

Retrieved from:

The European Journal of Psychoanalysis

Sep 28, 2022

<https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/articles/estates-general-a-provisory-balance/>

Caterina Koltai

Estates General: A Provisory Balance

The Estates General of Psychoanalysis began with the convocation of René Major, inviting us to consider the crucial problems concerning the future of psychoanalysis. This was an interesting proposition which, on the one hand, admitted a crisis in psychoanalysis, and on the other was addressed to analysts from various countries, who spoke different languages and analytical dialects. This made possible considering the crisis (should it really exist) in our various contexts.

In Brazil, thanks to the considerable efforts of Helena Bessermann Viana and Maria Cristina Magalhães, the relevant work began to take shape. I interpreted this convocation as a personal opportunity for a shared consideration of ways to relate the Freudian unconscious with contemporary social and historical transformations.

The Estates General began auspiciously, July 8, 2000. The individual, signed presentations of the first morning were excellent[1]. The game gained momentum and promised a certain enthusiasm. However, negative reactions soon surfaced, in the space of a lunch break. The afternoon session had been planned to approach current psychoanalytical clinical practice[2]. And it did, but it was very boring. The ball was not rolling, to continue with the analogy with soccer, the game stalled and became ugly and defensive.

Nevertheless, the afternoon was very significant because it was once more proved how difficult it is to speak about clinical practice distributed over such an extensive area. Mainly however it was interesting because it created that difficulty that we analysts feel at having to lend attention to a text and someone else's speech.

The idea was essentially a good one: the circulation of texts via the Internet, making possible general availability, comment and summarizing and eventually diffusion to the public. However, this was not exactly what happened. Not all the texts had been read by the "integrators of texts", while others were read only partially. There were time and language difficulties.... perhaps even a lack of curiosity. The fact is that the texts, such as they were presented, for the most part made evident the difficulty experienced by the integrators too to lend attention to the texts.

Many of the presented texts were monolithic, mono-linguistic, making it impossible to feel their possible diversity. No criticism is intended here of any particular integrator. Any one of us could have fallen into the same trap. In fact, succeeding in immersing oneself in the ideas of another, momentarily leaving aside one's own convictions, is a constant challenge.

If it was difficult for the speakers, it was equally difficult for the listeners. A strange atmosphere was created. We were forced to "listen" in a different way. We didn't know whether the contents being presented were a synthesis of the texts or if they just reflected the ideas and "truths" of the integrator. As a consequence, it was impossible for the listener to identify with the integrator, to accept or reject a text and a certain author.

It became clear, during this first afternoon session, that changing form is not enough. The Internet in itself is no miracle solution. The transformation must go deeper than that. In any case, the first day we all—speakers and audience alike—were provided a non narcissist type of exercise. And this is why, in spite of the uneasiness created, I still consider it to have been positive, because it revealed our difficulties implied in community participation—that is, our difficulty of not involving ourselves in the other's text, one in which we do not recognize ourselves and in which we feel not included. This is more due to the failures of the chosen method, than to the unquestionable quality of the works presented.

The morning session of the second day, dedicated to the transmission question, began very tense[3]. The menacing external storm threatened to explode inside the Grand Amphi of the Sorbonne as well. In fact, it is extremely difficult to speak of transmission, transference, analyses and supervision.

The weather unexpectedly improved the afternoon of the second day, July 9, which was dedicated to the analytical institutions[4]. Patrick Guyomard, the board animator, said he had the impression that the Colloquium had just begun. In fact, only on the second afternoon was the goal finally scored, and the ball found its way into the net. The applause was so intense that it was rather than a recognition of the unquestionable quality of the works presented, an outlet for the repressed tension.

At that point, the atmosphere began to change, and I was able to observe various, distinct types of suffering. There were, on one hand, the Latin Americans, who constantly referred to the “lead years” of torture, misery, lack of democracy in their respective countries. And there were, on another hand, the French (Lacanian or non) who, in my opinion, in particular elect themselves depositaries of an impossible mourning for Lacan, which sometimes makes them too critical of American psychoanalysis, which obviously created some resentment among the representatives of the latter. And, finally, the German-speakers expressed their dismay at the quasi-disappearance of psychoanalysis in the language and country of its origin. I was extremely touched by the sobriety and intensity of this dismay.

Monday morning was dedicated to the relationship between psychoanalysis and society and politics[5]. There was a certain consensus that psychoanalysis was already mature to abandon a certain naïve vision that would limit it to the normal and pathological development of the individual, leaving the study of any political aspects to the other human sciences. All the presentations seemed to reflect the certainty that the analyst must say, not only rightfully but also as a duty, something with regards to politics. Personally, I am in complete agreement with this. The analyst can possibly avoid listening to anything from an exterior world, whose roaring rumors reach us all. Criticism about globalization, misery and exclusion is an integral part nowadays of the repertoire of any “politically correct individual”. The analyst's aim is to progress more and more to surpass the merely politically correct aspects, which he will only achieve if he challenges psychoanalytical theory, confronting it with considerations of an other type, if he is to clarify the hidden causes for segregation of any kind, of the mad, of the poor, of the unemployed or those with a different skin color or another religion. In fact, the analyst cannot afford to consider what is happening around him as being none of his business. It is his duty to reflect on violence, misery, war, discrimination, also because these are signs of a malaise in society, the effects of which the analyst embraces in his clinical practice, in the form of symptoms.

