signifies the manifestation of a symptom, a symptom of psychoanalysis, that is to say, of professional performance in function of the demand, when we see these colleagues inclined towards a warm and tender exchange of their opinions with those of their patients.

Alongside the languishing of sustained intensive practice of analytic cures, one sees a diminishing interest in the study of "the classics" and of detailed discussion with colleagues of the texts and theories, not only of Freud and Lacan, but also of the place of psychoanalysis in the contemporary world, revolutionized by the irruption of information technologies. It cannot be ignored that the child with an iPhone is different from Juanito and his wooden horse (gifted by professor Freud) and that subjectivity is constructed on new beds, and that there are new forms of subjectivation at play, that psychoanalysis cannot ignore its relationship with the complex questions of a postindustrial economy, of the new conception of work in the era of robotization

and WFH (*work from home*), of the innovations of knowledge in the fields of anthropology, sociology, epistemology, didactics in scholarly institutions, of the threats to planetary ecology, of the formation of the masses by different mechanisms from those conceptualized during the time of Le Bon, McDougall, Freud, Ortega and Gasset, etc. and, closer to our time, by Canetti, Arendt, Marcuse, etc.

5- A New Subjectivity in the Technosphere?

There is no shortage of tools to think through these changes in the constitution of subjectivity. It is essential to highlight the anticipations of Lacan, who affirmed since the mid-1950's that the calculator was an instrument "much more dangerous for man than the atomic bomb" (Lacan, 1978, p. 111), that the momentousness of humanity setting foot on the moon was not the technological feat, but rather that all of humanity was watching the image of the astronaut at the same time, by means of global television, of the constitution of a "alethosphere" (Lacan 1991, p. 188-89) (the current preferred rendering being, "technosphere", which has its advantages) with the proliferation of objects @ under the form of *lathouses*, those exomatic prosthesis (again using the terminology that Stiegler disseminated) that radically change human existence by producing *humbeings* that depend on their functioning, speaking-beings that are regulated, watched, controlled, by the gadgets they handle, of which the most expansive is the *smartphone* "with [internet] coverage." More than half of the population is plugged in to them; going further we can affirm that of the 7.700 billion we are now which will grow to 10 billion by 2030, each one of us will be in possession, or will be possessed by, one of these devices that change the relationship of the subject with others, and with the Other thereby modifying at the root the relationship of the subject with knowledge. Thus, the analyst must rethink their relationship to the technosphere in which he coexists with his analysands taking into account Lacan's warnings, unfortunately actualized today when, in his "Short speech to the psychiatrists of Sainte-Anne" (November 1967, on the eve of May 1968) he proclaimed

... probably because of this profound structure, progresses of universal civilization will result, not only in a certain discontentment as Mr. Freud had already noticed, but also in a practice that will spread out you will see, that will not right away show its true face, but which has a name, whether altered or not, that will always have the same meaning, and it will happen: segregation.

The Nazis, whom you could be very grateful for, were precursors and immediately had, by the way, further East, many copycats with regard to concentrating people; this is the ransom of this universalization inasmuch as it only results only for the progress of the subject of science.

It is precisely because you are psychiatrists that you could have something to say on the effects of segregation – on the true meaning it has. Because knowing how things happen most certainly enables to give them a different shape, a less abrupt launch and, if you wish, a more conscious one if we know what we are yielding to, your... What you represent, I may say, in history, and since things move fast, what we will see very soon, I don't know in about thirty or fifty years, is that there was already, back then, what was called the body of psychiatrists which found themselves in an analogous situation to that which will then have to be invented to understand what it will be about in the turmoil to come and at levels that, you can bet, will be worldwide, to what will occur with these initiatives establishing a new [interhuman] distribution that will be called effect of segregation. At that point, historians will say my God, these dear psychiatrists are indeed providing us with a small model of what could have been done at that moment in terms of thinking which we could have used, but in truth, they did not provide us with it because at that time they were asleep, they were asleep why? My God because they never clearly saw what it was about in their relation to madness from a certain period in time, they haven't seen it, God knows why, we will say, they haven't seen it exactly because they had the means to see it. Simply because psychoanalysis was there and psychoanalysis is too difficult. Why is it too difficult? Because after all, they transformed psychoanalysis into something we could rather call a mean of social access. Social access to what?[5] (Lacan 1967)

Toward 1970 Lacan predicted “you will see the effects of segregation in 30 to 50 years,” that is by 2000 or 2020. It will emanate from the technological advances due to the calculator, more dangerous than the atomic bomb of which its effects were already anticipated in 1955.

