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## A Commentary

I began my presentation to the clinical section of the Estates General with the comment that the six themes proposed by René Major for the conference could be seen as the six sides of a cube, and “that the questions which arose from these, combined variously, could well revitalize psychoanalysis”. I placed great hopes in this meeting – as René Major had presented it – as the occasion for a liberation and emancipation of psychoanalysts from institutional ties, which in a suffocating way become evident at the majority of psychoanalytical conventions. My statement that “at traditional conventions, those considering themselves the *pillars* of psychoanalysis are usually confirmed in the name of a Master and his school, according to the conviction (and convention) that the stamp of a *pensée maîtrisante* [mastering thought] is sufficient to guarantee scientific validity to psychoanalytical theory and mask often substantial epistemological weaknesses” was meant in this context.

The conference fell dismally below those expectations created by the ideal opening of the program. Obviously, there were messages of considerable critical and perspective value, particularly in the sessions having to do with psychoanalysis/culture and politics confrontation. However, these encountered – as did most of the presentations – a disconcerting lack of attention and were virtually without response or comment, as if the nearly one thousand participants at the conference were each immersed exclusively in the anticipation of their turn at the podium. Thus, there resulted a series of more or less brief, prefabricated presentations, lacking in any conversational/interlocutory character, and by means of which each speaker reconfirmed – one might even say “shouted” – his own credo, for the most part in the name of the leader of this or that school (Lacan having the lion’s share in this context). There was an almost total lack of articulation of session times and modes: no coordination of the *integrators of texts* – i.e., those introducing each session – no time limit set for their presentations, or specific space provided for any pre-established presentations, distinguishable from the free interventions of the audience, and no regulation was provided by the chairmen of this chaotic, verbal bottleneck. This *manque* of organization was perhaps, in the minds of the organizers of the conference, considered to be the quickest way to de-institutionalization, to render the setting homologous with the anti-institutional spirit of its original, ideal premise. But instead of a social situation at the *statu nascenti* with all its potential for creative expression, what we had was a generally bellicose state with everyone against everyone else, producing a systematic obliteration of any possibility of dialogue.

It seemed to me that I was witness to a kind of psychodrama of the contents of my presentation, *Psychoanalysis has had its Day*, which was my contribution to the Estates General. I had advanced in it the theory that psychoanalysis as conceived by Freud, in the positivist simplification of 19th century paradigms as a *Science of nature*, had outlived itself, become a *revenant*, a spectre which continued to haunt psychoanalytical thought, in such a way as to prevent the development of those visions of *complexity* underlying all physical, biological and humanistic research. In particular, I maintained that that specter of psychoanalysis forced thought in the direction of the already known, of the order of linear causes which we might call the nocturnal order of origins, a *de facto* exclusion from being open to any diurnal order of project, of becoming, of the future, as it was intended by Bion in his dramatic denunciation of the diabolical

nature of psychoanalytical jargon. Supported by a kind of ideological traditionalism (the institutional structures of which are its sociological manifestations), *this* psychoanalysis is fragmented, over an infinite territory resembling as many sovereign realms with clear cut confines and each held in reciprocal suspicion by the others, any serious dialogue excluded.

According to French history, the Estates General – assemblies of representatives of the clergy, the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie – had an exclusively advisory character and were convoked by the king at particularly difficult moments when the crown needed the support of the entire nation. However, the Estates General most commonly referred to are those of 1789, which were convoked for the purpose of finding a solution to the disastrous financial state of the nation and the explosive “conflicts of interest” (as they would be called today) involving the privileged classes. This crisis of monarchical absolutism was fed by the spread of the ideas of the Enlightenment, beginning with the publication in 1750 of the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d’Alambert. In the session of May 1789, the clergy and the aristocracy, already at loggerheads, became allied against the “third estate” which was demanding peremptorily not to be solely a cover to the decisions taken, in the name of the king, by the first two “estates”, but to have equal rights in the voting process. Louis XVI at that point decided to close the rooms of the conference with the result that the representatives of the bourgeoisie resorted to assembling autonomously elsewhere. This triggered the revolutionary process from which emerged that democratic structure of the State, which, with various ups and downs, has up until the present constituted the most effective political model for contemporary economic, scientific and cultural development.

The title phrase, “Estates General of Psychoanalysis”, was obviously meant as a reference to the above historical precedent, and in the intention of the organizers of the conference, the voice of the “third estate” of psychoanalysts against the ideological absolutism of the institutions of the I.P.A. should have arisen clearly from this assembly. Instead, what in fact occurred was that the proposal of secularizing psychoanalysis, and consequently of its opening to a cultural politics/policy which would take it beyond the clerical horizon of the currently still prevalent orthodoxy – regardless of how often it has been rehashed – was defeated, drowned in the confusion of voices of the intellectual aristocracy. Thus, even Derrida, to whom René Major makes lucid reference in his “Desistential Psychoanalysis”, was not embraced for his deconstructive open vision, but became the lord-of-the-manor of a psychoanalytical province in conflict with the “clergy” as well as the more or less neighboring lords. His *performance* during the course of the conference (approximately four hours of reading a text, leaving no space whatsoever for possible debate) had the character of an edict of the most recent prince in residence, which resulted in the obscuring of the more vital and creative character of his thought.

In conclusion: the culture of dialogue, already anticipated by the more advanced minds in the history of the psychoanalytical movement, finds in no anti-institutional form fertile soil for its development, because the institution represents in any case the structured space of the conservative attitudes of the individual and collective mentality. These attitudes must eventually succeed in confronting innovative positions, as it is only from a comprehension of this double polarity of human cognition that a project can be designed for the advancement of the psychoanalytical community as a whole. Otherwise, there may well be a persistence of this fragmentation into an infinity of small (or larger) autocracies, each identified with “truths” which find in the “falseness” of the others its own illusive validation. And this is the scenario responsible for the self-exclusion of psychoanalysis from the scientific world. At this point, the challenge would lie in the creation of an epistemological model which, analogously to sociological democratic model, could contain the friction between “conservatives” and “innovators”, thus providing the foundation of an autonomous scientific discipline of conflict.

*Translated from the Italian by Joan Tambureno*