In the discussions of that morning I felt only the absence of a deeper discussion about the question of monetary payment in our practice. There are still analysts who accept or refuse a patient on the basis of his economic condition. Instead of heeding the pain of those suffering “in their mind and in their body” and attempting to succor them, they are more worried about how much the patient can afford to pay. They establish, a priori, their fee, which becomes the deciding factor as to whether analysis is or is not possible. I consider this unacceptable. The analyst cannot have a price—apart from the well known fact that the more expensive analysts are not necessarily the best ones. Moreover, it is perhaps essential to eliminate the very bad habit of sending those who cannot afford to pay well to those analysts at the beginning of their careers, when it is precisely the suffering of these patients which demands the attention of the more experienced analysts.

The afternoon was dedicated to the relationship between psychoanalysis and the arts, literature and philosophy[6]. There was a touching, wonderful clinical report, which reminded us that, although difficult, it is still possible to speak of clinical practice and of creating in a clinical practice. This report was a little masterpiece, meriting a board to discuss the relationship between psychoanalysis and the arts.

Tuesday morning, July 11, during the board discussion on the relationship between psychoanalysis and the neural sciences[7], we had the pleasure of listening to some voices, which described themselves as dissident, from countries and languages not represented at the event, delighting us with their particular style and considerable freedom of thought and expression.

Despite the vital nature of the dialogue between psychoanalysis and the neural sciences, we should not forget that, despite scientific progress which might result in future in babies being conceived in test tubes, we analysts will continue being responsible for caring for and listening to these human beings.

* * *

I should like to present some proposals for the future.

I am one of those who, although not presently part of any institutions, believe they are not superfluous. I have no illusions, I know there are no ideal institutions, nor do I believe that they provide any real guarantee. However, the existence of a place where one can discuss with colleagues the state of one's practice and the difficulties encountered is very important.

Institutions are necessary to the analytical field, just as political parties are to the community. When they are absent, we fall prey to sects which can only be refused as authoritarian, the result of an absolute identification with the leader and the position s/he occupies. In every totalitarian institution, power, law and knowledge become confused. The same thing occurs in totalitarian societies, concerned with denying their divisions, whether they are inherent to the social or to the power aspect. The mere existence of parties and institutions (I insist, on the plural form) are marks of a division and in this sense they are important. But this, obviously, is not enough. It is still necessary to make our analytical institutions more democratic, more productive and more creative.

In contemporary societies, the possibility of installing "more fraternal" institutions becomes progressively more necessary, inasmuch as any radicalization of individualism increases rivalry, envy and competition. The challenge is to allow space for an affirmation of singularity and authorship, which leads to a productive process based on clinical practice, individual and non transferable experience and, at the same time, deserves recognition. In this context, I would hope that theoretical plurality is made possible, thus making possible encounters in institutions where, in fact, the "analyst's desire" turns out to be stronger than that of the master.

I defend the existence of institutions also because of the internationalism that they make—or should make—possible. By internationalism, I do not intend a head office and its branches, spread worldwide—as is unfortunately frequently the case—but an internationalism which truly makes possible the free circulation and sharing of ideas, which know no frontiers. When this is not the case, I fear that we fall into the trap of national psychoanalyses and, in my opinion, the worst form of internationalism is preferable to the best form of nationalism.

By so asserting, I do not expect the Estates General to become transformed into a new institution. The aim of the Estates General to make it possible for analysts from around the world, from several associations, to speak in their own names, was realized completely. At this point, it will be up to us, who participated, to create several international meetings where, each time more, analysts from different associations, languages and cultures may dialogue, eliminating each time more divisions and including, as rapidly as possible, analysts from countries and languages who were absent in these Estates General: those from Eastern-Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Only thus, can we truly provide hospitality to the stranger, which is the

analyst's prime function.

Finally, I should like to thank Armando Uribe (former ambassador from Chile) and Professor Jacques Derrida for their wonderful lectures, and René Major, Elisabeth Roudinesco and the many others who made this experience possible.

Notes:

[1] The speeches were held by Michèle Gendreau-Massaloux (recteur de l'Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie), René Major (Paris), Elisabeth Roudinesco (Paris), Fethi Benslama (Paris-Tunis), Juan-David Nasio (Paris), Per Magnus Johansson (Göteborg), Michel Plon (Paris).

[2] The speeches were held by Pierre Fédida (Paris), Ricardo Avenvurg (Buenos Aires), Diego Napolitani (Milan), Nancy Chodorow (Berkeley), and others.

[3] Speeches were held by Howard Shevrin (USA), Adolfo Benjamin (Buenos Aires), Francis Hofstein (Paris), Erik Porge (Paris), Kazushige Shingu (Japan), Daniel Kuperman (Sao Paulo), Claude Lévesque (Montreal).

[4] Speeches were held by Paula Schmidtbauer Rocha (Sao Paulo), Chawki Azouri (Paris-Beyruth), Joël Birman (Sao Paulo), Lise Monette (Montreal), Juan Carlos Volnovich (Buenos Aires), Patrick Guyomard (Paris), Nancy Caro Hollander (USA).

[5] Speeches held by Gilou Garcia Reinoso (Buenos Aires), Esteban Ferrandes Miralles (Espana), Paulo Sternik (Brazil), Maureen Katz (USA), Helena Besserman Vianna (Brazil), Regina Orth de Aragao (Brazil), Richard Rechtman (Paris), Alvaro Rey de Castro (Lima, Peru).

[6] Speeches were held by Henri Rey-Flaud (Paris), Simon Harel (Montreal), Peter Hildebrand (London), Jacqueline Rousseau-Dujardin (Paris).

[7] Speeches held by Georg Christoph Tholen (Germany), Sergio Benvenuto (Rome), Amy Cohen (Paris), Jean-Jacques Moscovitz (Paris), Athanase Tzavaras (Athens), Claude Van Reeth (Belgium).