Can the today’s psychoanalyst be unaware of the global reality (“ignore that these effects would be global”) and refuse to admit what it means to live in the previously mentioned “Anthropocene?” The Anthropocene, a new geological era in which the earth suffers due to the fundamentally predatory activity of man (*anthropos*), something that B. Stiegler also calls the “entropocene”[6] because what increases exponentially is entropy, the entropy indicated by the second law of thermodynamics, the irreversible squandering of our natural resources[7], the economic, ecological, social, political impoverishment, subject to the disruption represented by the system of the markets (indeed, plural): financial, work related, industrial production and *mass* consumption, etc. Thus, we see the annulment of the social triumphs achieved in the last century by political and labor movements which worked to improve the quality of life, education, health etc., of the majority in their quest to attain measures of security and freedom. In these times we are faced with “uberization” (unsalaried work where “independent” contractors exploit themselves), with the proletarianization of subjectivities from the very moment of birth, with a disdain for thought and history, with a lack of potentially effective programs of action and reaction which could serve to restrain the hegemony of the aforementioned markets. We are obliged to live in an era devastated by the gale winds of Creative Destruction (the capitalization is by Schumpeter himself) and disruption. Live and think.

These are also the times where reflection has been annulled, regarding the relations between political economy and libidinal economy, between the camps of demand, desire, and jouissance in subjective economy, an unavoidable theme of psychoanalytic reflection that follows the paths laid out by Freud and Lacan. To follow Freud and Lacan without getting stuck to their words and texts, but rather to the movement of their thought, in constant flux, as they listen to the mutating forms that our cultural malaise continues to take. These effects, in our days, derive from the hegemony of a kind of thinking focused on the calculated short-term optimization of benefits for elitist minorities and of incorporeal corporations, pervasive, transnational, that govern the planet and preordain its self-extinction as it happens to the proverbial Freudian infusoria, suffocated by their own excrement.

Faced with the ferocity of Covid-19, a psychoanalyst of long and profound experience, recognized precisely by the circles in which we move, makes public a comment that makes evident certain doubts which haunt the practitioner of classical analysis (Freudian, or Lacanian, perhaps Kleinian). He says, in terms I prefer not to reproduce verbatim for justifiable personal reasons, as I see it, that he be summoned to testify about his ideas but that he also be allowed a moderate disfigurement of the literal aspect of his discourse to maintain, if he so desires, his anonymity. That is why I proceed with an omission of quotation marks, because I don’t reproduce his words, I translate them, although neither do I make them mine by commenting on another’s speech, that of someone, someone who is a nobody. For allowing myself that license, not without doubts about the legitimacy of my behavior, I apologize to the reader. Not being, neither his words nor mine I seek recourse in the brackets { } to frame his postulations. Says in essence, our respected colleague with whom I do not intend to argue:

{{ {Its probable that at these heights of the twenty-first century, psychoanalysis cannot continue locked away in a world of phantasmatic internal objects that form the basis of psychical reality; in place of this we should instead create space for the consideration of multiple cultural, political and social variables although without abolishing the frontiers that separate those two registers.} }}

I read this display with surprise and I wonder if it was necessary to arrive at the year 2020, if it was necessary to close off so many valuable discourses (of Freud and Lacan even, without even touching the more radical approaches of Reich or those of Guattari) so as to take into account the sociocultural realities that envelop us, to discover that there is a life beyond our impeccable laboratories of the unconscious. Nevertheless, our dear author insists on maintaining unbreakable limits and customs so that the two registers are not confused, that of internal reality and that of political and sociocultural reality which we could begin

to question in our analyses.

6- A New Analysis of the Ego for a New Mass Psychology

Psychoanalysis which, in its “current state,” opts for closing its eyes thereby adopting the politics of an ostrich, or the politics of adapting to the sad circumstances of competition in the marketplace of “mental health,” in an atmosphere muddled by the transformation of speaking subjects into appendices of the technological mechanisms which govern them each time the application (apps) icon is clicked and they are “profiled,” in other words integrated to an amorphous mass in which they participate without really knowing or relating with the others integrated in those telematically assimilated groups.

A new psychology of the masses has been articulating itself for the last thirty years, one wherein discourse as social bond (*lien social*) is substituted by the thoughtless choice of congregating icons, the unifying and unifying traits that configure new modalities of the superego and of its inescapable commands. The result is a new proletarianization of earthlings which seems difficult to escape, as the owners of the new technologies are impossible to localize and confront. Those machinations consist of mechanisms of memory storage, actions, of spatial localizations and the use of time like the distribution of attention given to an infinite variety of stimuli, so infinite that, the choice of key that will be pressed, awakens and agitates the phantasm of freedom in the speaking subject, such as what happens in the supermarket or on election day.

In this unprecedented historical juncture, the actions of men and women, their work, obligations to the other and compulsions, as well as character traits are shaped by artificial systems that operate automatically, without a leader and without an emblematic Hitler moustache that can be recognized as *Fuhrer*. Today’s leaders, the organizers of drives and their destinies, are planetary organizing exorganisms (organized and organizing, emissaries of orders) with whom nothing can be argued and around which human links are woven. None of the views converge as is represented in the graphic drawing made by Freud at the end of his Chapter VIII, in an exterior object that would unify the amorphous ego-ideal around “one and the same object,” so that individuals identify “themselves with one another in their ego” (Freud 1979[1921], p. 110). The movement of subjects in the internet, I dare to postulate, is *Brownian*, chaotic, incapable of organization. In that modality of movement (named after Robert Brown who discovered it in 1827) the particles of a substance dissolved in a liquid or gas medium do not group nor lump, do not form a “mass” but disperse molecularly or atomically following the random movements that lead them to collide with each other following an unpredictable trajectory that depends on their chance meetings with other equally wandering and disoriented particles. What I am interested in highlighting with this analogy is that it enables us to think about what happens to individuals in group meetings (rallies, concerts, protests) where each one, gifted with a *Smartphone* or comparable gadget, doesn’t relate to the others around them but rather activates this exosomatic device that isolates them from the others rather than grouping them into a mass as theorized by Le Bon and by Freud.

Like in Herzog’s movie (*Kaspar Hauser*) the motto could be “every man for himself and God against all.” Absent the abominable dogmas of unified obedience to a principal, organizing word, chaos has emerged, the Brownian movement of dispersion where each one acts for himself according to the characteristic mechanisms of the political economy of this post-industrial and cybernetic era. We all turn out to be proletarians in this world of devices, in this Heideggerian *Gestell*[8] (Heidegger 1954[1953]) where there can be no other proletarian plugged into *the web* that is capable of launching the slogan: “Unite!” Much less “*Smartphones of the world unite!*” Thus, the space opens up to think the *psychology of the disintegration of the masses* in the technosphere where the *analysis of the ego* should refer, not to the Oedipus complex nor the assassination of the *Urvater*, the primitive father, but rather to the modalities of the process of subjectivation in postindustrial capitalism, perhaps as savage as the primitive horde. In this way, we enter into a phrase of famous and fair memory: *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, subtitle of *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze & Guattari 1972). I believe it convenient to substitute the medical vocabulary “schizophrenia”

(etymologically: *divided mind*, as that which we all recognize from the moment Freud invented the unconscious) with a phonologically related but etymologically divorced phrase from that proposed by Deleuze and Guattari: “*Capitalism and subjective madness.*”

The new technological configuration of political economy is indissociable from libidinal economy, that is to say, to consider the subjective position of each speaking being attracted by the magnetic force of those two opposite poles: desire and *jouissance*, whose articulation is at stake in each psychoanalysis, in each moment where the signifier is freed from its conventional ties and the unusual irruption of the unexpected is permitted, of the creative spark that makes of the joke a paradigmatic model of artistic (poetic) production at the heart of the social situation that implies no less than three people. What is not a joke is the social, economic, ecological, anthropological, political and subjective situation of the billions of like-minded people who see themselves swept away by mysterious mechanisms operating from the “*technosphere*,” over which we have no influence and that work like architects in the formation of contemporary subjectivity. This subjectivity (in fact *immensely mad*) is governed in fact and without right by an algorithmic Other; It is sad and even dramatic that it is impossible to oppose or to say no to an algorithm and that all the inhabitants of the planet are submitted to a regime of “algorithmic government” (Rouvroy & Berns 2013). In a political system in which civic responsibility has been snatched away from the ideal democratic citizen (which was never real) and where irresponsibility has been transferred to the “internet of things” where those “things,” provided with *sensors* (censors?) make “things” of the users thus governed.

7- Questioning Again the Ethics of Psychoanalysis

Thus shines the ethical place reserved for psychoanalysis, removed from any dogma, taking distance from the “service of goods” (calculable, financial, calculated) and that advocates for the promotion of the power of the congregating word in favor of new forms: local or general, in families, in small groups or in large companies of *critical knowledge*. A *savoir-faire* or *know how* with the symptom, a *know-how of living and thinking* that work against entropic trends that banalize and offer anodyne dressings for the suffering of the new proletarians, servants to their *gadgets*, to their *lathouses*, to their smartphones that tend to transform them in aphonic inhabitants of the *smart cities* of the immediate future. “Current psychoanalysis” is, better said, “we current psychoanalysts are” indebted to our ethical duty, not only in the body-to-body encounters that occur in our consulting rooms and in our telematic sessions (psychoanalysis in intension); we are also indebted in spaces of public deliberation, in our conferences that are dying out by force in this time of pandemic, in our writings, that pass in turn through a virtual stage before arriving, or not, to a printed book, in our action outside of the session, that is “exosomatic” due to the interposition of screens and physical distancing vis-a-vis our interlocutors who themselves are also reduced to the wall-less enclosure of virtual spaces (terrain of psychoanalysis in extension).

It is imperative to note that to these flaming technosubjective configurations we have to respond with a new ethics adapted to the horrifying digitalized techniques of current capitalist discourse and participate in the critique of the social *ethos* which imposes (or intends to impose) itself on the multitude of subjects dissolved by Brownian movements of atoms that capriciously crash into each other. That new ethic will never be able to spontaneously emerge because it always consists of singular decisions that emerge from a deliberation, a dialogue that disarms the automatic action of the individual when they decide a course of action or when they make a certain speech-act, or direct words to whomever is their *socius* in the act. That is the very essence of the analytic act. How to convert the forces that enforce the Brownian *disintegration* and the *segregation* of those labeled as *differents* into engines of congregation that cannot be a return to the mass (be it spontaneous or artificial) gathered under a unifying leader of *masses*? How to invent a way to live ethically in a historical moment in which the majority of our acts have become automatic, a mode of reflexes conditioned by the satellite, extraterrestrial big Other, that leave as a remainder a balance of anomie and anonymity, apathy and depression, by the annulment of the goals of desire and drive, by the disinterest and manifest neglect of the Other of symbolic exchange.

To propose this renewal of ethics, psychoanalysis cannot search for models from the past, with a return to its historical sources, however unforgettable as they may be. It is imperative that it position itself in the vanguard, in the anticipation, reuniting with philosophers, anthropologists, economists, jurists, artists, etc., all focused on the same task of thinking the world to come. The circumstances keep changing, in irreversible ways, the fundamental aspects of life in general and of our practice in particular. It is the necessary consequence of cybernetic technologies and of the development of artificial intelligence that replace, not only the intellectual work of memory and calculation, but also aims at the suppression of bodily labor, through robots that swiftly replace machines operated manually by wage laborers. An immense quantity of human energy (*ergos* = work), symbolic, imaginary, and real energy, will be freed and available in principle to change the world if one can reverse the entropic tendency to proletarianize subjectivity by atomizing the social bond, colonizing it with the voluntary servitude of technological devices, that tendency that seems unmodifiable as we continue to wander down the paths of post-industrial capitalism. That is the task that we psychoanalysts cannot subtract ourselves from. We will have to remember that it is not the letter, but the spirit and the example we receive from the founders when they endlessly modified their theories and their practices in accordance with the lessons gathered from the present: from the two wars, the atomic bomb, the growing emancipation of women, the changes in "cultural sexual mores," from the overwhelming and often harmful influence of psychoanalysis itself transformed into ideology of the entrenched bourgeoisie in the complexes of Oedipus and castration,, whose haunting emanations have been transformed into dilapidated, moth-eaten topics, found everywhere, that surprise nobody.

8- The Specificity of the Discourse of the Analyst. The Discourse of the "Plague."

After the Covid-19 pandemic, psychoanalysis will have to maintain, yes, maintain and actualize, the insistence on and the proper and unmistakable aspects of its own discourse, the discourse of the analyst, insisting on its difference from all other forms of the social bond. The pressure against it emanates from medicine and psychiatry due to the reductionistic emphasis on "mental disorders," classified in the DSM-V, understood as supposed "disorders" of brain activity, even though none of these so-called disorders can be diagnosed via any of the marvelous technologies designed to research the brain. Emerging from reductionistic techniques of manipulation of souls through "cognitive-behavioral" therapies, that pretend to modify the mind by silencing the symptom which is the manifestation of a malaise one has not lent an ear to, in order to understand its logic. Emerging from psychopharmacological violence, serving the interests of *big pharma*, which emphasizes the intervention on neurotransmitters and ignores the subjectivity of those who have been "amassed" and tamed with "normalizing" tranquilizers and antidepressants against angst, insomnia and mood. Emerging from the commercialization of narcotics considered "drugs" which intoxicate and generate addictions in millions of users that hurl themselves toward them as substitutions for the satisfactions that reality (social, political, economic, domestic) denies them. Contemporary psychoanalysis is opposed on all these points to the "scientific discourse," allied with the master's discourse, that judges individuals according to their adherence to normality (the task of medicine) and with the law (the task of jurisprudence).

This is not the time to repeat that essential moment in Lacan's teaching, shortly after the challenging movements of 1968, when he formalized the modalities of the social bond by structurally defining, with algebraic formulas, the four discourses[9] and opposed the discourse of the analyst to that of the master, the university and the hysteric, showing the relationships and modalities of passage between one and the next in social interaction (Braunstein 2014). The well-oiled and illustrious mathematical graphic and topology of the four discourses was disturbed by Lacan himself when, from 1972 onwards, he recognized that the discourse of the master had to unfold between the *ancient master*, the repressing slave-master of drive aspirations, and the *modern master* that incites the direct satisfaction of demands and pronounces the super-egoic slogan of *jouis* the organs and functions of the body. To this new discourse, we could call it a fifth discourse, even though Lacan had said that the discourses were four and only four, rigorously organized in a non-permutating order, he gave it an unequivocal name: the discourse of capitalism. This novel discourse

emerges from the “copulation of the master’s discourse with that of science.” It is a discourse that leaves aside “that which we will simply call love.” The irruption of the capitalist’s discourse did not merely articulate something already evident, but Lacan, while in Italy in 1972, awarded it a structural formula using the same four mathemes that he had proposed in his original formulation of 1969, altering its organization and modifying, in a transgressive manner, his own writings regarding the relationships between them. In addition to rendering his formulation, in Milan, on May 12th of 1972, he formulated a prophesy by announcing “it is the cleverest discourse that we have made. It is no less headed for a blowout. It is untenable. because it goes too fast, it consumes itself so well that it is consumed” (Lacan 1978a).[10]

The whole proposal of the paragraph you just read (or that I just wrote) is well known history, even exhausting in its repetition, even though we are indebted, also and especially here, with the elaboration of the hypothesis of the discourse of capitalism in its relationship with the evolution of capitalism in the post-industrial era and its acceleration due to historical events arising after the death of Lacan. Among these I will point out a) the disintegration of the Soviet Union, b) the exorbitant development of the Chinese economy by the unforeseen collusion of eastern despotism, communist one-party rule and the most savage applications of the principles of Western capitalism, c) the immense deployment of numerical technologies materialized in the system of integration of all the computers of the planet, the internet, that does not massify its users but rather submits them to the infinite proliferation of possible singular responses that signal the enfeeblement and even the annulment of the social link. Lacan could not know (although he did have a premonition) about these changes but on that same day of May 1972 he dared to formulate a prophesy that today, in the circumstances we live in, turns out to be chilling, and which, I think, has not received enough attention. Let us listen:

In truth I believe one will not speak of the psychoanalyst in the lineage, if I can say this, of my discourse...my analytic discourse. Something else will appear, which, of course, must maintain the position of the semblant, but nonetheless that will be...but that will perhaps be called the PS discourse. A PS and then a T, that will be the PST discourse. Add an E, and that gives us PESTE (PLAGUE). A discourse that would finally be truly pestilent, wholly devoted, finally, to the service of capitalist discourse. This perhaps will one day be able to serve for something, if, of course, the whole business doesn’t fall apart totally, before then. (Lacan 1978a)

Lacan seemed to preannounce the shipwreck of his own analytic discourse and its replacement by “the plague,” a discourse devoted in its entirety to the service of the capitalist discourse...unless the apocalypse comes before the dominant discourse, that of science (“that for the moment is in charge of the game”), and what it might bring about. What do we think today of that premonition, terrible for the future of psychoanalysis, in moments in which terror and even panic proliferate throughout humanity via a minuscule and foul virus that invades the world of speaking beings, a threatening scourge that will occupy a period of unpredictable duration?

What remedies could psychoanalysis contribute to counter the might of the modern master, of the capitalist and his discourse? How can we recover the virulence of that plague that legend wants to narrate as a few extravagant apostles of psychoanalysis, those tasked with taking to the powerful American Union, source but not cradle, of the discourse of capitalism? How will the psychoanalytic discourse survive the pandemic of its discreditation in culture and society if its practitioners give in to the temptation to hybridize their discourse, diluting it in “utilitarian” practices that erase its specificity and its difference by giving up on their desire, the desire of the analyst, to put themselves at the service of the Other’s demand who asks for anodyne medications to suffocate the unfolding malaise of the culture. How to expunge the plague from analytic discourse?

Translated from the Spanish by Diana Cuello, with assistance from Fernando Castrillón, and from the French by Cécile Gouffrant McKenna.

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Notes:

[1] I resist the sanctioned use in the English language of *group psychology*, or the use of the term *crowds* derived from McDougall when translating from Freud's original *Massenpsychologie*, attracted by the pregnant study of *les foules* from 1895 by G. Le Bon. The word "masses" in Spanish is more akin to Freud's word and to Ortega y Gasset's study, written years later in alleged ignorance of the Freudian text he knew so well.

[2] Cf. Bernard Stiegler: *Wikipedia.en* and *Wikipedia.fr*. In particular: Stiegler, B. *Dans la disruption* (París: Les liens qui libèrent, 2016).

[3] "Telematization": passage from a somatic encounter in the same physical space to the exosomatic encounter with the interposition of screens which override physical distance.

[4] One example: in the winter 2019 edition of the prestigious magazine *Dissent*, the no less prestigious and sage Stephen Seligman (Professor at the University of California – San Francisco) wrote a lengthy article entitled *The New Psychoanalysis* where he proclaims, with respect to the **theory**, as if he were referring to something undisputable and widely known:

"The patriarchal theory that the Oedipus complex is the most important moment in civilizing the child's "primitive instincts" and organizing conscience and gender in the personality has been superseded. *The earlier Freudian misogyny and homophobia* has been largely discredited, with a new generation learning from critical theories about gender, power, ethnicity, and more."

To which he adds (I cite his words because they are unmatched with regard to anything I could write with respect to new *techniques*):

"In the consulting room, engagement and flexibility have replaced the imperious silence of the typical *New Yorker* cartoon analyst. There's a new, more responsive atmosphere, with a shift toward tenderness and creative attention rather than the paternalistic authority that too often characterized traditional analytic approaches. This parallels a new interest in infant care and the "maternal" role (not something exclusive to women). Fantasies and the unconscious mind still matter, but in even the most formal analyses (couch and all), most *practitioners feel free to engage warmly and directly with patients*, rather than sitting silently and imperiously" (Italics added by this author).

[5] This quotation has been shortened and edited for the purposes of this article.

[6] Stiegler, B.: *Qu'appelle-t-on panser?* París, Les Liens qui Libèrent, 2018, p. 77.

“What is Bandaging *?: 1. The Huge Regress (The Links That Free Up)

- The Anthropocene hence is what we should characterize as a clearing of localities and a generalized and planetary increase

- of thermodynamic entropy as increase of energy dissipation,

- of biological entropy as destruction of biodiversity, and

- of informational entropy as destruction of noodiversity

Characterized as such, Anthropocene might as well be called Entropocene”.

*Note: in French Panser/Bandaging is pronounced the same way as Penser/Thinking”.

It is worth remembering here that the second law of thermodynamics was fundamentally for Freud the principle of inertia first and death drive from Beyond the Pleasure Principle. He found a justification for his thought in the unicellular infusers that suffered the fate of self-destruction due to the debris they themselves were generating.

[7] Rationalized as “Creative Destruction” by Schumpeter in 1942 in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* and defined as: ” process of industrial mutation that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one” (p. 82-83).

[8] Heidegger, M. [1953] “Die Frage nach der Technik”, translated into the French (by André Preau) in *Essais et conférences*, (París, Gallimard, 1954), pp. 9-48.

My objection to the translation of *Gestell* as *arraisonnement* and the preferable option of the word “device” has already been amply discussed: Braunstein, N.A., *El inconsciente, la técnica y el discurso capitalista*. México, Siglo Veintiuno, 2014, pp. 25-37.

[9] Lacan, J.: *Le Séminaire. Livre XVII. L'envers de la psychanalyse* (1969-1970). París, Seuil, 1991, p. 31.

[10] Electronic version in French:

<https://pagesperso-orange.fr/espace.freud/topos/psycha/psysem/italie.htm>

A completely different translation in Spanish by Olga Mater: <https://www.elsigma.com/historia-viva/traduccion-de-la-conferencia-de-lacan-en-milan-del-12-de-mayo-de-1972/9506>

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